

Publisher's Commentary...

What is Nature Photography?

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Among those who practice the craft, there is certainly a great deal of debate over what constitutes "true" nature photography. A few of the most hotly contested aspects of the definition include whether an animal is "captive" or is found "in the wild," whether a species is native to a region or was introduced by man, or whether a floral subject is cultivated or

naturally occurring. Put ten photographers in a room and ask each of them to define "nature photography" and there's a good chance you will be given ten different interpretations. If that doesn't make the task of nailing down a single definition difficult enough, some of those ten may be quite passionate about their own point of view on the subject.

So what is nature photography? Why is it so difficult for a group of photographers to come up with a single, well-defined answer?

Perhaps the primary stumbling block in our quest for a universal definition is our individual interpretation of man's place in the natural world. Some see the human race as separate from the rest of God's creation, where the world was created for man's benefit and all other species are subservient. For others, the human race is viewed as a just another chapter in the evolution of life on Earth, nothing more than an inconsequential "flash in the pan" in the scope of geologic time and the incomprehensible vastness of the universe and the bounty of life it may contain. Are we Homo sapiens truly the masters of our world by divine decree, or simply temporary rulers who, like the dinosaurs, are destined to be displaced by natural processes?

For me, nature photography is the joy of viewing a beautiful flower through the viewfinder, the inspiration of a majestic scene coming into focus, the emotional connection made when the eyes of the subject make contact with mine through a telephoto lens. For those brief periods of time behind the camera, when life's trials and tribulations give way to something more fundamentally significant, it matters not where I am or how the subject got there.

I believe the definition of "nature photography" is strictly a personal one, at least partially dependent on aspects of our existence that are difficult to comprehend and impossible to define. In the final analysis, perhaps what truly defines "nature photography" is based entirely on what we as individuals bring to it spiritually and intellectually, thus rendering the need for a universal definition pointless.

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"Naturally" occurring spider on cultivated flower.