

The Woodland Drummer

It is still dark at 5:55 am as I slip a thermos of tea and several granola bars into my backpack and switch on my battery powered headlight. The sun won't kiss the morning horizon for another 34 minutes and I need to be settled in my blind before then. Overhead stars seem to twinkle more feverishly and somewhere to the east a Timberdoodle, high on testosterone, "peents" every eight seconds, but he is not my target for this morning.

Shouldering the backpack, I hang the 400mm lens from my left shoulder, grab the tripod and quietly leave the roadside. Although the birch and aspen are still in bud stage the brush is dripping wet from a heavy dew overnight, evident by the rivulets of moisture streaming down my rain pants. It's a cool morning as even the wood frog is silent, but the cardinal who usually breaks into song about an hour before sunrise is flooding the woodland with his clear sharp notes.

The headlight beam finally settles on the blind that I set in place yesterday and everything seems to be as I left it. Inside the blind the soggy ground has been covered with branches, twigs and dry leaves to keep the camp chair from sinking too deeply. The tripod is positioned to match the height of the lens sleeve and the 400 mm lens is slipped into the receiver of the Wimberly Sidekick to a point of perfect balance. The distance from the drumming log to the blind had been determined by setting a 20 ounce box of Cheerios on the log to approximate

the size of a Ruffed Grouse, and placing the blind appropriately, hence the soft mucky position.

With everything in place, I snugged the down jacket around me and poured



© Ron Winch

a steaming cup of Earl Grey - and waited. Crows were conversing across the valley as the sun broke the horizon and bathed the valley fog in golden light. Chickadees called. Woodpeckers hammered out their tattoos on



© Ron Winch

dead-sounding branches. The woodcock was quiet. Then came the sound I had been waiting for; like an old John Deere tractor starting up on a cool morning. I'm sure that many of you that have wandered the woods have heard the sound and realized it was not

a John Deere, but a Ruffed Grouse advertising his availability.

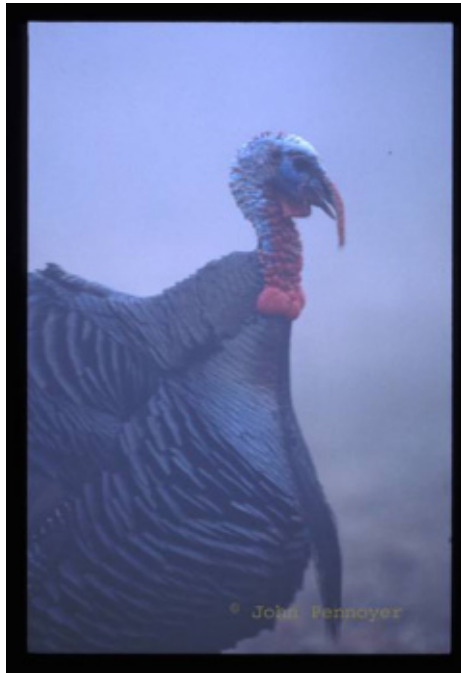
Within 30 minutes three grouse were drumming within earshot and a chipmunk had investigated the blind. Finally a male grouse boldly stepped up on the drumming log from the back side and after a quick rouse settle down to observe his territory. With eye glued to the viewfinder I studied his every move. The in-camera meter was creeping up - finally 125th of a second, enough light for the shots I had in mind with almost total backlighting. If it worked, I'd have some exquisite photos, if not, better luck next time.

I watched one more drumming and then rested my finger on the shutter release button. The bird move slightly, seemed to take a deep breath, and then the wings started. The drumming sounds of wing beats and motor drive were beautiful music to my ears. If everything had been right, I'd surely have some unique photos of a drumming Ruffed Grouse.

This scenario was repeated a number of times before the bird casually left for another post. I waited 30 minutes before exiting the blind so as not to spook the bird. Now it seemed warm as I made my way back to the car, content that I had observed and photographed a brief moment in the life of a Ruffed Grouse under very special conditions.

Ruffed Grouse can be heard drumming in William O'Brien State Park, Wild River State Park and most wild places north of there. Good Luck!

