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From the President

2007 is now history and we can look forward to 2008. At our December meeting for the End of Year Judging I was firmly convinced that we have some of the best nature photographers anywhere. Congratulations to all that entered in our monthly competitions and to those that received HM's and Awards for the End of Year. We all now know that the bar has again been raised and it is a challenge for each and everyone of us to work harder for next December, but that is why we are all nature photographer to keep shooting and improving. A big thank you to Stan Tekiela for being our Judge, having judged many times, I know how time consuming that it can be. Everyone enjoyed his presentation on his imagery and his talk about being a full time professional. Thanks to Linda Nygren for working so hard to get Stan as our judge. Thanks also to Rod Blessener and Mariann Cyr for working together to put the end of year judging program together.

We would like to know your opinions on our meeting place at REI. I want to confirm a spot for next year by February. We have had a few glitches, but I do think that REI has met our needs. Sometimes the 9:00PM makes me feel rushed, but with a group our size finding another place centrally located could be a challenge. If you know of a central location that may fit our needs better, let someone on the board know where and a contact person if you know of one.

NOTE: REMEMBER THE JANUARY MEETING WILL BE "THURSDAY NIGHT", January 17th, same time-same place!!!

John Pennoyer

Field Notes

"Floating Blinds"

By John Pennoyer

For years I tried photographing waterfowl from my regular blind that I would set on the bank of a creek and wait for the ducks to come swimming by. It is not that the blind didn't work but I just did not like the angle of my shot. I like the lens and eye of the bird or animal to be at the same level. It was probably about 10-12 years ago that I developed my floating blind and after a few years of trial and error it now works beautifully. I should be clear that I really don't float per se, but I only go into areas where the water is never over my hips. So when I sit in my blind my feet are always touching bottom. This gives me better control on turning my blind for better observation for waterfowl. Also I never pursue the waterfowl with my blind, but I find a location I like and just sit and wait for the ducks to come to me. I may move into a different location and wait some more. But what I have discovered is that on this type of blind any movement and the ducks are gone. This blind is not designed for big water, but I use it on a couple of small creeks or in small bay type areas of larger bodies of water. I realize that many of you do not do this type of photography, but for this month I thought that my article will be on the construction of floating blinds and other tips.

Basic Construction:

Fishing type floating tube: (Approx cost: \$100.00 to \$200.00) this can be purchased at any major sporting goods store such as Cabela's, Gander Mountain etc.

Camera Platform: (Approx Cost: \$50.00) one 16"X 32" ½" piece of plywood—cut 7 16" X 32" of 2" Styrofoam sheets, (used for home insulation) actually make the Styrofoam sheets just a touch smaller than the plywood you will need to attach some wooden poles to this. Glue the Styrofoam sheets together and glue to bottom of plywood. I also will duct tape the whole assembly. Purchase a wooden pole (the type that is used to hang clothes in closets) Cut the pole into two 60" sections and attach to the plywood. The camera platform is tied to the tube via the wooden poles. In order to mount my camera system I have an old Gitzo short center column that I attached to the plywood and then I attach my Wimberley head to this. Yours will vary based on your equipment. The number of Styrofoam sheets you use will vary (at my 165 lbs this works). All of this is purchased at Menard's or Home Depot type stores.

Camouflage: (Approx cost: \$20.00) Wrap the entire camera platform in camo netting and staple. For years I would then just venture out in my water and cover myself in camo netting. But I found out that this was not very good in wind, plus any movement by me would move the netting and the waterfowl would notice my movements and leave in a heartbeat. Camo netting can be purchased at any major sporting goods store, buying a bulk roll is cheaper than package netting, but I have a harder time finding bulk rolls now.

My final floating blind: (Approx cost: \$40.00) about 4 years ago I had Midwest Mountaineering make me two custom tent type aluminum poles that are used for tents. After I get in my blind and get to my location with the poles attached, I attach the camo netting to the poles. This gives me room to move inside without the birds noticing any movement. This has worked excellent for me.

Float Blind Tips:

Photographer: (Approx cost: \$100.00 to \$150.00) I use neoprene chest waders and insulated underwear and appropriate outer

clothes with hat and gloves. (You may not think it is cold, but in the spring it may be 70 F but the water is just a little above freezing) I am usually good for about 4 hours with this set-up, either I get too cold or Mother Nature calls!

Camera: I always have my camera set-up the way I want, with fresh batteries and an empty flash card. I **NEVER** want to change lenses, converters; battery's or cards while in the tube. It would be just my luck to drop my 1.7X in the water.

Move slowly: With my final set-up it really works well, but when a bird comes into your area whether flying in or swimming in, any sudden movement by you or your camera system they will notice and will leave quickly. So always make slow deliberate movements.

Bubble Level: I always have a tendency to use a bubble level on my camera at all times, but especially when shooting water. If you are not careful your birds will be swimming up or down hill. However even with this, as you move the blind it will tip, so you will spend time in Photoshop leveling the image.

The unexpected: Muskrats will be bumping into your legs frequently, and on two occasions I have had them come up into my float tube. Scared the bejeebers out of me and them!!!

Permission: So where can you use this floating tube? Actually any public place that allows folks to boat, canoe, fish, hunt etc. My only word of caution - if in a place such as State Park, wildlife Management area, etc. be careful of nesting waterfowl, many agencies will consider that harassment and may even have certain areas closed. If in doubt, always check with the authorities for the area that you want to float in.

Some of my floating blind conquests:

Waterfowl: Ring-necked ducks, Hooded Mergansers, Pie-billed Grebe, Wood Ducks, (the reason I initially built my floating blind) Greater Scaup, American Coots, Blue-winged Teal, Common Loons and of course our ever present Mallards and geese.

