

## PADRE TRAILS NATURE 2 COMPETITION - Insects and Spiders

Judged by David J. Gubernick, [www.rainbowspirit.com](http://www.rainbowspirit.com)

It was a pleasure and a challenge to judge these images. I hope you find my comments helpful for your photography in general and for other competitions you may enter.

### General Comments

Advancing your photography and taking it to the next level involves **both** improvement in your capturing images and post-processing images. Virtually every image needs to be worked on in post-processing even if it is just adjusting exposure. At a minimum, usually you need to adjust exposure, contrast, saturation, and sharpening, as well as removing dust spots. What I have seen from previous judging and returns from other competitions is an apparent general lack of post-processing work on images, especially in the AAA group, as well as in the AA and some in the A groups. I encourage you to work on your images and experience the enjoyment of producing images you can be proud of. Use global and targeted adjustments. Have others provide feedback on your images before submitting them to any competitions. A list of the adjustments allowed for Nature competitions is on the PSA website and on PTCC website. Use them as a guideline.

### AAA GROUP

**01. *Apis Honey Bee*** - A lovely image, well-captured of a bee with pollen (and its shadow) about to land on a poppy. Well-composed and relatively sharp. Maybe slightly tone down brightness. From the perspective of enhancing the image, remove the distracting brown stem in background, left side of image. For Nature competitions, such removals are not allowed, even though they would enhance the image.

**02. *Black Widow Spinning Cocoon*** - well-composed image and nicely captured. Could use much more sharpening given that only parts of a few spider legs are in focus - would also result in the cocoon being more sharp. Upper right-hand corner is a bit distracting, tone down.

**03. *Garden Spider and Prey*** - works well with the spider in the middle of image and as a vertical. The out-of-focus colored circles in the background add some nice color. The white band across the top pulls my eye away, so cropping it out would keep attention on the spider and web. Difficult to see the prey. Spider over-exposed and not quite in focus.

**04. *Garden Spider*** - the cropped image is nicely composed; the "spotlight" on the spider works very well to make it stand out from the black background and at the same time is a bit overexposed, so can be toned down a touch. Like the way the web is lit. The spider could use some sharpening.

**05. How About a Lift** - wonderful colors and soft light, with the background well out of focus so that it does not distract from the two butterflies, one on top of the other's back. At first I did not see that it was two butterflies but rather one beautiful and varied-colored butterfly. Some overall sharpening and targeted sharpening of the top butterfly's head and body may help with that (as well as the use of a slightly higher f/stop when shooting).

**06. Lady Bug** - a well-composed and nicely captured image. Could use more sharpening to really bring out the details in the lady bug and flower. Toning down the highlights would bring more detail out in the petals so that they don't look washed out. There's also a strange fringing along the flower petal edges [chromatic aberration?]

**07. Latrodectus hesperus awaiting prey.** A nicely captured image of a Black Widow spider which can be elusive. The underside view of the spider and its red "x" works well. Could use sharpening to bring out more detail in the spider.

**08. Lightness in Feeling the Dragonfly Spirit.** Nice capture of the dragonfly in context. Would help to use sharpening on the dragonfly. The plant it is resting on captures more attention than the dragonfly - crop in to help make it stand out more.

**09. Monarch Butterflies.** Nice composition showing several Monarchs on the same plant. They don't look quite in focus - sharpening would be very helpful here.

**10. Monarch Butterfly Pacific Grove.** Nicely composed image. Doesn't look quite in focus, sharpening would help with that before down-sizing the image. The bright white area in background is a bit distracting. Opening up (increasing the brightness) of the left wing would bring it out more.

**11. Money spider family Linyphiidae awaiting prey.** Nice composition, with spider against a soft even background. The spider needs sharpening. Only thin sharp and in focus is the leaf tip above the spider.

**12. Monarch butterfly Carmel Valley.** Nice composition. Needs more lightening of image and sharpening to bring out the butterfly. Also lots of dust spots in the blue sky

**13. Praying Mantis.** Nice composition of the mantis against a smooth background. Observe how the mantis' body and antennae divide the frame into different spaces. The mantis needs a bit more sharpening to make it really "jump out."

**14. Resting Ceanothus Silkmoth.** Nice even lighting in this apparently indoor shot. The square cropping works well with this image. Slight lightening of the image would help see more of the moth. Only the antenna and part of the wing tops appear in focus - more sharpening would really make the entire moth stand out.

**15. Rhopalocera Butterfly in Fog.** This image has a lovely soft feel to it. The butterfly itself is not quite in focus, especially compared to parts of the flower that are. Sharpening the butterfly would really help. A small amount of overall lightening of the image may be beneficial, so long as you don't lose the soft feel of the image. The green leaf in the upper left corner is a bit distracting - try darkening it a bit. From

the perspective of enhancing an image, remove that leaf and the darker dried one below it [clone in the smooth background]. Such removals, unfortunately, are not allowed in Nature competitions.

