

Group AAA Nature 3 Submissions

01. Western Grebe at Moss Landing

It's interesting seeing how these birds tuck their heads into their bodies like this. Unfortunately, the lighting is your biggest problem here. The eye and head area are very important and they are barely visible. Try this when the directional light is in your favor.

02. Vigor to Rigor - mortis that is (cupressus macrocarpa).jpg

The tree is beautifully captured with nice tones and contrast. In Nature however, clever or cutesy titles are not appropriate. You need to at least identify what type of tree this is and say a little more about it if possible.

03. Tuft of Wild Grass in Haleakala Crater.jpg

I like the off-center composition for this plant as well as the shallow depth of field, but I would watch the crop on the right side and try to include all the tufts. The biggest problem here is that you have not identified this plant and in Nature, that is VERY important!

04. Tube anemone.jpg

Wonderfully captured sea creature in terms of lighting, color and contrasts. The angle is pretty good too, showing some of the stem/tube. Don't be afraid to crop in a little tighter. That blue item in the lower right corner is particularly eye-catching as a distraction.

05. Solstice Sunset Portal.jpg

You managed to keep details in the rock itself while capturing the sunset and those rock textures are very interesting. This is probably a stronger candidate for Pictorial however, since you are not mentioning anything about this rock and/or arch itself and the location.

06. Soberanes Canyon from Rocky Ridge.jpg

This is a nice landscape. I like how the edge lighting shows off each of the ridges. You have a weak Nature title however. Try informing us why these ridges and canyon look this way – erosion, tectonic activity, weather, etc.

07. Snowy Egret (Egretta thula) on rocks at high tide.jpg

The background of surf spray and the rock shapes is really nice here. But that does not make this a strong Nature image. Perhaps if it had a fish in its mouth it would be stronger. Try this lovely capture in Pictorial.

08. Snowy Egret (Egretta thula) just ahead of breaking wave.jpg

You captured this egret at a nice moment. The lighting on the wings helps it stand out against the rocks in the background.

09. Sauvignon Blanc New Growth.jpg

You did your best to isolate this part of the plant to avoid distracting elements but the crop and background bokeh are a bit off. The dew or raindrops add interest and I would mention this in the title. I would also mention that this is a grape and perhaps find the scientific name - don't assume everyone knows that Sauvignon Blanc is a varietal wine grape just because this is California. I would make sure this is not a hybridized variety since **“artificially produced hybrid plants”** are not permitted in Nature.

10. Sargeant Majors (Abudedefduf saxatilis) Flank Shipwreck.jpg

I like the vivid colors here and the incidental diver as well as the boat itself does not take away from this Nature image in my opinion. The fish (correct spelling is “Sergeant Majors”) are not really the strongest subject here however and I would definitely try to identify all the fauna in the foreground!

11. Rocky Coast near Pt Joe.jpg

For Nature, I would compose with less sky and get more of the rocky shore. Give more info about the location. I don’t know where Pt. Joe is! In addition, mention WHY or WHAT made this area rocky. We want a Nature story, not just a pretty scene.

12. Redwood Down (sequoia gigantea).jpg

This angle does show off the size of these trees and what their roots look like. I would watch the catchy title and go for more informative – something like: “Fallen Redwood With Root Detail”. I don’t know if you could have backed up a little bit more to show where the tree meets the snow in the foreground. Also, it would be stronger if you could bring out a bit more detail in the root area (I like to use Shadow/Highlight in Photoshop which won’t affect the brighter areas in situations like this).

13. Poppies among the grass (Eschscholzia californica).jpg

You have some rich colors and good contrasts here. I am distracted by 2 things – the partial poppy in the right background, and that one out of focus grass coming from the top center down across the poppy cluster. A little cleaning up around your subject(s) should have been possible in most cases. Also changing your angle might work. Except for wind, these subjects are not going anywhere so fast.

14. Pacific Dogwood (Cornus nuttalli audubon).jpg

You captured some nice detail in these delicate flowers. The exposure is excellent and the colors inviting. I am disappointed to see the bottom right flower especially blurry as well as some of the others. Probably wind caused this more than your depth-of-field, but either way, I would have tried to capture this image when everything was still and sharp!

