

Feature Article...

## Passion or Keeping Up with the Jones

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There are very few constants in this world of ours. Times are changing so fast that at times I feel we have finally arrived at "warp speed, Captain" as Scotty used to say on Star Trek. I am old enough to remember when that marvel of photography - the Polaroid - was invented. Surely, nothing would ever surpass this "modern marvel of technology" and yet today I am writing about digital photography that is now in a usable and useful format for the nature photographer. No, there are very few constants left in this ever-changing world.

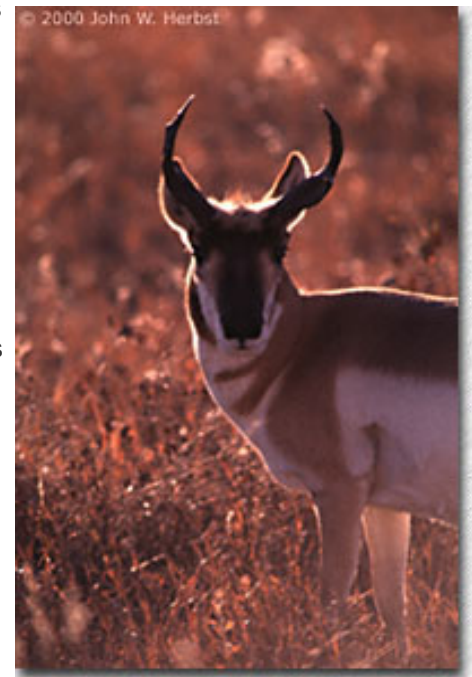
And yet, there is one constant that I have recognized in the world of nature photography. The next time you have the opportunity to listen to a group of nature photographers discuss whatever subject they may be on at that time, listen closely - ever so closely. For soon, a certain word will soon find its way into that conversation. Whether it be a group of amateur photographers at the local camera store or a group of well known professionals such as Arthur Morris, Jim Brandenburg, Moose Peterson, David Muench or Art Wolfe, this word will soon creep into whatever subject that is being discussed at the time. And what is that word? - the word is "Passion".

Technology is a funny thing - for at the same moment, we both welcome it and abhor it. We welcome it because we photographers, as a group, are "techno-nerds." We love the latest gadgets and "toys." John Shaw refers to it as "lens lust" and we are all guilty of it.

But there is a great paradox here - for just as much as we love the latest "toys", we also fear them. What if we don't "keep up" with our "competition" and "they" get new "toys" that we don't? Will "they" get the "upper hand" and will "the rest of us" get left in the dust? Translated - if we don't have the latest and greatest new "techno-toys" will our egos be exposed to the slings and arrows of comparisons with the work of others? And what if "their toys" expose us as being "lesser" than they simply because "they had the new toys and we didn't"?

Photography, as with any art form, when done well comes from "within" - those images we produce are reflections of our beliefs, our personal character and ourselves. To have others view our photographic work is to have them view us naked. Rejection of our work (photography) is a rejection of us - a situation that is never easy to deal with.

Make no mistake about it, I love technology. I love autofocus (especially as my eyes get older). I love the new metering systems that free up my feeble mind to concentrate on the subject instead of on what exposure to use. I am infatuated with digital technology - the possibilities and the potential of personal communication and expression through this new technology has me as excited as an eight year old at Christmas. And yet, I fear it. I fear that through the technologic advances we will loose that human emotion and interaction with our subject that has made nature photography the incredible means of communication that it is.



The harsh reality is that you no longer need to be a great photographer to produce great photographs. Virtually anyone can produce great photographs now and therein lays the problem. This technology has become a threat to the egos of all of us. How many times have you heard "I could have shot that photo if I had had all the equipment that he/she has"! It all comes down to ego and we all have one. Threaten our artistic ability and you threaten our ego. Threaten our ego and you threaten our character. Threaten our character and the threat has become most personal. Yes, technology is truly a double-edged sword.

But this is where that word comes in. Remember that word we began discussing several paragraphs ago? That word was "Passion". No matter how advanced our technologic world of photography becomes, I believe that it is that emotion of "passion" that truly determines whether or not our photographs "succeed". It is passion that drives us as nature photographers - passion for our subject, passion for saving our natural heritage and passion for the pure joy of nature photography.

No, I do not fear technology, I welcome it. Technologic advances such as digital photography are merely new tools that allow us to express that passion that all of us as nature photographers have. The only way we can go wrong is if we allow our passion to be overcome by ego.

So, I urge you to embrace the new technology if it fits your photographic needs. Embrace it if it helps you to express your passion for the natural world in your photographs. Embrace it if it opens up new worlds, excites you and reawakens emotions that have been submerged. If the new technology does not fit into your photographic world, be brave enough to ignore it and enjoy what you have been doing all along.

But above all, enjoy the passion! Never loose sight of that passion. For if the passion that we as nature photographers share is lost, then we and the natural world that we all love and cherish will surely vanish. Never, ever loose sight of the passion!

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