NANPA
Expressions 2017
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NANPA Expressions 2017

Thank you, NANPA members, for making another successful Showcase competition and edition of Expressions.

The 2017 competition drew approximately 3,350 images from some 369 NANPA members (only members can enter). The 250 images in Expressions break down into 2 top prizes (Best of Show and First Runner-Up) for each of the 5 categories (Mammals, Birds, Scapes, Altered Reality and Macro, Micro and All Other Wildlife), 10 Judge’s Choice awards and 230 of the highest-scoring images from the competition.

In addition to appearing in Expressions, all 250 images are included in a searchable image gallery on the NANPA website. Top-scoring images are featured on the NANPA home page slideshow and promoted through social media for the entire year.

Wendy Shattil spearheaded the competition, as she does every year, but this year she did it alone. We lost a member of our Showcase team, Wendy’s partner, Bob Rozinski, who, together with Wendy, had been involved with Showcase from the start. We’d like to dedicate this issue of Expressions to Bob (1938-2016).

This year’s judges included Alison Jones, George Lepp and Marc Muench. Quotations from the judges can be found with the ten Judge’s Choice selections. They give us a peek into the judging process. Sharon Cohen-Powers shares her insight on this year’s entries and how they are different—or not so different—from previous years. Her synopsis has become a staple in Expressions.

The features in this annual are written by regular contributors to NANPA eNews, so you may recognize their names. Their stories are more personal than those we’ve done in the past with a focus on creativity, developing a style and paying it forward.

F.M. Kearney—a photojournalist turned fine artist photographer—talks about how knowing your equipment frees you up to be more creative. Kearney lives in New York City so he is up against some challenges when shooting nature, his primary interest. He frequents the botanical gardens and local and state parks in the area. In his effort to keep his images fresh and innovative, Franklin seeks out perspectives others may not see.

Jerry Ginsberg tells us how he came to photograph landscapes—national parks in particular—and develop his own style. He muses on the joys of travel and places he still hopes to see.

Clay Bolt, NANPA’s president, recounts what led him to a career path dedicated to helping others reconnect, appreciate, and ultimately protect the wildlife and wild places within their own communities.

We offered advertising again this year, because it helps keep our costs down. Then, we extended the savings to you. Early purchase of the print edition of Expressions was reduced by $7. In the electronic version, the ads are interactive. Click on them and you will go to the advertisers’ websites. Please support our advertisers if you can as they have supported NANPA through their ads.

Thank you for your interest in the Showcase competition and Expressions.

—Niki Barrie, editor, and Sharon Cohen-Powers, creative director
Author Bios

Clay Bolt is the president of NANPA and a widely published professional natural history and conservation photographer based in Bozeman, Montana. He cofounded Meet Your Neighbours (http://www.meetyourneighbours.net) in 2009 to reconnect people with the wildlife that lives within their own communities. In 2012, he cofounded Backyard Naturalists, whose mission is to inspire an appreciation of the natural world through experiences children learn about science, art, technology. Clay is particularly interested in seeking ways to promote the concept of nature beginning at home.

Photo © Neil Lovin

Sharon Cohen-Powers has been a photo professional for more than 30 years. She is the past owner of The Wildlife Collection stock photo agency and was the director of operations at AGPix. She currently serves as webmaster for the Photographic Society of America (PSA) as well as several small websites. She is the creative director of Expressions and NANPA eNews. Sharon is past president of NANPA and recipient of the 2013 Outstanding Service Award. She currently serves on NANPA’s Awards Committee as well as the Communications/Marketing Committee.

Photo © Steve Powers

Jerry Ginsberg is a widely published freelance photographer whose images have graced the pages of hundreds of books and magazines. He has photographed all 59 U.S. national parks, as well as most of South America, with medium-format cameras. Jerry has been a national park artist in residence at Petrified Forest National Park. More of his work can be seen at http://www.jerryginsberg.com. Email him at jerry@jerryginsberg.com.

Photo © Jerry Ginsberg

F.M. Kearney began his career as a photojournalist for a variety of local New York City newspapers. It was an exciting profession, which allowed him to cover everything from famous celebrities to ride-alongs with the NYPD and the FDNY. He now specializes in nature and urban landscapes. As an award-winning photographer, his images have been licensed on many products and published in numerous publications, as well as exhibited in galleries in the United States and abroad. To view more of his work, visit http://www.starlitecollection.com. Kearney can be contacted at starcollec@aol.com, or via Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn.

Photo © F.M. Kearney

Cover Photos: © Amy Marques (front cover), © Patrick Pevey (back cover)

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All Showcase images should be considered wild unless indicated by “Phil” (Photo Illustrated) or “Capt” (Captive).

Expressions, NANPA Showcase 2017, Editor: Nicolette Barrie, Creative Director: Sharon Cohen-Powers
Special thanks to: Richard Day, Susan Day, Bill Jaynes, David Lester, John Lock, John Nuhn, Rebecca Spriggs and our Showcase 2017 judges: Alison M. Jones, George Lepp, and Marc Muench

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In 1972, Mark Kelley had to choose between photography and physics as an elective in high school. He chose photography, and it became his passion. After studying photojournalism at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks, Kelley worked for 13 years as the staff photojournalist at the Juneau Empire, the only daily newspaper in Alaska's capital. In 1993, his passion turned to nature, wildlife and outdoor adventure photography and a thriving publishing company. Kelley is a Juneau resident, and his website is http://www.markkelley.com.

These snow monkeys (Japanese macaques) were part of a troop of more than 100 individuals that frequent Jigokudani Monkey Park in the Japan Alps. Patrick Pevey captured the image on a snowy morning in February, 2015. Even though, "their thick fur provides insulation, they can conserve even more heat by snuggling together," says Pevey. "When the youngster popped his head up, opened his eyes and looked directly at me, I zoomed in to record the soft texture of the monkeys’ luxurious coats." Pevey used a Canon EOS 1DX camera, Canon EF 70-200mm f/4L IS USM lens at 160mm, 1/50 sec. at f/13, ISO 800, EV +2/3, handheld.

Pevey is a long-time resident of Nevada. The advent of digital photography, along with his love of nature and the outdoors, re-ignited his passion for nature photography. Pevey's proximity to Lake Tahoe, Mono Lake and the Eastern Sierra provides ample local photographic opportunities.

"I spent five very wet days in August 2014 hanging out with the black and brown bears of Anan Creek in the Tongass National Forest," says Mark Kelley. The bears fish at the bottom of a waterfall in a steep ravine with very little light. "Out of hundreds of images that I shot on that trip, he continues, "this was the only keeper." In the image, the black bear reigns over the old-growth forest from a spruce tree during a torrential downpour. Kelley used a Nikon D800 camera, Nikkor 70-200mm f/2.8 lens, ISO 1250, 1/500 sec. at f/2.8.

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**How can you go wrong with interaction of these huge subjects and clear water? This takes great effort. The image is the reward.**

—George Lepp

This must have been a fantastic moment to have a camera in your hands. This is not an easy image to capture, and the photographer deserves merit for being there in the right place at the right time.

—Marc Muench

**This great image embodies the saying that you can only take advantage of being “in the right place at the right time” if you understand the behavior of the species, if you have the right equipment, and if you know how to use it blindfolded and in your sleep.**

—Alison M. Jones

I feel for the giraffe, but capturing the ultimate moment makes this a great shot. Still, I’m uncomfortable with it.

—George Lepp

As sad as this image makes me, I am thrilled by the power of the lion captured in midflight. The only nit I have is that the cropping could be better. That said, this is such a compelling scene and perfectly timed capture it deserved merit.

—Marc Muench
Both the oxpecker and the Cape buffalo are crisp, and the image is a nicely balanced capture of dark and light, and it’s well-framed. What puts this at the top of my list is the composition. The sweeping lines of the buffalo’s horns connect the heavy dark bull with the ray of sunshine in flight. Contradictions abound, and are resolved, as one more example of the Balance of Nature.

— Alison M. Jones

I have seen this image before and it took my breath away then as well as now! The light, the curve of the horns, the sharpness and isolation of the bird make this a spectacular moment.

