



The Camera Hunter®

Nature Photographers Have Much to be Thankful For

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I observed a moment of silence on the anniversary of September 11th with a cow moose and her calf at a remote pond in the Maine woods.

I was also in the company of an old friend. Together we honored those who were lost on the day that changed everyone's life with our own special kind of silence.

The moose, of course, didn't know what was going on. They just understood that we meant them no harm. And because we respected their need for space, they permitted us to enjoy what Baxter State Park's Director Buzz Caverly refers to as "nature at peace".

Watching those moose on that date in the quiet solitude of a pond that so few ever get to visit reminded me that I had much to be thankful for. I live far from most of the hustle and bustle that so many others endure, in an environmentally healthy and diverse state with special places such as the 204,000 plus acre Baxter State Park.



I silently gave thanks for the foresight of Percival Baxter. He believed, ahead of his time, that man needs wilderness. When Percival Baxter couldn't convince the state legislature in 1921 that they should protect Katahdin and the land around it, he did it all by himself. While many in his era thought him crazy, he knew that we in our time – and future generations – would increasingly seek out "nature at peace".

If you've been to Baxter State Park and you're thinking you know where we were – you're wrong. Few people visit the pond we marked the anniversary of 911 at. Which raises an important point: we need many places like this. Far too many of us are going to the same places to find nature at peace these days. We nature photographers have the power to show the world the need for the protection of more such places. In fact, isn't it our duty, so that in another generations' time, they too can find solace in wilderness? Perhaps the spirit of men like Percival Baxter can guide us all.

To "get close enough" to photograph those two moose without interfering required a long telephoto lens. Mother moose are very protective of their calves, even in the fall. And the little guy – see the bumps on his head where he'll grow his first set of antlers next year? – was skittish about getting too far from the protection of mother. He displayed nervous behavior when we tried to move any closer, so we gave the moose their space.

I used a 500mm lens, plus a 1.4 teleconverter. That 700mm equivalent of 14 power binoculars offered the moose enough distance to feel comfortable with our presence. However, it comes with some cost. Inexpensive teleconverters are just that – cheap glass. Most decent ones run from \$300 to \$500. If you buy a quality teleconverter, especially one made by the lens manufacturer and matched to your telephoto lens, you should get publishable results.

Photographing those moose at that quiet place on that day also reminded me how lucky I have been to be able to pursue wildlife photography as a profession. The story of how that evolved is so tied to that place where I sat and the friend who quietly sat watching me photograph those two moose that it rang in my ears on that solemn day.

"Did you see any moose?" asked the stranger. He carried a camera with a short telephoto lens slung around his neck.

"No, but there's lots of sign along the trail." I pointed to the path I had come from.

He nodded and eyed my camera gear. Then he asked: "Do you sell your photos?"

"I've been thinking about trying to."

"Well, if you have photographs worth publishing, I'm a regional manager for a calendar company. We're always looking for new material."

We exchanged names and addresses on scraps of paper that long ago day in the woods of Baxter State Park. Later that year, I sent 20 images to Dick Lemke, then New England branch manager for Impact Photographics. Dick published my scenic of a backwoods pond in Impact's 1988 New England calendar. My first sale!



A few years and much photography and sales experience later, I suggested to a buyer at L.L. Bean that they publish my photographs in a Baxter State Park calendar. The buyer shook her head. "We're not interested in doing calendars, but if you publish one with the pictures you've shown me, we'd carry it."

The next day I drove to Dick Lemke's warehouse and replayed that conversation. I showed him images, much better ones than those of that first submission. We shook hands on an agreement to create a Baxter State Park calendar. Since I had no winter images then, he used 7 of my photos for that first 1992 calendar. I've done it exclusively since.

In 1993, I was stalled, waiting for a publisher that eventually failed to fulfill a contract for a children's book on moose. I wanted to do an adult book on moose watching. Dick asked me to consider writing it as a local title

that featured all color photos of mine, with him as publisher. We shook hands on a deal and went to work.

He published 10,000 copies of the Maine Moose Watcher's Guide. He printed another 10,000 copies three years later. In 2001, we did a new book: the Moose Watcher's Handbook, also on a handshake.

While I've done many projects with other, larger publishers over the years since, Dick and I long ago become hiking friends as well as trusting business associates. Each fall we visit remote ponds in Baxter State Park, where I shoot fall colors and moose while Dick, who takes great photos of his own, more enjoys the last fly fishing of the season and the solitude that we so treasured on that day this past September.

Treasure the things that you have to be grateful for this year in this special season.

Catch yours in the good light.

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

Maine wildlife & nature photographer Bill Silliker, Jr. – The Mooseman - photographed at many wild places in North America, with the results published in magazines internationally and in 9 of his own books. Bill was an instructor of wildlife and nature photography for L. L. Bean's Outdoor Discovery Program and a member of the Fuji Film Talent Team. Read more about Bill on the [Camera Hunter archives page](#).

