

PTCC - 2015 Nature #3 - Group A submissions

33 submissions from 11 members

01. A Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) dives for prey

A wonderful action shot! Tells a very good story. Image is sharp but very contrasty. Perhaps that can be toned down a bit digitally. This would be a totally awesome shot if it weren't for the vignette. The vignette doesn't add anything to the image and distracts the eye away from the action. Initially, I thought maybe it was shot through a spotting scope, as in digiscoping, leading to the vignette. However, the image looks too sharp to have been digiscoped so I think it was probably shot with a regular camera lens and the vignette added intentionally afterwards.

02. A Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) with fish (species unknown) in beak

Exact same comments as #01 above.

03. American Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

I like the unique composition. Not one you typically see of a flying pelican, or any bird. Extremely sharp image. It works well as a B&W, however, I think the overall image should be a little brighter, without washing out the white feather detail. That would make the background whiter instead of grayish and it would add some punch to the image.

04. An Adult Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) lands next to its chick

Great photo! Nice capture of the action just as it lands. Good use of fast shutter speed and the light is nice. Excellent exposure, as it's often difficult to maintain detail in the darker areas of the image without washing out the highlights. Well framed to draw attention to where it needs to be drawn. Photographing birds at their nest is fun. First of all, you know where the birds are going to be! That's huge. Secondly, there's lots of interesting behavior that occurs. Just be sensitive to the birds' space and make sure you don't interfere with their normal routine and activities. It's always better to photograph birds at the nest when the chicks are older, like in this image. That minimizes chances of disturbance leading to nest abandonment, or little chicks going too long in the hot sun or without food. The welfare of the critter comes first over photography.

05. By-The-Wind-Sailor (*velella velella*) blown ashore

These are such interesting animals, actually a colony of animals, related to jellyfish, working together. They live on the ocean surface and that transparent sail catches the wind and propels them. This is a lovely closeup that nicely shows the structures and pattern of the colony. I'd add just a little brightness and sharpness to it.

06. Elephant Seal Mother & Pup (*Mirounga angustirostris*)

Nice interaction between mom and pup. Interesting how, even at the young age, they will flip sand onto their bodies to help stay cool. Pup is pretty well camouflaged except for flipper. Appears sharp, though a little too contrasty, perhaps because of too much digital sharpening.

07. Filoli Field

Very dramatic lighting! It's a beautiful photo. The fence creates a good leading line guiding the

eye through the image. It's very sharp and well exposed. My only issue with it is its appropriateness for nature competition, where human elements are not to be present, unless integral to the nature story, such as with the barn swallows chicks we saw earlier. I imagine this photo would do very well in a color pictorial competition because it's quite lovely.

08. First Spring Male Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)

I'm wondering if you photographed this in the eastern US, as it would be a rare sighting here in CA. I used to band these birds when I was operating a bird-banding station in WV and VA. The tanager is well exposed and super sharp. I just wish that one leaf wasn't sticking out in front of the bird. Believe me, I certainly realize there's nothing you can do about that! Perfect catchlight in the eye too.

09. Grand Canyon Twig

Beautiful light on the foreground, however, the canyon itself is a little too dark to see any detail. One solution to this might be to use a graduated neutral density filter to slightly darken the foreground so you can collect a bit more light from the background. It doesn't need much, just a little. Good placement of the tree in the frame.

10. Grand Canyon

Flawless landscape photo! Perfect light. You were obviously positioned and ready to shoot when the sun hit the right spot in the sky. I know the spot so I know it was just before sunset. The rays of sunlight streaming into the canyon are ethereal. Good anchor in the foreground at the lower left. Shooting with a medium telephoto like that compresses the image so you get those ridges stacking up, one behind the other. This creates a beautiful layering effect that adds so much depth to the image. Sharp all the way through. Exquisite!

11. Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)

An absolutely perfect B&W photo of a flying Great Egret! I can't believe how sharp it is. Phenomenal job on the exposure, maintaining detail in the white feathers and not losing the legs against the dark water. Good composition too, leaving the negative space in front of the bird. Very impressive image!

12. Great Horned Owlets (*Bubo virginianus*) keep an eye on things

Very compelling photo! It's hard to take your eyes off of the owlets' eyes! Very sharp and well exposed. Shows good interaction with them snuggled up next to each other like that. Nice composition too, with the branch creating a diagonal one direction and the owls creating a diagonal in the other direction. Notice how the owls have two toes in front and two in back? Most birds have three in front and one in back. Owls are adapted that way to increase the chances of grabbing their prey when they're hunting in the dark. The tufts on top of the head are just feathers not ears. The ears are actually under the feathers along the edge of the facial disk. OK, enough natural history stuff. Back to photography.

13. Honey Bees pollinating *Matilija* popples (*Apis* and *R. coulteri*)

Pollination is a nature story that few photographers try to tell. Kudos for telling it so well with your photo! Very sharp focus. Good job stopping the honeybees in flight with the fast shutter speed. I love that you can see the pollen sacs on the bee in flight. Good background, it's there but

not distracting. I wish the flower still had all of its petals. The Matilija Poppies are the largest native flower that blooms in CA! They are very fragrant too. My wife and I have them growing in our backyard.

