

Publisher's Commentary...

## Decisions

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In the beginning, we knew that a bulletin board section for photography discussion and image critique would be a worthwhile addition to the NPN web site. So when the first issue of *Nature Photographers Online Magazine* hit the Internet in April of 2000, the Reader's Forum was an integral part of the site. It has turned out to be a far wiser decision than we had realized at the time.

Now averaging over 500 combined "new topic" and "reply" posts a day and accounting for over 75% of site traffic, the NPN Reader's Forum is a 24-hour a day center of nature photography activity – a virtual electronic entity unto itself. Nature photographers from all over the globe come to post and critique images, and engage in conversation with others. For those who enter this non-stop online community with an open mind, the free-flowing exchange of ideas provides the fuel for ongoing education and personal enrichment.

As one might expect, differences of opinion can and do occur on a regular basis. This is only human nature, and learning how to consider other points of view is part of the personal growth process. The NPN community has become renowned for its ability to conduct conversations on sensitive issues that erupt into instant flame wars on most other Internet bulletin boards. By and large, the folks who participate on NPN are a mature and responsible lot, and are a magnitude more sophisticated than what is typically found on other nature photography sites.

Part of the responsibility for those of us charged with administering this online community is to not only monitor the galleries and forums, but with the input of community members, to set guidelines for what is acceptable subject matter. NPN is obviously a site dedicated to the subject of nature photography, but there are seldom distinct lines between what a nature photography subject is and what is not. Thus the task of administering the NPN web site in the best interest of the NPN community as a whole becomes the ultimate challenge. It can be an agonizing process, one fraught with compromise and the specter of alienating those whose views are not congruent with "mainstream" NPN thinking. However, the input offered by our members and readers provides a reliable framework for the decision-making process.

After considering diverse points of view on any subject, from what are acceptable subjects and topics of conversation to what is fair and responsible editing of a participant's post, we must at some point in the process rely on our personal judgment to make the final call. However, NPN is no longer simply a web site dictated by a handful of individuals; it is now a home to a global community of people with a common bond – a passion for nature photography. Ultimately, the decision-making process must be guided by a simple litmus test – which decision is the one that will most likely strengthen our common bond, not put it at risk?

What was originally conceived as simply a "worthwhile addition" by a few has grown into a diverse, international family of many, a place where ideological differences take a back seat to the celebration of a passion that so strongly bonds us. A conscious effort to keep that in mind will no doubt prove to be a wise decision as well.

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