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Judging as per PSA

Introduction

Welcome to Issue 2. Many thanks for the feedback on Issue 1.

We have a few members registered for the online Forum. Obviously there was nothing in Issue 1 of the e-news to provoke discussion so I shall have to create something this month.

In this Issue there is an update on Assessment Forms, a review of the Lecturers Seminar, an

article from Bill Hall on judging Natural History and an article on judging I found on the Photographic Society of America website.

Assessment Forms

As reported in Issue 1 Assessment Forms for Judges and Lecturers were introduced in the autumn. I have had a number returned which will help provide content for the next Judges Seminar. I would still try and encourage clubs you visit to complete them, Supplementary Judges especially as this will help considerably in assessing suitability to move to the senior list. An Assessment Form for us judges and lecturers to comment on the Clubs is now available via the N&EMPF website.

Review of Lecturers Seminar

On the 21st February we held our inaugural Lecturers Seminar at Long Eaton Camera Club premises. Prior to the event over 25 people had indicated they would attend, however, we woke at 7:30am that morning to find 2-3 inches of snow, which meant a number of people couldn't get to Sawley. I am absolutely delighted that the event went on and would like to thank everybody who was able to attend.

Howard Fisher gave an excellent presentation explaining how to go about producing a show, the objective, equipment, software, timing and finished by demonstrating how to use PowerPoint to deliver a digital show.

Pete Cheetham then explained the process of getting Lecturers into the PAGB handbook, the expenses procedure and things to consider when delivering print talks. I finished the session with an overview of the types of presentations used in Clubs (Lecturers, Chairman Introductions, Votes of thanks and Announcements) and how to structure these 4 categories. There was a lot of good discussion and feedback which made the session very worth while from my perspective.

Change of details

Retirements

Vic Haas is retiring from Judging and Lecturing at the end of this season. I would like to thank Vic for his many years of excellent service to the Federation.

Please ensure that your Programme Secretary is aware of these changes.

Expenses

It was raised at the last PAGB Executive that one or two clubs have been embarrassed when a visiting speaker or judge has charged a rate considerably higher than was expected. Whilst I am not aware of this within our Federation can I remind all speakers and judges that we are only permitted to claim the full cost of petrol PLUS a charge of up to 22 pence per mile. We have one authorised speaker within our Federation who is authorised to make a charge in addition to the PAGB approved expenses.

Judging Natural History

It is my intention to try and get fellow Judges to provide an insight into judging specialised subjects. **Bill Hall DPAGB AFIAP** (Rolls-Royce (Derby)) kindly agreed to write the following article on Natural History:-

Definition of Nature and Wildlife Images

(As defined by FIAP/PAGB, for exhibitions under their auspices)

“The Nature section of an exhibition is restricted to use of the photographic process to depict observations from all branches of Natural History, except Anthropology and Archaeology, in such a manner that a well informed person should be able to identify the subject matter and to certify to honest representation.

The story telling value of a photograph must be weighted more than it’s pictorial quality. Human elements shall not be present, unless, on the rare occasion where they enhance the story, they are unobtrusive.

Photographs of artificially produced hybrid plants and animals, mounted specimens, obviously set arrangements, deviations and manipulations that alter the truth of the photographic statement are not permitted, with the exception of detailed macro photographs, and scientific banding on wild animals.”

“Accurate, descriptive titles, rather than pure titles are recommended for nature pictures. Identification of the species being a minimum requirement.”

(An example would be say, “Hippos fighting” being a correct nature title, whereas “Clash of the Titans” for the same image would not be correct in a Nature section).

(Cute titles such as “Bonny Baby” should definitely be avoided, in favour of a more realistic “New born fox cub”).

“A **WILDLIFE** picture is defined as showing one or more organisms living free and unrestricted in a natural habitat.”

In my experience these rules are somewhat loosely followed, and can be regarded in effect as guidelines. In particular the definition that story telling aspects be weighted more than pictorial ones are rarely followed, although there is a trend nowadays that rather more is going on in a picture than previously. Birds on a perch are still well represented though, but if that bird is singing, or fending off a rival, or doing anything, so much the better.

