



Warming Up to Spring

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After a winter like we've had here in the Northeast, and even most of North America for that matter, most of us are no doubt embracing the warmer spring temperatures (although, as of this writing the Carolinas are getting blasted with a very strong and rather rare winter snowstorm).

When the temperature here is consistently at or below zero, our enthusiasm for photographing nature may subside somewhat, as we wait for some subtle signs of spring. I personally enjoy the opportunity to photograph in winter, but I have to admit my annual late winter trip down to Florida to photograph beautiful migratory birds is usually a welcome break. My wife Pam and I have been leading teaching tours to Sanibel Island on the Gulf Coast side of Florida for several years now. From time to time we also like to go alone just to unwind a little bit. It just so happened that this year I was invited to lecture at the Fort Myers Beach camera club, and since Pam's mom lives in Fort Myers, we decided to combine business, visiting and photography into our annual trip.

For me, there are several advantages to an annual, late-winter trip to Florida. Besides the obvious break from the long winter, I find it to be a great opportunity to get the proverbial cobwebs out of my head and my equipment. Since Pam and I will be leading a tour to Zion and Bryce Canyon national parks in late March, this short Florida trip gives us the chance to "Warm up to Spring." No doubt, like many readers, Pam has a "real" job (I hear that a lot, but thankfully not from Pam), so getting out photographing on a regular basis can be difficult. Being a very good photographer in her own right, she, of course, plans most of her vacation time around our tour schedule, but she also looks forward to a little quiet time that a trip to Florida allows us. So here are a few recommendations on ways you too can "Warm up to Spring."

Shake the dust off your equipment. Drag your camera bag out of the closet, and get your tripod out while you are at it.

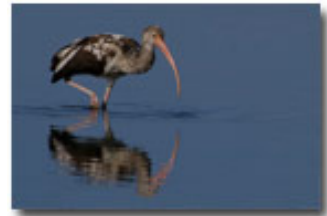
Tripod - Check and make sure all the nuts and bolts are snug, that the legs and leg locks all work properly. Wipe them clean with a clean, slightly damp cloth to remove any dirt. Now check the head to make sure it is working properly. Wipe it off in the same manner. Avoid using any lubricants, as most manufacturers don't recommend it.

Camera Bag - Get rid of any junk that doesn't belong in there, like candy wrappers, used lens cleaning tissue, old batteries that you no longer remember if they are good or not.

Lenses - Using 'canned air' or a 'Hurricane' blower, blow off all dust on the surface of both front and rear elements. Make sure if you are using the canned air that the can is held upright at all times when using it. Don't shake it either. You're trying to avoid any of the propellants from getting on the surface of your lenses, and keeping an easy cleaning job from becoming a nightmare.

Camera - Hopefully, you use your camera often enough that the need to remove your batteries to prevent damage, is not an issue. Batteries have been known to leak, allowing acid (corrosion) to ruin the electrical system. Besides cleaning the contacts with an abrasive cleaning brush or eraser, my favorite trick is to use ammonia! Yes you heard right. Just dip a Q-tip into a little ammonia and swab out the battery compartment, cleaning all the surface contact areas, quickly drying the area with canned air. Watch that you don't get any ammonia in your eyes, and avoid breathing in the fumes. Using this method, I have fixed everything from cameras, flashes, and even my daughter's electronic keyboard.

Use your bulb blower to clean any dust from around the body of your camera. Then use a soft cloth to wipe down the body. Be very careful around the opening where your lens mounts to the camera, especially if you use canned air. The mirror inside is prone to scratching and is very delicate. If your



mirror is dirty, you may want to let a service tech clean it for you. The same is true if you are shooting digital and have a dirty CCD sensor. Yes, I clean my own, and if you feel comfortable doing so, fine, but please, be very careful. If you are still shooting film, use caution when you dust the camera's film holding area. Be very careful around the shutter curtain, it only takes one slip to put your finger through it.

Also be aware that the contacts or pins around the outside of the lens mount of an automatic or auto-focus camera can also be affected by corrosion. Remember, they transfer information from the lens to the camera. I carefully clean these contacts using ammonia as well. Keep in mind, that if you have electronic problems with your camera, and it is under warranty, think it through before performing any service that might void your warranty. It may be far less expensive to have a service technician clean your camera and lenses once a year.

People Maintenance - Most of the time, my equipment is the least of my problems, it's the creative rustiness and my need to get out of the office that makes our annual trip to Florida and the Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge such an important part of my own "people" maintenance program. If you haven't been working that creative mind of yours, this is a great way to "Warm up to Spring." I've found that photographing the magnificent birds of South Florida will quickly get your mind working again, and that your familiarity with your camera equipment will soon return. Putting yourself in an area where there is an abundance of wildlife, such as Ding Darling, will quickly bring your photographic skills back on track, or at the very least, let you know what areas you need to work on.

Ask Yourself These Questions: How am I doing with exposures? Am I selecting the right focal length lens for the shot I want? Am I trying different compositions, both horizontal and vertical? Am I focusing accurately? When shooting a group of birds, do I allow enough depth of field to keep them all in focus? Am I getting down to their level so as to give the photograph a natural look? Am I trying any new creative techniques that might make my shots more interesting? Am I still paying attention to the importance of lighting or making sure there is catch-light in the bird's eyes? Am I aware of any distracting elements in my composition that might take away from an otherwise pleasing photograph?

This is the kind of mental questioning that I do in a situation like this. I find that it keeps me creatively and mentally sharp no matter the subject. Now as my trip to Zion approaches, I'm more confident that I'll be ready to capture some excellent images there as well. All because I took the time to "Warm up to Spring."

About the photos - The images to the right are thumbnail links to larger images with descriptions, which are presented in a slide show format.

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About the Author

Gary W. Stanley is a nationally known professional nature and landscape photographer based in New England. Gary leads popular photo tours and seminars throughout North America. He is a contributing editor for [Nature Photographers Online Magazine](#), and a popular speaker at the annual New England Camera Club Council conference held each year at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Gary is a skilled photographer with unique artistic vision, and his ability to teach his skills is equally impressive.

Gary has numerous photo and writing credits including national magazine articles and covers. Gary recently concluded a photo assignment shooting an icing research project on Mt. Washington for NASA. Much of Gary's landscape and nature photography can be seen in New England calendars and post cards. Gary's work has been featured in *Outdoor Photographer*, *Popular Photography*, and *American Photography* magazines.



Gary is also part of the well-known Fuji Professional Talent team of speakers who lecture on behalf of Fuji Professional films at various seminars around the country.

Visit Gary's web site at www.light-chasers.com.

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