



Circles of Photography

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On this 4th anniversary of being online, I remain as enthused and excited as I was when NPN first made its debut on the Internet. It seems like only yesterday that it all began, yet during these last four years, much has changed while much has remained the same. No doubt about it, NPN has had a profound effect on many of us.

What strikes me the most about the NPN community today is how it has grown, and continues to grow, in its appreciation of diversity of photographic style. The first images to appear on NPN in April of 2000 were predominantly avian images, and it didn't take long for these images to become similar in both style and technical execution. Through the process of image critique, everyone's images steadily improved, even though they all gradually took on a certain "look." At one point in time, someone joked that the site should be renamed "Bird Photographers.net" due to the preponderance of such images in our single image critique forum.

Due to the large numbers of avian images being posted, and a growing number of complaints that "non-avian" images were sliding off the "first page" too quickly, the single image critique forum was divided into multiple forums, each catering to a specific genre of nature photography. We not only had a forum for bird photos, but also forums for landscape, animals, flowers, macro and even underwater photos. While the number of images being posted in the avian forum still out-numbered those of all of the other forums combined, we at least gave those interested in a specific "non-avian" genre a place to focus on their "circle of photography."

Soon, each of the forums began the same process of posting, critiquing, improving and "consolidation of style" that the original, all-inclusive forum had gone through earlier. Through the give and take of image critique, preferred methods of technical execution were adopted by forum participants, and certain styles emerged as more "successful" (based on the critiques offered) than others. Accordingly, those that best conformed to the preferred style and method of execution received the highest praise.

More recently, we have had the true honor of greater participation by fellow nature photographers from outside of the United States. When our colleagues from the United Kingdom began posting their avian images, the NPN community was exposed to a style quite different from what was generally accepted on this side of the pond. As expected, the early critiques of those U.K. bird photos were based on the then familiar "large-in-the-frame-blown-out-background" style that, at the time, was considered as the *only* way to create an avian photo. Needless to say, our UK members were "welcomed" to NPN with some very critical feedback of their "non-conforming" images.

Luckily for the NPN community, the British never give up without a fight. Through pointed exchanges on the subject of approaching wildlife, us Yanks came to the realization that *all* nature photographers have to work with what is given by Mother Nature. Slowly, our appreciation of the skill and dedication of our U.K. members began to show through in our critiques of their images. Today, I think it's safe to say that on NPN, there is greater appreciation for these images, and for the effort and skill required to make them. Thus, yet another "circle of photography" has appeared and made its mark, enriching the NPN community in the process. This most certainly can be said as well for the contributions of our Australian and other nature photography colleagues from around the globe.

So now, four years after its debut, the NPN community continues its remarkable nature photography journey. We have been instrumental in helping countless numbers of nature photography enthusiasts to achieve new heights with their work, elevated to "stardom" a handful of now well-known names, and even spawned the emergence of other familiar nature photography websites.

Most remarkable of all, however, this place we call NPN has opened our eyes to the possibilities that exist outside of the circles we all inevitably grow comfortable in.

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