15. Northern fur seal thermoregulating.jpg

Striking colors and contrasts as well as the strong ripple reflections gives this instant impact. I’m happy to see the eye and a good amount of detail in the dark areas of the seal. It looks like this was cropped and if so, I would add back just a bit more (visual) breathing room near the tail. You might want to mention in brackets after thermoregulating that it means “Maintenance of a constant internal body temperature independent of the environmental temperature” for us curious folks.

16. Nesting Great Blue Herons - Ardea Herodias.jpg

Not an easy capture because of all the branches, you managed to get most of the herons and their vital body parts free. Showing the nest is very important but I might like the top and right sides cropped a bit more. Larger birds and fewer branches would be a choice here.

17. Map Pufferfish Profile (Arothron mappa).jpg

Adding profile (or detail) is appropriate to this image, since you have only part of the subject. It feels to me that the exposure is just a little but over – perhaps by only a third or half stop. But the fish has lost a little of its color brilliance a richness of detail in the brightest area. Not easy by all means. Bracketing when possible is useful.

18. Long-billed curlew preparing for take off.jpg

Excellent capture. The frozen moment has yielded a good body position and splash that matches the title. The colors and exposure are pleasing as well as the crop.

19. Lichen on rock in Yosemite.jpg

Whether flash was used or not, the exposure does not bring out the fine details needed to show the subtle textures that are found in this subject. Try getting in closer, use a tripod and if necessary, a macro setting to get some better detail. This could work as a playful spinoff of a Jackson Pollack with some added saturations, contrasts and/or curves/levels adjustments and entered into Creative!

20. Kelp evidence of ebb and flow (phaeophyceae).jpg

Forgive me for having a bit of trouble evaluating this image and your title. The kelp/algae have been aligned in a fairly even angle and pattern, yet at a right angle to the ocean which seems unusual, and part of me feels this is more due to the shoreline terrain of rocks and eddys in this one area. Even so, you are showing the results of tidal ebb and flow activity. I am wondering if you had moved to the right and shown the kelp horizontal in the composition with some of the ocean in the background could this have been a stronger image? The cropped rock at right center and the ones top right do not strengthen your title and make the kelp less strong a subject.

21. Jelly fish.jpg

You folks live in the enviable location of having the world class aquarium on your doorstep! This is a very good image. It captures a nice, repetitive swirl of tentacle pattern. Colors are not too vivid which is less of a common capture or tendency. I like that there is some empty space around them. I would crop a bit off the left side to remove that strand in the top left corner. It would be helpful to know what species of Jellyfish this is!

22. Island in a Stream.jpg

Perhaps a play of words from the popular song, this is not a fully useful Nature title. Adding what is growing among the rocks is more helpful. I also feel that the rock at the bottom is not so helpful, especially noting that the flowers at the top are cropped. I would definitely trade less rock for more flowers.

23. Honey bee on Matilija poppy (Romneya).jpg

Probably having to sacrifice depth of field at this close range, you chose wisely to have the center of the poppy and the bee in focus. The out of focus foreground petals are not too distracting. Did you take more than one photo at the time? An even stronger image would show the bee's head... (in a perfect world).

24. Hawksbill Turtle (Eretmochelys imbricata) & French Angelfish (Pomacanthus paru).jpg

I can't decide whether I like the turtle without the angelfish better (an easy crop). Forgive me if I am wrong, but it looks like a flash was used. What this did was make the turtle a bit too bright and at the same time, the dropoff of brightness and color in the lower right is not as gradually pleasing as with normal light.

25. Great Egret taking flight (Ardea alba).jpg

You did a good job on the individual feathers on the wings. That's the plus. I'm having trouble with the environment. The reddish hued seaweed is not aesthetically pleasing and neither is the brownish-green water. A tough chore here but another time and place should yield better results.

26. Great egret – Ardea alba -fishing.jpg

You nailed this one. Excellent shutter speed, F-stop and crop choice. With the soft background, the fish and heron stand out strongly and the splatter of water drops makes it more dramatic. Bravo!

27. Great Egret - Ardea Alba - building nest.jpg

Good capture. You have a very nice composition giving the egret a little more space on the left to fly into. It's a good size twig/branch to show how large the nest must be. I would however change your title to say that the egret is carrying material/wood to MAKE a nest, since we don't actually see the nest in the image.

