

THE FINE ART OF SEEING SIG  
WILDLIFE COMPOSITION IN  
THE ENVIRONMENT THEY  
CALL HOME

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## AGENDA OF PRESENTATION

- PERSONAL BACKGROUND
  - INTENDED PURPOSE OF MY PHOTOGRAPHY
- EQUIPMENT
- COMPOSITION PRINCIPLES I FOLLOW (STYLE)
- DISCUSSION ON PICTURES WITH COMPOSITION PRINCIPLES
  - (GOOD AND NEEDS IMPROVEMENT)
  
- (WILL TAKE QUESTIONS AT ANYTIME JUST INTERRUPT OR RAISE YOUR HAND)

PURPOSE OF PRESENTATION IS TO PROVIDE AT LEAST ONE IDEA YOU WILL TRY IN THE FIELD TO IMPROVE COMPOSITION

## MY BACKGROUND

- 9 YEARS AGO, BOUGHT FIRST DIGITAL CAMERA
- LAST THREE YEARS GOT MORE SERIOUS TO IMPROVE PHOTOGRAPHY SKILLS
- IMPROVEMENT DRIVEN BY:
  - CRITIQUING YOUR SIG AND WOODLANDS CAMERA CLUB
  - JARED LLOYD - JOURNAL OF WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY
  - MORTEN HILMER – NATURE & WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY
  - YOUTUBE VIDEOS

## BACKGROUND - CONTINUED

- PREFER TAKING PICTURES OF BIRDS
- HAVE BECOME KNOWN FOR SNAKE PHOTOGRAPHS
- TO TAKE A GREAT PHOTOGRAPH, IN MY OPINION:
  - TAKEN WITHOUT DISTURBING OR INTERRUPTING THE WILDLIFE'S NORMAL DAILY ACTIVITY
  - GENERATES AN UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE FOR THE WILDLIFE OR AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION/RESPONSE OF THE VIEWER
  - COMPOSITION IS A KEY COMPONENT IN TAKING A "GREAT PHOTOGRAPH"

## EQUIPMENT AND SETTING

- CANON MARK IV (FULL FRAME)
- PRIMARY LENS IS 100-400 MM
- 800 MM FOR SMALL BIRDS AND DISTANCE
- SHOOT MANUAL, STARTING TO USE AUTO ISO
- SHOOT PRIMARILY WITH WIDE APERTURE
- BIG BIRDS 1/1250 SEC, SMALL BIRDS 1/2000 SEC
- ISO UP TO 6400 AND GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH EVEN HIGHER ISOS

## COMPOSITION PRINCIPLES

- QUALITY LIGHTING
- QUALITY BACKGROUND (BOKEH OR NO BOKEH)
- QUALITY FOREGROUND
- POSITION OF WILDLIFE
- CAMERA HEIGHT VS WILDLIFE
- PORTRAIT VS ENVIRONMENT SEEN WITH WILDLIFE

## PICTURES

- WHAT PRINCIPLES WERE FOLLOWED, WHICH WEREN'T?
- WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?

(A CRITICAL EYE OF YOUR OWN PHOTOS IS KEY TO IMPROVEMENT, OTHERS CAN HELP WITH CANDID COMMENTS)

**BACKGROUNDS**

(MY MOST NEGLECTED COMPOSITION COMPONENT,  
UNTIL RECENTLY)





THICKET ENVIRONMENT

MORNING LIGHT

- 1) f/6.3, 1/1,000, ISO 800, 800 mm lens
- 2) White eyed Vireo
- 3) Good lighting but side lit
- 4) The shot shows the thickets these birds live in vs a tighter crop
- 5) Some of the sticks are distracting but shows the environment
- 6) Eye level with subject provides a greater sense of equality between bird and viewer
- 7) If I could change anything I would flip the bird, so the light was on the front of the bird
- 8) High Island TX