**16. *Spider came and sat down beside her.*** Nicely composed. The spider, especially the legs in the foreground, would benefit from some heavy sharpening. A slight overall lightening may help also.

**17. *Western Honey Bee.*** Nice composition. The brightness of the flowers is a bit distracting - tone down the highlights. The bee could benefit from more sharpening.

**18. *White Crab Spider and bee.*** This cropped square image captures an interesting moment between a spider and bee. It would be helpful to know what is going on - can use the title to tell us. With this special moment captured, it is unfortunate that the image is totally out of focus. It could also benefit from a bit of lightening of the bee.

**19. *Yellow sun flower red bug.*** Lovely colors and light and nicely composed. The orange bug (what is it?) stands out against the green sepals of the sunflower. The bug could use some sharpening.

**20. *Walking Stick.*** What "makes" this image is the long shadow of the walking stick. Cropping this image to a panorama format would nicely accentuate the stick and its shadow. The walking stick's legs are overexposed, yet does not distract that much. Try bringing down the highlights on its legs.

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1st Place - Lady Bug (06)

2nd Place - Apis Honey Bee (01)

3rd Place - Praying Mantis (13)

**Honorable Mentions:**

05. How About a Lift

14. Resting Ceanothus Silkmoth

15. Rhopalocera Butterfly in the Fog

16. Spider came and sat down beside her

## AA GROUP

**01. Caterpillar on blade of grass 1** - Nicely composed - could use more space on right side. The caterpillar can benefit from sharpening - does not look in focus or sharp except for the green leaf.

**02. Caterpillar on blade of grass 2** - Stronger composition than 01 image. Similarity could benefit greatly from some sharpening of the caterpillar and slight adjustments to brightness and contrast.

**03. Caterpillar on strawberry** - Good composition. Image a bit bright, slightly tone down. Caterpillar does not appear in focus - strong sharpening would be beneficial.

**04. caterpillar** - Good composition. Whole image is underexposed and could benefit from lightening and a bit more sharpening of the caterpillar.

**05. centipede** - Good choice of a vertical composition and getting the whole body and antennae in the frame. The center segments appear in focus but not the head nor tail end. Sharpening more would make the head and tail be in focus. A bit bright overall, so try toning down the highlights. Trimming off a small part of the top and right side would make the centipede really jump out more.

**06. coccinella (lady beetles) feast on aphididae** - This image depicts a wonderful moment of a lady bug eating an aphid among numerous aphids. Nice soft light. Stronger sharpening would really make the lady bug and some aphids stand out more - the lady bug is a bit soft.

**07. coleoptera tenebrionidae (common ground beetle) in mating embrace** - Nicely composed image of an "intimate" moment. Try strong sharpening to make both beetles stand out and be more in focus. The upper and bottom right-hand corners are bright and distracting - tone down.

**08. Cranefly** - This is a really neat perspective of the cranefly from underneath. The body and legs create a nice composition in the way it breaks up the frame into various negative spaces - the blank areas. The cranefly can use more sharpening. The differing purple color casts of the background look odd - try removing the purple.

**09. Cross Spider waiting for prey** - Nicely composed with a good soft background. The spider is not quite in focus - sharpening would greatly help with that. The spider is a bit bright (flash used?). The out-of-focus streak in the background is distracting - try cloning it out.

**10. Cross Spider 2 waiting for prey** - The square format works well and with a nice soft green background. The spider itself is not quite sharp - needs sharpening and perhaps a bit of lightening of its body.

**11. Fork-tailed Bush Katydid** - This is a striking image of a katydid in nice warm light. Well composed. More sharpening would really make the katydid stand out.

**12. Hummingbird hawk-moth feeding** - Nice capture and composition of a hawk-moth feeding. Could use both more sharpening of the moth and perhaps some lightening of its body.

**13. *Hyphantia cunea - fall webworm moth caterpillar*** - Nice cropped composition and use of space occupied by the background and the wood. Nice soft even lighting. The caterpillar could use much more sharpening which would make its bristles really stand out.

**14. *order opiliones-harvestman*** - Nicely composed image of the harvestman - the shadows of its legs adds a nice element. Parts of the legs appear in focus but not the body. Try more sharpening and also reducing the highlights which are fairly bright which will make its body stand out more.

**15. *pholeus phalangiodes with arachnid prey*** - The cropped square format works well and is nicely composed. Parts of its legs appear in focus - more sharpening would make both predator and prey stand out. The dust (?) spots in the background are distracting - try removing them as well as the color cast to the background..