— George Lepp
Top 100

POLAR ICE FOG SUNRISE, Hudson Bay, Canada. © Rick Beldegreen

BREACHING YOUNG HUMPBACK WHALE, Juneau, Alaska. © Shayne McGuire

ELK AT SUNRISE, Wyoming. © Martin Pumphrey

BABOONS PLAYING TUG OF WAR, Chobe National Park, Botswana. © Deborah Seibly

GRIZZLY AND CUB, Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, Alaska. © Andy Lerner

SEALED WITH A KISS (Sea Lions), La Jolla Cove, California. © Jennifer Leigh Warner
AFRICAN ELEPHANTS DRINKING, Chobe River, Botswana. © Carol Grenier

PALLID BAT DRINKING, Green Valley, Arizona. © Fi Rust

NORTH ATLANTIC HUMPBACK FLUKE, Silver Bank, Dominican Republic. © James White

HOWLER MONKEYS, Honduras. © Lance Carter

BARREL OF MONKEYS (Olive Baboons), Tarangire National Park, Tanzania. © Dee Ann Pederson

SPIKE AND COW DISAGREE (Roosevelt Elk), Sequim, Washington. © Bonnie Block
Top 100

ARCTIC FOX CURLED UP IN SNOW, Churchill, Manitoba. © Richard Day

COASTAL BROWN BEAR, Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, Alaska. © Cathy DesRochers

AFRICAN ELEPHANT DUST BATHING, Chobe River, Botswana. © Carol Grenier

MOTHER LEOPARD WITH TWO-WEEK-OLD CUB, South Africa. © Christine Crosby

LEOPARD LEAPING, Okavango Delta, Botswana. © Barbara Fleming
BEAR SURFING, Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, Alaska. © Janice Champion
AFRICAN ELEPHANT MOTHER AND YOUNG REFLECTION, South Africa. © Patrick Pevey
VULTURE CROSSES OVER MIGRATING WILDEBEEST, Mara River, Masai Mara, Kenya. © Shirley Kloppe
HUMPBACK WHALE ARCHING FROM THE WATER, Antarctica. © Shayne McGuire
CLOSE TO MOM (Baby Dolphin Exhales in Glittery Shower), Virginia Beach, Virginia. © Jane Scott Norris

BULL MOOSE EMERGES FROM THE COTTONWOODS, Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming. © Sandy Sisti
BLACK-CAPPED SQUIRREL MONKEY, Manu Wildlife Center, Peru. © Johnny Chen
GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL, Donner Lake, Truckee, California. © Jacqueline Deely
BLACK BEAR CUB CLINGING TO VINE, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee. © Don Grall
BEARDED SEAL ON ICE, Svalbard, Norway. © John Trone
KODIAK GRIZZLIES, Uganik River, Alaska. © Diane McAllister

WOMBAT, Coles Bay, Tasmania, Australia. © Sean Crane

BOBCAT IN WINTER, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming. © Donald Quintana

LIONESS IN SUNBEAM, Namibia. © Michael Cohen

ELEPHANT FAMILY, Masai Mara, Kenya. © Melody Lyle

IMPALAS LINE UP IN THE RAIN TO PROTECT MALE IN MIDDLE, Kenya. © Madeleine Barbara

PUMA, Torres del Paine National Park, Chile. © Jeff Parker

LIONESS ON TERMITE MOUND AFTER STORM, Masai Mara, Kenya. © Christine Crosby

CRAB EATER SEALS RESTING ON COASTAL ISLAND, near Detaille Island, Antarctica. © Stephanie Newkirk

SHE’S MINE (Humpback Whale Competes for a Lone Female), Hawaii. © John Chaney
POLAR BEAR CUB KEEPS UP WITH MOM ON WALK, Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Kaktovik, Alaska. © Debbie Tubb
THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY (Bear with Fish), Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, Alaska. © Cathy Hart
MOTHER POLAR BEAR NURSING CUBS IN THE WILD, Svalbard, Norway. © Jo Ann Crebbin
FIGHTING BROWN BEAR CUBS, Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, Alaska. © Wendy McIntosh

GUHONDA RESTING IN THE MIST (Mountain Gorilla), Virunga Mountains, Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda. © Shirley Kleppe
GIANT OTTER EATING A FISH, Pantanal, Brazil. © John Trone
DEATH GRIP (Leopard and Warthog), Botswana. © Rick Beldsgren
WILD PIGS, Texas. © Ann Gill
PLAINS ZEBRAS FIGHTING, Namibia. © Patrick Pavey
A few years ago I tagged along with my friend and fellow photographer Andrew Snyder on an expedition to a relatively uncharted region of the world known as the Kanuku Mountains. These mountains rise up from the southwestern corner of the South American country of Guyana. They are ancient, weather-worn peaks that harbor some of the highest levels of biological diversity in the world.

This was my first trip to the Amazonian region. Like most wide-eyed newcomers, everything that I cast my eyes upon prompted a non-stop stream of oohs and aahs from my wagging jaw. In situations such as these, it can be helpful, while difficult, to take a step back and realize that not everyone shares your level of enthusiasm for the wildlife that you’re encountering. Case in point was Nico, one of our guides for the trip and a local teenager at few words. Nico seemed less than thrilled to be leading Andrew and I through the forest at 1:00 a.m. in search of frogs and snakes.

One evening, I heard a strange noise in the forest. “What’s that, Nico?” I asked with my usual enthusiasm. “Bird,” he said, with not a hint of irony. “I know that it is a bird,” I said, “but what kind?” “Bird,” he repeated. Later on, I asked our silent sentinel why he was carrying a battered old rifle as we hiked through the lush vegetation. “Jaguar, he said. I let that one slide. No more questions needed.

In that moment, I was reminded of something important. Just because you’ve grown up in one of the most species-rich places in the world doesn’t mean it’s a given that you’ll be spending your days sliding down rainbows and shouting from the rooftops about how wonderful it is. And to be honest, Nico’s tone wasn’t all that different than that of my own teenage son, who has also followed me on many a hike, slowly trudging behind with a similar glazed look in his eyes. Life goes on in the usual ways, no matter where you hang your hat.

Really seeing what surrounds us each day requires a practice of deliberate patience, coupled with a healthy dose of an open heart and mind. Ironically, my own story has held similar elements of complacency. While I grew up absolutely fascinated with the natural world, by the time the teenage years rolled around, I became distracted by the usual things that every teenager obsesses or frets over. It took a trip around the world to remove the blinders from my eyes.

THE FIRST CARDINAL

After graduation, I spent time working as a professional musician (a career that pays less than nature photography—just). Later, I worked in advertising. Having studied hard for my degree, I wanted to prove to myself that I had made the right career choice. I was hired as a graphic designer in a major corporation, moved into my cubicle, and decided that I’d made it. During these years, I spent very little time hiking anywhere. Somehow I’d forgotten how important the forest and the secrets it holds had been to me in my younger years.

In 2001, my wife and I planned a trip to Western Australia to visit her family. Oddly, even though many people dream of visiting Australia for the spectacular wildlife and scenery, this didn’t really excite me. I was focused on spending time with relatives. However, on a whim, I brought along an old, malfunctioning Pentax K1000...
that I had used in a college class. It barely worked, but I thought that it might be fun to create an artsy scrapbook of our trip.

We traveled through the southwestern portion of the continent and saw ancient eucalyptus forests that exploded with orchids and songbirds in the most fabulous array imaginable. Something began to awaken within me. I saw so many rolls of film, and I recalled my hands. Ironically, this was the moment when I became hooked to a career path dedicated to helping others reconnect, appreciate, and increase awareness of our regional wilderness, and what we stood to lose if it wasn’t protected.

After several years of diligently working head-down in this part of the world, I finally came up for air and began to wonder if there were other photographers doing the same thing as me. While it was great to see the impact of my dedication to conservation on a local level, I sometimes felt left out of the larger community of photographers who were jet-setting around the world in pursuit of iconic species. At times, I felt like I was the only one who was seeing just how remarkable they are. It was as if I was seeing the part of many observers? Perhaps it is the old, “don’t know what you’ve got till you’ve lost it” mentality. I like to use the eastern box turtle as an example. This is a species with bold orange patterns that practically jump out at you like a reptile standpoint. Males have blazing red eyes and shells marked with white. Male and female turtles look identical, more so than any other species. I soon realized that I had been living a life of self-deception: I had been living next to a temperate rainforest my entire life. Even today, very few people realize that the Southern Blue Ridge Escarpment in western North and South Carolina is considered to be a temperate rainforest with one of the highest levels of biodiversity in the world. I soon became a photo-evangelist for these ancient forests. I worked closely with conservation organizations such as The Nature Conservancy to increase awareness of our regional wilderness, and what we stood to lose if it wasn’t protected.

In late 2008, I noticed a technique that friend and mentor Niall Benvie was utilizing in his native Scotland and other parts of Europe. This technique, which he called the field-studio, framed subject against a brightly lit white background, enhancing detail and removing reference to habitat. In this way, a subject—whether it be an ant or an anemone—was transformed into a celebrity in its own right. I saw an opportunity to introduce this technique to photographers around the world, uniting us all in support of the local approach.

In time, MYN grew to include dozens of photographers around the world unified under one banner. Now, nearly nine years later, I still thrive and continue to influence our perspective of underappreciated and overlooked wildlife. The clean field-studio technique has become a regular tool of the trade for photographers documenting insects, reptiles, amphibians and plants, with and without accreditation. That’s fine by me. My goal was simply to help people pay close attention to the beauty of nature.

