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Musings of the Bee Queen

by Robin Stern

Page 24



Inside this Issue:

- 2020 Youth Showcase
- My Time at Home During Covid-19
- Busy Compositions
- NEOWISE in the California High Deserts



Musings of the
Bee Queen



On Bright Pink at Huntington Estates

I've got a magnetism to all small living things, especially bees. This began when I got a new lens for my Nikon D5100 camera about seven years ago. I would shoot the bees handheld buzzing around the Pride of Madeira blooms in my backyard, followed by a session in my easy chair viewing and eliminating image after image. Then I'd repeat the session in the yard continually adjusting the camera settings until the images got better and better.

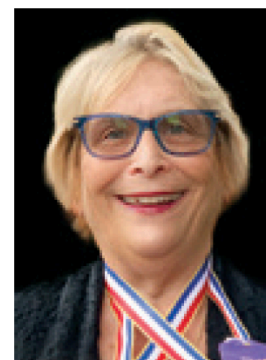
They say practice makes perfect and I was quite determined to get the best shots I could in those sessions. Of course, a close eye on movement and detail allows you to find other nature subjects like dragon flies, robber flies, butterflies, spiders, etc. to photograph.

Walking around parks and gardens only increased my attention to the bees. What would start out as a walk, would end up as a shooting session with the bees, flies, dragon flies and more bees everywhere I went. I often entered some of my best images in the monthly competitions of the camera clubs here in San Diego just to get a judge's feedback (Southern California Association of Camera Clubs). Soon I got the designation of

The Queen of Bees, a nickname I still enjoy. Being a regular participating member of a camera club is a great way to challenge yourself and get feedback for improvement. I heartily recommend finding a club in your area.

Often when I mention my favorite six-legged subject, others cringe thinking they would be putting themselves in harm's way. It has been my experience that the bees are so busy doing their work collecting pollen from flower to flower they don't notice my intrusion, even as close as I get to them. I haven't been stung even once in these past seven years. I am trusting that this record remains.

Two years ago, I bought a macro lens, a Tamron SP 90mm f/2.8 Di VC USD and my bug images on my Nikon D7200 got even closer and better. It's a prime lens that takes getting used to because of the range of focus and distance from these moving subjects. If you use this kind of lens you know exactly what I'm talking about. If you don't own one yet and are interested in the small world of insects, I recommend renting such a lens and giving it a go. I must say I am forever hooked on using my macro, which I use handheld. I am interested in upgrading to one that shoots even the



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From Morning Til Night



Winged Bee

tinest details on these insects and allows me to stay a bit further away, but haven't yet bought one.

The continual learning curve in macro shooting requires the photographer to manage the shutter speed, ISO and f stop. I guess that's true in any photography, but in macro it seems to be tougher. If the f stop is too large (small number), not enough of the image is sharp, and part of the subject may be out of focus. If the ISO is too low the shutter speed cannot stop the action of flight in these insects. I find that I must shoot at a shutter speed of at least 1/2000 of a second to get the wings/face sharp in flight. I usually shoot at an ISO of 400 to allow that speed or greater, with an f stop of over 10. There are downsides to shooting with a macro lens. The big one is lighting. Generally, it requires additional light because you're shooting at f11-f22. Without additional flash images are darker. I also take advantage of image compensation on the camera up to 3.3. As of yet, I haven't added flash because it slows down the camera's shooting speed. If anyone's head is spinning reading this and thinking about all these numbers to keep in your head, just remember practice, practice and more practice. Photography is a lot of physics and mechanics!



Weird Bee in Pollen

I have learned a lot about bee behaviors from watching them. I love watching the bees get covered with the sticky pollen and then wiping their body clean on a leaf or twig. I watch them load the pollen in the pollen basket on their hind legs. The bulge of pollen always takes on the color of the pollen they have collected. If the flower and pollen are purple, then the basket on their hind legs is purple. Usually bees are solitary collectors and



45 Degree Tongue



Hanging on in 2020



Flying Towards Aloe



Tongue Out and Running



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Photos © **Robin Stern**

Tongue in the Plant

will chase away the another insect to be alone, but occasionally you see two interacting like a team. The life of the bee is very fascinating.

Every year since I retired ten years ago, I entered the county fair. My first entry was a bee inside a calla lily and it got me a fourth place ribbon. That spurred me on to continue. I must give a shout out to my friend and mentor who took me from a point and shoot ten years ago to joining clubs, entering the fair and eventually winning Best of Show at the San Diego County Fair. Another shout out goes to my son who lent me his Nikon camera until he was tired of lending it to me and just gave it to me. I have since bought a few new cameras—always a Nikon from the old days of borrowing my son's.

Photography is a great hobby. I find that any day I am out shooting is a happy day of serendipitous learning and practice in the world of nature. ■



Going in for the Pollen