

Attending a NANPA Summit

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Every year, approximately 700 nature photographers, editors, stock agents, and others in the nature photography industry gather together for the North American Nature Photography Association's (NANPA) summit. While the hosting city changes, the summit provides a place for NANPA members to come together to renew old friendships, establish new ones, network, conduct business, share ideas, ask questions, learn new techniques, and share our love and joy of nature photography. While the Albuquerque summit was my fourth, each year I anticipate the coming event with greater excitement. This year was no exception. As I signed up for workshops and selected breakout sessions I made two promises to myself. First, I was going to work hard to spend as much time as possible participating in the summit. Second, with my increased interest in marketing my work, I wanted to maximize the networking opportunities the summit would provide.

Wednesday morning started with the feeling of needing to be in two places at the same time, except in this case it was literal. At 8:30 I was scheduled to start an all day digital workshop with George Lepp and to sit down with Sharon Cohen-Powers for a 30-minute portfolio review. I figured that I could miss the introduction to the digital workshop and catch up a little later, so I headed to the review. As a former stock agent and now part of the staff at AGPix, Sharon was able to help me look at my images from a marketing perspective. She provided tips and suggestions on little things that would improve my photography and which markets I should target. She informed me that there are two types of photographers, the Art Wolfes and the Frans Lantings. The Art Wolfes capture the story with a single frame. In contrast, the Franz Lantings use six pictures to tell the same story. Both methods work, but it is important to decide which type of photographer you want to be.

After my review, I headed across the street to hear George Lepp's detailed description of digital photography. From image capture to the final output, George discussed the various options available to the digital photographer. As someone moderately comfortable with digital, I appreciated the fact that he concisely covered a lot of information and walked through examples. For example, when talking about his Photoshop workflow, we ran through the steps of taking a scanned image (or a RAW digital file) and preparing it for printing. After having read so much information of processing digital files on NPN, it was nice to watch someone run through all of the steps.

The next three days were a blur of activity beginning at 7 in the morning and often continuing well past 10 at night. Connie Toops, this year's master of ceremonies, introduced a host of distinguished keynote speakers, including Karen Hollingsworth, Joel Sartore, Theo Allofs, and Mark Moffett. Jim Brandenburg presented a look at his latest project *Looking for the Summer – A Daily Diary of the 93 Days of Summer*. This is a continuation of Jim's *Chased by the Light* project where he documented his northern Minnesota backyard by limiting himself to only a single picture a day. In *Looking for the Summer*, Jim altered his methods by take as many pictures as he wanted, but selecting only a single frame to represent that day. As Jim's presentation demonstrated, selecting a single image from a group is often harder than capturing the image in the first place.

Mornings and afternoons were spent in breakout sessions where we had the opportunity to hear presentations on a variety of subjects. Over three days I heard talks about shooting magazine stories, photographing natural abstracts, entering the children's publishing market, Photoshop for photographers, and running a part time nature photography business. Other attendees learned about developing a web site, shooting on public lands, large format photography, photographing eagles (presented by NPN's own Bill Silliker, Jr.), and taxes just to name a few.

Thursday night I joined 39 of my fellow attendees and took part in what has become a much-anticipated event, the member's slide show. Organized by Wendy Shattil and Bob Rozinski, members are given the opportunity to show 10 slides and talk about them for 3 ½ minutes. This year, we were each asked to select a theme for our presentation and I choose animal antics, a closer look at animal behavior (the fact that Animal Antics is my business name had nothing to do with my title). Participating in the member's slide show was one of the best things I could have done at the summit in terms of my two goals. Not only was I taking part in as many opportunities as possible, throughout the rest of the summit people I did not know approached me to discuss my images.

One of the highlights of any NANPA summit is the trade show. This year almost 50 vendors set up booths in the exhibit hall. Representatives from the major manufacturers were there, including Canon, Nikon, Tamron, Epson, Fuji, and Kodak. Smaller

companies catering to the special interests of nature photographers were also on hand with everything from film processing to exotic photographic tours. In addition to talking to representatives about the latest and greatest equipment, I had the opportunity to meet face to face with a number of people who have only been voices on the other end of the telephone until now. In particular, I was happy to meet Gary Farber, better known to most people as Hunt's Photo & Video's "filmguy". For the past two years Gary has been contacting me regularly with NANPA member discounts on film and other photographic equipment, saving me hundreds of dollars annually (easily paying for my NANPA membership fee each year). As a result, Gary has become the primary supplier for most of my photographic gear. I also met the folks at Photo Craft Laboratories, the lab that has been processing my film for the past few years. In each case, it was nice to put a face to the people I am working with.