HELLO NEIGHBOR

I am not sure why, but generally speaking, it seems to me that people place more value on wildlife—and are willing to put more into protecting a species—when the creature in question is rare. In fact, I recognize that rare places urgency and a timeline on conserving a species, but why does that also appear to equate to more intrigue on the part of many observers? Perhaps it is the old, “don’t know what you’ve got till it’s nearly gone” mentality. I like to use the eastern box turtle as an example. This is a species that is, in my estimation, pretty much unappreciated from a beautiful reptile standpoint. Males have blazing red eyes and shells marked with bold orange patterns that practically jump out at you like a burst of wildlife when encountered crossing a forest path. And yet I have seen more of them at church on the highway than I care to remember. If this were a rare species, how much money would people donate to ensure its survival? To what lengths would we go to slow it down and let it pass?

One of the great surprises that arose during my journey to becoming a nature photographer came when I learned that I’d been living next to a temperate rainforest my entire life. Even today, very few people realize that the Southern Blue Ridge Escarpment in western North and South Carolina is considered to be a temperate rainforest with one of the highest levels of biodiversity in the world. I soon became a photo-evangelist for these ancient forests. I worked closely with conservation organizations such as The Nature Conservancy to increase awareness of our regional wilderness, and what we stood to lose if it wasn’t protected.

After several years of diligently working head-down in this part of the world, I finally came up for air and began to wonder if there were other photographers doing the same thing as me. While it was great to see the impact of my dedication to conservation on a local level, I sometimes felt left out of the larger community of photographers who were jet-setting around the world in pursuit of iconic species. Attitudes were very much different in the early 2000s. The local approach wasn’t as well received as it is today. I began to search for a way to connect and empower this community of photographers around the world who photograph locally.

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In time, MYN grew to include dozens of photographers around the world unified under one banner. Now, nearly nine years later, I still thrive and continue to influence our perspective of underappreciated and overlooked wildlife. The clean field-studio technique has become a regular tool of the trade for photographers documenting insects, reptiles, amphibians and plants, with and without accreditation. That’s fine by me. My goal was simply to help people pay close attention to the beauty of nature.

MONEY WHERE MY MOUTH... WAS

In 2015, I decided it was time for a change. My career as a natural history and conservation photographer had continued to develop, and I had come a very long way from that early trip to Western Australia. However, I felt that I needed a challenge. I wanted to seek new ways of using my local approach to conservation photography to reach the public. I noticed a posting on World Wildlife Fund’s (WWF) website for a communications lead for their Northern Great Plains program in Bozeman, Montana. I applied on a whim. Several weeks later, I found myself driving across the country, watching my beloved blue wall of Southern Appalachians fade like a phantom in the rearview mirror.

The primary focus of my new position, in addition to supporting the communications needs of field-office staff, was to increase awareness of the threats facing one of the largest remaining, relatively intact regions of North America’s great grasslands: The Northern Great Plains. I arrived in Bozeman in July. On that first day I grabbed my camera and got to work. I drove to a nearby meadow that was bursting with wildflowers. As I hurried from my car, I looked out over a spectrum of parrots in the Australian bush, I had somehow somehow become more receptive. In that moment, there was no separation between continents or the wonder I felt. It is an experience that I’ll never forget.

When we returned to the United States after spending several months in the Northern Great Plains, I applied on a whim. Several weeks later, I found myself driving across the country, watching my beloved blue wall of Southern Appalachians fade like a phantom in the rearview mirror.

In late 2008, I noticed a technique that friend and mentor Niall Benvie was utilizing in his native Scotland and other parts of Europe. This technique, which he called the field-studio, framed subject against a brightly lit white background, enhancing detail and removing reference to habitat. In this way, a subject—whether it be an ant or an anemone—was transformed into a celebrity in its own right. I saw an opportunity to introduce this technique to photographers around the world, uniting us all in support of the local approach. Soon afterwards, our international biodiversity and nature photography project, Meet Your Neighbours (MYN), was born.

In time, MYN grew to include dozens of photographers around the world unified under one banner. Now, nearly nine years later, I still thrive and continue to influence our perspective of underappreciated and overlooked wildlife. The clean field-studio technique has become a regular tool of the trade for photographers documenting insects, reptiles, amphibians and plants, with and without accreditation. That’s fine by me. My goal was simply to help people pay close attention to the beauty of nature.
and what I call non-traditional conservation partners. However, in the back of my mind, the worry that I just wasn’t progressing photographically continued to gnaw away at my confidence.

Winter came. Several feet of snow fell. One day I found a spider slowly crawling across freshly fallen snow. I photographed it for over an hour. It was the first invertebrate that I’d seen in months. I couldn’t help but wonder if I’d been lying to my audience all along.

For the remainder of the winter of 2015, I read everything that I could on the ecosystems of the Rocky Mountain Front and Northern Great Plains. I devoured field guides on plants and insects pouring over them with religious fervor. That’s when a key began to turn until a light came on.

When the spring of 2016 rolled around, I was ready and determined. The snow had melted along with some of my fears from the previous winter. I went out with newfound determination, seeking new habitats that I’d discovered online and through conversations with friends.

I decided to check out a nearby trail called Sypes Canyon. As I hiked along, I noticed butterflies flitting about. And, as I proached a patch of wildflowers, I heard a familiar sound: the buzz of bumblebees. I ran the rest of the way, threw my camera bag aside, and stared with tremendous gratitude at an incredible array of wildflowers and insects. I had found my way back home.

THE LESSON
Nature is unceasingly giving, but she wants us to earn those gifts. We learn things about ourselves during this process of discovery that are necessary for our appreciation and understanding of nature’s beauty. For me, learning to slow down and photograph locally has enhanced my appreciation for nature in ways that I never imagined. And while I still yearn for the Carolina mountains from time-to-time, I’ve now begun to let go. They are there waiting, should I ever return. In the meantime, I have a new home to explore.

I’ve realized that nature, no matter where it lies, is part of a continuous fabric. The threads that I touch in Bozeman, Montana, connect to the rich forests of the East, to the depths of the ocean. If you ever feel that you’re being left out because you don’t have the means to travel across great distances to make incredible images, take a lesson from me: It all begins at home. As I like to say, the best trip you can ever take is on hands and knees, carefully peering at the overlooked wildlife on your doorstep.

A black-tailed bumblebee (Bombus melanopygus) flies in front of the Golden Gate Bridge.
I love herps, and when I saw that respected workshop leader Greg Basco of Deep Green Photography was leading a trip to Ecuador with Lucas Bustamante of Tropical Herping, I jumped at the opportunity,” says Richard Green. “When photographing fast-moving, unpredictable and potentially dangerous reptiles, it’s always good to have someone else along to assist with the handling.”

Green photographed this short-nosed vine snake (Oxybelis brevirostris) in March, 2015, at Ecuador’s Buenaventura Nature Reserve. His equipment included a Nikon D7100 camera, Sigma 150mm f/2.8 EX DG OS HSM APO macro lens, SB-600 flash, estcott pocket box, ISO 100 at f/32.

Green is an artist, naturalist and geneticist who brings a scientist’s eye to photography, from the microscopic to the macroscopic. He has traveled around the world in pursuit of award-winning images, and he has been widely published and exhibited extensively in his home state of Georgia. He was featured on an Emmy award-winning Georgia Public TV nature program, and taught nature and travel photography for 30 years. Green is represented by Science Source of New York. His work may be viewed at http://www.downtoearthportraits.com.

“Seeing a bee landing on a frog,” says Hector Astorga, “seemed unusual and kind of tells a story.” While Hector was hoping he could photograph the frog eating the bee, it didn’t, nor did it eat additional bees that also landed on the frog that afternoon. When a frog catches a bee or other insect, it uses powerful muscles in its head to pull its eyeballs down, pressing the roof of its mouth onto the insect. This image was captured on the Santa Clara Ranch in South Texas in Spring, 2016. Astorga used a Nikon D5 camera with a Nikkor 500mm f/4 lens with 1.4 teleconverter, f/5.6 at 1/4000 sec., ISO 900.

A freelance nature photographer based in South Texas, Astorga’s love of nature and the outdoors began as a child in his native Honduras. His goal is to capture the beauty of the natural world. He is a professional guide for visiting photographers at the Santa Clara Ranch where he also serves as the ranch manager. He conducts photography workshops there and at other locations around the country, Central America and Africa. Astorga’s website is http://www.hectorastorga.com.
CARPENTER ANT

This simple ant takes on the persona of a large mammal at a watering hole. Beautifully done in sharpness and color.

—George Lepp

I normally don’t care for macro work of insects, but this one is amazing because of the step the ant is making onto the water. Very well done and perfect timing. Oh, and the colors and processing are flawless!

