**TIPS FOR MAKING BETTER NATURE PHOTOGRAPHS**

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**Be a naturalist.** Learn more about the flora, fauna, environments and geology in the places you photograph. Read natural history field guides, study reliable information online, attend classes by naturalists, join field trips, and learn from your own observations. The more you know about things like bird behaviors, bloom times of flowers, unique environmental features and the topography of your surroundings, the more likely you are to find good subjects at the right times.

**Find places close to home.** Explore your region for good scenes and subjects. Ask other photographers and nature lovers about their favorite spots. Study maps for parks, preserves and other wild places. After all, if a place is a park, it’s been preserved for some natural feature that could make it your next favorite location. When you find nearby places, you can get back to them in different seasons, different light and different weather. And you might find good things as close as your own backyard.

**Know your equipment.** Get comfortable with the operations of your camera body, lenses and tripod. The better you know your gear, the less time you’ll spend thinking about the mechanics of a photograph and the more energy you can focus on the artistry of it.

**Learn from the work of others.** Study books, magazines, calendars, videos, advertising and artwork to understand the elements of a pleasing photograph. Examples are all around us. Finding good work to examine isn’t tough. It’s more a matter of learning what elements make images that are pleasing to you.

**Learn from your own work.** Take time to study your own results. Make notes in the field about the equipment and techniques you use and refer to them. Compare your work to that of others. Compare your recent work with your older stuff and see how it’s changed. Weigh the good and bad, then decide what habits to change and what to keep working on.

**Be patient.** Good photos come to those who wait – sometimes. The keen senses of birds and animals may require that you sit quietly for a while. Or you may have to return to a scenic spot later when the light is better. And when you’re making closeups, waiting for the wind to calm may become the truest test of your resolve. But remember, even on days when the good photos get away, chances are you’ll learn something about yourself or nature.

**Aim to please yourself.** Make photographs that *you* like – not just those you think others would appreciate. That may be the true definition of successful photos. And when you strive to please yourself, your personal vision of the world will bring life to your photographs.

**Enjoy what you do.** No matter what your reasons for photographing nature – for prints, for competition, for fun or for profit – take time to enjoy where you are and what you see. Sometimes you have to step away from the viewfinder and enjoy the view. Nature photography is less like work than any job I can remember and more rewarding than any hobby I’ve had, so I hope some of this advice helps you find the way to your own photographic fun and pleasure. ■