

PTCC-2016
NATURE #3
GROUP A

39 images from 13 members

Before getting into my comments about the images in this group, let me preface by saying this: WOW! All of these images are stunning. I think my suggestions for improvement will be few and my accolades will be many. And, please understand that if I point out something that can be improved, it doesn't mean it's not a good photo. I just need to be more nit-picky with this group.

01 - Allan's Hummingbird (*Selasphorus sasin*) hovers before feeding.jpeg

Beautiful shot! I would suspect if this was taken in a natural setting, the background would be more visible and more of the flowers would be seen as well. Most shots you see like this are setups with a hummingbird feeder tube behind the flowers so you know where the bird will be. This allows you to prefocus on a spot, place your background far enough back so it's not distracting, and control the lighting. Although probably manipulated in this way, you did a great job capturing the image. Super sharp focus, excellent exposure, and I really like the blur in the wings as opposed to wings frozen with high-speed flash.

02 - Angry Western Grebe - *Aechmophorus occidentalis* .jpg

A technically excellent image! Tack sharp, well exposed. You captured that grebe's expression at just the right millisecond! This is not just a portrait of a Western Grebe, you totally captured the bird's personality (along with its "bad hair day"). I can picture this image on the front of a greeting card for somebody's birthday, "No way! You can't be that old!"

03 - Bald Eagle - *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*.jpg

Nice closeup of the eagle, although I think it's a bit too close. With most wildlife photos, I think it works better to show more of the critter in its natural habitat. That creates more of a story-telling component to the image. Closeup portraits are nice, however for a Nature Division competition, they tend to not be as effective as photos that show behavior and interaction.

04 - Budding Tidestrom's Lupine.jpg

Very pretty photo. Patterns and textures in nature can make beautiful images. That being said, for a Nature Division competition, I think this photo doesn't show quite enough of the plant for either ID purposes or story-telling purposes. When shooting a subject like this, it's good to take lots of shots at varying focal lengths, angles, etc. That way, you have images from which you can pick and choose depending on the specific purposes at the time.

05 - Bumblebee (*Bombus*).jpg

Bees (and other insects) on flowers can be tough subjects to photograph. It's

often hard to get the entire insect in focus, especially if shooting only with natural light. If you use flash, you can use a smaller aperture and get better depth of field. The little critters tend to move so quickly that the resulting images are sometime blurred a bit from motion. Flash fires so quickly that it can stop the motion of the insect as well. This shot would be effective if the bee was facing the camera so you could see its face and eyes. I hope my comments aren't too stinging.

06 - Calcite concretions-Rock City-Minneapolis, Kansas.jpg

Compositionally, your image has wonderful layers of interest that lead the eye into the photo. It tells a great geology story and the use of B&W really emphasizes the patterns and textures of the formations. Shooting nature in B&W is extremely challenging. One of the biggest challenges is managing the contrast. You've done that perfectly here. I'm particularly fond of good geology photos. Most people just take them for granite. I'd share some more geology puns if I were a little boulder. Beautiful photo.

07 - California Common Scorpion (*Paruroctonus Silvestrii*).jpg

I think a different angle or view of the scorpion would make this a stronger image. As it is, it's a rather static photo. The left cheliped (pincher) is slightly out of focus, as are the legs closest to the viewer. With wildlife, it's best to try to get the eye(s) in the image and make sure the part of the animal closest to the front of the image is sharp. I think shooting it more from the front of the animal, possibly at a lower angle (by laying on the ground) would add significantly more interest to the photo.

08 - Coyote Brush up close - *Baccharus pilularis*.jpg

Nice detail on the Coyote Brush flowers (now seeds). One of my favorite CA native plants. I have one in my backyard right out my window. Valuable plant for native pollinators too. I like the subtle colors and tones in this image. Good use of depth of field to isolate the flowers from the potentially distracting background, while keeping the main subject sharp.

09 - Desert Pebble Pincushion-*Chaenactis carphoclinia*-Death Valley Spring 2016 Superbloom.jpg

Good ID shot of the plant, showing the flowers, leaves, and growth pattern. It would make a fine field guide photo. Perhaps to add more interest to the image, along with a story-telling component, you could shoot with wide angle from a lower vantage point. That could keep the plant the same relative size in the frame, yet show the background habitat and some sky. That could provide a bit more information and interest for the viewer.

