



# Nature Photo Times

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## The Heart of Nature

By  
Ron Winch

It's embarrassing! As the image of the pine forest fades and melds into an image of a Saw-Whet Owl surveying the forest floor in hopes of locating breakfast – a Red-Backed Vole, perhaps. Emotions are high and words don't come easy. My voice cracks a bit and the lump in my throat grows large.

Strange that I should have these feelings now; I'm in the midst of a slide presentation to some fifty folks at a Wisconsin State Park. The image on the screen is being experienced only with my eyes, although the soft background music relaxes the spirit and encourages a mood.

Step back in time to the morning the image was made. The sun, like a big orange, peeked over the horizon two hours ago and kissed the river valley with its warmth.

A Veery's song drifted through the woods like the morning fog, and the smell of moist earth, reminiscent of decades of spring mornings, is so succulent you can almost taste it. A shadow glides by on silent wings. The Saw-Whet Owl glides to his hunting perch on an aspen snag. Soft green maple leaves unfold in the warmth of a new day as I loosen the ball-head and frame the tender leaves and owl into a pleasing composition. The soft green background enhances the image as my index finger gently presses the shutter release. Two seconds and twelve frames later the owl, startled by the staccato rattle of the motor drive, flies to a quieter part of the forest.

For me, this is what nature photography is all about. Being alone in the woods – it's like being in a living library. You experience nature at her grandest with all your senses. It is here that feelings are at a high pitch for you have captured an elusive moment in the secretive life of a Saw-Whet Owl.

Over the river an eagle screams and only fifty yards away a Ruffed Grouse – high on testosterone – drums frantically to attract any unmated female. Thoughts begin to drift as I wander the forest in search of more fine images, but I can't forget that moment.

Editing the slides on the light-table, I find 4 discards, 7 very good shots and one exceptional image where the bird – close to the edge of the frame – is looking out of the shot, ala Robert Bateman. Although I recognize it's a great shot, a myriad of distractions prevents me from truly savoring the moment.

Only in the slide presentation, after a brief introduction to the program and what nature photography means to me, do the images begin to get to me. Soft mesmerizing background music and the near darkness of the room overcome all distractions. It is in this dark void with slides projected on a six foot screen that feelings for the images are at their strongest. I am transported back to the taking of every image, only now emotions are higher. There is only me and the audience, background music and the images. It is the audience that I am playing to and I want to involve them in the moment. There is a time for quiet and a time to tug at their emotions.

If you can truly get your viewers emotionally involved in the beauty, wonder and awe of the story you and your images are portraying, you will have done a great job in entertaining, educating and giving them a greater appreciation for our natural world.

And they will invite you back.

## Field Notes

### **“What's in your vehicle?”**

By John Pennoyer

As I lay in bed still in the fog of sleep, my half opened eyes looked at the clock- it was 5:30 AM. I got up and looked out the widow overlooking our deck and all I could see was darkness filled with stars! My heart leaped for joy and I quickly went downstairs, got dressed, grabbed my tripod and photo pack, raced to the bedroom and loudly informed my wife I would be out photographing. She mumbled something like “have fun”. Within 30 minutes I was at the river. The temperature was -8F with no wind which is perfect conditions for winter photography. I quickly put on my winter outer clothing, put on the winter pac boots, pulled the polar fleece neck covering over my nose, put on my polar fleece hat, stuck in some chemical heat packs in my mittens, grabbed my camping stool and within 45 minutes of waking up I was set-up in darkness on the shores of the Mississippi River waiting to capture a sunrise and later, hopefully, some waterfowl along the river.

As I look back over the 25 years of my nature photography, I have come to determine that probably 60% of my photography is “spur of the moment”. Living in Minnesota all of us are so fortunate because we have so many natural and wild things that live and grow so close to us, no matter where we live in the Twin Cities area. However, to be a “spur of the moment”

photographer does not mean that you do not have to plan. I would not want to be photographing at -8 F without the proper clothing etc. I would have to say that, being retired, I probably am out photographing 2-4 times a week with most of that only being for 3-4 hours each time. So I thought that for this article I would write on what I do to try and stay prepared so when the clock says 5:30AM with perfect conditions to photograph my subject I can be on the road in a heart beat. Of course if the conditions were not perfect I would probably just roll over and go back to sleep.

### **My Photography Vehicle:**

This is probably the most important item for the “spur of the moment” photographer. Here is how my vehicle is “almost” always equipped. I have to say almost because sometimes for family outings my wife insists that I clean it out! Also remember what is in my vehicle will change with the seasons.

**Bean Bag:** This never leaves my vehicle, with the exception that it takes a plane ride with me, or I am going in a friend’s vehicle where I may use it. Not only have I captured some great images with this bean bag, but it is a great pillow when snooze time arrives.

**Compass:** The only time this leaves the vehicle is when I am in unfamiliar woods or bogs and it is with me. The compass also is handy when in unfamiliar territory on a cloudy day to locate east and west for potential sunrises and sunsets.

**Nutri-grain bars:** I usually have 2-3 bars in my glove box for when hunger strikes. Of course it really sucks when on my last outing I ate them and never replenished my glove box!!

**Camping stool:** I hate sitting on the cold, wet ground so I frequently use camping stools. I have 3 different types depending on my subjects. Almost always it will be in the back of my vehicle.

**Camo netting:** Those of you that have heard of my photo blind programs know that when I use my vehicle as a blind that I will use camo netting on the driver’s window while photographing. Also during the spring for wild turkeys I always have my other camo netting that goes in the field with me.

