



Nature Photo Times

Member: Photographic Society of America & Twin Cities Area Council of Camera Clubs

Vol. 48, No. 8 - April, 2004

Interstate Park St. Croix Falls, WI

by Ron Winch

© Ron Winch



river are transported back to an earlier time.

Somewhere in that lichen-rich landscape of tumbling rocks and mosses a nature photographer searches for a semblance of spring. He should have no trouble, for as the song goes "...spring is bustin' out all over." The pines are in bloom. Their flowers, heavy with pollen, shed clouds of yellow pollen dust with each slight breeze. The fresh oak leaves, light green to red in color, stand guard over their dangling pollen flowers, and the flowers of the wild plum flood the area with their seductive fragrance. In the seeps and along the creek,

© Ron Winch



even yield a cactus.

White-tailed deer are abundant in the park, however, at this time of year they are not in the best of shape due to shedding. You may find a very pregnant doe worthy of a photo or two. Later, in May or June, you might be fortunate to view and perhaps photograph a young spotted fawn hidden in dense foliage or frolicking in an open field of flowers. The headquarters area usually draws a number of red,

The beautiful St. Croix River muscles its way through the basaltic gorge as kayakers play in the surging rapids. Overhead a Bald Eagle, circling on the rising warm air currents, lets go with a scream. Majestic Red and White Pines squeeze their roots into seemingly solid basalt. Rock climbers test their skill on the sheer 150-foot rock faces to the tune of pitons being driven into the almost invisible cracks. Tourists, enjoying an ice cream cone, feel the mighty surge of the great river and listening to the music of the wild



© Ron Winch

the last skunk cabbage is beginning to fade. Higher ground yields Bloodroot, Hepatica and Dutchman's breeches in full bloom. Dry rocky outcrops may



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keen observer may identify nearly 200 bird species in the park throughout the year and at least 75 species nest here, including a dozen different warblers. Spring and fall migrations see many more birds moving through the park.

The floodplain forest is made up primarily of silver maple, black and green ash and American elm. You're likely to find a raccoon or barred owl in the large old trees. Several frog species in addition to puddle ducks, muskrat and an occasional mink, inhabit the many ponds.

Surely the jewels of the river bottom are the vernal pools, those temporary pools that fill with snowmelt and early spring rains and later dry up. Here you will find a myriad of insect larvae. Salamanders, Blue spotted and Tiger, come to the pools shortly after ice-out to breed and deposit eggs. Red-backed salamanders are also found here, but being strictly a woodland salamander, and unlike other salamanders it does not go to water to breed. You might be surprised to find shrimp in these pools. The Fairy Shrimp, semi-transparent and pinkish-green in color, is only about an inch long and swims on its back by waving its appendages. As the pools dry up in summer the adults perish, but the eggs over winter in the moist bottom and hatch after ice-out next spring.

Fifteen feet away a Scarlet Tanager settles onto a Silver Maple branch and feeds on tender young insects - and here I am with a macro lens on the camera. Oh well, nature photography is as much, maybe more, about nature as photography.

If you've never been here, give it a try. Almost three square miles of park, miles of trails and as varied a terrain as you could ask for. Don't forget good sturdy shoes or boots.

Maybe I'll see you there.



© Ron Winch

gray and the seldom seen fox squirrels that visit the bird feeders during the winter. You'll likely find the usual feeder birds here also. A



The Bald Eagle sat high atop his perch intently looking at the water below. It was dinner time and he was ready for his next meal. I was certain that ocean Herring was on the menu for the night. As I watched him through my viewfinder, it was easy to see that he was ready to take-off at the first sign of a catchable fish. Suddenly he lifted off with his powerful legs and began to fly in my direction. He dropped down just inches above the water and with a quick thrust of his legs and with hardly a ripple, he pulled a herring up out of the water. He circled behind me and headed straight to his perch. With a screeching eagle call as if to say "I got my dinner", he began to tear apart the herring with his powerful beak. I looked at the LCD screen on my digital camera and found that I had taken 6 frames and it looked like at least two of them would certainly be keepers.

There are many difficult subjects to photograph in this beautiful natural world that we live in, but I don't know of any subject more difficult to photograph than birds in flight. Not only are the majority of birds swift in the air, but they also know where they are going - and you don't. With a quick movement of a wing tip or tail feathers, they can change direction in a heartbeat. If we are pressing the shutter while they're changing direction, all that is left is a great image of a partial bird, or empty sky. Over the past five years I have been doing a great deal of bird flight photography. Here are some ideas that have really helped me increase the number of keepers.