- CLEAN BACKGROUND
- GOOD LIGHT BUT SLIGHTLY SIDE LIT
- SIMPLE PERCH
- VIEWER'S EYE EASILY FOCUSES AND STAYS ON SUBJECT

- 1) F/7.1, ISO 800, 1/3,200 sec, 800 mm lens
- 2) Rose Breasted Grosbeak
- 3) Bird is looking down on viewer
- 4) High Island, TX

- BLANK BACKGROUND (BORING)
- NO CONTEXT TO LOCATION OR ENVIRONMENT
- CLEAR AND GOOD FRONT LIGHTING



- 1) f/7.1, 1/3,200 sec, ISO 400
- 2) Osprey
- 3) Would like to have gotten diving in the water/fishing.
- 4) Spring Creek Nature Trail

- SHOWS THE GRASS FIELD (ENVIRONMENT)
- LOW FLIGHT PATH
- FACE OF BIRD IS LIT BUT NOT UNDERBODY
- FOCUS MANAGEMENT COULD HAVE BEEN IMPROVED



- 1) f7.1, 1/3,200 sec, ISO 400, 400 mm lens
- 2) Male Northern Harrier
- 3) Slightly out of focus
- 4) This is typical hunting of a Harrier.
- 5) Wish lighting was better on bird.
- 6) Wish bird was tack sharp
- 7) West Texas

- SO FOCUSED ON FLOWER AND BEES FLYING AROUND I DIDN'T EVEN NOTICE THE BUSY BACKGROUND UNTIL LOADED ON MY COMPUTER
- USING THE TIME NEEDED TO GET AN EXCELLENT PICTURE. HARD TO ACCOMPLISH WHEN WITH OTHER PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY IF THEY ARE NOT PHOTOGRAPHERS
- I NOW TAKE "TRIPS" JUST TO TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS TO GIVE ME THE TIME TO WORK ON TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS WITH THE BEST COMPOSITION



- 1) 1/500 of sec, ISO 200, f/7.1, 70 mm lens
- 2) Big Bend National Park
- 3) Needed a cleaner background
- 4) Position myself so I get more of a side or frontal view of the bee

- CLEANER BACKGROUND LETS THE VIEWER FOCUS ON BIRDS WITHOUT DISTRACTION
- GROUP TELLS A STORY VS INDIVIDUAL BIRD.
- ENVIRONMENT: THE IMPORTANCE OF WATER IN A DESERT.



- 1) 1/800, ISO 800, f/8.0, 400 mm
- 2) Guadalupe Mountain National Park
- 3) Western Blue Bird



- EVEN BACKGROUND
- EVEN FOREGROUND
- MANAGEMENT OF DEPTH OF FIELD
- EVEN IN "DARK" ENVIRONMENT YOU CAN TAKE A QUALITY PICTURE.

- 1) 1/60 SEC, ISO 3200, f/6.3, 400 mm
- 2) Free Frog
- 3) Spring Creek Nature Trail

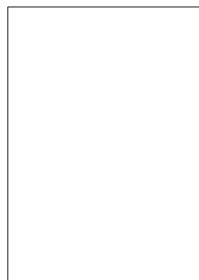
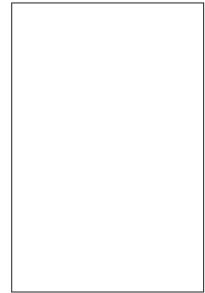
- CLEAN BOKEH BACKGROUND
- THIS IS THE TYPE OF SHOT I AIM TO ACHIEVE



- 1) 1/1,000 sec, f/8, ISO 640, 800 mm
- 2) High Island – Boy Scout Woods
- 3) Blue Grosbeak



- LOOK AT THE DIFFERENCE IN A CLEANER BACKGROUND





- COMPARISON OF BACKGROUNDS
  - BUSY VS BOKEH
  - BUSY HIGHLIGHTS IN FIRST PICTURE WHICH ARE UNMANAGEABLE IN POST PROCESSING
  - DEPTH OF FIELD SAME IN BOTH PICTURES WITH F/8
  - SET UP WHERE YOU WILL BE TAKING A PICTURE WITH A CLEAN BACKGROUND AND THERE IS ENOUGH SPACE BETWEEN SUBJECT AND BACKGROUND TO CREATE DESIRED PICTURE.

