

Dr. Stephen Weiss

Hi Padre Trails,

My name is Dr. Stephen Weiss. I was born and raised in South America. I immigrated to the US in 1981, and have adopted the Bay Area as my home, establishing my family and professional practice in Contra Cost County. I am a member of the Contra Costa Camera Club, competing in all divisions for eleven years, serving as Travel and Journalism Chair for over five years. For the last five years, I have been a Board Member at large and have judged many competitions. Photography has been my hobby since my first 35mm SLR at age seventeen. Being self-taught, I have participated in several collective B&W print exhibits during my college years. After a long hiatus from printing, I completed the B&W photography curriculum at Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill, CA. MY PHILOSOPHY: A photographic image can be considered "excellent" if it has impact on the viewer, and if it can elicit an emotional response. Following or breaking all of the described rules and norms of proper exposure, composition, timing, technique, etc. can make such an image. The ability to control and combine these elements and to use them to one's advantage is the mark of the "excellent" photographer.

John sent me your definition and requirements for nature Competition and I requested that he read it before my critique.

Padre Trails - Group A - NATURE COMPETITION # 1 - November 2011

1. Pelican tucking in its bill

This is an interesting shot but it does not tell much of a nature story and appears a bit over sharpened. The white feathers closest to the view are blown out.

2. American Bison

I love these enormous animals. This is a nice shot. However, I think it would be more impressive if you had a little more landscape around your subject to show his environment. It just feels a little too tight for me.

3. American Maidenhair Fern (*Adiantum pedatum*)

You know botanical images often take a back seat to large warm fuzzies which is unfortunate. Personally I love botanical images and this is a very nice image of a beautiful fern. It shows the damp environment and the exposure is right on the money.

4. Big Laughing Gym (*Gymnopilus spectabilis*)

Here is another very nice botanical image. We can see the environment, the mushroom sprouting from the rotting stump and forest duff. It appears the sun is low on the horizon because the gills are well lit from below and the light has a warm glow to it.

5. Brown pelican tossing squid

This is a very lucky catch for both of you. It is a bit confusing at first because it appears there are two heads but only one body. It is too bad you couldn't have gotten some separation between the two birds. I think you have over sharpened this image a little.

6. Common Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*) In Defense Display

Great catch of the snake's tongue in action. The image shows the environment nicely. You've got a nice catch light in the snake's eye and the head is very sharp. Great lighting and exposure.

7. Devil Mantis Nymph (*Idolomantis diabolica*) Eating

This looks like something from a science fiction movie. I had to look this guy up on the internet and found that it is one of the largest of all mantids. Very nice sharp image with excellent depth of field.

8. Egg yolk jelly with Sheep Crab

Fantastic image of the jelly fish but for the life of me I can't see the crab. Exposure is excellent.

9. Elephant Seal With Pup

This is a nice portrait of the mother and pup. I would like to see more of the environment but it is a cute image nonetheless. Mom needs to blow her nose it appears. This image is razor sharp and the exposure is dead on.

10. Greater Yellowlegs and Fish (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

This tells a good nature story. It shows the environment and an activity. You do have to feel sorry for the little fish.

11. Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) Returns to the Sea After Basking In The Sun All Day

Now that is a heck of a way to have to get around isn't it? Exposure is excellent. The image is very sharp and shows the environment well. A basking sea turtle on a black sand beach, I wish I were there right now.

12. Guanaco Nursing Calf

A very lovely image of mother and nursing calf. The image is very sharp and the exposure is great. I have never seen an image of a Guanaco before. Excellent.

13. Healthy coyote hunting

That is indeed a very healthy looking coyote. Your exposure is very good under tough lighting conditions. I wonder if you had waited a little if he might have gotten a ground squirrel or gopher.

14. Heermann's Gull

A nice documentary image of a Heerman's gull. I wish the feet were in focus, however. That bill is beautiful.

15. Male Redtailed Hawk Bringing Food to Nest (*Buteo samicensis*)

This tells a great nature story. I think if you used a faster shutter speed the mother and young bird on the right would be sharper. Great exposure and shows the environment very well.

16. Manzanita Oak and Poison Oak

Another gorgeous botanical image. Very nicely captured. This belongs on a calendar for magazine cover.

17. Mineral Deposits Overtake Land

We have another geological image from Yellowstone. This tells a nature story but it is not as strong an image in my opinion. You handled the exposure well. You should try this image in Pictorial.

18. Northern Fulmar Eating Jelly

The environment is visible and the image is very sharp. This tells a very good nature story. These gulls sure have an odd taste in food don't they?

