

## Appreciate Where You Live

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Nature photography, for most, is more of a passion than a profession. Among the many competent nature photographers out there, probably a small percentage are full-time professionals. On the other hand, nature photography is hardly a part-time hobby. It takes a lot of work and talent to produce quality work that can set apart a photographer's work from the rest.

Many exceptional images are regularly posted in various forums on NPN. I have always been amazed by the diversity of locations where the memorable images are created. A good share of the best images predictably come from some of the well-known, spectacular natural settings. But other images are created in unknown locales that are probably only being photographed because they are close to the photographer's residence.

I have often wondered how important it is to spend days or weeks in the wilderness or near natural locations (e.g. national parks, etc.) when the sole objective is trying to find and create images. It is often the only way to quickly build a portfolio. It is also the way most professionals operate. But, what about the rest of us who are not full-time professionals, with full-time demanding jobs and commitments, but possessing the same degree of passion, drive, and skill to create nature images?

What I would like to write about here is making images near where you live in a regular and planned method. Some of us are fortunate to live near wonderful natural settings while others live near urban jungles and boring suburbs. But if you are keen and ready to explore a little, you can still find nature photo opportunities nearby. One of my friends was worried when he moved to a New York City suburb in New Jersey that he would have no opportunities for nature photography. I had to buy him a copy of Dwight Hiscano's photography book on New Jersey to convince that his fear was based on nothing but a misguided perception.

In my opinion, there are two very important aspects to consider when doing serious nature photography in your local surroundings:

1. Appreciate where you live: Unless you start appreciating the nature around you and start believing that great nature photography is possible within 50-100 miles from your residence, you will probably never be successful. Many ignore, overlook, or drive past the natural surroundings as part of their daily lives and postpone their nature photography for those trips to stunning locations far away. This is the wrong approach. To convince yourself otherwise, look for photographers who have extensively photographed in your area and study their published works. Often the local photography clubs are good resources, as are regional magazines and bookstores.

2. Be prepared to try new approaches or styles. If you don't find the kind of scenes or subjects that you are most comfortable photographing, be prepared to re-think your approach and style. The key here is to understand the visual aspect of the nature around you and then change your style to suit that aspect (very different from the approach of travelling to places where opportunities for your types of photography exist). A big-landscape-dramatic-light shooter may need to understand the intricacies of intimate shots or a passionate avian photographer may need to explore the wonderful world hidden in the tiny creatures. Getting out of your comfort zone is not always easy, but it opens up a lot of possibilities.

Once you are ready to adopt the two approaches outlined above, everything else will start fall into place. Here are a few more tactics that may work for you:

- Research, explore, scout. One of the advantages as a local is the ability to have the scout endlessly and observe the location in different light and seasons. Sometimes exploring without your photo gear helps too. Take a hike, paddle away with a canoe, ride a bike, drive those back roads – whatever suits you. Always be prepared to keep coming back to a



spot that you like.

- Working on a theme often works wonders for many. For someone living in urban area, themes may vary from nature-human coexistence to environmental exploitation by civilization. Farm lives, traditional fares and festivities, local floras and fauna are all endless opportunities that are only limited by your imagination.
- Pre- and post-capture techniques. Use these techniques to present a scene as artistically as your inner vision interprets it. Long exposures, unusual lighting (e.g. twilight, light painting, etc.), selective focus, infrared photography, Orton-effect, HDR, etc. are just some examples of the tools that you have at your disposal. Many of these techniques have been written about in NPN before.



Photography is primarily a medium of art that relies on mastering the capture of light, while the subject comes as a distant second. If you believe in this very basic understanding of the medium, photographing where you live can be very rewarding. The real focus should be to capture your vision and the intricacies of light that touches your subjects. Only you have to appreciate and believe in it first.

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**Arnab Banerjee** lives in the lower Hudson Valley of New York. His love of photography and nature is a long time affair and has evolved through many mountaineering and exploration trips to various mountain ranges and wilderness across the world. By profession, he is a business strategy consultant but he spends the rest of his time capturing unique images, bringing him close to nature. His writing and images have been published in many journals. More of his work can be seen at his website, <http://touchinglight.smugmug.com>.



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