Mixed into all of the other activities, I found time to sit down to five more portfolio and editorial reviews. For thirty minutes, Barry Runk (Grant Heilman Photography) and Nancy Carrizales (with Animal Animals/Earth Scenes) reviewed my portfolio with consideration of accepting me into their respective agencies. While I was not accepted on the spot by either, I walked away with positive ideas about my future as a stock photographer. Both Barry and Nancy indicated that the quality of my work was as good as the images in their files, but to interest a stock agency I needed to find a niche that differed from the more common photographic subjects (apparently large Florida wading birds have been photographed before). Both agents provided suggestions as to the types of subjects I should shoot and encouraged me to see them again as my image files grow.

Following the portfolio reviews, I sat down with Melissa Ryan (Nature Conservancy), Bonnie Stutski (*Smithsonian*), and Stephen Freilih (*Nature's Best*) to discuss a book proposal I am working on. While I will not go into details about the book, all three indicated that the idea is original and there should be a sizable market for it. Each reviewer helped to contribute ideas and make suggestions regarding both the proposal and how to make the book appeal to the widest market. While some suggestions would change the project in fundamental ways that I am not in favor of, most of the ideas have provided me with alternatives worth exploring. Stephen Freilih also expressed interest in my submitting an article proposal to *Nature's Best* on my South African fur seal research. In the end, taking part in the NANPA portfolio and editorial review process assisted me in providing direction for marketing my work, recommendations on how to improve the chances of my book being published, establish interest in a future article with *Nature's Best*, and helping these editors put a face to my name so that next time they receive my letter in the mail they will not think of me as a stranger. Each reviewer also walked away with a folder of promotional material that I provided.

The summit finale was the awards banquet. It was a strange sight watching my fellow nature photographers who in the field are covered with mud and dirt appear dressed up to honor their colleagues. The banquet was followed by a slide presentation put together by the 10 participants of this year's student scholarship program. Using top-notch digital equipment donated by a variety of sponsors, these 10 students shot over 11,000 images in 2 ½ days. Fortunately, they edited the work and presented an inspirational show that confirmed the future of nature photography is in good hands. The evening ended with a presentation by Gary Braasch, this year's Outstanding Photographer of the Year award winner. Sharing his ongoing effort to document global warming, Gary left us with the challenge of moving beyond the pretty picture and encouraged us to use our cameras to save nature, not just document it.

As Sunday morning dawned most of the attendees packed their bags and headed towards home. For those who wanted to take advantage of the local photographic opportunities, summit field trips headed to Bosque del Apache and Petroglyph National Monument. However, some of us stayed at the hotel for the post-summit workshops. For five hours that afternoon, Ray Pfortner gave one of the most informative and concise workshops about the ins and outs of creating and selling a photography book. Through numerous examples, Ray explained how serialization of a book through magazines frequently brings in more money than the book itself. We looked at the reasons for wanting to publish and the advantages and disadvantages of self-publishing as compared to working with a commercial publisher. Ray showed how there are situations where working with a regional publisher is better than going national, both for their familiarity with local markets and the extra effort they put into marketing every book they publish. We learned how the introduction of new publication formats, including print on demand and e-books are rapidly changing the publishing world. By the end of the workshop, Ray had provided us with the tools to make our book ideas a reality.

As I said earlier, Albuquerque was my fourth NANPA summit. Each year I return home from the summit with a renewed desire to get back out into the field with my camera. While not inexpensive, I believe the NANPA summit to be worth every penny I spend. Nowhere else can one meet face to face with such a diverse collection of people who all share a love for nature photography. I hope to see you next January at the NANPA summit in Portland, Oregon.

Editor's Note - Be sure to visit Dr. Chris Gamel's [Animal Antics](http://www.Animal-Antics.net) at www.Animal-Antics.net.

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