



Field Notes

Al and the other Al **By John Pennoyer**

This was my second trip to Alaska to photograph our Nations symbol the American Bald Eagle. Last year the weather was overcast and drizzling rain for the entire trip, with the exception of our last day when the sun decided to shine for the entire day. On the plane home I had already decided to go back the next year and stay a little longer to try and capture the birds in some Alaska winter sunshine. Upon landing at Stephens International airport in Anchorage the sun was shining with the temperature in the mid 20's. What we did notice on our drive to Homer was the lack of snow. As a photographer this is an important factor for helping to lighten the underside of the eagle's very dark wings as they fly overhead. The entire drive was under clear skies and shining stars until we began to get into Homer and the clouds seemed to gather.

Also on this trip were Al Schulz, a long time member of our club, and Al Markegard who I got to know through my workshops at Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary. I referred to them as "Al and the other Al". The next morning we were all anxious to get to the "spit" and begin photographing. Of course, just like last year, we awoke under very heavy dark clouds which lasted for two days. But as we watched the weather reports on cable TV, they were talking about clear skies and very cold temperatures. It was all that "the other Al" and I could do to restrain ourselves from dancing a jig! As we went to bed one night they were certainly right about the cold temperatures as we could tell by the cold temperature in the cabin! As usual we awoke at 5:00 AM and immediately looked out the window. This time stars were shining brightly. For the next day, and the 7 days following, we had temperatures in the single digits with very clear skies and hardly a cloud showing itself. Even though we had no snow, the cold temperature in the harbor made the water begin to ice over. What made this so spectacular was that it was only a thin layer of ice and it was taking on the color of the blue ocean.

The perfect conditions would certainly help the underside of the wings on our flight shots, but it also gave us another dilemma - how to shoot a very dark bird on the bright foreground and backgrounds. I used my ambient light meter and determined the exposure for EV 0. Due to the fact the ice had taken on a blue color it was not necessary to open

the normal amount. I shot a few images at + 2/3 and few at +1/3 and also shot images at EV 0. When I was looking at my histogram on my camera it did look to me that the +2/3 was a little over-exposed. After the afternoon shoot, I downloaded my images on the computer and confirmed that the correct exposure was generally between EV +1/3 and 0. Al, the other Al and I shot most of our images in this exposure range. This of course is a huge benefit with shooting digital - corrections can be made immediately in the field.

Later on in the week a very prominent wildlife photographer mainly known as a bird photographer had arrived to start his workshop. He was on the "spit" photographing with 3-4 of his friends. He was helping them with their exposure setting on photographing the birds when they were on the ice. One time he told everyone to "open up 1 stop". Al, the other Al and I looked at each other and just smiled. After about 1/2 hour this "professional wildlife photographer" told everyone to open up +1 2/3 stop. He told them this was necessary because of the dark bird and very bright ice. Again there were three photographers that could do all they could do to restrain themselves. Later in the week he was down on the spit with his workshop participants and the other Al and I heard one of the workshop participants ask him, what exposure he should set for shooting these birds on the ice. The professional answered "open up +1/3 stop".

This little episode really convinced me on how difficult it can be to determine exposure. In most situations, it would have been necessary to open up +1 to +1 1/3 stop, but the color of the ice threw that right out the window. Most of my images were shot at EV 0 and the exposures were right on. If you are shooting film, I always recommend when shooting difficult exposure situations that you always bracket your exposures to be sure to capture an important shot. If shooting digital always look at your histogram. As I use my histogram more and more, I am beginning to feel very comfortable with it and have let it override what I thought would be perfect exposure and it was right on.

Good Shooting!



Eagles and Blue Ice



Landing on Blue Ice

Phantom of the North Forest

By Ron Winch

Snowflakes hurried along by a light breeze almost obscured the Great Gray Owl at times. Only 40 feet away, the deep yellow eyes seemed to twinkle as the snowflakes hurried by. It was only a quick glance before the eyes shifted again to the same spot on the snow. Under the snow something was alive and moving and the Great Gray Owl would like to make it his evening meal.

Light was fading fast – and the snow didn't help – not that the owl cared, but the photography for the day was over. So what to do? Snow accumulated on the cold photo gear and

didn't melt and I was snug in several layers of fleece and a down parka, and the owl was hopefully about to have lunch. So I waited – and watched.

Some minutes later the Great Grey pushed off his perch and gliding on silent wings plunged into the snow. I could sense the talons on those powerful feet flexing, opening and closing, squeezing the life out of his catch. And then the warm meal was swallowed whole, as five foot wings carried the phantom of the northern forest into the darkness of a spruce grove.

By this time I had already spent over 20 hours observing and photographing the Great Grays in all kinds of weather. Hundreds of images were captured on film. Now it was time to try to understand some of that behavior. What we are seeing this year is one of the greatest eruptions of all time of the northern owls. Some counters have reported over 1000 owls in Minnesota. Many are adults but there are also many juveniles. Since the young get their adult plumage at about five months they can be hard to identify. First year birds have rather pointed tail feathers – adults are more rounded. Viewed from the top, young birds have a white cream colored band around the outer edge of the wing. Flight feathers of owls differ greatly from those of hawks. The soft comb-like leading edge of flight feathers and the soft, fuzzy upper surfaces muffle sound as the feathers move against each other and through the air, thus making for silent flight. Hawks, especially accipiters and falcons have hard edged more rigid feathers for more maneuverability and faster flight.