- 1) First picture: 1/1,250 sec, ISO 2,000, f8, 800 mm
- 2) Second picture: 1/2000 sec, ISO 2000, f8, 800 mm

**FOREGROUND**

(IS THERE ANYTHING IN THE WAY OR DISTRACTING?  
DOES THE FOREGROUND ADD TO PICTURE?)

- I BELIEVE THE FOREGROUND HELPS THE VIEWER UNDERSTAND THIS BIRD HIDES IN THE GRASS AND REEDS



- 1) 1/320 sec, ISO 1,250, f/8 and 800mm lens
- 2) Rail ?
- 3) Attwater Chicken Prairie Wildlife Refuge
- 4) Also like the picture as it was the best shot I could get that showed the rail

- DOES THE PLANT COMPETE WITH THE SUBJECT?



- 1) 1/125 sec, ISO 800, f/5.6, 400mm lens
- 2) Buttermilk Racer
- 3) George Mitchell Preserve off Flintridge
- 4) Snake was moving directly towards me.
- 5) Getting into position and waiting for the snake to come to me made the picture and composition

- TALL GRASS FRAMING THE FAWN
- | DON'T MIND SMALL GRASS OVERLAPPING SUBJECT, EXCEPT WHEN ON EYES. PLACES THE ANIMAL IN ITS ENVIRONMENT



**ENVIRONMENT**

WHAT IS THE BACKSTORY BEING TOLD ABOUT THE  
ANIMAL?

- PINE WARBLER TAKING MEAL TO CHICKS IN A NEST
- WAITING FOR ME TO LEAVE TO VISIT THE NEST.



- 1) 1/200 sec, f/7.1, ISO 400, 400 mm
- 2) Pine Warbler
- 3) Clean background behind head



- COMING IN FOR A LANDING FOR THE EVENING AFTER BEING OUT IN THE FIELDS EATING ALL DAY
- ALL WINGS UP (MORE PLEASING)
- FLYING TOWARDS VS AWAY. (MORE PLEASING)
- CAPTURES THE ENVIRONMENT OF BOSQUE DEL APACHE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE IN NEW MEXICO



- 1) 1/1,000 sec, ISO 2000, f/5 182 mm
- 2) Sandhill Cranes
- 3) Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge NM

- GAMBEL'S QUAIL IN GRASS FIELD
- BACKGROUND?
- FOREGROUND?
- LIGHTING?
- COMPOSITION? ( I WOULD HAVE LIKED TO HAVE BEEN IN A FIELD AND HAD A WIDER FIELD OF VIEW TO SHOW MORE ENVIRONMENT.)



- 1) 1/1,600 sec, ISO 640, f/5.6, 800mm
- 2) Bosque Del Apache
- 3) Picture actually taken on Nature Trail by visitors center, attracted by bird feeder

- NOT SHARP BUT DOES IT MATTER?
- SHOWS ENVIRONMENT OF COYOTE



- 1) 1/640 sec, ISO 200, f/6.3, 800 mm lens
- 2) Coyote about to cross service road
- 3) Shutter speed too slow for sharp image



- JAVELINA DURING DAILY ROUTINE - ENVIRONMENT
- ANIMAL MOVING AWAY FROM VIEWER – NOT STRONG IMAGE

- 1) 1/1,600 sec, ISO 1250, f/5.6, 800 mm
- 2) Javelina
- 3) Like foreground and background but would have liked the animal to be coming towards me

- FOCUS ON BUCK
- TWO DOES ON THE GROUND ADDS INTEREST AND MAKES STATEMENT OF BUCK'S STATUS
- ENVIRONMENT OF FIELDS AND THICKETS



- 1) 1/250 sec, ISO 200, f/6.3, 800 mm
- 2) Mule Deer
- 3) Environment
- 4) Need to focus on on eyes of buck, could have improved depth of field
- 5) Composition is great just poor execution.