—Marc Muench
SLENDER-LEGGED TREE FROG, Tambopata National Reserve, Amazon Basin, Peru. © Erik Hagstrom

PALMETTO GECKO, Namib Desert, Namibia. © Wendy Kaveney

MILKWEED, Madison, Wisconsin. (Capt) © Stacey Meanwell

THIGH-SPOTTED POISON TREE FROG, Tambopata National Reserve, Amazon Basin, Peru. © Erik Hagstrom

DEW-COVERED ROBBER FLY, Kissimmee Prairie Preserve, Okeechobee, Florida. © Christina Evans
CRAB SPIDER WITH HONEY BEE ON WILDFLOWERS, Sick Dog Ranch, Texas. © Robert Rommel

HALLOWEEN PENNANT DRAGONFLY IN EARLY MORNING MIST, Kissimmee Prairie Preserve, Okeechobee, Florida. © Christina Evans

CATERPILLAR MACRO, Costa Rica. © Steve Bly

JACARE CAIMAN TOSSING PIRANHA, Pantanal, Brazil. © Nate Chappell
BEE ON BABY BLUE EYE, Filoli Native Garden, Woodside, California. © Judy Kramer
GRASSHOPPER UNDER LOTUS LEAF, Kenilworth Park and Aquatic Gardens, Washington, D.C. © William MacFarland
CATERPILLAR ON MILKWEED, Tijuana Bird and Butterfly Garden, San Diego, California. © Michael Shane
YELLOW-STRIPED OAKWORM, Dunwoody, Georgia. © Richard J. Green
MILKWEED AND BUGS, Pitt County, North Carolina. © Anne Grimes

CLOSEUP OF A BACKLIT PEACOCK PLANT LEAF, Longwood Gardens, Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. © Mary Louise Ravese
COSTA RICAN MALE TRANSPARENT FROG GUARDING EGGS, Costa Rica. © Mary Lou Graham
TIGER-STRIPED MONKEY TREE FROG, Tambopata National Reserve, Amazon Basin, Peru. © Erik Hagstrom
ZINNIA LEAF, Pitt County, North Carolina. © Anne Grimes
SECRETARY BLENNY, Curacao. © Barry Brown
NEON REST STOP (Siphonfish on Fire Urchin), Lembeh Strait, Sulawesi, Indonesia. © Sharon Wada
AND THEN IT RAINED (Coral Reefscape), Namena Marine Reserve, Fiji. © Sharon Wada
BOXER CRAB, Lembeh Strait, Sulawesi, Indonesia. © Tony Frank

CUBAN BROWN ANOLE SHOWING DOMINANCE-FLARING DEWLAP, Key West, Florida. © Bill Klipp
MUSHROOMS WITH MILKWEED SEED, Warren, Pennsylvania. © Sandra Rothenberg
SKINK ON OLD BARN, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee. © Mike Walker
DRAGONFLY, Michigan. © Arn Orson
I've made a career of shooting images in and around the New York City area.

I started out as a press photographer for local newspapers but soon changed my focus (pun intended) to nature. As such, most of my photos are still concentrated in my own backyard. Creating fresh images in a world where quality nature photos can often be captured by almost anyone with a good eye, and a good iPhone, is a challenge for all serious photographers. With local parks and botanical gardens serving as my primary stomping grounds, it's especially challenging for me to produce photos that stand out in this oversaturated field.

One of the most important things for me is knowing how my equipment works. While that may sound obvious, you'd be amazed at how many photographers don't know how to use some of the most basic features on their cameras. Some may not even know these features exist.

In the middle of a night shoot, I once had to explain to a fellow photographer the necessity of using the Long Exposure Noise Reduction feature. I then had to show him where that feature was located within the extensive array of menu items on his camera. Although the photographer wasn’t a professional, he was using a professional-quality camera. If you’re going to spend thousands of dollars on a piece of equipment—no matter what it is—shouldn’t you know how to use it to its fullest potential?

I move frequently used features to the My List section of my camera, enabling me to find them quickly when time is of the essence. I wouldn’t have known about My List (or a slew of other features) had I not taken the time to learn about my camera. I used to shoot with a Nikon F4, a top-of-the-line camera back in the days of film. I now use a Nikon D800 with a staggering amount of features. I spent three months studying the camera.
Unusual “S-shape” formation of pinecones.

and reading the manual from cover to cover before I felt confident enough to take it out into the field.

Even though my camera has lots of bells and whistles, it’s not something that I particularly dwell on. I think creative photography has more to do with one’s own personal vision as opposed to fancy equipment. I don’t rush out to trade in my equipment every time the “latest and greatest” thing hits the market. I held onto my F4 until it was no longer economically feasible to do so. By then, it was costing me nearly $30 for every roll of film I shot.

Although today’s digital cameras are far more capable of just about everything than film cameras ever were, I never rely solely on technology. I believe there’s no substitute for good technique and creative thinking.

Not everyone shares that view.

Years ago, I ran into a photographer at the New York Botanical Garden, whom I can only describe as a “tech-head.” As I was setting up my shot, he droned on for several minutes about the latest features on all of the top cameras and lenses. When he finally took a breath and asked me what I was doing, I explained what I considered to be a very simple, common-knowledge technique. He took a thoughtful pause, then said, “Interesting. I’ll have to try that sometime.”

I take far more time searching for images than actually shooting them. Walking back and forth to survey water lilies in the New York Botanical Gardens on one visit, I was asked by a non-photographer what I was looking for specifically. I explained that I wasn’t just looking to take pictures of pretty flowers but to also combine them with interesting backgrounds. By crouching down to the level of the water lilies, I showed him how much a complimentary background can improve a photo.

Since photography is all about light, I always pay close attention to the weather forecast. Depending on what I’m shooting, I might want a cloudy day or a sunny day. I try to avoid partly cloudy days, because the constantly changing light usually leads to nothing but frustration. Knowing which subjects look best under flat or high-contrast light is important. Equally important is being aware of my surroundings. Whenever I’m walking along a trail, I always find myself turning around or “checking my six.” (In the military, that translates into checking the six o’clock position, or watching your back.) I’ve taken some pretty interesting photos that would have otherwise gone completely unnoticed had I not taken the time to look back.

Rarely do I seek out specific compositions. It seems, no matter how well I may know an area, the scene is never going to be exactly as I envisioned it. I try to capitalize on whatever it is that catches my eye, i.e., repetitive patterns of colors and/or shapes, unusual designs, subjects that stand out from their surroundings, a mixture of warm and cool tones, etc.

Emphasizing any of these characteristics is a proven recipe for success. I do, however, try to previsualize my shots by forming a mental picture in my head of precisely how I want the photo to look. This may include a host of decisions like how much depth of field I need, whether or not to compress or elongate the space, showing or freezing motion, the list goes on. Once I determine that, it’s merely a matter of choosing the right tools and/or techniques to obtain the image I want—sort of like following a blueprint.

Everything I’ve mentioned up to this point is probably what most serious photographers do to achieve consistently excellent results. This is fine if all you want is an accurate representation of the scene. But if you want something a little more creative, you will have to start thinking outside the box.

A lot of photographers tend to congregate in the same spots, shooting the same photos from the same angles. If the scene is truly iconic, I might shoot it as well, but then I’ll put my own spin on it to make it somewhat unique. In most cases, however, I seek out totally different compositions in areas where many wouldn’t think to look. To keep my images fresh and to make them stand out in the crowd, I try to literally separate myself from the crowd.

Sometimes the crowd follows. I experienced that on Liberty Island, home to the Statue of Liberty. In addition to nature, I also shoot urban scenes of New York for a couple of licensing companies. While everyone had planted themselves in front of the statue to shoot the standard view, I walked around to the side, looking for something different. I found a perfect spot where I could position the sun directly behind the torch, giving it the appearance of being brilliantly lit. Although I was alone and in an obscure area, it wasn’t long before I had plenty of company.

When I began setting up my tripod, it was as if a siren went off to anyone who could see me. Tripods attract a lot of attention. Some people seem to view all tripods users as professionals who possess the ultimate knowledge of photography. Within minutes, almost like a “domino-effect,” my once secluded spot was occupied by a sizable group of Japanese tourists. When they saw the shot I was going for, they shadowed my every move as I repeatedly repositioned myself while trying to align the perfect angle. Only when I was satisfied with the composition, and locked my camera down on the tripod and began taking pictures, did I hear the clicks of their cameras going off, almost simultaneously.

I remember a similar incident while shooting the Manhattan Bridge, which connects Brooklyn and Manhattan. There’s a famous view of the Brooklyn-side tower of this bridge, where the Empire State Building can be seen nestled neatly under its arch. This view can only be seen from Brooklyn at a certain angle from the middle of a street. I picked a clear evening at twilight for the shoot, just as the lights of the city were beginning to come on. I picked that particular night because the Empire State Building was going to be lit green (adding even more color to the shot), as opposed to its usual signature white. I positioned myself in the middle of the street (fortunately, the traffic is light in this part of town) and framed the tower between a canopy of rust-colored, pre-war buildings. Also, since it was twilight, the sky was transitioning from a
beautiful golden amber to cobalt blue. It was the perfect scene in the perfect light. However, just before I could take a shot, a car turned the corner headed in my direction. I picked up my tripod and moved out of its way. After it passed, I repositioned myself and worked quickly so as not to lose the light. Although totally engrossed in the shoot, I suddenly had the feeling that I was not alone. I briefly looked away from my viewfinder and saw that a woman was standing right next to me taking the same shot. Passersby on the sidewalk were no longer passing by. Many had stopped in their tracks to capture the scene on their phones. The car that I had stepped aside to give the right of way had stopped just a few feet behind me, in the middle of the street, and a passenger was standing up through the sunroof (you guessed it) also taking the shot.