1. Study bird behavior. Many birds will have some specific type of behavior before they take flight; i.e. head bobbing or looking around. Since it's more difficult to lock on to a flying bird than one at rest, try to pick a bird before it takes flight.

2. Pay attention to the wind. Birds will take off heading into the wind and land heading into the wind. If you see a bird in the water and it changes direction into the wind, the chances are it is going to take flight.

3. Consider shutter speed. In most cases I consider the minimum shutter speed to be 1/500 of a second. Not that a

slower speed won't work - especially if the bird is going into the wind. Many times it may be necessary to push your film one or two stops or set the ISO equivalent on a digital to ISO 400.

4. Focus on the head. As difficult as it is, try to focus on the head and not the body of the bird. If there are multiple birds in flight, focus on the bird closest to you.

5. Shoot wide open. In most cases shoot with your aperture wide-open. This will give the fastest shutter speed possible. Also, the auto-focus will work better. If I can get enough shutter speed, I might go to F5.6 on a light colored bird and my AF will be excellent in this area. This will allow for a little more depth-of-field and a little more room for error.

6. Set Focus Tracking. Have your camera system set up for focus tracking or whatever your camera's manufacturer calls this operation. For my Nikon it is set up for Dynamic AF and high speed continuous shooting. As I lock onto a bird, I pan with the bird and when the light is hitting the bird I just hold the shutter down while still panning. Depending on what camera system I am using, I usually fire off 6-8 images.



7. Observe flight direction. Birds flying towards the photographer are easier to photograph than those flying parallel. Once the birds are flying away, I usually quit shooting but may still keep the camera on them because I might capture a turning bird or some other behavior. In addition many birds, especially waterfowl, will circle before landing, so when they pass, keep locked on them and you may get an opportunity for a great image.

One of the items that has been around for about 10 years or so is the Gimbal-style tripod head. For me this head has been a real ace in the hole for bird flight photography. The first manufacturer that I know of to make this type of head is Wimberley. Kirk Enterprises has one called the King Co-

Digital Corner

by Jeff Morgan

It's time to go Digital!

I believe now is the optimal time to jump on the digital SLR bandwagon. Here is my personal review of the advantages and disadvantages of a 35mm film SLR versus a digital SLR for nature photography comparing the Canon 10D to film.

Digital Advantages

1. Crop Factor

The size of the sensor in the 10D is smaller than a 35mm frame, so when you attach a lens and look through the camera you are effectively multiplying the focal length of the lens by 1.6 times. The viewfinder looks just the same, the image fills the screen, but you are closer to the subject. It's just like getting a longer lens for free and the really great part is that the f stop stays the same. For example your 50mm f1.8 lens is now the equivalent of an 80mm f1.8 lens and because it is not using the edges of the 35mm frame, it is sharper also. A few more examples: Your 600mm f4.0 becomes a 960mm f4.0, and with a two times converter a whopping 1920mm! Your 400mm becomes a 640mm lens. Your 100mm macro becomes a 160mm macro. This alone is worth the cost of the camera. The disadvantage is that your 21mm wide angle becomes a 33mm—not exactly wide!

2. Free film

Once you have purchased the camera and accessories, the images you take are free of film and processing costs. I have read a number of accounts from famous photographers who have stated that their photography really improved after they started working for a company that paid for film and processing costs. When you can just keep shooting and practicing without regard to the cost, you experiment more and learn from your mistakes and successes. I shot over 10,000 images in the first year with my digital SLR—a great learning experience.

3. Instant Feedback

You know in the field instantly if you have nailed the exposure. No more bracketing and missed shots. Shoot that

eagle against the sky, the raven on the snow—perfect exposures every time. No waiting for the film to come back to review your images. Since camera settings are recorded with every image, you know exactly why one shot worked and another did not just by reviewing the data. One of my favorite late evening camping activities is sitting at the picnic table reviewing the day's images on my laptop computer.

4. Film type

With the digital camera you have slow ISO, medium ISO, fast ISO, color, artificial light, daylight, and black & white film loaded at any time—even mid-roll.

5. Quality and cost of prints

The 6 megapixel sensor gives me a fantastic 11x17 print from my own printer. I am fully in charge of the color, brightness, contrast, crop, paper surface, etc. I can get a better, sharper, cheaper print at 11x17 off my printer than I can get a lab to produce a print of the same size from a 35mm transparency. I will bring a few to the next meeting, so just ask me if you wish to see them.