Wading birds: Green Heron, Night Heron, Blue Heron, Common Egret

Other Species: Muskrats, Mink and Belted Kingfisher

Funny story or two: One of the areas that I go to is close to where I live in Maple Grove. I park in a parking lot next to a children's play ground, and carry my stuff about 100 yards to the creek which is hidden by cattails. This year, in March, I had the police called (for the second time in 10 years) to check up on this suspicious looking character.

The first year that I made my blind I used to run around Rice Lake here in Maple Grove, I noticed some herons and Egrets were using a tree branch that had fallen out in the lake, but was hung up about 5 feet above the water. I thought this could be a great back-lit shot during sunrise. So the next morning I got up bright and early and hauled my stuff down to the lake. I finally got set-up in total darkness and was about 10 feet out from shore. After about ½ hour the first egret came in and it was at about that time I noticed water coming in through the top of my waders and my butt was on the bottom. I had just put air in my float tube and in a hurry to get to the lake I did not fully tighten the air inlet and my tube was going flat. No shots that morning and this very wet photographer went home; but I got the shots the next morning.

There probably are many places to get images of waterfowl without going to all the trouble of a floating blind. But for me there is nothing better on a spring day to sit in my blind and observe nature. Even the common Mallards shooting at water level make these images unique.



Good Shooting

“Turkey Time” By Ron Winch

Slowly I lift the tripod and rotate about 45 degrees to the right - moving only when their heads are down while feeding. Carefully I bring my eye to the viewfinder and zoom out to 400mm; on the Nikon with a 1.5 crop factor that 400 becomes a 600mm. Add a 1.4 teleconverter and you have an 840mm f5.6 lens. Great for wildlife! Though still not as large an image as I would like. The 11 wild turkeys continue to scratch and feed on seeds and the few remaining insects in the late October afternoon.

When we first discovered the turkeys in early summer there were three blue-headed hens and 24 youngsters. Of course, with so many chicks the adults were extremely wary, so we were content to observe them through binoculars. As with our own kids there are always several adventurous individuals, but a few “cluck-clucks” from the hens brought the group together again.

Eventually they would follow the perimeter evergreens to the north to inspect and feed under our birdfeeders. The count now revealed only 19 young and three hens. This was to be expected as we had coyotes and raccoons in the area, and a nesting pair of Red Shouldered Hawks with three ravenous chicks to feed. They seemed to sense some degree of safety around human habitation as we would see them most afternoons at the fringe of the pine grove just north of the house. Come evening the frantic beating of young wings would laboriously propel young and adults high into the Scotch Pines only 50 feet from the deck. And then quite – except for the frogs and mosquitoes.

Toni always kept a camera handy and got many good documentary photos of their behavior. One afternoon she spotted a white-tailed fawn sleeping in the tall grass behind the house. Naturally she went for the Nikon and upon returning a few minutes later was excited

to see five young turkeys curiously approaching the fawn. At about five feet they stopped and seemed to be befuddled by this tawny spotted creature with the huge soft brown eyes. The chicks just stood there looking at the fawn and then each other until somewhere near the wooden fence and the pine grove an adult called several times. Cautiously they turned and headed toward the pines leaving the fawn probably wondering about its new visitors. Toni, in the meantime, was viewing the encounter through the viewfinder, a double pane glass window, and a screen. The images, of course, were soft, but good enough to document this new wildlife encounter.

And so the summer went and this fall only eight youngsters still remained. All were quite cautious and never closer than 50 yards. The deer – 6 with no antlers and two bucks, came in as close as frame filling. It was a good year learning about our wild neighbors, and now that snow covers the landscape there is an obvious deer highway “across” the pasture.

For Sale:

Nikon D100 digital camera

MBD100 vertical grip/battery pack

4 Li-ion batteries and charger

RRS mounting plate (mounts on battery grip)

I still have original box for camera and vertical grip.

Entire package for \$500.00 (will also consider best offer)

All components in excellent condition!!

Contact: John Pennoyer

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Cell: 763-913-8651

2007 Image of the Year

All the results of the year end competition can be found on the club website. Below are the winners in each category and the image of the year.

General First Place



“Boundary Waters Sunset” John Pennoyer

Botany First Place



“Dew on Ox-eye Daisy” Mariann Cyr

Zoology First Place



“Gull and Clouds” Alan Schulz

Wildlife Image of the Year



“Iceberg with Penguin” Mariann Cyr

2007 Image of the Year



“Superior Ice” Jim Aronson

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

6:00 PM - Set-up and Social Time
6:30 PM - Announcements and Business
6:45 PM - Program
7:45 PM - Nature Salon (Competition and
Judge's Comments).

Meetings are held at:

REI
750 West American Blvd
Bloomington, MN 55420

January 17, 2008 Meeting

Note the meeting this month is on Thursday

January Program:

Northstar International
Award Winning Images
- Mike Prokosch

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Winter Photo Shoot Saturday February 9, 2008

John Pennoyer will be on the Mississippi River in Monticello photographing some of his favorite subjects "Trumpeter Swans". We will possibly do a side trip to Maria State Park searching for winter wonderland images. More information and a sign-up sheet will available at the next meeting on **Thursday night January 17th, 2008**. Feel free to call or e-mail John for more information. As far as time John intends to be at Monticello all day. Even though our field trips are not intended to be "instructional" type outings. John is willing to help anyone in any way, just ask him!



Monticello Swans

by John Pennoyer