This incident confirms my belief that while people may look, they do not see. Actually, in this age of total cell phone absorption, it’s questionable if many even look at much beyond their screens. A scene that was in full view of everyone in the area went completely unnoticed until people saw me shooting it. This experience, and especially the one on Liberty Island, illustrate the benefits of not always following the crowd. Observing everyone else’s actions, then doing the exact opposite, has helped me even in some of the non-photographic aspects of my life.

As a brief aside, one of my pet peeves is sitting in a movie theater with the person behind me constantly talking and/or licking my seat. Over the years, I’ve devised a “nuisance-avoidance” plan that keeps me as far away as possible from annoying fellow moviegoers. If there are two entrances into the theater, I always use the one that’s farther away. Nine times out of ten, that will lead to the emptier side of the room. Most people will use the closest entrance (the path of least resistance) and stay on that side, making it the most congested area. If the theater is large, and has a main central seating area, flanked by two smaller side areas, I sit on the side. I’ve actually seen people walking up and down the aisles, searching for a few scattered empty seats in the center, while plenty of seats are left unused on the sides. If the theater is almost filled to capacity, I’ll just sit in the back row. Try some of these methods the next time you want to enjoy a movie in peace.

If I had to create a wish list of future photo projects, I would love to photograph the beauty of New England in the fall. I’ve also dreamt of shooting the magnificent waterfalls in the Blue Ridge Mountains region along the East Coast. Other photographers, however, may have loftier goals. I was once approached by one such individual in the New York Botanical Garden complaining, almost bitterly, about photographers who travel the globe, shooting amazing images in some of the most exotic locales. He reasoned that if he worked for a big publication with a huge budget who could send him to these locations, he, too, would come back with images just as amazing. While that may or may not be true, I try not to look at it that cynically. His argument reminded me of an article I read in a photography magazine several years ago. It asked the question, “Would you rather be an international nobody or a local hero?” The basic message was that a globe-trotting photographer is often racing against the clock when visiting any given location. A local photographer, on the other hand, has the luxury of time. He or she can pick and choose the absolute best times to capture a scene, with the added benefit of returning to shoot it under a variety of weather conditions and during different seasons. Therefore, a traveling photographer’s photos (no matter how well done) of any one location, will never be as in-depth or comprehensive as a local’s with unfettered, 24/7 access.

I certainly wouldn’t consider myself to be a local hero of New York photography, but I do have a fairly well-rounded collection of images of the city and state. I suppose that is what inspires me to constantly create new images. Whenever I read about an interesting technique in a nature magazine or see an intriguing composition on a calendar or greeting card, I immediately start thinking of ways to utilize it to help me see common subjects in uncommon ways. Photography has been a personally rewarding profession that I wouldn’t trade for any other.
SCAPES
Constance Mier frequently shoots on Biscayne Bay near Miami, Florida. On this calm October morning in 2015, she waited for the canoe to come into the frame to add interest to the photo. “The clouds and their reflections did the rest,” she says. Mier used a Sony Alpha SLT-A77V camera, Sony DT 16-50mm f/2.8 SSM lens, at f/11, 0.5 sec., ISO 50, with a Manfrotto tripod and ballhead and Hitech neutral density filters.

Mier has been exploring the Everglades and Biscayne Bay from a canoe for more than 12 years, and she often spends several days at a time in some of the remotest areas, accessible only by boat. “Shortly after buying a canoe, I purchased my first DSLR came a,” she says. Her goal as a photographer is to best represent her wilderness experiences and invite the viewer to imagine the peaceful solitude of being in that place and to gain a deeper appreciation for what is wild. Mier’s website is http://www.constancemierphotography.com

Gregory Duncan loves that the banyan tree represents two people entwined, helping one another amid challenging obstacles. “I was driving along the winding road to Hana in Maui when I saw this ocean-drenched banyan tree,” he says. “I could not get the scene out of my head, so I turned around to capture the moment, standing alone in the ocean landscape.” Duncan took the photo in January, 2016, using a Canon 5D-S R camera, Canon 24mm lens, B+W XS-Pro Kaesemann polarizer and ProGray 7-stop neutral density filter, at f/16, 30 sec., ISO 50.

A commercial landscape contractor, Duncan has been living and working in Southern California for the past 27 years. His interest in photography began at an early age and has continued throughout his life. Duncan travels between Iceland, Norway and Greenland, running photo workshop tours. One of his great joys is helping other photographers take that “once in a lifetime” image and seeing them smile ear to ear. His website is http://gregoryduncanphotos.com.
The hiker in orange gives scale and contrast to the blues. He also adds to the exhilaration of this beautiful scene. A warm spot in all that cold!
—George Lepp

I enjoyed the scale of the person in this image compared to the landscape/ice. The composition is great. This is an exciting image worth merit.  
—Marc Muench

“Show me something I’ve never seen” is a great mantra for photographers as they seek their subjects. This is mesmerizing as I look at the whole scene from above and below at the same time. As well, it speaks of the confluence, interdependence and oneness of marine life with that of forests.  
—Alison M. Jones

I would call this an image that shows a different way of seeing. In a word, creative.  
—George Lepp

I’ve used underwater housings with dome ports for these types of images, and I know how difficult they can be. This is a great execution in a wonderful location. Love those colorful stones.  
—Marc Muench
Top 100

THE DARK SIDE (Shelf Cloud over Lake Michigan), Ludington State Park, Ludington, Michigan. © Brad Reed

ICEBERGS AND FOG, Stikine-Leconte Wilderness, Alaska. © Brenda Tharp

FOGGY MORN AT GREAT FALLS NATIONAL PARK, Great Falls, Virginia. (Phil) © Joel Boches

STAR TRAILS, SOUTH TUFA, Mono Lake, California. (Phil) © Bruce Straits

ICY CURVES OF A MELTING ICEBERG, Antarctica. © Shayne McGuire

FROZEN WAVE, Jokulsarlon Lagoon, Iceland. © Jeremy Woodhouse
SUNRISE LIGHT AT BORAX HOT SPRINGS, Alvord Desert, Oregon. © Scott Smorra

EL CAPITAN EMERGING, Yosemite National Park, California. © Bob Canepa

MOUNTAIN REFLECTION AT SUNRISE, The Pacific Range, British Columbia. (Phil) © David Young

RIVER OF SILENCE, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming. © Rodney Lough

SUMMERTIME DISPLAY OF VERATRUM AND WILDFLOWERS, Jefferson Park, Oregon. © Scott Smorra

THE WIZARD’S HAT SEASTACK AT SUNSET, Bandon Beach, Oregon. © Andrew Lerman
Top 100

BROKEN GLACIER ICE ON THE BEACH, Iceland. © Alfred Forns

TRANQUIL LIJIANG RIVER, Lijiang, Guilin, China.  (Capt) © Johnny Chen

SUNRISE COMES TO WONDER LAKE, Denali National Park and Preserve, Alaska. © Mark Kelley

VESTRAHORN, Stokksnes, Iceland. © Greg Duncan


HOT SPRING TERRACE AT SUNSET, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming. © Thomas Hanson
AURORA BOREALIS REFLECTION, Jökulsárlón Lagoon, Iceland. © Jeremy Woodhouse
SOUTH ISLAND SUNBEAMS, Milford Sound, New Zealand. (Phil) © John Benet
VOLCANO, Hawaii. © John Chaney
SAN TAN MONSOON LIGHTNING, San Tan Regional Park, Queen Creek, Arizona. © William Lewis
RAINBOW OVER ALASKA RANGE, Denali National Park and Preserve, Alaska. © Mark Kelley

TRACKS, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming. © Emmitt Booher
A KAYAKER PADDLES AWAY FROM THE CALVING GLACIER, Johns Hopkins Glacier, Glacier Bay National Park, Alaska. © Mark Kelley
A COLORFUL WAVE MAKES ITS WAY ASHORE, Cape May, New Jersey. © David Francis
LAKE AND MOUNTAINS, Lago Pehoe, Torres del Paine National Park, Chile. © Sue Wolfe
PERITO MORENO GLACIER, Patagonia, Argentina. (Phil) © Alice Cahill
Top 250

SUNSET LIGHT ABOVE A SMALL STREAM AND MOUNTAINS, Wind River Range, Wyoming. © Scott Smorra

ZODIACAL LIGHT POINTING TOWARD PLEIADES, Yankeetown, Florida. © Maureen Allen

WHITE LUPINE MEADOW IN UNSETTLED WEATHER, Colockum Pass, Washington. © Geoffrey Schmid

