

NPN Interactive

Nature Photography with a Purpose

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Nature photography is an activity that has appeal to many. In those of us who pursue it, there are common threads that bind us, the most important of which is the joy of recording the natural world around us. This is something that each and everyone one of us can relate to, regardless of any other factor.

For those who participate on NPN, not only do we share in the joy of recording nature, but also the desire to do so to the very best of our ability. In many ways, this is the essence of NPN – to not only celebrate our common passion, but to hone our artistic and technical skills in the quest for visually stimulating nature imagery. This no doubt is a huge undertaking, requiring an untold amount of time and dedication to make images that will elicit a strong, positive response from those who view them. For many of us, these artistically/technically well executed images are the final goal, and in combination with our joy of recording nature, supplies all of the gratification needed to justify the activity. In a day and age when there are so many issues that divide us, this simple pleasure serves as a refuge from the stress of everyday living, and as the foundation upon which the NPN community is built.

Recent discussion in the NPN General Discussion forum has made me think about a number of issues, how they may be related and what relevance they may have to the mission of the NPN community. A thread entitled [Does NPN discourage creativity?](#) raised many valid points in regards to the creative process and our quest for perfectly executed images. As is the case in any other human endeavor, we often learn by emulating the technique and style of the photographers who inspire us. This is a perfectly natural, and in most cases, perfectly acceptable way to reach our personal goals with our photography. Those who participated in this particular conversation contributed to what turned out to be a very informative thread.

Another discussion, entitled [Bored with nature photos?](#), which is actually a spin off of a discussion that began on the photo.net nature forum, made me wonder why and how does one become bored with viewing the typical wildlife image? The first thing that popped into my mind was the fact that for many of us, creating those perfectly executed nature images that emulate the style of a few well known nature photographers could very well be contributing to what can be viewed as a “cookie cutter” approach to nature imagery. I believe this may hold especially true in bird photography, where there seems commonality, perhaps even repetitiveness, among those perfectly executed avian images that garner the most praise in the NPN avian gallery.

The final pieces of this philosophical puzzle came from two sources; a thread about the politics involved with a display of images of the ANWR at the Smithsonian, and a [single image](#) that despite its technical flaws, was selected as an editor's pick. The image of a gull stealing a duckling away from its mother elicits a strong emotional response, one that in many ways relates to human existence. In the words of NPN staff member Tom Webster –

I actually believe that Norbert's photo perfectly exemplifies what has been discussed about viewers becoming bored with nature photos. How many individual "preening egret" photos are you going to remember over the coming years? How long are you going to remember *this* image and be able to recall the details?

Tom's comments should give us pause. Could it be that in our quest for perfectly executed nature images, we have neglected this more important aspect, resulting in imagery with great visual appeal but with little stand-alone meaning or importance? In our debates of what should be fair game for discussion on NPN, have we completely lost sight of the incredible communicative power of photography, and the NPN mission of empowering mastery of it?

Our individual reasons for pursuing nature photography are varied, as are the goals we wish to achieve with the endeavor. The goal of producing images that are technically and aesthetically exquisite is something we should all strive for, and is a worthy goal unto itself. Indeed, those images that may have inspired us to pursue nature photography ourselves no doubt exhibit a high level of technical and aesthetic competence. But execution alone cannot be counted on to carry the day. Beyond the temporary visual

appeal of a well executed photograph, there lies the opportunity to communicate in a way that transcends all other means.

In a sea of nature images that stimulate our eyes and minds, the ones that stand apart are those that our hearts and souls will not let us forget.

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