Flower and fungi photographers will of course rightly argue that you can wait a long time for something to happen with these subjects, and it will be pictorialism above all else that scores here.

Some other points to consider are:-

Composition.

The positioning of the subject/subjects in the frame, and with relation to the surroundings, is of the utmost importance. If there is more than one of the subjects, they should relate to each other in a balanced way. There are not really any hard and fast rules, but a good composition just looks and feels right, while a poor one feels uncomfortable to view.

Quite often “Less is more”, as a simple image with single subject can work well, as opposed to an overcomplicated one, with a lot of subjects competing for space and attention.

Flowers and fungi can be shown to great advantage in their natural habitat, especially if they are in a favourable setting. Alpine flowers with a mountain backdrop for example, or wide angle shots of fungus in a sympathetic woodland setting work well, but the composition of the landscape now too becomes just as important.

Size and position in frame.

Related to composition, the subject/subjects should not be too small or too large in the frame, and not too close to an edge or smack in the middle. Certain subjects, such as butterflies, moths, and dragonflies look better if placed on a slight angle, rather than square on.

Flowers can be tilted slightly in a vertical (portrait) framing, rather than starkly upright.

Birds bodies will generally be upright, unless on an angled tree trunk or branch, as will mammals, unless on a hillside, as many Scottish deer are commonly seen for example.

Viewpoint.

Rarely looks right if looking down on the subject, typically a lot of shots are taken like this from Safari vehicles, and the subject looks diminished.

Exceptions would be insects, or ground hugging flowers.

It is generally best to try and photograph birds and mammals from their own level.

Although not always possible, impact can be gained by shooting from below that level. Birds of prey particularly look more majestic if shot from just slightly below.

Setting.

The surroundings can make or break a picture, too complicated bushes, branches, grasses, or undergrowth can look “fussy” or “busy” for want of a better term. Simple perches or stems are ideal, but should not be too large, solid, or new, or show bright ends where they have been broken off.

An old post or gate is a good perch, or an old weathered branch, for a bird shot. Insects on a single reed or grass stem, butterflies on a softly muted flower, moths on a sympathetic piece of bark are examples of what works well.

Backgrounds.

Some people spend as much time considering the background as the main subject, and it can show in the result. Anything that distracts in the background should be avoided, and should not be unnaturally either too light or too dark, or too even in tone suggesting an artificial backdrop.

In a totally blurred out background such as we see with the big super-telephoto lenses, it does help to have a range of tones to prevent an overall blandness.

Technique /Sharpness and Exposure.

Must be VERY sharp, you should be able to clearly see excellent detail in fur, feather etc. Top quality lenses, and technique to keep the camera still are essential. Ideally the subject should be sharp throughout, but a certain degree of fall-off is acceptable. It is essential to have the maximum sharpness around the head, and particularly the eyes.

Exposure, has to be just right, especially without any burnt out areas. If flash has been used, obvious “over flashing” and unnaturally dark, backgrounds, giving an unnatural feel to the lighting should be avoided.

Lighting.

Great lighting can make the difference between a good picture and a great one. A lion drinking at a waterhole will look better in early morning or late evening light.

Catch lights in the eye is an old myth, as long as you can see the eye in detail. A bird with a black eye in a dark head would of course require a catch light so you can make out where the eye is, and definitely one to look out for, there is a current trend to add catch lights digitally, this can look terrible if not done carefully.

Condition.

For a straight portrait, the subjects should be in first class condition, however some poignant pictures have been made of injured or dying subjects, or those caught by a predator.

Impact.

Not easy to define, some pictures just grab you immediately.

Originality.

A different view, uncommon species, unusual behaviour or new setting will be successful.

Artistic Merit.