SUNSET TIDAL POOLS, Bandon Beach, Oregon. © Andrew Lemmon

RIALTO BEACH. Olympic National Park, Washington. © David DesRochers

LATE BURST OF COLOR AFTER THE CROWDS LEFT, Pfeiffer Beach, Big Sur, California. © Ian Frazier

CALVED ICE ON A BLACK SAND BEACH, Jokulsarlon Lagoon, Iceland. © Jeremy Woolhouse

ICE BEACH, Jokulsarlon, Iceland. © Fabiola Forns

CHANNEL MARKERS (Pine Tree Saplings at Low Tide), Rock Harbor, Orleans, Massachusetts. © Rona Schwarz

AURORA BOREALIS, Dalton Highway, Alaska. © John Trone
SOARING STONE, Bisti De Na Zin Wilderness Area, New Mexico. © Geoffrey Schmid
EDGE OF DAWN, Sparks Lake, Oregon. © Bob Watson
TWELVE APOSTLES AT SUNSET, Port Campbell, Australia. © Stuart Gordon
MANGROVE SILHOUETTE AT SUNRISE, Biscayne Bay, Miami, Florida. © Constance Mier
WORLDLY WONDER, Black Rock Desert, Nevada. © Rodney Lough

APPROACHING COLD FRONT, Cape Hatteras National Seashore, North Carolina. © Mark Buckler
FOG SHROUDS OCEAN MOUNTAINS, Stephens Passage, Southeast Alaska. © Mark Kelley
EARLY MORNING IMAGE, Otter Crest Loop, Oregon Coast. © Rick McEwan
SOUTH SISTER AND BROKEN TOP AT DAWN, Sparks Lake, Oregon. © Stuart Gordon
A SUMMER THUNDERSTORM AND RAINBOW, Florida Keys, Florida. © Judd Patterson
CURLED MUD AND FALL LEAVES ON FLOOR OF SLOT CANYON, Zion National Park, Utah. © Erik Hagstrom

ENDANGERED SILVERSWORD AT NIGHT, Haleakala National Park, Hawaii. © Scott Reither

TREE IN THE OCEAN AT HIGH TIDE, Jekyll Island, Georgia. © George Feekhan

DAWN AT DRIFTWOOD BEACH, Hunting Island State Park, South Carolina. © Chet Burgess

WINTER MOON SET, Bald Mountains, Tennessee. © Lori Kincaid

SWAN LAKE, Denali National Park and Preserve, Alaska. © Rodney Lough

LOWER KENTUCKY FALLS, Siuslaw National Forest, Coast Range Mountains, Oregon. © Greg Vaughn

JETTY AT SUNSET, Mexico. (Phil) © Peter Lik

DOUGLAS FALLS, Monongahela National Forest, West Virginia. © David Johnston

HOLY WATER, Jasper National Park, Alberta, Canada. © Rodney Lough
In my 25-plus-year search for beautiful places to photograph, I have become intimately familiar with America’s far-flung 59 national parks. I am as accustomed to seeing Delicate Arch, Glacier Point and Kilauea Volcano through my viewfinder as I am looking in the mirror to shave.

A few decades ago, after having enjoyed a fair amount of success as an aspiring photographer, I made the big decision to turn professional. Intuitively, I knew that I needed a niche to distinguish my work. With perhaps more guts than brains, I calculated that the world had enough people and wildlife images but simply could not live without my landscape photography. My country had already seen enough images of photographing sunrises at locations customarily seen in evening light and vice versa. This going against the grain of the “norm” fosters the creation of many original works of true art.

As a result of diligent study of earlier works, I began to understand that my photographs needed to be nothing less than 100 percent original. Originality is not easy to achieve when using standard lenses, I worked my way through about half of the 51 parks then in existence. Around that time, the advice of brilliant and generous mentor, William Henry Jackson (geological survey photographer and an explorer famous for his images of the American West) lugged his enormous view camera and fragile wet glass plates around Yellowstone in the nineteenth century, many others have followed in his footsteps (including Ansel Adams). Since childhood and the many joyful memories of often spontaneous family car trips, I have been drawn by the allure of travel. There is nothing as wonderful as seeing the world. Following family tradition and my father’s example, I made sure to take my son and daughter through many countries by the time they were teenagers. As a result, they have a much more cosmopolitan view of the world and its civilizations than they would otherwise.

Without ever having been particularly attracted to South America, I was invited on a photo trip to Chilean Patagonia about 15 years ago, and a love affair was born. To me, the nations of South America present the best possible marriage of a Eurocentric culture with virtually endless scenic, natural and man-made wonders. Since that initial trip, I have gone back at least two dozen times and treasured the best parts of each South American country—except Venezuela (more on that later).

For nature photographers, Patagonia is an endless treasure trove of opportunities. At the southern end of South America, this wild and pristine land is shared by both Argentina and Chile. Patagonia is generously punctuated by sharply serrated mountain peaks, sparkling cold lakes, icy blue glaciers and furiously rushing waterfalls. The compositions are everywhere, each one more stunning than the last. While standing before them with my tripod set up and waiting for the light to make its contribution to the evocative image that I visualize, I soak in all of that enveloping beauty.

This marriage of the scene and the light is what makes any photograph work. One without the other lacks strength. Capturing that one moment in time when all of the ingredients blend together to make a spectacular image is the great joy of nature photography. That moment has never occurred in precisely the same way and will never come again. It is, as so aptly named by the legendary David Muench, the quintessential “Timeless Moment.” Recording that instant and then sharing it with others is always my goal and my reward.

Moving on from Patagonia, at the northernmost edge of Argentina, the stupendous Iguazu Falls straddles the border with Brazil. Dwirling mighty Naga by several orders of magnitude, this thundering cascade literally take your breath away when you get close to them. With its enormous power, this is nature at its most raw.

Another of the stunning highlights of South America is southern Peru with Lake Titicaca and the indigenous peoples living quietly in their most raw.
on the islands that dot its vast surface. There also is the fabled Inca Trail and the mystical and often photographed Machu Picchu, last stronghold of a vanished civilization.

Earlier I mentioned that I hadn’t yet been to Venezuela, but it has been on my Bucket List. The tallest waterfall on earth (at more than one-half mile) is tucked away near Brazil’s eastern border to Venezuela. The towering Angel Falls (Kerepakupai Meru) is named for the intrepid aviator Jimmie Angel (1899-1956) rather than any heavenly being as is commonly assumed. This breathtaking cascade stubbornly remains a photo I’ve not yet taken.

While the opportunity to journey to this secluded spot exists, I have deferred the trip year after year because of the unrest and danger in visiting Venezuela. Just transiting Caracas airport can be fraught with peril. There are stories of taxi passengers being killed by their own drivers merely for their wristwatches. What an easy mark a lone American traveling with several rolling trunks filled with camera gear would make!

Even after all these years and many, many trips, I still become intrigued with places I haven’t been. My list continues to grow. When I was a kid, the Soviet Union was the evil empire. It was impenetrable and forbidding. Few westerners were allowed in and fewer yet were allowed to leave, making it all that much more attractive to me. Now, tourists flock to the heart of the old USSR, the Kremlin itself, and multilingual guides take visitors through the once dreaded Lubyanka prison. Farther north, St. Petersburg and its wonderful Hermitage and Winter Palace await. My niece, a St. Petersburg native, tells me fervently that the area between that city and Finland, though remote, offers great scenic beauty. She does not fully appreciate how this remoteness, rather than being a deterrent, is attractive to me.

I know that big cities such as those in Russia and elsewhere are not exactly landscape subjects. Still, the magnificent architecture and the many fascinating cultures to be found around the world hold out the promise of exciting experiences and wonderful images.

Thus far, I have a favorite place in Chile—the spectacular Torres del Paine National Park. In Israel, beyond the thrilling history and architecture of the Old City of Jerusalem, is the limestone Rosh Honikra grotto, hard against the border with Lebanon, where the Mediterranean comes thundering relentlessly through a tiny opening in the chalk-white headlands.

Yet other tiny spots on the vast globe that continue to fascinate me are deserts. Both the Atacama in northern Chile and the Negev in southern Israel possess great beauty if one knows how to look for it. While I have visited both of these widely separated countries several times, I have yet to devote any time to their famous deserts. These are but a few of the many places that I hope yet to see and enjoy.

Some 30 years ago, I watched a TV interview with my late mentor and teacher, the sorely missed author James Michener (1907-1997). Michener wrote 40 books—many of them multigenerational historical fiction sagas—that sold a total of 75 million copies worldwide. In the interview, he said he had ideas for at least 10 more historical novels. He said that each tome took him at least three years to research and write and that, at age 80, “Some of those babies will never see the light of day.” I’m beginning to be able to relate.
Six separate images make up Amy Marques’s photo (plus digital warping and airbrushing) to create a surreal beach scene with birds commonly found by the ocean. All of the images were created in 2015 and 2016 at a variety of Florida beach and river locations. Marques said the idea for the image grew out of seeing a simple diorama a child made from a shoe box, construction paper and cotton for clouds. Marques has a background in Photoshop and art, including airbrushing, that enabled her to give the image a three-dimensional feel. She used Canon DSLRs and Canon L lenses, each image at a different setting. Adobe Creative Cloud along with Topaz and NikPro plug-ins were also used.