6. Show your work

Small prints are great, cheap and easy to do. I can now show anyone my best images without setting up my projector and darkening the room. I can also take a CD-ROM full of images to Sam's Club and get them printed for just 19 cents each. But the big WOW is email where you can send all your friends a copy of your latest image just minutes after you take it.

7. Travel on airplanes

I have no worries about security checks at airports now since everything can get x-rayed no problem! I have almost unlimited amounts of (digital) film and backup CDs and don't have to worry about risking images or equipment going through the scanners.

8. Unlimited originals

If you take one good action shot of a bird in flight on film, you only have one (valuable) original. Yes, you can get it scanned but that may mean trusting it to someone else. The quality of film scanning is not as good as a digital original. A digital original has no film grain, no dust or scratches, and you have to

scan at more than twice the resolution to get equivalent quality. A digital master can be copied many times without degrading the quality. You can send a master to a magazine without a second thought and forget that dupe!

Digital Disadvantages

1. Cost

An equivalent digital camera costs at least 3 times what a film camera costs. It is true that it is quite expensive to equip yourself for digital. However I believe that it has now reached the point where the cost-benefit ratio favors the advantages. Even if I had bought the cheapest slide film and processing for the number of images I have shot with my digital SLR, I would have paid twice the cost of the camera by now.

2. Projection

This is the BIGGIE! A transparency projects really well, has great colors and looks really sharp on a projector that costs a few hundred dollars. As you have by now noticed, we are having some problems getting the digital projector to have good, consistent results. There is hope on the horizon, though, since the new DLP projectors they are developing and selling for HDTV are very good. I was in Best Buy last week and took a look at a \$900 DLP projector. The colors were great, the image sharp, the projected image was bright and impressive, and there were much better blacks (2000:1) than a LCD projector (about 350:1). It will not be long at all before we are very happy with these projectors.

My closing point is that digital has conquered nearly every area into which it has moved. You can still buy records and tapes if you are a collector. There are still typewriters if you really want one. You will still be able to buy film for many years, but it will start to get expensive and processing will be slow and not local. So one day you WILL want to move to digital. Why wait to face the steep learning curve later? Do you really want to be at the back of the line playing catch-up?

If you're interested in a local, one-day workshop on Digital SLR Workflow, keep an eye on www.elmstudio.com or speak to me

Bluestem Prairie Field Trip

April 23rd & 24th

Location: Blue Stem Prairie
Subject: Prairie chickens and pasque flowers



Four club members have already signed up for the April trip to Bluestem Prairie. There is still room for two more people, so if you're interested, please contact Vijay. You'll be in the blind by 5:00 am and will stay until about 8:30 am when the prairie chickens leave the site. Later during the day you'll explore Pasque flower photography.

March Awards

*Judges: Alan Schulz
and Cynthia Fleury*

10

Dale Hargadine	Snowy Egret #4
Aaron Moen	Cougar Kitten

9

Eric Baker	Heron
Mariann Cyr	Yoho Mushrooms
John D. La Mere	Eye of the Shoveler
Marilyn Gladitsch	Frog on Rock
Marilyn Gladitsch	Maidenhair Fern
John D. Jenkins	Yellowstone in Winter
Joe Kandiko	Ice - Two harbors
Jean McDonough	3 Spoonbills
John Pennoyer	Showy Lady's Slipper Grouping

8

Jim Aronson	Pink Petals
Jim Aronson	Trumpeter Landing #2
Joel Bahma	Badwater Sunrise
Joel Bahma	Mesquilel at Dunes
Eric Baker	Ibis
Mariann Cyr	Lefroy Lake, Yoho NP
Betty Goossens-Bryan	Wintering Trumpeter Swan #2
Betty Goossens-Bryan	Wintering Trumpeter Swan #9
Jerry Harlow	Lutsen Forest 8
John D. Jenkins	Bison in Winter
John D. La Mere	Bosque del Apache
Jean McDonough	Arctic Tern on Rock
Aaron Moen	Trees at Baptism River
Jeff Morgan	Egret
Venky Narayanaswamy	Elk in Winter
Venky Narayanaswamy	What's in the Air
John Pennoyer	Backlit Egret
Tom Samuelson	Into the Woods
David Zosel	Snowy Egret

Minnesota Nature Photography Field Trips

At A Glance Calendar

All trips will be held regardless of the weather. Any changes will be printed in the newsletter. An email bulletin will be sent shortly before the planned trip. For further information contact Dale Bohlke at 952-445-6125 or dbohlke@mn.rr.com.