Again not easy to define, and subjective to the eye of the beholder. The BBC wildlife photographer of the year has increasingly leaned towards the more artistic ethereal, impressionistic, original image in recent years. After all, when you are looking at 20,000 or so of the world's best nature pictures, a kingfisher on a perch, no matter how good, may not do that well, it has been seen so many times before. A locust in flight, a blur of leopards fighting, backlit in the African morning sun, an Eagle grabbing a blackbird in flight, will do well anywhere, as they are the best of the best. But how do you quantify a fuzzy arctic hare running away from the camera in a snowy waste, where everything, including the hare, is soft and indistinct, or a swirling blur of Brambling leaving their tree roost, where it is difficult to make anything out, yet these are the creative visions that are winning contemporary awards, so keep an open mind, one day it may be you winning that award.

My thanks to Bill for these valuable guidelines. It is interesting to compare some key points to evaluating "general" images e.g. composition, viewpoint, lighting, impact, and artistic merit.

The Photographic Society of America (PSA) has recently provided clarification around Image Manipulation in Natural History. The PSA definition of Nature is:-

"Nature Photography is restricted to the use of the photographic process to depict observations from all branches of natural history, except anthropology and archaeology, in such a fashion that a well informed person will be able to identify the subject material and certify as to its honest presentation. The **story telling** value of a photograph **must** be weighed more than the pictorial quality while maintaining a high technical quality. Human elements shall not be present, except where those human elements enhance the nature story. The presence of scientific bands, scientific tags or radio collars on wild animals is permissible. Photographs of artificially produced hybrid plants or animals, mounted specimens, or obviously set arrangements, are ineligible, as is any form of manipulation that alters the truth of the photographic statement. *No techniques that add to, relocate, replace, or remove pictorial elements except by cropping are permitted. Techniques that enhance the presentation of the photography without changing the nature story or the pictorial content are permitted. All adjustments must appear natural.*"

The majority of the above is identical to that quoted by Bill in his introduction the italics are the difference. The Nature Division goes on to state "No elements may be moved, cloned, added, rearranged or combined. No manipulation or modification is permitted except resizing, cropping, selective lightening or darkening, and restoration of original colour of the scene. No special effect filters can be applied. Any sharpening must appear natural." It is worth reading the June 2009 PSA Journal to get a more detailed explanation of what is and what is not allowed as the article

also includes example images. The PSA provides the following checklist of what is Allowed in their Nature Competitions:-

- Exposure Adjustment
- White Balance/Colour Correction
- Adjust Highlight and Shadow Detail
- Adjust Contrast
- Adjust Saturation
- Dust Spot Removal
- Noise Removal
- Flare Removal
- Cropping
- Straightening
- Reversing (flipping horizontal)
- Resizing

All Adjustments **MUST** look natural to be successful.

The Royal Photographic Society (RPS) has an excellent Nature Photographers' Code of Practice. It is too lengthy to include here but it is important to read. I include a couple of paragraphs:-

Photographs of dead, stuffed, homebred, captive, cultivated, or otherwise controlled specimens may be of genuine value but should never be passed off as wild and free. Users of such photographs (irrespective of the purpose for which it is thought they will be used) should always be informed, regardless of how little they may seem to care.

You may recall the huge controversy recently when the winner of the prestigious Wildlife Photographer of the Year Award was initially given to someone who used a "trained" wolf.

The use of playback tape or stuffed predators (to stimulate territorial or alarm reactions) should not be undertaken near the nest in the breeding season. Additionally the use of bait or song tapes to attract birds to the camera, even though this is away from the nest, should not be under-taken in an occupied breeding territory.

One of the members of our club regularly challenges some of the bird shots that have been attracted into gardens by the use of bait.

Hopefully this article may provoke some discussion on the Forum. I would like to express my sincere thanks again to Bill for producing his article on judging nature. I am hoping that the next topic will be on judging portraits.

If anybody would like to produce an article for the e-news and the website which will benefit all of us Judges and Lecturers then I shall be very pleased to receive it.

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Judges and Lecturers Secretary