



# Nature Photo Times

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## South Texas Ranches By Ron Winch

“Be careful of rattlesnakes!” was Patty’s sage advice while closing the gate behind us as we entered the Javalina, a brushy, tangled wilderness near McAllen Texas. Several “roads” lead one to one of a half-dozen photo blinds situated at man-made waterholes and maintained by an old tractor-drawn water tanker. These waterholes are truly a great draw for birds and wildlife in this arid Rio Grande country of South Texas. Regular visitors to the waterholes include coyote, bobcat, green jay, greater kiskadee, golden-fronted woodpeckers and many more.



The Javalina and the Homestead are John Martin’s contribution to the Texas Lens and Land project which he initiated some years ago. Martin, a rancher and businessman, had always been a fighter and preservationist for the wild lands of South Texas. After the last big win - another feather in his cap - had put many people out of work, John asked, “Can’t we do something positive to help the people and economy of our area?” Thus was born the Lens and Land project. He showed ranchers that by constructing waterholes and erecting photo blinds that they could attract the exotic wildlife of South Texas which would attract photographers who would gladly trade cash for the opportunity to capture frame-filling images of the exotic green jay, greater kiskadee and other native and migrant exotics that use the Rio Grande valley.



There are a number of ranches in the McAllen area that offer great photo blinds at feeding stations and waterhole-feeding areas. One might also find natural blinds near the edge where trophy white-tailed deer come to feed on baited corn. At other ranches, when livestock die the carcass is hauled out to a photo-appropriate area and blinds are set in place. Harris hawks and greater caracaras flock in to enjoy a hearty meal for days. Photo opportunities range from environmental shots to portraits and even headshots.



My early-December shoot was a bit too early as there were no migrants headed north or south. Even so, I was fortunate to capture fourteen species of birds, most of which are not seen in Minnesota, white-tailed deer and at one waterhole, a rare eastern indigo snake plying the edge of the waterhole before swimming across. These snakes are common throughout Florida, with a subspecies in the southern Rio Grande valley. They are a beautiful glossy blue-black and may be America’s largest snake – growing

to a length of eight and a half feet. It feeds on frogs, small mammals, birds, lizards, young turtles and other snakes – including venomous ones.

The blinds are well placed with consideration for the best light. Feed is either natural or hidden out of sight but with regard to profile shooting. My gear consisted of the Nikon D2X, 200-400 zoom, 70-200 zoom and a 1.4 teleconverter, plus, of course, a good stable tripod.

If you go, the spring is great for migrants and photographers, so you might have to share a blind with another photographer.

<http://www.lensandland.com/>

Good shooting!



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### Field Notes Black and White

For over 40 years my wife and I have been going to the Minnesota North Shore on Lake Superior. I consider this area one of the most photogenic places anywhere. There is always something to photograph no matter which season that you choose to visit. Our favorite season is fall and this year we did a first ever type of trip.

We took a full two week vacation in both the Ely, MN area and the North Shore. We canoed and photographed in the BWCAW for a few days then headed to the North Shore. The first day as we traveled to the Lutsen area we were greeted with heavy overcast skies and a slight wind. When we got up the next morning, the wind had picked up considerably and a pine tree had fallen next to the cabin, but being a photographer I decided to drive some of the back roads looking for photogenic subjects. But no matter what dirt road I selected, we had to turn around because of fallen trees blocking the road. Being concerned about getting blocked in on the back roads, we elected to go back to the cabin and I would do some photography around there. Upon arriving at the cabin around noon we discovered the electricity was out from fallen trees on the power lines. As it turned, out the whole

of Cook County was without electricity for about 30 hours. After spending the night reading by flashlight, the next morning the wind was still howling more than ever. When I looked out at the lake, my eyes witnessed waves that I have never seen before on Lake Superior: there were 10' to 15' rollers coming into shore. We immediately jumped in the car and headed for Split Rock Lighthouse State Park, dodging trees that had fallen across highway 61. I spent the entire day all along the shore photographing this spectacular display of nature's fury. My only concern was the horizontal rain and the mist being thrown by the crashing waves and I did my best to keep moisture away from my camera and lenses.

After arriving home, and as I began the task of editing and working on my images, I found with the heavy gray skies, mist and rain it was very difficult to bring out any of the red and yellow color of the aspen, birch and maple trees that were along the shore. My images that I had taken during the storm lacked the "punch" that I wanted so the viewers would feel "nature's fury" as I had. I decided to convert some of those images to black and white, after all it was a gray day to begin with. After converting one or two images, there was so much more impact with black and white than in color, many of those images were converted to black and white. The two images attached for this article are the original color and the black and white conversion.



Which do you like the best?

This is another huge benefit of digital photography: converting to black and white in post-production. Some images are still better in black and white than in color; this is not the first time I have done this conversion. I use Lightroom 2.5 to make my conversion (Treatment/Grayscale.) After the conversion I do my post-production work for tonal areas etc, then I open the image in PS CS3 which is now converted to 16 bit tiff. After sizing I will sharpen generally using "Smart Sharpen." If using Photoshop you can convert to black and white also - just select image/adjustment/black and white.