**16. *Running Crab Spider running for cover*** - Nicely composed, filling the frame with the spider. The spider itself is not sharp - more sharpening would help here and would toning down the highlights.

**17. *spider*** - Nice composition and use of space occupied by the upper and lower sections relative to the surface the spider is on. The spider itself is not quite in focus - strong sharpening would help to make it stand out more. The right side is a tad bright - try toning down the highlights.

**18. *White crab spider stalking a butterfly*** - Really neat perspective, feels like you are right in there with them. Nice even light. Try brightening it a bit. Initially difficult to make out the butterfly that is being stalked -could have tried taking another image focusing on the butterfly and then focus staking in post-processing. The spider could use more sharpening.

**19. *White marked tussock moth caterpillar feeding*** - Nicely composed and exposed. This colorful caterpillar could benefit from stronger sharpening.

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1st Place - Fork-tailed Bush Katydid (11)

2nd Place - Coleoptera tenebrionidae (Common Ground Beetle) In Mating Embrace (07)

3rd Place - Coccinella (Lady Beetles) Feast On Aphididae (06)

**Honorable Mentions:**

02. Caterpillar on blade of grass 2

08. Crane fly

18. White crab spider stalking a butterfly

19. White marked tussock moth caterpillar feeding

## GROUP A

**01. Vapourer Moth Caterpillar on a Flower Bud** - Nice composition with the slightly s-shape of the caterpillar and placement in the frame. The caterpillar is not quite in focus, nor is the bud. Sharpening would greatly help here. Try also turning down the highlights.

**02. Blue Dasher Dragonfly Rests in the Sunshine** - The tail end of the dragonfly appears in focus, whereas the head is not. More impactful to have head and eyes sharp. Sharpening would greatly help. The large upper right section compared to the other areas seems large - was this cropped? Try toning down the highlights a bit and increase overall exposure.

**03. Broad-necked Darkling Beetle** - Nicely cropped to a square format. Looks like some of the left-side legs and antenna are in focus and a part of the head, but not the beetle's body and right side. Sharpening would help with that. Also the bright spots on the body are distracting - cloning them out would help.

**04. California Tarantula** - A really nice capture of a tarantula and the almost square format works well. Good composition. More sharpening would really make the spider "pop" more and show more details. The brightness of the upper corners is a bit distracting; try toning them down.

**05. California Tube Trapdoor Spider male** - A really nice composition as cropped to a square format. Wonderful soft lighting that helps bring out tiny details. More sharpening would really bring out more details. The black border (left and right side) and brown frame is distracting - try removing them and compare.

**06. Cross Orb Weaver Spiderlings** - What a neat situation to have captured of this mass of spiderlings and a challenge because it is a mass. Spiderlings overlapping each other get lost compared to ones more "separated." More sharpening would help bring the spiderlings out more. Nice exposure.

**07. Diabolic Shieldback Katydid** - Lovely light and nice composition. The background is a little distracting as is the bottom left corner. Would remove the stems in bottom left, if it was allowed in Nature competitions. Darkening down all the corners would help with that.

**08. Domestic House Spider** - Nice capture of a spider. Could use more sharpening to bring out more details of the spider. Try darkening the corners and trimming off a bit of the right side of the frame.

**09. Emerging Monarch Butterfly** - Nice cropped composition and even light and color in background. Could use a bit more sharpening and try a slight contrast boost.

**10. Flower Fly** - Well composed and close up of the fly. A bit bright - toning down corners would help as would a bit more sharpening.

**11. Golden silk orb-weaver, Costa Rica** - Nice lighting and composition. More sharpening would make the spider really stand out as well as some of the web.

**12. Golden Silk Orbweaver** - Nice lighting on the spider which helps bring out the colors. Bottom bright area a bit distracting - try toning it down and the corners. Stronger sharpening would make the spider stand out, now mostly just the body is in focus and sharp.

**13. Goldenrod Crab Spider with pollen covered bee** - What a neat moment to capture. The square format of this iPhone image works well. Nice even lighting. The bee's head is out of focus; the spider is somewhat in focus and both could use a lot more sharpening.

**14. Goldenrod Crab Spider lying in wait** - Wonderful image - good composition, color, soft even lighting, of this spider and Iris. Good use of negative space. Could use a bit more sharpening to bring out the spider.

**15. Green Darners mating** - Captured a wonderful moment of them mating. Nicely composed. Could use more sharpening to bring out details in the Darners - a bit soft.

**16. Honey Bee on wild radish annual** - The cropped square format works well for a nicely composed image. Soft background helps the bee and flower stand out. The flower the bee is on is somewhat in focus but the bee is "soft." More sharpening would bring out details in both the bee and flower.