Owls have four toes on each foot that can be positioned with three forward and one back, two forward and two back or fully spread for optimum capture and gripping of prey. The large facial discs receive sound waves and focus them back to asymmetrical ears thus creating triangulation for precise location of sound.

There are many great photo opportunities granted by this wonderful gift from the north. It is also a great opportunity to learn more about the Phantom of the North. Let's take advantage of both. Remember – there is more to nature photography than photography.

Good Shooting!

Additions to the January Salon Results:

The following results from the January Salon were mistakenly left out of last month's newsletter, my apologies to the photographers. The error was entirely mine.

8

Aronson, Jim	Casey Lake Sunrise
Bergma, Lyle	Lone Birch
Blesener, Rod	Deere 0020
Cleveland, Ron	Shovel Point Dawn
Cleveland, Ron	Whitetail Buck (W)
Cyr, Mariann	Prairie Blazing Star
Dykstra, John	Early Spring
Dykstra, John	Red Fox Kit
Galambos, Ted	Sunset at Monte Verde
Graves, Rick	Maple Leaf on Rock
Hahn, Jeff	Mating Tiger Beetles
Harlow, Jerry	Prairie Chicken Walking
Jones, Cathy	Wood Stork (W)

February Salon Results:

Judges: Lawrence C. Duke and John Dykstra

10

Zosel, David	Great Blue Heron
Nelson, Vern	Red-breasted Nuthatch
Gladitsch, Marilyn	Patterned Mushroom
Bertas, Mary Kay	Prescott, AZ
Morgan, Jeff	Blue Heron (W)

9

Hoppe, Paul	Yellow
Ellenbecker, Dave	Skunk Cabbage #8
Samuelson, Tom	Blazing Star Monarch
Moen, Aaron	Misty Morning
Hoppe, Paul	Coneflower Head
Hahn, Jeff	Tachinid Fly
Ellenbecker, Dave	Milkweed #7
Handsaker, Bill	Mono Lake, CA
Sanderson, Virginia	Swan Touching Down (W)
Handsaker, Bill	Tufa at Black Rock Desert
Morgan, Jeff	Great Egret (W)
Perez, Dave	Cedar Waxwing Eating Berries (W)

8

Samuelson, Tom	Kettle River
Nelson, Vern	Luna Moth on Leaves
Karia, Vijay	Ducks in a Row
Gladitsch, Marilyn	Hepaticas (Seven)
Harlow, Jerry	Cactus in Navajo Canyon

Baker, Eric	Fawn
Bertas, Mary Kay	Canadian Poppy
Snowden, Curt	Raindrop on Spotted Knapweed
Karia, Vijay	Canada Goose & Goslings
Harlow, Jerry	Leaves in Rain
Baker, Eric	Eagle & Gull
Polley, Lil	Tetons
Wilbrecht, Jon	Golden Arches
Bader, Bill	Iridescent Clouds
Sanderson, Wayne	Great Blue Heron at Sunrise
Mamer, Joe	Lilly
Vichich, Dave	Pads
Cleveland, Ron	Swan Wings (W)
Sanderson, Virginia	Pelican Drying Feathers (W)
Sanderson, Wayne	Eagle after Hurricane Charlie (W)
Cyr, Mariann	King Shag (W)

For Sale:

This is the first item offered for sale in the newsletter, I encourage anyone with items that they wish to sell to contact me (email preferred) and I will include the items in the next month's letter.

Canon 300mm f/4.0 L telephoto lens, very sharp, will autofocus with a 1.4 x converter (420mm or 672mm on digital). With leather case, good condition, very clean, \$595 obo, Call Jeff at 651-436-1949 or jeff@elmstudio.com

Items of Interest:

1. Monticello Art Council's 2nd Annual Community Riverside Photo Show.
Dates: Friday – Sunday March 18- 20, 2005
Times F 4-9 a.m., Sat. 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., Sun 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Location: Mississippi Room at the Monticello Community Center.
Categories: Landscape, Animals/Wildlife, Botanical/Nature, Misc./Open and Black and White
Deadline for Entries: March 10, 2005
Ship or deliver to :
Design for Print
PO Box 1075
113 Locust Street
Monticello, MN 55362
Phone: Lynne Dahl-Fleming
Office: 763-295-8100
Cell: 763-300-8118

Details can be found at
www.monticelloarts.org/photoshow.html

Continued on the next page

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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. Meetings are held at:

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

March Meeting:

The March meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 3/16/2005. This month's program: Marianne Cyr, "2005 Minnesota Botany Show."

For your consideration (continued from page 3):

2. from Lyle Bergman. In October (9-15), I'll be going to Pennsylvania to attend Joe and Mary Ann McDonald's Digital Photo Nature Course <http://www.hoothollow.com/Digital%20NPC.html>.

Since the drive there is 2 days, I was hoping to hook up with someone who would also like to go and share some of the driving and expenses. The classes are small and fill up quickly, so whoever would want to go would need to sign up soon. The course isn't that cheap (\$1500), but it does include all food and lodging. Please contact me directly at lberg1@mninter.net or 651-769-0888, or even simply sign up for the course first, and then contact me

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3. **Our photo exhibit at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge will come down on Sunday, March 27th at 3 to 4:30 p.m.** Please make arrangements to pick-up your photo at that time. Ron Winch will not be available to help after that date. Thanks to all who participated in a great show. Be sure to thank Ron for his help in organizing the show and let him know if you have interest in doing this again.