April

April 18th, 6:00 pm

Location: River Terrace SNA
Subject: Pasque Flowers

April 23rd & 24th

(Contact Vijay Karai for details)

Location: Blue Stem Prairie
Subject: Prairie chickens and pasque flowers

May

May 22nd, 8:00 am

Location: Schaefer Prairie
Subject: Lady Slippers

Trip Details

River Terrace Field Trip

April 18th, 6:00 pm

Pasque Flowers! Spring is here! The prairie is starting its rainbow of color with the pale lavender of the pasque flower. Meet at the Cannon Valley Trailhead across the street from the grocery store in Cannon Falls at 6 PM, Sunday, April 18th for an evening of prairie and pasque flower photography. We will caravan to River Terrace Scientific and Natural Area which is about 5 miles east of town. In addition to the flowers there is an excellent opportunity for a prairie sunset and several oak trees for silhouette or texture shots. Any lens will work but macro capability is recommended. There is a short, steep hike from the car to the terrace and best photographs are on the hillside. Sturdy shoes are recommended.

Schaefer Prairie Field Trip

May 22nd, 8:00 am

Lady Slipper Morning

The small white lady slipper is a delicate prairie orchid that can be hard to find. Schaefer Prairie, managed by the Nature Conservancy, has several of these plants which typically bloom during the latter part of May. There are other locations in the Metro area where these can be found but Schaefer was chosen as a field trip location to spread out photographers and minimize habitat damage.

Meet at the fast food restaurant (Burger King?) on the Northwest corner of the stop light in Glencoe at 8:00 am on Saturday, May 22nd. We will caravan to Schaefer Prairie which is about 6 miles west on 212. Caution: Poison ivy is everywhere! You will be in direct contact if you leave your vehicle. Wearing rain gear and washing thoroughly within 6 hours of contact will decrease the risk of acquiring this miserable rash.

Nature Photo Times

published Sept-May by the

Minnesota Nature Photography Club

www.minnesotanature.org

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Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month September through May. Set-up and social time with light refreshments begins at 6:30 pm. The nature slide salon starts at 7:00 pm and a program follows the salon.

Visitor Center

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge,
3815 East 80th Street, Bloomington, MN

FIRST CLASS MAIL



April Program

The Beauty of Birds

*presented by
Ron Winch and Toni Meglitsch*




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The Beauty of Birds

presented by Ron Winch and Toni Meglitsch

Gyrfalcons and Dovekies in the high arctic. Gentoo and Chinstrap Penguins in Antarctica. Hyacinth Macaws and Taco Tucans in Brazil. Lilac Breasted Rollers and Malachite Kingfishers in Kenya. Atlantic Puffins in Iceland. Crested Auklets in the Pribilofs. Barnacle Geese in Svalbard. Barn Owls in New Jersey. Ringneck Pheasants in Iowa. Bald Eagles in Wisconsin. Chickadees in Minnesota. Red Shouldered Hawks in our back yard.

Marvel at the colors and splendor of birds from many parts of the world and their diverse habitats. See how birds are adapted to their habitats.

As a fellow-up to Dave Klein's excellent program a year ago on how to photograph birds, Toni and I will present some of the most beautiful birds in the world for your viewing pleasure. We've traveled from 81 degrees North to 65 degrees South latitude and from 171 degrees West to 40 degrees East longitude capturing avian species through long and not-so-long lenses. Please join us and share in the beauty of birds.



**Art,
Film,
Food
And
Fun!**

Featuring the artwork of Bruce Wilson

Friends of the Minnesota Valley presents an evening full of art, film, food and fun.

Award-winning nature and wildlife artist Bruce Wilson presents his incredibly detailed work in the spacious art gallery located at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Hors d' oeuvres and refreshments will be served. The breathtaking feature film "Winged Migration" will be shown twice during the evening in the intimate setting of the Refuge Theater, and a silent auction to benefit the Friends and the Refuge will be taking place throughout the evening.

This exciting event will be held on Thursday, May 20, 2004 at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center, 3815 American Blvd. East, Bloomington, Minnesota, 6:00pm to 10:00pm. Tickets \$15. Call 952-858-0706 for reservations. Space is limited to 200 persons.