I could hear the Toms behind me gobbling like crazy and it sounded like there were at least three of them. I looked at my watch and it was only 5:45 AM, still too dark to try and call them into my blind. After a few minutes, they were almost directly behind me and it was possible to hear the "whoosh" of their feathers as they began doing the "turkey strut." I remained as motionless as possible, for the eyesight of a wild turkey will catch the slightest movement and they will vacate the territory without a sound. For the next 15 minutes all was quiet. Then I heard a couple of gobbles but the sound was farther away. My mind began to wander and I tried to analyze whether or not the Turkeys had spotted me. Having been after



Foggy Morning Gobbler, John Pennoyer
Nikon F100, Nikon 500mm S lens, Provia 100F
@ 200, EV: +2/3 (necessary to overexpose
because of the heavy fog), Aperture Priority

Wild Turkeys for quite a few years, I figured they just decided to look for hens in a different direction. It was still about 15 minutes earlier than I preferred, but I didn't want to lose them. I took my box call and gave a couple of soft "yelps". Almost immediately the field echoed with gobbles. Not one minute later, off to my left, three mature Tom's came out of the woods. They spotted my decoy's-a hen and a Jake (immature tom). All three of them made a beeline to the Jake and began kicking it, knocking it over. One of the Tom's actually jumped a couple of times on the "injured decoy." After they determined that this competitor was out of commission they

went to check out the hen. All three of them gave a strut or two and decided that she was not very exciting and they trotted off to look for a more co-operative lady friend. I had fired off a whole roll of film while this episode was taking place. Conditions were not ideal as the sunrise was still about 10 minutes away and it was also

a foggy morning so that made for a difficult exposure.

I stayed in my blind for another couple of hours and sure enough another Tom came in to check out my decoys. The light on him was fantastic and I easily fired off 18 more shots. But for some reason this Tom did not give one display. At 10:00 AM I figured it was time to head for home. But I first stopped at Leonard's farmhouse and as we enjoyed a cup of coffee together, I told him

my stories of the morning!

A couple of months before I had left one of my dealers and, as I usually do, took the backroads home. Driving slowly and watching the fields, I saw all kinds of birds and wildlife. At one location I noticed some black clumps out in the middle of a corn stubble field. There really was not a whole lot of snow so I figured that they were just clumps of dirt. But as I looked through my binoculars, I identified them as wild Turkeys. I pulled into the farmer's yard and knocked on the door. An elderly gentleman opened the door and I introduced myself and gave him my business card. I explained to him that I was

a Nature Photographer and that I had spotted some turkeys on his land and would like permission to try and photograph them. He invited me in and I learned that Leonard is a retired farmer and just lives in the house and leases out the land to a "younger" neighboring farmer. He allows no hunters on his land but gave me permission to use my blind and pursue the wild turkey. Two days later the previously described episode occurred.

Minnesota has some very strict laws about trespassing on private land. I think every nature photographer should read the fish and game laws of states in which they want to photograph and pay special attention to the section regarding this subject. However, I am not going to get into the legal aspects of this because I think that it is only courteous to ask permission to go onto private land. It really makes no difference if you are a hunter, birder, or photographer. If your quarry is on their land, a simple knock on the door is all that it takes. When I used to do a lot of hunting, many landowners gave me permission and many did not. As a photographer I have always been able to get permission. When you do get permission, be sure to get the specifics of the boundaries of the property. They may have some guidelines for you to follow. I always let them know the type of vehicle I drive and ask if they have a specific location they would like me to park. If you get a great photo of your subject, consider offering them one.

I stopped at Leonard's place again this spring just to renew my permission. He remembered me and permission was again granted. I promised him a photo of one of his Toms in "full display." I was there on Saturday, March 29, and I called in one tom but he was too wary to come into my decoy. That just means I will go back a few more times to try and fulfill my commitment to Leonard.

Good Shooting

Spring Break 2003

Ron Cleveland

Twin Cities Area Council of Camera Clubs (TCACCC) volunteers and the Mystic Lake facilities and staff provided a Saturday (April 5) full of photography, food and friends - all for only \$65.

We could select four of nine available presentations during the day. The first one I attended was a close-up workshop by JoAnn Kuntemeier. She showed several prints of her work and described how each shot was made. Nearly all were hand held with an off-camera flash at the 10:00 or 2:00 position above (sometimes behind) the subject. The flash to subject distance would



MNPC member Dave Klein using his Nikon D100 at the Close-up workshop.

vary depending on the effect desired. Sometimes, she also uses a white or gold reflector to bounce light into shadow areas. Attendees could practice the technique with several subjects set up at the back of the room.