The next time your color image lacks the punch you desire, why not try a black and white conversion - you may be surprised how black and white is still the way to go for many images!

Good Shooting  
John Pennoyer

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Dear Minnesota Nature Photo Club Members:

Rocky Mountain School of Photography (RMSP) is bringing one of its Weekend events to the Twin Cities, Minnesota on April 17-18, 2010. Each year, RMSP brings their unique style of photo education to cities around the country. RMSP Weekends are two fun-filled days, loaded with information about the latest tools and techniques in photography. Following are some important details for the RMSP Weekend in the Twin Cities:

- Location: South Saint Paul Hotel & Conference Center  
701 South Concord • South Saint Paul, MN 55075
- What: Ten classes to choose from, a professional critique session and great door prizes. Visit [www.rmosp.com/weekends](http://www.rmosp.com/weekends) for a schedule of classes and a list of course descriptions.
- Who Attends: Class content is suitable for beginner through intermediate amateur photographers shooting with digital or film cameras.
- Group Pricing: \$159 per person for both days, \$119 for one day. Online and early registration savings have been included in your group pricing (a savings of \$20 for two days and \$10 for one day).
- Your group code is: CC214 Submit this code when registering to receive the special group price of \$159 for two days or \$119 for one day.

Registration: Register online at [www.rmosp.com/weekends](http://www.rmosp.com/weekends) or call (800) 394-7677 to register by phone. You may also download registration forms from [www.rmosp.com/weekends](http://www.rmosp.com/weekends) and mail them to the address below.

Please keep in mind that many of our Weekend events sell out ahead of time. We encourage you to register early. In order to secure a spot, registrations must be received in our office before an event has sold out. You can register now using any of the methods mentioned above.

Please do not hesitate to call if you have questions regarding the RMSP Weekend event in the Twin Cities.

Hope to see soon!

Michelle Lousen  
Weekends Director

**Minnesota Nature  
Photography Club  
November 2009 Salon  
Scores**

**Judge: Rikk Flohr**

Photographer	Title	Score
Marilyn Gladich	Hepaticas with Bud	8
John Anderson	CA Condor 52 (w)	8
Barbara Wilson	Snow Canyon	8
Betty Gossens-Bryan	Ruby Throat	8
Jerry Hogeboom	Huntsman (w)	8
Don Nadreau	Fighting Chicken	8
Carolee Ramos	Blue Weed	8
Don Specht	After the Rain	8
John Anderson	Barred Yawn	8
Ron Cleveland	Mt. Mahtotopa	8
Bill Handsaker	Fall in Colorado	8
Jerry Hogeboom	Gator (w)	8
Paul Hoppe	Loon with Chicks	8
Jean McDonough	Three Wolves Looking	8
Dave Vichich	Frosty Morning	8
Roger Williams	Bluebird (w)	8
Eric Baker	Shaking Moose (W)	9
Ron Cleveland	Amnicon River	9
John LaMere	Black Skimmer (w)	9
John Pennoyer	Loon and Reflection(w)	9
Dave Vichich	Baby Buck (w)	9
Roger Williams	Mourning Doves (w)	9
Jim Duncan	Distelfalter	9
John LaMere	Banning Colors	9

Bill Handsaker	Capitol Reef NP	10
Paul Hoppe	Bee on Cone	10
Jean McDonough	Snow Monkey in Tree (w)	10
Lil Polley	Red Fox	10
John Ringquist	Canadian Rockies2	10
Eric Baker	Loon Taking Off (w)	10
Karl Fiegenschuh	Bosque Sunset I	10
Rick Graves	Don't Look Down (w)	10
Lil Polley	Sand Dunes	10
John Ringquist	Tranquil Tiger	10
Don Specht	Alaskan Dinner (w)	10

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Member Bernard Friel's stunning image of an indigo bunting in flight is on the cover of the Dec/Jan 2010 issue of National Wildlife magazine. Congratulations, Bernard!

This is not the first of Bernard's images to be published in National Wildlife.

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Upcoming Meeting Programs:

January: 2010 Northstar International Award Winning Images will be presented by club member Mike Prokosch

February: John Gregor

March: Ron Winch

April: Bill Handsaker

May: Mariann Cyr

### **Nature Photo Times**

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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

### **December Meeting Wednesday December 16, 2009**

Our December presentation will be

"End of Year Competition"

Our December program features the end of year competition for best photographs. Doug Ohman has agreed to be our judge. Doug is a professional photographer and popular public speaker. His photographs are featured in the Minnesota Byways series which include BARNES OF MINNESOTA and CABINS OF MINNESOTA to name a few. Doug's website is: [pioneerphotos@comcast.net](mailto:pioneerphotos@comcast.net).

We will also have our annual holiday buffet at this meeting. Everyone be sure to bring a food item to share.



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