**Boots:** During the spring, summer and fall I keep knee high rubber boots, or I like the term Ron Cleveland uses - “his bog boots”! These stay in the vehicle for use when ever I go into bogs or wet prairies. They work especially well when going into grassy or prairie areas with dew on the ground. Just tuck your pants inside and stay dry. Also I think bog boots work excellent during tick season. My winter pac type boots stay in the back of my vehicle and I only bring them inside to dry out the inserts.

**Snow shoes:** If the conditions warrant my snow shoes stay with me. However, this year I only used them the last week of February and 1<sup>st</sup> week of March.

**Winter Snow Camo Suit:** My favorite item of winter gear is a snow camo type suit that I bought for \$20.00 many years ago at a company that was going out of business. Usually from about December until sometime in March it just resides in the back of my vehicle.

**Chemical heat packs:** Every fall I usually purchase 20-30 of these chemical warmers to keep my hands nice and toasty during my winter photography.

**Hats-gloves-mittens-neck:** Most of these are all for winter photography, but again they will stay in the back of my vehicle so I don’t have to think “Where is my polar fleece hat”?

### **Photo Packs:**

I have two different photo packs, one is set-up for wildlife and the other one is for all other subjects that do not require a 500mm lens, such as landscapes, wildflowers etc.

**Hama Bubble Level:** If my flash is not on my camera, I will have a bubble level on the hot shoe. Each bag will have a level in it.

**Flash Cards:** Each bag has spare flash cards. (Of course like many things in photography I learned this the hard way)

**Wildlife Photo pack:** 500mm lens-70-200mm lens and 1.7X converter.

**Other Pack:** 12-24mm lens, 28-70mm lens and 70-200mm lens (No I do not have two 70-200 lens but depending on what I am photographing I will change that lens into the appropriate pack) and I have two cameras, but my primary camera is the D200 and that will go into the pack that I intend to use.

This just gives you a quick run down on how I try to stay prepared to do some “spur of the moment” photography. Doing it this way is why I can wake early and have nothing to think about except to grab my photo pack (or packs) and tripod and can be out the door quickly. Doing it this way I am almost always prepared for a quick 3-4 hours of photography. And I am usually home by 10:45 AM and downloading some great images. On the above mentioned morning I captured Trumpeters, Geese and my prize - 4 Common Mergansers who swam by within a few feet of me. As a result, I got some full frame images of a species that I didn’t have in my stock file. Being prepared paid off!





Good shooting

### March Salon Results (Alan Schulz Judging):

Score of 8:

Aaron Moen	Ice Bridge
Cynthia Fleury	Dogwoods
Cynthia Fleury	Waves on Rocks
Dave Ellenbecker	Spiderwort #6
Dave Vichich	Family Reunion (W)
David Zosel	Ground Squirrel (W)
Don Nadreau	Sierra Nevadas
Douglas McGinley	Gold Heart
Jean McDonough	Waiting for the Ice
Jeff Morgan	I See You (W)
John D. Jenkins	Waterfall
John D. Jenkins	Light on Angel Arch
Jon Wilbrecht	Black Bears
Linda Nygren	Pelican (W)
Mariann Cyr	South Orkney Islands
Marilyn Gladitsch	Toad in Habitat
Mary Kay Bertas	Firery Sky
Nadav Cassuto	Rosetta Spoonbill Reversed Throttle (W)
Rick Graves	Rocky Knob
Rod Blesener	White on White (W)
Roy Abbott	Swan Argument (W)
Roy Abbott	Soaring Swan (W)

Todd Nordquist	Bald Eagle with Fish (W)
Todd Nordquist	Fall Woods Floor

Score of 9:

Aaron Moen	Superior Ice
Betty Goossens-Bryan	Grouse Display (W)
Bill Handsaker	The Combs
Dave Ellenbecker	September Sumac
Dave Perez	Fox Kit (W)
Drew Mattison	Hyland Lake
Drew Mattison	Dance (W)
Jean McDonough	Red Tailed Portrait
Jeff Morgan	Building Next (W)
Joe Miller	Ice Crystals
Joe Miller	Ice and Water
John Pennoyer	Boundary Waters Sunset
Marilyn Gladitsch	Bellworts Four
Rick Graves	Elk & Wildflowers (W)
Rod Blesener	Subzero Swans (W)
Ted Galambos	Victoria
Tom Samuelson	Sunset on Sugar Lake
Tom Wilson	Flying Drake (W)
Vern Nelson	Female Sparrow

Score of 10:

Betty Goossens-Bryan	Barred Owl
Dave Vichich	Misty Morn
John Pennoyer	Morel Mushrooms
Mariann Cyr	Grass Wren (W)
Tom Wilson	Gray-Headed Coneflower

### Election Time

Club officers will be elected at the May 16, 2007 meeting. The slate of officers for 2007-2008 is:

President: John Pennoyer  
 Vice President: Rod Blesener  
 Treasurer: Jim Duncan  
 Secretary: Linda Nygren  
 Editor: Don Nadreau

Floor nominations may be made at the April or May meeting providing previous agreement of the nominee has been obtained.

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**Meetings** are held on the third Wednesday of the month, September through May

6:15 PM - Set-up and Social Time  
6:45 PM - Announcements and Business  
7:00 PM - Program  
8:00 PM - Nature Salon (Competition and Judge's Comments).

### Meetings are held at:

Visitor Center, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge,  
3815 East 80<sup>th</sup> Street  
Bloomington, MN

### April 18, 2007 Meeting

**April Program:** Bernard (Bernie) Friel, real high speed flash.

### Workshop:

John Pennoyer will be instructing a week-end workshop on Nature Photography. The workshop includes a class room session at REI Bloomington on Saturday April 28th with an optional field shoot in SE Minnesota on Sunday April 29th. The class is designed for the beginner to intermediate level photographer. Information available outside the meeting room, or feel free to talk to John

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