28. Flamingo.jpg

The way flamingos rest their heads into their backs is quite interesting to see. You did not mention in the title that this is a "Flamingo detail" which you should, since you cropped the feet and tail off entirely. This odd crop, coupled with the legs of other flamingos in the background, makes for a not very strong presentation. You may also want to say that the coloration is due to the algae, crustaceans, and diatoms that they eat containing beta carotene.

29. Field of Dandelions.jpg

It's a pleasing landscape scene interspersed with the trees but a very strong Nature image. It would be better to identify the species of tree that is just as dominant here. Perhaps saying something about the way the dandelions spread or carpet large areas would be useful. Try this shot in Pictorial.

30. Feast of Thistle (Centaurea calcitrapa L).jpg

It's a good Nature photo, but I really, really want to know what kind of insect(s) are clustered on the flower. Are they eating the flower or gathering pollen or other goodies? Give us more – don't be afraid to expound upon this fascinating bit of Nature!

31. EchiumFlowersAtCarmelBeach.jpg

These are pretty plants and the sun going down adds a nice touch. Unfortunately you did some post processing that leaves this looking unnatural, which is a no-no in the Nature category. Whether you tried dodging the flowers in the back section or some other manipulation, the lighting looks very odd to my eyes. Also, the effect spills over into the waves behind them, adding to the peculiar uneven lighting. Be more careful and read the guidelines.

32. Early_Morning_Buck.jpg

Sorry to say, this image does not quite fit the definition of Nature. Yes, deer have adopted lots of human habitat areas, but it's best to show them without finely mowed grass and paths. There is some nice early light but the background just behind the buck is also distracting.

33. Central Coast Cypress Habitat (cupressus macrocarpa).jpg

Your title works for this image, showing the rocky terrain where these trees grow. It would have been stronger if you could get a better angle and a little bit closer to the central cypress.

34. California Clematis (Clematis ligusticifolia).jpg

Flower close-ups are difficult to photograph and this one is no exception. Lighting is one of the biggest challenges. Here you have mixed bright sunlight and shadows that are preventing some of the flower details from emerging nicely. The two bright leaves are conflicting with the flowers above them. Diffused light is a common way to avoid harsh light and difficult shadows. People

carry umbrellas and thin cloth to help filter light sometimes. You did manage to keep the background out of focus which helps keep better attention on the flowers.

35. Bull and calf bison.jpg

Strong image. The connection of the adult and calf are well captured in this “detail”. The color tones are true and pleasing. The backlighting is very nicely done, yet there is detail in the dark fur and the eye is clearly visible – a big plus. Selective darkening IS allowed and I would try to “burn” in the horn in the top left corner to make it less conspicuous. Unless you are absolutely sure the adult is a male, I would change the title to say Adult (or mature) Bison and Calf.

36. Blackberry Standing at Attention (Rubus armeniacus).jpg

First off – your title is not well chosen. Many times we tend to anthropomorphize human traits to other things. A flower bud does not “stand at attention”. Also, when most people hear Blackberry, they think of the fruit. I would call this the flower partially open. That said, I think the image misses the mark slightly by not having enough sharply in focus. A bit more depth of field is needed to make sure most or all of this entire flower is sharp.

37. A Flannelbush Abstract (Fremontodendron californium).jpg

I don’t know about this being an “abstract” but this IS a “selective detail of flannelbush flowers and leaves” and you might want to change your title. It works fairly well. I like that there are flowers at different angles so that we can examine their design from different aspects. Lighting is good and color is too. I like the depth of field which gives a pleasing background of the same plant but softer.

Winners:

6th HM: 14. Pacific Dogwood (Cornus nuttalli audubon)

5th HM: 23. Honey bee on Matilija poppy (Romneya)

4th HM: 21. Jellyfish

3rd HM: 27. Great Egret - Ardea Alba - building nest

2nd HM: 15. Northern fur seal thermoregulating

1st HM: 4. Tube anemone

3rd Place: 18. Long-billed curlew preparing for take off

2nd Place: 35. Bull and calf bison

1st Place: 26. Great egret – Ardea alba -fishing