My next session was the PhotoShop 7 presentation by John Woods of Adobe and Jim Lyons of Kodak. Jim introduced the subject and informed those present that Kodak isn't just a film company and, in fact, holds many of the patents that digital camera makers license for their cameras. The normally six-hour presentation they give around the country was compressed in less than two hours and concentrated on a quick method for color correction. Picking the white point with the eyedropper in Curves (John's preference) or Levels is the key. Adding contrast with the black point eyedropper was another tip. Use of the eyedropper was an eye opener for sure. Attendees left with a CD of 52 other PDF-based lessons to learn at home. John and Jim may return to town with the full program some day - soon, I hope.

A big box lunch awaited us in the main meeting room. Several door prizes were given away, but it wasn't my day.

Al Havlicek and Mark Rasmussen, from Illinois, presented Magical Natural Light. Al opened with a detailed explanation and examples of hyperfocal distance - the point of focus where everything near and far in the frame will appear in focus. Mark then showed several truly amazing examples of his work. He (1) focuses on the hyperfocal distance, (2) spot meters to measure the light in selected areas from top to bottom in the frame, (3) determines which graduated neutral density filter to use, (4) adjusts the exposure for the amount of color saturation desired and for the reciprocity effect of the film and then trips the shutter. Sounds simple, doesn't it? Needless to say, small apertures (large f-numbers) and long exposures are involved. Mark also showed comparative samples of center-weighted, matrix and spot metering. Al and Mark sold 3x5 cards with hyperfocal settings and natural light photo tips. They also lead photo tours with the next one being Glacier National Park, July 20-26, 2003.

PowerPoint by MNPC member Mike Prokosch was my final session of the afternoon. Mike discussed several software and hardware options for presenting conventional and digital slide shows. Most valuable, I thought, was his detailed outline of how to organize and present a show - regardless of the method employed. He concluded his presentation with a fine show of his own work.

A fine and full dinner buffet was followed by a grand presentation from nature photographer Moose Peterson. The nature story is all-important to Moose. He narrated a sequence of short stories told with photos, a lot of it in Alaska. His message: the key to appreciating and protecting the natural world is improving and sharing our knowledge of it. There is a lot we can do in this regard close to home.

To Include or Not?

by Tom Samuelson

In a recent photo outing, the inclusion of my sons in a day of hiking and photography quickly turned into a day of questions. "Dad, that is a really cool cave, take a picture of it." "Dad, take a picture of this. Dad, take a picture of that." When the answer to their many questions was; "that really doesn't work" or "the cave is on the other side of the river and there isn't enough light to have anything in that cave show up" or "there are too many trees, it's too busy", their response was, "If you came out here to take pictures, then why aren't you taking any?"

The thought that lingers is this: how do you begin to teach them the photographic concepts of composition, light and subject and combine that with the physical limitations of film? Their lack of understanding that film cannot see the same tonal ranges the human eye can, doesn't stop them from wanting to capture any and all images, regardless of whether or the not the photographs will "work". What my son sees as a "cool cave", the film sees as a "black area" when exposing for the surrounding elements of snow and granite. If you expose for the cave the surrounding area becomes over exposed. Realizing that this is a "teaching moment" has me struggling for answers to the question: How and when do you begin to teach?

An outing such as this leaves me torn between whether to include my sons or not. Can we spend time both exercising our hobby while including our family? This question is posed to all of you. What is your answer? I assume that for some it's yes and others no. Sometimes the kids are interested in being right next to dad and asking questions about why things are set up a certain way. Sometimes they are much more interested in being off by themselves throwing rocks into the river. In either case, we are all winners.

Once the composition is set up, the kids love to peer through the viewfinder and immediately the questions begin. They also get to handle the camera and take several pictures of whatever they want. It is usually at this time that they begin asking me more questions about shutter speed and f/stop. If additional film is burned and thrown away, so be it. Employing the "use film and then review" method keeps the kids involved, not only on the day of the outing, but afterwards when the slides come back. They get to take a picture and see the results, touching and feeling both sides of the process.