- POSITION OF BIRD IN PICTURE!
- INTERESTING BACKGROUND ENVIRONMENT BUT A LITTLE MESSY. ENVIRONMENT SHOTS WILL TEND TO HAVE MORE DETAILS THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE PICTURE
- BIRD A LITTLE ABOVE BRUSH HELPS

- 1) 1/1600 sec, ISO 640, f/7.1, 800 mm lens
- 2) Female Northern Harrier
- 3) Bosque Del Apache NM

- BACKSTORY AND SET UP TO CAPTURING PICTURE
- ONE OF THE FIRST TIMES I SAW THE PICTURE WELL BEFORE I TOOK THE SHOT.
- GRASS FIELD IS WHAT ATTRACTED ME TO TAKE THE PICTURE
- FALL LEAVES IN BACKGROUND, GOLDEN GRASS FIELD AND SANDHILL CRANE



- 1) 1/1650 sec, ISO 2,500, f/7.1, 800 mm lens
- 2) Sandhill Crane in grass field
- 3) Waited for Sandhill Crane to move into the space where yellow fall leaves filled the background

**PERSPECTIVE ANIMAL VS VIEWER**

HOW DOES THE ANIMAL SEE THE WORLD?  
HOW DO YOU SHOW WHAT THE ANIMAL SEES?





- A PATH THROUGH A FIELD THE RACCOON WAS TRAVELING.
- MORNING SUN IN BACKGROUND COULD BE CONSIDERED DISTRACTING. DOES IT HELP SAY, THIS IS MORNING? LOOK AT ALL THE DEW.
- I COULDN'T GET AS LOW AS I WANTED BEFORE THE RACCOON LEFT.
- WOULD YOU CROP TIGHTER? WHY?

- 1) 1/250 sec, ISO 1250, f/7.1, 400 mm
- 2) Raccoon
- 3) Aransas National Wildlife Refuge
- 4) I actually like that he is looking through the grass and slightly hiding

- GET YOUR CAMERA AS LOW TO THE GROUND AS POSSIBLE TO GET INTO THE ANIMAL'S ENVIRONMENT
- LAY ON THE GROUND A LOT
- ONCE YOU LAY ON THE GROUND YOU WILL REALIZE YOU NEED TO THINK ABOUT THE PICTURE BEFORE PICKING YOUR SPOT TO LAY DOWN. ONCE ON THE GROUND YOU WILL HAVE A MUCH DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE. IF YOU DON'T THINK ABOUT THE PICTURE FIRST, YOU WILL BE GETTING UP AND DOWN NUMEROUS TIMES AS YOU REALIZE YOU CAN IMPROVE THE PICTURE IN A DIFFERENT LOCATION



1) 1/25 sec, ISO 2,000, f/7.1, 400 mm



LOOK AT THE DIFFERENCE IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF BEING AT EYE  
LEVEL WITH A LIZARD.

- 1) First picture: 1/250, ISO 400, f/16, 400 mm lens
- 2) Second picture: 1/2,000, ISO 400, f/10, 400 mm lens

- WHICH PICTURE DO YOU PREFER?



There isn't a right answer to the question. Both pictures have a place.

Common Yellowthroat Warbler

Boy Scout Woods on High Island

Yellowthroat pictures bathing: 1/1,000, f/5.6, ISO 5000; 800 mm

Yellowthroat singing: 1/400, f/5.6, ISO 3,200, 800 mm

- LOOK AT THE COPPER EYE – I DIDN'T SEE THIS UNTIL I WAS ON THE GROUND
- LOOK AT THE CRUSHED GRANITE (IT WAS LIKE LAYING ON CRUSHED GLASS)
- RED-SPOTTED TOAD SITTING ON SMALL RIDGE WHICH HELPED SEPARATE THE TOAD FROM THE BACKGROUND



- 1) 1/2,000 sec, ISO 400, f/8, 400 mm lens
- 2) Red-spotted Toad
- 3) Joshua Tree National Park



WHICH PICTURE IS MORE IMPACTFUL?