10 - Grass Spider (*Agelenopsis* Spp) Emerges from Web.jpg

Wonderful perspective for the viewer! Makes me feel like I'm entering the spider's realm. The plane of focus seems a little too far towards the back of the spider. I think the very front of the spider could be sharper, which also would sharpen up the front legs a little. The out of focus front legs tend to distract my attention from spider's face. Maybe using a flash would allow you to use a smaller aperture and get better

depth of field.

11 - Great blue heron (Ardea herodias) bringing stick for nesting.JPG

Wonderfully sharp shot and perfect exposure. Definitely shows interesting behavior. Good use of negative space in the direction the heron is flying, although it is a bit too tight on the left side of the image. It's a dynamic shot with good action. I said, "It's a dynamic shot with good action!" Do you need a heron aid?

12 - Great Horned Owl-Bubo virginianus.jpg

Owl be darned! My guess is that this is a captive bird. But, since there's nothing visible in the image to confirm that, I don't really give a hoot. Nice contrast between the owl and the background. I like the out of focus background with the circular highlights. Nice portrait of the bird, although static.

13 - Gull eating red pelagic crab.jpg

Great shot! Wonderful interaction! (Unless of course you're the crab.) Capturing predator/prey relationships in nature always adds an effective component to photos. The water dripping off the crab adds to the dynamic nature of the image. I'd like to see the species of gull in the caption, although I know that's easier said than done, especially with immature gulls. I'd try to help with the ID but I would need to know when and where you saw it. I suppose I could just definitively say it's a particular species and you might fall for it, but you're probably not that gull-ible.

14 - Juvenile Black-tail Deer.jpg

This is a really nice intimate portrait of the young buck. I like the detail on the velvet off the new antlers. The asymmetry of the antlers adds interest to the shot as well. Those very compelling eyes just capture me and draw me into the image. Nice separation from the background. Looks like it was shot with a pretty high ISO. I think a slightly lower ISO would add to the sharpness a little bit.

15 - killdeer sheltering three chicks.jpg

Excellent photo! The technical aspects (sharpness and exposure) are really good. You left some negative space in the direction the adult Killdeer is facing. Nice catchlight in the eye of the adult and the chick. A catchlight in the eye really adds life to the critter. This shot has everything: technical excellence, interaction, storytelling, and adorable little fluffy chicks!

16 - Killdeer.jpg

This is a tack sharp shot and well exposed! It's kind of a static portrait but pleasing to the eye. It's a good ID shot of a killdeer.

17 - Kingbird catching a cicada.jpg

Phenomenal action and story! Most people would look at this and say, "WOW! You were really lucky." Having done this for a while now, I know it's way more than just luck. So much of nature and wildlife photography is being in the right place at the right time, being prepared, knowing your equipment, and being able to predict what's going

to happen. You obviously had all those components in place to capture this image. My only suggestion would be to toss some fill-flash into the shot. Using a Fresnel flash projection system, like the Better Beamer, would fill in those shadows on the Western Kingbird a little and provide some more detail. Finally, most strict Nature Division competition rules state that human elements shall not be present, except where those elements are an integral part of the nature story. Here the kingbird is on a wire. In this situation, I'd say that's not a big deal because it's rare to see a Western King that's NOT on a wire, fence, sign, or post.

18 - Knobbed Whelk (*Busycon carica*) on foot at low tide.jpeg

I recognize that individual whelk! That's Lawrence! Great sharpness, exposure, and detail. Love the spiral pattern too. You usually don't get to see a mollusk's foot exposed like that. Very pleasing background as well.

19 - Lined Shore Crab (*Pachygrapsus Crassipes*).jpg

These are tough little guys to photograph! They usually see you coming with their super vision and then they scoot back into the rocks of the tidepool where you can't see them. Best to try with a telephoto lens so you can keep your distance (which is what I guess you did). This is a wonderful photo. Sharp in the right places and well exposed in a difficult exposure situation.

20 - Mating great egrets (*Ardea alba*).JPG

Perfect! Tack sharp. Ideal exposure on the egrets. This shot has technical excellence, beautiful and graceful subjects, info about the surroundings, action, and sex. What more could you ask for in a nature photo?