**17. House Fly on a leaf** - Really neat image of a fly. Nice composition with soft lighting and background. The fly's head needs sharpening.

**18. Jorou Spider** - The cropped square format works well and the image is nicely composed. What a colorful spider. The brightness of the background is a bit distracting, toning the highlights down would help. Likewise for the spider itself. The spider would benefit from more sharpening. The black borders on the two sides distract from the image - try cropping them out.

**19. Jumping Spider Rests on a Flower Petal** - A colorful well-composed image in the cropped square format. The spider's eyes and body are a bit soft - more sharpening would bring out its details and also the flower above. The line in the upper left corner is distracting - remove it.

**20. Jumping Spider** - Really like the intimacy of this image. Nicely composed. The spider itself would benefit from a lot more sharpening. The pink petal is overly bright and distracting - try toning it down.

**21. Jumping spider building web around Cricket** - What a neat moment to have captured. Nicely composed and evenly lit. The spider and cricket would benefit from much stronger sharpening.

**22. Jumping spider female** - Well composed image with nice light on the spider in a neat close-up shot. The spider could benefit from a lot more sharpening to bring out details which also makes it more "in focus."

**23. Monarch Butterfly catches some Winter Sun** - Wonderful colors and composition. Only part of the left wing and flower are in focus. More sharpening would help with that.

**24. Monarch Butterfly** - Interesting rendition of the butterfly in color with the rest of the image in black-and-white. The butterfly appears in focus. The plant it is on has lots going on and tends to be distracting

- my eyes keep going back and forth between the plant and butterfly. Try cropping to a closer-in square format. More sharpening would bring out more detail in the butterfly.

**25. Orb Weaver *Araneus montereyensis*** - Nice close-in composition. The spider is soft - compare it to the sharp part of the foreground leaf. More sharpening would help and would toning down the highlights and corners.

**26. Praying Mantis** - Nice cropped composition in this square format. Nice lighting. The mantis would benefit from much more sharpening and toning down slightly the highlights and the corners.

**27. Swallowtail on native *Cosmos flower, Costa Rica*** - Well composed image and timely caught while the butterfly has its wings folded back and "drinking" from the flower. Both the butterfly and flower would benefit from more sharpening and maybe brightening the upper wings a bit. Try darkening all the corners to reduce the distracting background and the yellow flower in the bottom right corner.

**28. Trash Line Spider** - Nicely composed image with the line of encased prey running across the frame. Nice soft even background. Try toning down the highlights so more detail comes out in the spider as well as more sharpening.

**29. Western Tiger Swallowtail** - Nicely composed in this cropped format. There seems to be an overall yellow color cast that can be easily removed. Brightening the image would help make it pop more - it's a bit flat overall in terms of exposure. Sharpening would bring out more details in the beautiful butterfly.

**30. Goldenrod Crab Spider** - A nicely captured moment of a spider taking a bee. The cropped almost panorama format works well, except for the black vase that pulls my eye away from the main event. Nice even exposure - a little brightening would be helpful as would more sharpening.

**31. Monarch Butterfly on *Impatiens oliveri*** - A nice composition with the triangle formed by the Monarch and the two *Impatiens* below it. Try toning down the highlights on the flowers (a bit washed out) and a curves contrast boost. Darkening all the corners would help keep attention focused on the Monarch and flowers.

**32. Spider on *Calla Lily*** - This image has a lovely feel to it, with its soft light and muted colors. Nice composition. Try reducing just the highlights a bit to bring out more texture in the dried calla lily. Also a tiny bit more sharpening. Remove the tiny black spot in bottom left.

**33. Tomato hornworm *Manduca*** - This is a well-composed image and nicely exposed. The hornworm captured is striking in its orientation crawling along the underside of the stem. More sharpening would really make the hornworm stand out. Curious how you captured this hornworm without movement with a 4 sec exposure at f/40?



- 1st Place - Goldenrod Crab Spider lying in wait (13)
- 1st Place - Tomato hornworm (33)
- 2nd Place - Jumping Spider Rests on Flower Petal (19)
- 2nd Place - Jumping spider female (22)
- 2rd Place - Spider on Calla Lily (32)
- 3rd Place - Diabolic Shieldback Katydid (07)
- 3rd Place - Flower Fly (10)
- 3rd Place - Swallowtail on native Cosmos flower, Costa Rica (27)

**Honorable Mentions**

- 04. California Tarantula
- 05. California Tube Trapdoor Spider male
- 11. Golden silk orb-weaver, Costa Rica
- 15. Green Darners Mating
- 17. House fly on leaf
- 20. Jumping Spider
- 21. Jumping Spider Building Web Around Cricket
- 23. Monarch Butterfly catches some Winter Sun