A few weeks after our outing, an interesting thing occurred. The February Outdoor Photographer magazine arrived and Kirk Enterprises was advertising some of its products. As my son was looking over my shoulder, he inquired as to what that "Flash Extender" product was. After a short explanation, his response was, "With this, you could have gotten a picture of that cave and had things inside show up!"

This left me contemplating on whether the learning process had already started. Will my sons continue to be included? For me, there is only one answer.

Nature Photo Times

published Sept-May by the

Minnesota Nature Photography Club

www.minnesotanature.org

Editor: Cathy Jones, 952-897-1881, cathyj@toomuchheat.com
3533 W. 103rd St
Bloomington, MN 55431

President: Joe Kandiko 952-445-3406 jgkandiko@msn.com
Co Vice Pres.: Mike Hagerty 612-920-2635 mhagerty@hjab.com
Co Vice Pres.: Vijay Karai 763-757-6300 vkarai@temgweb.com
Treasurer: Jim Duncan 651-459-3558 jduncan001@attbi.com

Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month,
Sept-May at the Visitor Center of the Minnesota Valley
National Wildlife Refuge, 3815 East 80th Street,
Bloomington, MN

April Program: *Stories That Pictures Don't Tell...*

presented by Vijay Karai

FIRST CLASS MAIL



The Raptor Center Spring Bird Release

Saturday, April 26, 2003
10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Lake Minnetonka Regional Park

Cosponsored by Three Rivers Park District, this annual event features the release of rehabilitated birds of prey at 11:30 a.m. and 2 p.m., with raptors on exhibit, educational displays, children's activities, and merchandise sales throughout the day.

Lake Minnetonka Regional Park is located on Lake Minnetonka in Minnetrista. From Interstate 494, take Highway 7 west approximately 12 miles. Turn right County Road 44 and follow signs to the park visitor center.

Minnesota Nature Photography Field Trips



For further information contact Dale Bohlke at (952) 445-6125 or dbohlke@mn.rr.com

April

April 26th, 6 PM until dark, River Terrace SNA

Subject: Pasque flowers and sunset

Notes: Meet at Cannon River Trailhead, Cannon Falls. Be prepared to get low! Tips on wildflower photography will be shared.

May

May 17th, 7 AM - 9 AM, Tierney Woods

Subject: Ephemerals & Ferns

June

June 21st, sunset (Tentative)

Subject: Butterfly Weed, Schaefer or Black Dog Prairie

July

July 11th (Tentative)

Subject: sunset at Roscoe Prairie, possible sunrise, followed by butterflies at Regal Meadows

August

August 4th Weekend, before sunrise (Tentative)

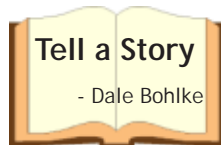
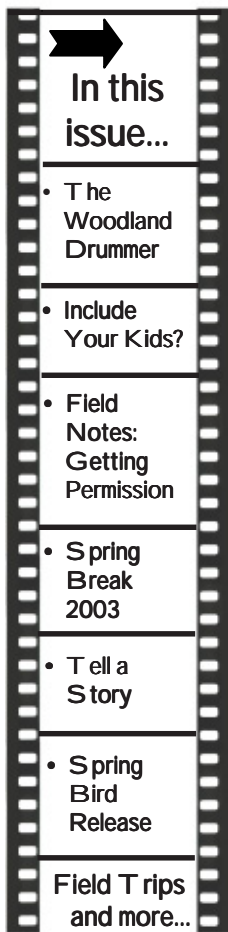
Subject: Monarch Migration

Notes: Photograph Monarch butterflies before they warm up

September

Subject: Spiderwebs at Louisville

Notes: Arrive early and finish the morning at the Renaissance Festival



April Showers

After an April shower rain drops on new leaves are waiting to be discovered. The air is clear and quiet allowing you to use the long exposures needed for maximum depth of field. I like to use an 81A warming filter to warm the light after a shower or a polarizing filter to intensify the greens. Unfortunately this is at the expense of 2 stops of light; a one second exposure becomes a four second exposure. This is a long time to expect a plant to hold still for you so take several shots in hopes that one will be perfectly sharp.

If you are lucky enough to see a rainbow use your polarizer and underexpose slightly to maximize the color. To my knowledge no photographer has ever found the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow but several have reported an exciting chase.

