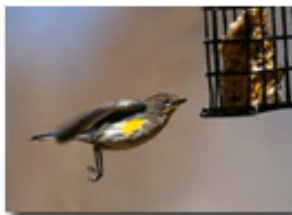




## NPN Member Profile...



### Bob Steele - NPN 252



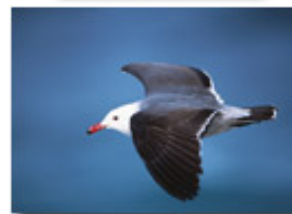
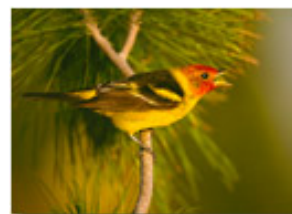
It all started 20 years ago when, fresh out of college, my wife Susan and I moved to the desert of California. Soon after, my favorite uncle came to visit from the east and took us "bird watching" with him. Susan was fascinated and took up the hobby immediately. I, on the other hand, wasn't too interested. Little did I know how this one event would change our lives. It didn't take long before Susan had mastered the birds in the yard and most around the local area. Now she wanted to go places to look for them. After a few years of tagging along with her, I had learned some of the birds but still hadn't found the

spark that fueled my interest. Then one day I picked up my old Canon EOS 650 and decided to try to photograph some birds. I had always had a real interest in photography and the outdoors, photographing everything from family functions to backpacking trips we took annually. I quickly realized I needed more reach if I was going to photograph anything this small, so I purchased my first "long lens," a Tokina 400mm f/5.6 and a 1.4X TC. This combination served me well for many years and gave me a reason for being out there. Today I think I'm as much a birder as a bird photographer, but it was bird photography that got me going.

In May of 2001, we got a call at home that one of the rarest birds to ever hit the lower 48 states (an Eyebrowed Thrush) was nearby. It was late in the afternoon and we dropped everything we were doing to make the mad 45-minute dash to the spot. The thrush was there and we were two of only seven people who got the chance to see this first lower 48 record. Naturally I took along my camera gear, and as it turned out, I got the only still images of the bird. By my standards today, these images were just awful. But I was in the right place at the right time, and several of these images were published in numerous places. I was now more hooked than ever on bird photography.

During the rest of 2001, I kept thinking about how I wanted to get more serious with my bird photography – and that meant investment in better gear with more reach. Several things happened that fall that made the turning point. The first was meeting pro bird photographer Brian Small at a local migration hot spot. Second, I purchased a 500mm f/4 IS lens. And finally, Susan convinced me to set a goal with my bird photography. This goal fell into place when, after a long day of counting birds for a Christmas Bird Count, I presented an idea to Bob Barnes of Audubon California's Kern River Preserve. I asked Bob if he was interested in co-authoring an article with me on the preserve to help promote visitation to this unique place. He would do the writing and I would get the photos. I spent 11 months shooting images that would be the basis of the submission for the article, and learned much along the way. The article was published in the April 2003 issue of *Birding*. An image of one of the species I worked very hard on for the article (Lawrence's Goldfinch) was also selected as the cover for the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology audio CD, *Bird Songs of California*.

My association with Brian Small was more than I ever could have imagined. I sent Brian a few emails asking some advice about



getting the article published. He was extremely helpful and it wasn't long before we ended up spending some time shooting together. Brian has been my advisor, mentor, and most importantly, my friend. I sincerely appreciate everything he has done for me.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the impact of NPN on my bird photography as well. Since starting to post images in the Avian Gallery in January 2002, I have received excellent critical feedback that has dramatically improved my images. I've made many new friends and associates too. And hopefully I've been able to share my knowledge with some along the way. To me, NPN has always been about community. We share, give advice and encouragement, and have a lot of fun.

I've come a long way in these 20 odd years. Birding and bird photography have allowed me to do something I dearly love, and spend time in the outdoors with Susan. Thankfully our hobbies are compatible and we can often go out together. She finds them and I shoot them. Couldn't ask for a better partnership than that!

*Editor's Note* - Click any of the thumbnail images on this page to view a slide show of larger images. You can view more of Bob's work in his online portfolio at <http://bsteele.imageculture.com>.

Comments on this article? Send them to the [editor](#).

[Site Map](#) • [NPN Membership](#) • [Front Page](#) • [Reader's Forum](#) • [Links](#) • [Gift Shoppe](#) • [Online Portfolios](#)

Copyright 2000 - 2003, Nature Photographers Online Magazine, Inc. All rights reserved.