19. Painted Lady

Gorgeous image. Sharp and shows the environment and the wings are not tattered. I think I would have cloned or toned down the bright white areas on the left hand side of the image as I find them distracting.

20. Pair of Clark's Grebes Tending Nest (*Aechmophorus clarkii*)

A beautiful shot of a pair of nesting Grebes. You've got to love those red eyes. The reflection is just an added bonus. Very nice exposure.

21. Pair of Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*)

A very nice shot of these sandhill cranes. Unfortunately, there is some haloing from manipulation of the image. I think I would start over with the RAW file and try this one again.

22. Resting Female Ann's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*)

Razor sharp. Because the bird is backlit you have a terrific rim light separating it from the background.

23. Southern sea otter diving

An interesting image showing behavior but the focus is a little soft.

24. Thermal Crust

This is a very beautiful serene image telling a primitive story of the earth's beginning. Great exposure. Very nicely captured. It looks like something out of National Geographic.

25. Turkey Tail Fungus (*Trametes versicolor*)

Nicely captured bracket fungus. Beautiful light and great exposure. Very sharp.

26. Western Gull With Sea Star

This makes me gag just looking at it. This is truly a mouthful. Excellent image.

27. Western Sword Fern Spores (*Polystichum munitum*)

Another very interesting botanical shot. Extremely sharp, you can even see the fallen spores on the leaves below the frond. Nice depth of field.

Well here are the images for group A that I felt had the most impact and I found myself going back to over and over. You folks did make it difficult as the images were all great. I showed both sets of images to my family and guests over the holidays and you would be impressed with their comments.

HM Big Laughing Gym (*Gymnopilus spectabilis*)
HM Painted Lady
HM Pair of Clark's Grebes Tending Nest (*Aechmophorus clarkii*)
HM Thermal Crust

- 3 Common Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*) In Defense Display
- 2 Guanaco Nursing Calf
- 1 Devil Mantis Nymph (*Idolomantis diabolica*) Eating

Padre Trails - Group AA - NATURE COMPETITION # 1 - November 2011

1. A Delicate Beauty Carol Silveira
For a nature competition you should try to stay away from cutesy titles for your images. Instead you should "just state the facts." This is a Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) feeding. The image could be improved if you were able to get in a little closer and it is over exposed.
2. Anna's hummer on a branch Ben Grasmuck
These are beautiful little birds. Unfortunately, your depth of field is so shallow that only its breast feathers and eyes are in sharp focus.
3. Butterscotch Smoothie Shelley Nemeth
This is an image of Antelope Canyon. As a nature image it demonstrates erosion. The title "Butterscotch Smoothie" is better suited to a pictorial

image. This is a difficult image to capture with the sky and shadow the range of exposure is too great for your sensor. This is a case when an HDR image would work better.

4. Cinnamon_Teals_of_New_Hampshire Carol Fuessenich
Very nice image of two Cinnamon Teals. You have space in front of the ducks for them to travel into, you show their environment and your exposure is very good.
5. close-up-of-leucospermum Chris Johnson
Your exposure is very good and it is an interesting shot although I feel you are in too close and the nature story is lacking. If you are going to position your subject in the middle of the frame make sure it is in the middle. Either include the left side or take off the right side.
6. Crashing Wave Ben Grasmuck
This would be better as a pictorial shot as it doesn't fit the nature category very well. The white of your spray is blown out.
7. Dandelion Seed Head Elke Ikeda
Your exposure is good but I feel you are in a bit too close. It doesn't tell much of a story.
8. Flower Spider Gerald Gifford
Very nice image. the exposure is very good and the focus is sharp. A better title for this image would be "Crab Spider Laying In Wait," This gives you the viewer a point of reference. It tells us the nature of its behavior.
9. Fly agaric mushroom Carol Fuessenich

This poor thing has seen better days. Actually this is not a fly agaric mushroom as the fly agarics have white raised spots or warts on them. Your exposure is good and it is sharp.

10. Fresh Crab for Lunch

Gerald Gifford

This is an image of a female sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*) eating a rock crab. For a nature competition you should try to refrain for cutesy titles. This is an excellent image. It shows behavior, the exposure is perfect and it is razor sharp.

11. Great White Close Up

Karen Schofield

Now this is what nightmares are made of. Do you remember the movie Jaws. It is a bit soft but your exposure is good.

12. Great White Shark on the Prowl

Karen Schofield

This is a better portrait of the great white. Look at those teeth. Beautiful image. Exposure is very good and the light patterns on its back are great. I just wish you had the whole fish.

