

## A Day in the Life...

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**For other outdoor photographers**, an early alarm call normally means a rendezvous with daybreak. For me, the triumphant "Bonnnng !! " of booting Macs is as familiar a dawn chorus as that of blackbird or skylark. The alarm silenced, I head through to the office just before 0500 for the most productive two hours of the day - before children awake, the phone rings or the e-mail deluge begins. I get my living by licensing rights to my pictures and articles and while my agents provide me with about 30 percent of my income, the other 70 percent has to be generated from this office. And that calls for a lot of early rises.

The day's job list, compiled the previous evening, shows a characteristically varied schedule. Top priorities include making some high resolution scans of sea eagle pictures for a client needing them urgently for a book, building and sending out a couple of light boxes in response to requests that came in late yesterday afternoon, and invoicing. But the pre-breakfast slot is my golden time for writing and after a quick review of overnight e-mails, I get down to work on a short technical piece for one of the camera magazines. By 0645, a draft is ready for editing later in the day. It's full swing now into getting everyone ready for work / school - and as much breakfast as I've time to eat. Once quiet returns just after 0900, I turn on the Flextight scanner and only then notice that one of my external hard drives seems to have disappeared into space. I've come to expect some sort of exasperating computer-related angst about once every three weeks but this one I have encountered before and Disk Utility's First Aid repairs the fault. I make the scans, clean them with Polaroid Dust and Scratch software, drop in their keywords from the low resolution versions posted on my website and after putting them in the correct folders on different drives, burn them to DVD. My office assistant, Christopher, will finish off the submission when he comes in later in the day. I believe that even small stock businesses must have some additional help if the photographer is to use his or her skills most productively: So, Christopher deals with the time-consuming but essential tasks such as cleaning scans, preparing and uploading captures and scans to the website, packing and checking in submissions, keeping our contacts address database updated and running back-ups. When we have a big scanning order another helper, who has been trained to get the best out of the Flextight, comes in to deal with that. Perhaps the most important indirect help comes from the children's care giver who looks after them on the days my wife works. Without her, working effectively from home would be quite impossible.

It's 1030 now and time to press on with the light boxes for two conservation organisations who contacted me yesterday. They will make initial selections from these and only at that stage will we send high resolution files. We rarely ship original transparencies now, and the ability to e-mail light boxes, then scans (or captures), suits clients and saves me a lot of money in administration and postage. The light boxes are completed in half an hour and while I'm at it, I make another one for a proposal on eco-tourism I want to pitch to a lifestyle magazine. In the meantime, e-mails have come in requiring attention, which delays the start on the dozen invoices I need to issue today. The 'phone remains mercifully silent - virtually all business comes by e-mail now - and I complete the chore, uninterrupted, by 1315. I'm tempted to get some lunch but just want to try processing some RAW files from my last shoot to see how they look, first. Well of course, it's hard to stop once started and when I next look up, it is 1445. And since I've done the conversions, I may as well finish off the files in Photoshop so that Christopher can drop in the key words (already prepared on the evening of the shoot) and run the PS actions to make them web ready. He won't have time to do all that, along with his other work, today so I make a note on the office white board for him.

I take an all or nothing approach when it comes to balancing image creation with office work; if I am at home to work in the office, that is what I do, no matter how attractive the conditions are outside. If I am in the field in my campervan on a shoot, Christopher keeps me posted (and deals with urgent requests it if he can) and I concentrate on making pictures and researching stories. Though this may seem inflexible, it has proved over time to be more productive than changing plans as the weather changes - and is certainly more sympathetic to family life.



It's too late for lunch now so I start to reply to e-mails: "Thank you , but I'm afraid I can't do a talk next year for £30 plus expenses", "Just to let you know we received your scanning order this morning and will get down to work on it tonight", "I'm glad you enjoyed that article. I'm gratified to know that someone read it" , "It's very easy to become a professional nature photographer; much harder to remain one." Now, at 1550, it is only 10 minutes before Christopher is due to arrive and I jot down a submission reference number so that he can write the delivery note for the sea eagle pictures. In the meantime, one of the conservation organisations has e-mailed their selection from the light box I sent earlier and I quickly determine how many high resolution scans we need to make and how many we have already, using the iView catalogue of our scan collection. Only two to scan out of the 8 requested for further review. I get these done while Christopher completes the sea eagle submission on the other Mac and deals with the invoices. Working together we get the new files cleaned, keywords dropped in and the whole order burned and packed by 1650. For the first time today, I go outside and walk to the Post Office with the day's packages while Christopher runs the backup programme and continues preparing pictures for my website. I normally try to take a break at 1645 to get the evening meal together but my wife is home from work by the time I get back from the Post Office. The children, at least, have already been fed. At 1900 it's their bath time and I can nip back and forth to the office changing DVD's as Dantz Retrospect backs up new and amended files. By 2000 I'm free again but can manage only another half hour's work - just long enough to edit and e-mail the essay I wrote this morning and to finalise the next day's job list. I never did get that scanning order started but if I get up at 5 again, I'll have it done before breakfast. One day I'll get out to take photos again, I'm sure.

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**Niall Benvie**, who runs [Images from the Edge](#), is the UK's most prolific writer on natural history photography, publishing almost 70 articles and a book (amounting to over 135,000 words) between 2000-2002 alone. But the scope of his writing extends much wider into issues of land management and the polarisation of nature and culture as well as travelogues and commentaries on subjects as diverse as species re-establishment programmes and eco-tourism.

Several thousand pictures from The Images from the Edge collection are accessible in its [searchable online database](#).

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