14. Ladybug (Coleoptera coccinellidae) feasting on aphids and creating a sticky mess

Excellent story-telling photo, showing the predator/prey relationship on a very small scale. I've got shots like this, even a little higher magnification, so I know you put a great deal of effort into creating this image. It can be quite tedious to shoot tiny things with such minimal working distance and extremely shallow depth-of-field (DOF). This is very well done, given that it looks like it was shot with natural light, as opposed to flash. Flash would give you a little more DOF because you could shoot at a smaller aperture. Flash would also enhance the highlights of the image a little bit. As it is, I like the shallow DOF because it draws the eye to the main point of interest. The out of focus portions of the image just provide additional info to the viewer in a non-distracting way. My only suggestion is to add a little edge sharpening to it to make it pop a little more.

15. Morning Dew and Ladybug (coccinellidae)

Pretty shot and very nice composition. The water droplets add some interest to the image as well. The ladybug is sharper towards the back part of the wings and the hind legs. The head and eyes are not nearly as sharp. It's really hard to get the DOF right on a tight macro shot, with a moving insect, when shot with natural light. If you know you'll only have a portion of a critter in focus, prioritize the eyes. The artificial background is distracting to my eye because it just doesn't look natural. If you're shooting in a controlled setting, you can make a natural looking background by glueing some green leaves to a piece of cardboard and placing it far enough behind your subject that it will be way out of focus and diffused.

16. Newborn elephant seal warming up from the sun

Tough shot of a dark, shiny seal on a brightly lit day. Leads to a very contrasty image. Hard to get around that but you may try underexposing a bit to tone down the highlights and then bring out the shadows later on the computer. If the seal was staying very still, which they often do, you could even try two shots, one exposing for the highlights and one for the shadows. Then combine digitally as a HDR image. If the seal moves though, you're out of luck. Very cute photo! Looks like it need to grow into its own skin!

17. On alert Bobcat (Lynx rufus)

Now, how the heck did you get it to lie down and be still? I've seen bobcats do this but I've never been close enough to get decent shots. This is a beautiful photo! Perfect light, nice and sharp, exposure is spot on. My only suggestion for improvement would be to crop it in slightly from the right side. You can maintain the same aspect ratio. It will get a little tighter on the top and bottom but it will eliminate some of the distracting plants on the right side and offset the bobcat's head from the center a little bit.

18. Phronima stebbingi maneuvers Sea Lettuce

Beautiful photo of an obscure little marine invertebrate. Perfect exposure and the little amphipod is sharp as can be. The grains of sand are a neat addition to the image, showing the viewer that the scene is underwater. I wish the out of focus sea lettuce in the foreground wasn't there. It

would nicer to have a totally unobstructed view of the critter.

19. Pocket Gopher at work

It's definitely tough to get shots of fossorial critters (underground species). You're fortunate that it popped up for a look around! I like the way you included the dirt mounded up outside the gopher hole. This helps tell the story. It doesn't look super sharp on the eye and it looks like you may have added a little too much digital sharpening to the image, which appears as little pixelated artifacts, especially around the teeth. If not from digital sharpening then perhaps it was shot at an ISO that was too high for the sensor to record without lots of noise.

20. Preening Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax penicillatus*)

Very difficult exposure situation. Tough to get detail on a dark cormorant, especially at any great distance. My only suggestion would be to find another cormorant in better light that you can get closer to. Sometimes, we just have to pass on certain subjects and wait for a better opportunity. Nice try though!

21. Royal Tern with catch

Wonderful sequence that tells a great story of how the terns fish. I'm surprised there's only one tern though. They usually travel in pairs. Do you know why? Because one good tern deserves another! Sorry about that. This photo has good action and technically is pretty good. As with another image in one of the other groups, I'm not sure how to judge a composite image like that. My impression is that you need to submit a single image that tells a nature story. Other clubs for which I've judged actually have a separate category of competition for photo sequences. Please let me know what you think and how your club handles this.

22. Sand Dollars converging (*Clypeasteroidea*)

Excellent photo! Shows habitat. The tracks behind them make it more than just a static image of sand dollars. It shows that they are living, moving organisms. Very sharp where it needs to be. The barnacles hitching a ride on the sand dollar really add to the photo too!

23. Sea Lion Flophouse (*Zalophus californianus*)

Cool composition. The one sea lion that's grooming its flipper is nicely placed in the frame in the upper right thirds intersection. The scene is a bit contrasty. It would be dynamite in overcast light.

24. Sea Lion up close (*Zalophus californianus*)

Amazingly sharp. Great composition and framing. Everything about that sea lion is so darned bilaterally symmetrical, even it's eyebrows. This image works very well as a B&W due to the sharpness and texture, as well as the cuteness factor!

25. Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*)

Great shot! Very sharp. Love the reflection broken up by the lines on the beach. Just a bit overexposed on the egret's neck, face, and tail. Even underexposing the shot by ½ stop would help maintain detail on those burned out feathers. Shows interesting behavior with the egret very focused and intensely hunting. I'd like to see a little more room to the right of the egret. That would show a little more of the beautiful diagonal pattern on wet beach or mudflat.

26. Snowy Plover (*Charadrius nivosus*)

I love everything about this photo... except the fact that it's just not sharp. It almost looks like a flash was used and there was ghost image of ambient light. Sometimes that can work but here it just makes the photo look less than sharp. Everything else is phenomenal, including the diagonal line on the water, the reflection, the position of the bird in the frame, the action and position of the legs, the catchlight in the eye, and the storytelling aspect of the shot.

27. The Early Bird, American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) (*Lumbricus terrestris*)

Sharp, well exposed, good composition. I love catchlights in the eye of critters because it just gives the animal so much more personality as you view it. As a species, we definitely key into eyes. Nice storytelling with the predator/prey relationship there. Lots of people overlook, or put off, photographing the really common species in our own yards, yet they provide us so many neat photo ops!

28. Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) dines on dead seal

Excellent story-telling! I love the way you captured the image right when it's pulling open the body cavity! Yummy! Unfortunately, it's not really crisp and sharp. By the looks of it, my guess is that: #1 you were quite a distance away and used a long tele and then cropped the image a bit too close, and #2 you probably used a pretty ISO so you could shoot at a faster shutter speed. Those things lead to the lack of sharpness you see here. One way to get around this, and I realize not everybody has the where-with-all and the equipment to do this, is when you find a carcass like that, set up a little photo blind closer than you would get otherwise. Sit in the blind very quietly and still for hours and hours and hours and hours. Eventually something will come to dine of the carrion and you'll get some great shots!

29. Two Flamingos

I love the position of the legs! That just makes the shot! The reflection is nice, however, I would almost like to see a closer shot of the birds so I could see more detail on them and those amazing legs. That also would minimize the amount of the rather uninteresting sky above them. I could go either way on that.

30. Vultures on Elephant Kill

Great story-telling photo. Judging by the DOF, it looks like a medium telephoto was used. This keeps the view wide enough to show the sheer number of vultures converging on the carcass. That emphasizes the story, however, I think the story can still be told if a longer focal length is used, thus showing the action right on the elephant carcass. Capturing the vulture coming in for a landing makes the shot. I think it should be tighter where that action is taking place. Otherwise very well exposed and sharp.

31. Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) with sand flea

Sand fleas. Yum! Good story, behavior, and habitat in the photo. Very sharp and well exposed. The overcast light provides a nice even exposure, yet you still got a little catchlight in the eye, which adds a lot. Nice composition too, with the line of the bird's body creating a diagonal across the frame, leaving room in front of the Whimbrel.

32. Young Coast Redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) aspires to height of elders

Pretty scene, however, to draw attention to the young tree, I would get up closer on the left side of the young tree and shoot it against the trunk of the older tree. I would use a wide-angle lens and shoot from way down low, looking upwards. I think that would really emphasize the little sapling against the old giant.

33. Young Elephants

Nice interaction between the young 'uns. Photographing them against the huge adult provides size context for the viewer. Very sharp and well exposed. Wonderful texture too!

34. Cinnamon Teal fighting for mate

I'm running out of superlatives to use for all of these magnificent photos! This shot is incredible. Perfect exposure and sharpness. Excellent action and interaction between the male teal. Those eyes are amazing. They're one of my favorite ducks. One slight modification might be to crop it a little tighter, especially on the left side. This will accomplish two things: 1. It will focus more attention directly on the action. 2. It will offset the heads of the ducks slightly from the center, leading to a more pleasing composition. Please submit this photo to *Ducks Unlimited* magazine. I can pretty much guarantee they will use it!

35. White Faced Ibis fishing

Marked here as #35 but file name of image says it's #36.

Spectacular photo of the White-faced Ibis. Literally, the best I've ever seen of that bird! Perfect light, perfect pose, sharp as a tack, excellent exposure showing the beautiful iridescence on the back and wing feathers. My only suggestion would be to leave a little, just a little, more space in front of the bird.

36. Great Egret with Crawfish

Marked here as #36 but file name of image says it's #35.

This is an astounding photo! Fantastic job capturing the action at the decisive moment! You're tight on the egret, yet it's well composed. Great use of a fast shutter speed to stop the action. My only suggestion for this image would be to brighten it just a little, perhaps masking the lower neck and body of the egret so it doesn't lose feather detail. The rest could use a little more light, a little more contrast, and a light edge sharpening. Try those slight adjustments and I think you'll be pleased with the results.

First Place: 36. Great Egret with Crawfish

Second Place: 34. Cinnamon Teal fighting for mate

Third Place: 22. Sand Dollars converging (Clypeasteroida)

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