13. I see you, too

Carol Silveira

Cutesy title. Enough said. This is a jumping spider sitting in ambush. The most amazing thing about jumping spiders is their eyes. Unfortunately, you are just a little bit too far away to really see them clearly. Your exposure is great. If you get another chance to shot one of these try to get in closer they are amazing.

14. I'm waiting

Carol Silveira

I won't say any thing about the title. For a nature shot you should not have the hand of man unless you are shooting a barn swallow or something like that. This ground squirrel is sitting on a park table.

15. mating-dance-of-erato-heliconian. Chris Johnson
Terrific image. Great exposure, shows behavior. Your titles tell your viewer what the behavior is. Nicely done.
16. Mono Lake Seagull Jared Ikeda
Unfortunately, this image of the gull is very soft.
17. No Trespassing Gerald Gifford
This image tells a great nature story. It is a nesting cormorant defending its nest. Your title should state this. Your exposure is good and it is sharp.
18. Preparation for Winter Gerald Gifford
I know you are tired of hearing this. Your title. This is a shot of an Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) placing an acorn in it's' pantry. This is an excellent image, your exposure, your focus and your composition is beautiful.
19. Prepare for landing Ben Grasmuck
A California Condor preparing for landing. A very nice image. Your exposure is a little hot on the back of the condors head but over all very good. This is a tough exposure because the bird is black and the head is light pink. In bright sunlight the cameras sensor can't handle the exposure difference or dynamic range.
20. Raging Waters of Merced River Jared Ikeda
This is a nice image but it really belongs in a Pictorial competition. Your exposure is good. You handled the whites very well.
21. Richardson's Geranium Jared Ikeda

This is a close up of a wild Geranium. Unfortunately it is a little underexposed.

22. Shark & Sardine

Karen Schofield

Well I got a shot of the entire Great White. Excellent. Now I know I'm not going swimming in the ocean.

23. Small Brown butterfly

Elke Ikeda

I'll just say title. This is a Fiery Skipper Butterfly - *Hylephila phyleus* feeding. Unfortunately it is soft. The exposure is good.

24. Summer Sunflower

Carol Fuessenich

This is a great image of a sunflower. However, I think your composition is better suited to Pictorial competition. Your exposure is very nice and the one flower is very sharp.

25. Sunning Turkey Vultures

Ben Grasmuck

This is a very good nature image. It shows behavior and environment. Exposure is good. The one bird flying in the background compliments the birds sunning on the roosting tree.

26. Sunrise_over_Lake_Winnepesaukee,NH

Carol Fuessenich

This is really a Pictorial image.

27. Suspended Hummingbird

Karen Schofield

For a nature image there should not be the hand of man. The feeder clearly is the hand of man.

28. Tarantula

Joni Zabala

You have a terrific image of a tarantula. It shows the environment. Unfortunately it appears soft. If you ever get the opportunity to shoot one

of these again try to get in front of it and get the eyes. This is most likely a male in search for a female in her burrow.

29. Thumbing a Ride to Acoma Shelley Nemeth
I'll just say title and let it go. Good seeing but I feel this image would be better suited to Pictorial instead of nature as this is a domesticated sunflower. Try it in Pictorial.
30. Waiting for Frogs Shelley Nemeth
Again we need a nature title here. Is this a wild water lily? What is the genus and species? This will make a great pictorial image.
31. Warming in the sun Carol Silveira
Title. It is a skipper butterfly. Unfortunately it is out of focus and very contrasty.
32. Water Ballet Shelley Nemeth
Title. This is not ballet. Seals can't do ballet. These are California sea lions and they have their fins out of the water to cool off. For a nature competition the title should be California Sea Lions (*Zalophus californianus*) regulating body temperature.
33. Wild Iris Elke Ikeda
What kind of iris? Most likely it is a Douglas Iris (*Iris douglasiana*). Try to show the environment with your botanical images. Animals have behaviors that we can capture. Botanicals do not move or chase and kill things. So in order for a botanical image to compete effectively in a nature competition the image has to tell some sort of story. That story relates to their environment. What does the plant look like? What does the flower head look like? What is growing next to it? What does the seed pod look

like? How are the seeds spread? These are just suggestions and if you think about it you can come up with many more I'm sure.

My choices are the following:

HM No Trespassing

HM Flower Spider

HM Prepare for landing

HM Shark & Sardine

3 Mating-dance-of-erato-heliconian

2 Fresh Crab for Lunch

1 Preparation for Winter