Marques has always had a fascination for birds, nature photography and art. She enjoys observing and capturing the amazing moments nature has to offer. Her website is http://www.amymarquesphotography.com.

Portrait © Amy Marques

Three images make up this composite photographed by Bob Canepa, and each was shot in a different season and location on or near the central coast of California. The moon was shot in summer from Canepa’s backyard; the Oceano Dunes, in winter; and the surf, in fall at Cayucos Beach. Canepa used a Canon 1 DX, Canon 28-300mm L IS lens at differing focal lengths. Settings varied as well. Special methods included Lightroom, Photoshop and MacPhun software.

When a group of kids at the junior high school where he taught asked Canepa to take their photo, he had to tell them he did not have a camera. “Well, get one!” they said. “I owe those 7th grade students way more than I can ever repay,” he says. Canepa taught math at the school for two more years. His first photography classes were at the Lepp Institute and he’s been taking pictures ever since. His website is http://www.bobcanepaphotography.com.

Portrait © Dan O’Donnell
This is a melding of graphic art and photography that is simple and dramatic at the same time. The scene looks like it could be real, but you know it isn’t. This is hard to pull off because it could so easily look phony. Here, it works.

—George Lepp

GREAT SAND DUNES STORM

© Hector D. Astorga

POLAR BEAR AND AURORA, Kaktovik, Alaska. (Phil) © Steven Barger

REDDISH EGRET SHADES WATER WHILE FEEDING, Bunche Beach Preserve, Gulf Coast, Florida. (Phil) © Sandy Ashley

ANNA’S WORLD, Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge, California. (Phil) © Indrani Sircar
WILDFLOWER ARTWORK, Rappahannock County, Virginia. (Phil) © Joyce Harman

ZEBRA, Gentry, Arkansas. (Capt, Phil) © Ron Day

BIRDIE TOTEM, Malibu, California. (Phil) © Holly Peskin

MULTIPLE EXPOSURE POPPY, New York. (Phil) © Barbara Adams
DANDELION FIREWORKS, Field in Frederick, Maryland. (Phil) © Daniel Grove
STAINED GLASS FOREST, Woods in Hagerstown, Maryland. (Phil) © Daniel Grove
SPIRAL OF LIFE (Snail), Eastern Oklahoma. (Phil) © Ron Day
ANCIENT LANDSCAPES OF THE SOUTHWEST DESERT, Death Valley National Park, California. (Phil) © Trixi Huish

COMPOSITE DEPICTING THE DROUGHT IN CALIFORNIA, San Luis Obispo County, California. (Phil) © Alice Cahill
TREE OF LIFE, Canaan Valley, West Virginia. (Phil) © Bruce Haley
FAWN AND FLOWERS, Florida. (Phil) © Christina Evans
PLAYING WITH SAND PATTERNS, Crowe’s Pasture, Dennis, Massachusetts. (Phil) © Mark Preu
WOOD STORK, Delray, Florida. (Phil) © Sandy Richards
ROSEATE SPOONBILL, Sarasota, Florida. (Phil) © Cindy Cone
BIRD IMAGE COMPOSITE WITH BACKGROUND, Bird photographed in St. Augustine, Florida. (Phil)
  © Donna Eaton
ELEGANCE, Yosemite National Park, California. (Phil) © Sandy Richards

LEOPARD DINNER TIME, Masai Mara, Kenya. (Phil) © Aaron Baggenstos
BIRDS CREATED FROM HIGH SPEED PAINT DROP IMAGE, Citrus Springs, Florida. (Capt, Phil)
  © Maureen Allen
TWO GREAT EGRET CHICKS DEMAND ADULT’S ATTENTION, Alligator Farm, St. Augustine, Florida.
  (Phil) © Rona Schwarz
PELICAN SQUADRON, Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge, California. (Phil) © Indranil Sirca
The Common and the Extraordinary

by Sharon Cohen-Powers

Competitions, such as NANPA’s Showcase, are in some way a measure of how well nature photographers deliver on an escape through their imagery. We reward the images that give us the most pleasure, based on how they appeal to the arbitrers of that competition. The pleasure can come through seeing extraordinary images, but also in seeing more common ones captured in an extraordinary way or in a way that tugs at our hearts.

As judges of the Showcase competition, we can ask photographers to give us something new and different, and when they do, they certainly are rewarded. But we also can expect some entrants to continue to give us that comfort food of photography—the subjects that continue to appeal to us both as photographers and appreciators of the art, such as lovable bears, familiar birds and scenery that calls to our deepest need for peace and tranquility.

Entries in the 2017 Showcase reflected that split between the “Wow, we’ve never seen this before,” and the familiar subjects that are almost guaranteed to make us react. The bears were, done I say, adorable. The breaching whales blew our minds, and the elephants continued to draw us in. Mother/offspring images are crowd pleasers and stop-action moments almost imperceptible to the naked eye are astounding to behold. Showcase had them all.

In past years, we have warned entrants not to shoot common subjects such as bears, herons and sunsets. We receive many, often taken from the same locations, and the competition is stiff among these subjects. Yet, despite our warnings, that’s exactly what we got, probably more than in any other year. And despite my better judgment, I was drawn to many of them, which made me question my own warnings. After all, who can resist a big furry momma bear tumbling with her cubs? Certainly not the judges, because 11 of the 59 mammals chosen in the top 250 were bears. The larger, more common birds, such as herons, egrets and cranes, won 8 of the 67 birds chosen, and sunsets were represented 13 of the 62 times that a Scapes winner.

From the photographer’s point of view, given the choice between a heron and a warbler, isn’t it easier to find the heron? How long can you lose yourself in an expansive sky, an incredible sunset, or a landscape that leads your mind to wander into infinite possibilities? Should you go for color and/or composition, wait for inspiration or hope that nature will reveal a magic moment? In the Altered Reality category, which made its second appearance this year, there still was some hesitancy to push the boundaries. Yet, some progress was made. The cover photo, Best of Show for Altered Reality, gave us something out of the box, and one of the Top 100 images in the category showed a literal pecking order of herons and egrets. My particular favorite, appearing in the top 250 of this category, is a heron family made entirely from paint drippings. (A seriously cool image!)

Altered Reality was not the only category that pushed the envelope. Some of the underwater scenes in the All Other Wildlife category contained a focus and clarity never before seen. Even an image of a tiny ant and its reflection was so impressive it won Best of Show in this category. The scenes appear to have as much movement in them as the best mammal images, and the birds caught in mid-flight are posed so perfectly that they look as if they are participating in an impossible aerobatics challenge.

Digital capture has advanced to the point that now allows for more subtlety in colors and depth. There were more images of white subjects in white surroundings, tan on tan, and more golden tones than we’d seen before. Digital photos are no longer the newbies to the field, but rather they have almost completely replaced analog. This is a distinct disadvantage for the photographer who is still trying to submit images that were originally shot on film. There’s just no comparison anymore. I need, old and outdated images are immediately pushed to the side. (Apologies to those who keep submitting the exact image year after year, but it’s time to face facts—those images need to be retired for good!)

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In closing, I’m not going to warn you off the same-old, same-old subjects, which have a very good chance of winning, but I am going to say that if you attempt to photograph these and submit them for contests, you’re going to be held to a higher standard. Don’t muck it up.

Altered reality was not the only category that pushed the envelope.

Who can resist a big furry momma bear tumbling with her cubs?
“This image illustrates the plight of small rural Alaskan communities that are trying to deal with garbage while being disconnected from the road system,” says Mark Kelley. “Adak is located on Adak Island in the Aleutian Chain and is some 1,100 miles from Anchorage. With only 300-plus residents, the community cannot afford to ship out its trash.” For a couple months in early 2014, the burning landfill was responsible for the death or injury of some ten bald eagles. Kelley used a Nikon D800 camera, Nikkor 70-200mm f/2.8 lens, ISO 200, 1/320 sec. at f/2.8.

In 1972, Mark Kelley had to choose between photography and physics as an elective in high school. He chose photography, and it became his passion. After studying photojournalism at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks, Kelley worked for 13 years as the staff photojournalist at the Juneau Empire, the only daily newspaper in Alaska’s capital. In 1993, his passion turned to nature, wildlife and outdoor adventure photography and a thriving publishing company. Kelley is a Juneau resident, and his website is http://www.markkelley.com.

EAGLE HELL

© Mark Kelley

Beasley prefers action shots or ones that show behavior, and these birds gave her both—they were battling over territory and food. That’s “a typical reason for friction and can make for spirited images,” she says. She used a Nikon D4 camera, Nikon 300mm f/2.8 lens, at f/5.6.