- 1) Picture 1: 1/100 sec, ISO 6400, f/5.6, 124mm
- 2) Picture 2: 1/80 sec, ISO 6400, f/5.6, 400 mm



BOTH PICTURES HAVE A PLACE FOR A VIEWER.  
WHICH PICTURE MEANS MORE TO YOU?  
WHY?



Buttermilk Racer

Camera settings for both pictures the same: 1/400 sec, f/6.3, ISO 1250

Close picture 182 mm, Other 100mm.



- THE FIRST PICTURE REFLECTS THAT I COULDN'T EVEN GET A GOOD PICTURE OF THE SNAKE BASED ON LOCATION.
- I CRAWLED INTO THE BRUSH TO BE ABLE TO GET THE SECOND PICTURE.
- WHICH PICTURE TALKS TO YOU?



## Western Rat Snake

Spring Creek Nature trail (by beaver pond)

Body of snake taken at 1/125 sec, f/8.0 ISO 1,000, 400 mm

Snake. Face: 1/200, f/9.0, ISO 2,500, 400 mm



SILHOUETTES AND REFLECTIONS (ART)

- SUNRISE IN A RICE FIELD?
- WHITE BALANCE IS IMPORTANT!



- 1) 1/80 sec, ISO 800, f/14, 400 mm lens
- 2) On the way to High Island

- LOOK AT THE FALL COLORS BEING REFLECTED IN THE WATER.
- I PICKED THE SPOT BECAUSE OF THE REFLECTION AND THEN WAITED FOR A BIRD TO FLY INTO THE SCENE.



- 1) Snowy Egret
- 2) 1/1,250 sec, ISO 250, f/7.1, 800 mm lens



WHAT TIME OF DAY DO  
YOU BELIEVE THIS WAS  
TAKEN?

Great Egret  
1/2500 sec, f/16, ISO 400  
Spring Creek Nature Pond off Ann Snyder Drive

## SUMMARY OF COMPOSITION OF WILDLIFE PHOTOS

- IS THE LIGHTING GOOD ON THE SUBJECT (DO YOU NEED TO MOVE TO IMPROVE?)
- PAY ATTENTION TO FOREGROUND AND BACKGROUND – IT CAN MAKE OR BREAK A PHOTO. CAN YOU POSITION YOURSELF TO MAKE THESE COMPONENTS BETTER?
- DOES THE ANGLE OF VIEW PROVIDE THE VIEW YOU WANT?
  - GET LOW FOR ANIMALS ON THE GROUND
- SHOW THE ENVIRONMENT, DON'T FEEL YOU NEED TO CROP EVERYTHING INTO A PORTRAIT OF THE SUBJECT.
- SUBJECT FACING INTO THE FRAME OF THE PICTURE IS PREFERRED
- FRONT OR SIDE OF SUBJECT SHOULD BE CAPTURED IN PICTURE, NOT BACK.
- SUBJECT SHOULD BE MOVING TOWARDS YOU NOT AWAY FROM YOU WHEN SHOT IS TAKEN
- TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT – WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO TRY?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND INTEREST!

ANY ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS?

EXTRA PICTURES TO DISCUSS COMPOSITION IF  
TIME AND INTEREST



COMMENTS?

White Egret  
1/500 sec, f/8.0, ISO 100, 800 mm  
Rookery on High Island





COMMENTS?

Texas Coral Snake  
1/320 sec, f/7.1, ISO 800, 400 mm  
My front yard

COMMENTS?



Baby Alligator  
1/1000 sec, f/8.0, ISO 800, 800 mm  
Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge

COMMENTS?



Swallow Tail Butterfly  
1/125 sec, f/10, ISO 400, 400 mm

COMMENTS?



Tropical King Bird  
1/640 sec, f/7.1, ISO 400, 400 mm  
Southern Texas

COMMENTS?



Barred Owl  
1/500 sec, f/7.1, ISO 400, 400 mm  
Spring Creek Nature Trail

THOUGHTS?



Bald Eagles at Bosque Del Apache  
1/1250 sec, f/7.1, ISO 640, 800 mm