Beasley is a native South Texan, with deep roots in pioneer ranching families that settled this area. She lives in Beeville, which calls the hub of some of the very best nature photography lands anywhere. Beasley works as both a real estate broker and nature photographer. “One feeds me and the other feeds my spirit,” she says. Her website is http://www.CoastandCactus.com.

© Cissy Beasley
LILAC-BREASTED ROLLERS

“Three is a crowd” does not apply here! With nice unity, beautiful colors and interesting interactions, the connection between these birds reminds me of The Dance painted by Henri Matisse. Their circle kept one’s eye going around and around.

—Alison M. Jones

Threes are good for composition, then place them in perfect symmetry with great color and you have this.

—George Lepp

EGYPTIAN GOOSE AND GosLINGS

Simply put, this family portrait is bound by the beauty of reflections and the simplicity of symmetry.

—Alison M. Jones

I would like this capture even without the reflection. This is a bonus and elevates the intimate family portrait.

—George Lepp

We call these guys the “Masai Air Force,” while on safari in Kenya. In spite of how often I’ve seen them in and around great settings, I do not have a worthwhile image of my own. This capture is well-executed in a calm and heartwarming scene. I imagine the photographer lying down on the banks next to a croc or in the water with the hippos!

—Marc Muench
JUDGE’s Choice

© William Pohley

The sharpness of the image, color and silver spot above the eye gives this image the lyric feel of an art piece that I could live with for a long time on my wall.
—George Lepp

ATLANTIC PUFFIN CLOSEUP
Top 100

OYSTER CATCHER FEEDING TIME, Fort Myers Beach, Florida. © Ursula Dubrick

EGYPTIAN GOSLINGS, Zimanga Private Game Reserve, South Africa. © Owen Deutsch

HELLO WORLD (Piping Plover Chick and Parent), Long Island, New York. © Grace Scalzo

FLAMENCO DANCER (Reddish Egret), South Padre Island, Texas. © Hector D. Astorgo

GREAT BLUE HERONS CELEBRATING NEW YEARS, Viera Wetlands, Florida. © Lynn Long

RUFOUS FANTAIL IN THE AUSTRALIAN RAINFOREST, Lamington National Park, Australia. © Judd Patterson
Top 100

BALD EAGLE TAKES OFF, Alaska. © Carol Grenier

SANDHILL CRANE SUNRISE OVER FROZEN POND, Bosque National Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico. © Stan Bysshe

SWAINSON’S HAWK FEEDING ON BATS AT SUNSET, New Mexico. © Arash Hazeghi

PUFFIN PORTRAIT WITH EELS, Iceland. © Ann Pacheco

MALE BELTED KINGFISHER WITH PREY, Sebastian, Florida. © Michael Cohen

NORTHERN GANNET LANDING WITH NESTING MATERIALS, Bonaventure Island, Quebec, Canada. © Melody Lytle
Top 100

YOUNG BURROWING OWLS PLAYING, Vista Park, Southern Florida. © Judith Malloch

CRESTEM CARACARA FLEDGLINGS GET DUST BATH LESSON, Kissimmee Prairie Preserve, Okeechobee, Florida. © Christina Evans

TERN ALTERCATION, Sanibel Island, Florida. © Sandy Richards

LITTLE BEE-EATER TOSSES MOTH IN AIR, Tarangire National Park, Tanzania. © Bruce Finocchio

ROADRUNNER WITH LUNCH, Santa Clara Ranch, South Texas. © Hector D. Astorga
Top 100

ROCKHOPPER HONEYS, Saunders Island, Falklands. © Myrna Paige

MIRED (Red-Masked Parakeet), San Francisco, California. © Ben Knoot

SKIMMER WITH ORANGE TONGUE AND MINNOW, Amberjack Environmental Park, Florida. © Mary Lundeborg

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS, Hidalgo County, Texas. © Ruth Hoyt
COURTSHIP DISPLAY (Bluethroat), Seward Peninsula, Nome, Alaska. © Ken Archer
FLIGHT PRACTICE (Piping Plover Chick), Long Island, New York. © Grace Scalzo
RISING FROM THE MIST (Lesser Sandhill Cranes), Merced National Wildlife Refuge, California. © Donald Quintana
BOOTED RACKET-TAIL IN STAR FORMATION, Tandeyapa, Ecuador. © Amy Marques

OSPREYS SUNSET, Smoky Mountain National Park, Tennessee, and Osprey, Florida. (Phil) © Amy Marques
PYRRHULOXIA MALE, Laguna Seca Ranch, Hidalgo County, Texas. © Melody Lytle
NORTHERN CARDINAL FEMALE, Hidalgo County, Texas. © Ruth Hoyt
JUVENILE PEREGRINE FALCON STOOP, Southern California. © Arash Hazeghi
A COLD WINTER’S DAY WITH A SNOWY OWL, Alberta, Canada. © Barbara Fleming
FLYCATCHERS CHECK A SAGUARO HOLE AS A NEST SITE, Scottsdale, Arizona. © Ann Beisser
AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER PAIR, Fort De Soto Park, Florida. © Marie Read
WHITE MORPH REDDISH EGRETS DISPLAYING, San Antonio Bay, Texas. © Nate Chappell
CONVERSATION (King Penguins), Antarctica. © Adel Korkor
NORTHERN CARDINAL AND GOLDEN-FRONTED WOODPECKER, Laguna Seca Ranch, Hidalgo County, Texas. © Melody Lytle

CAPE SUGARBIRD, Kirstenbosch Forest, South Africa. © Owen Deutsch
FEMALE AND YOUNG WOOD DUCK LEAVING NEST, Boise, Idaho. © Steve Bly
EGRET DISPLAYING, Kiawah Island, South Carolina. © Allyson Hurley
Baltimore Oriole Female, Laguna Seca Ranch, Hidalgo County, Texas. © Melody Lytle
BLACK SKIMMERS, St. Petersburg, Florida. © Amy Marques
Top 250

PRAIRIE CHICKENS, Nebraska. © Deborah Winchester

STELLERS SEA EAGLES WITH BEGGARS, Japan. © Patrick Pevy

WHITE IBIS FIGHTING WITH LAUGHING GULL OVER FISH, Pinellas County, Florida. © Robert Rommel

WILD TURKEYS IN A SPARRING MATCH, Pershing County, Nevada. © Diane McAllister

DANCE FIGHT (Black Grouse), Sweden. © Guido Frazzini

BARRED OWLET, Florida. © Ann Gillis

INDIGO BUNTING WARBLING ON A SUNFLOWER, Middleton, Wisconsin. © Stacey Meanwell

ROBIN REFLECTION, Veneto, Italy. © Guido Frazzini

SCARLET-CHESTED SUNBIRD, Okapuka Ranch, Namibia. © Wendy Kaveney

SHORT-EARED OWL AT TWILIGHT, Camano Island, Washington. © Bonnie Black
Top 250

EARED GREBE CARRYING CHICK ON ITS BACK, Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge, Montana. © Marie Read

GULLS, TERNs AND CORMORANTS ROOST ON STICKS, Biscayne Bay, Miami, Florida. © Constance Mar

AMERICAN AVOCET COURTSHIP, Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon. © Ken Archer

GENTOO PENGUINS SWIMMING IN SURF, Bleaker Island, Falklands. © Michael Mika

AMERICAN AVOCET COURTSHIP, Redwood Shores, California. © Ben Knoot

PEREGRINE FALCON DROPS FOOD TO JUVENILE, Point Lobos State Natural Reserve, California. (Phil) © Alice Cahill

GREAT BLUE HERON AND GROUND SQUIRREL, Merced National Wildlife Refuge, California. © Rick Derevan

BLACK-BELTED PLOVER IN A TUG-OF-WAR, Ocracoke Island, North Carolina. © Mark Buckler

GIANT KINGFISHER CATCHES CRAB, Chobe River, Botswana. © Carol Grenier

GREAT BLUE HERON WITH CHAIN PICKEREL, Central Florida. © Ronald Bielefeld
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By Drew Gardner,
London, UK
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The surprisingly lightweight Batis 2.8/18 is the ideal lens for people who are often on the go and need to withstand any weather conditions. It is ideal for achieving exceptional angles in landscape and astro photography.

Scotland is one of Drew Gardner’s favorite travel destinations. This time he took along his wife, son, dog Wriggle and the new ZEISS Batis 2.8/18. The Isle of Mull in northwestern Scotland is one of the most beautiful places on the British Isles, says Drew Gardner. In December there are few tourists, making it the ideal time of year for a short trip away with the family to take some pictures with the new ZEISS Batis 2.8/18. If you travel to Scotland in December, count on rain. And if you want to take good pictures, you’ll sometimes have to deal with a wet ground. To take this photo of the abandoned fishing boats, Drew stepped into the lake until the water almost reached the top of his boots and then looked for a secure spot to place his tripod.

Under these circumstances, the extremely long exposure time of 57 seconds feels even longer. But the effort was worth it: the clouds are softly blurred and the water lies there like a calm milky lake. The picture is in focus, even though more and more rain drops collected on the lens during the exposure.
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