21 - Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) rests on a bottlebrush blossom.jpeg

Excellent angle. The blue sky as the background works really well. Good job keeping the Monarch entirely in focus. A wing or antenna out of focus would create a distraction in the image. It shows the relationship between the butterfly and the bottlebrush and it's value as a pollinator. Wow, it's extremely sharp. I also love the detail on the stamens of the flower. Beautiful!

22 - Mydas Flies (*mydas clavatus*) Mating.jpg

Outstanding! The iridescence on the wings really pops out. Another shot with great interaction. Good sharpness and exposure. The eyes on the left subject don't look quite as sharp as the one on the right. Maybe a slightly smaller aperture would sharpen that up (may require slightly higher ISO to maintain adequate shutter speed). It's important to remember that the closer you get to your subject, the depth of field will be more shallow at any given aperture. When I'm moving in on a macro shot, I usually try to shoot at f/11 at the widest.

23 - North American Beaver Lodge (*Castor canadensis*) Vicksburg Colorado).jpg

This is a good shot that shows the relationship the beaver has with its surrounding habitat. There's good information here. From a composition perspective, I think it could be tightened up a bit. Right now the foreground is too prominent and

distracting. I would suggest zooming in, or cropping from the left and from the bottom, thus placing the beaver lodge in the lower left corner of the frame and including the mountain in the background. You'll still get the lodge, water, trees, and mountain but you'll eliminate the distractions. It also looks like it's listing a little to starboard (right).

24 - Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) lights on aloe (*Aloe arborescens*) plant.jpeg

Superb photo! Amazingly sharp. Perfect exposure. Catchlight in the eye. Great background. Wonderful lines on the aloe. Good action.

25 - Notch-leaf Phacelia-*Phacelia crenulata*-Death Valley Spring 2016 Superbloom.jpg

Nicely shows the growth pattern of the plant, with the leaves at the bottom. I find the background a bit distracting, although the colors of the rocks in the background compliment the flowers well. There's a little too much going on in the frame and my eye doesn't quite know where to focus. I would probably try to isolate a smaller portion of the plant to emphasize the flowers more, as well as the detail on the seed pods on the stems below the blossoms. That would also help by throwing the background out of focus a little more, while retaining the colors of the background.

26 - *Peucetia viridans* (Green Lynx Spider) captures honey bee.jpg

You certainly know by now I really emphasize the story-telling aspect of a nature/wildlife photo, as well as interactions with other animals and the environment. All I can say regarding this photo is, "HOLY \$&%^!!" This is an amazing photo! Not only did you capture the very cool predator/prey relationship between the spider and the honeybee, but you captured another incredible story here. Those three teensy, tiny flies on the honeybee are probably a species of parasitic fly (*Apocephalus sp.*) that injects its eggs into the honeybee's abdomen. This invasion of the honeybee's body causes it to behave strangely, such as stumbling around and flying at night. This debilitating condition may make the bee easier for predators (like your spider here) to catch the bee. If the infected bee isn't eaten from the outside by a predator, it's eaten from the inside by the fly larvae, which eventually emerge, pupate, and metamorphose into adults. Your photo, by the way, is sharp, well exposed, well composed, and astounding!

27 - Poppies along Old Coast Road - *Eschscholzia californica*.jpg

As much as I love CA Poppies, you really have to do something different and creative when photographing them so the image stands out amongst the billions of poppy photos. This is a pretty straightforward shot. It appears a bit flat and seems to lack some contrast and saturation. There also are some distracting elements. When I look at this scene, the part of it that turns me on is the poppy just to the right of center where you can see the shadows of the stamens and petals. I would try to isolate that at a low angle (laying down on your belly) and nearly fill the frame with it. Getting really close to the point of interest will blur the background, thus making it less distracting.

28 - Resting at Sunset.jpg

I love the backlit ears on this Desert Cottontail, showing the blood vessels. Good composition with the negative space in the direction the bunny is facing. It's nice that

you see some of the habitat in the frame, yet there's enough separation from the cottontail that the background isn't distracting. The focus is pretty soft all the way through and would look better if it was sharper, especially on the rabbit's eye. Fortunately, cottontails are pretty easy to find so you can go wabbit hunting and try again. Just be vewy vewy quiet!

29 - Sanderling by the shore, CA (*Calidris alba*).jpg

I love watching Sanderlings scurry back and forth on the beach, running from the incoming waves. Your photo is beautiful. I love the light, the catchlight in the eye, the highlights on the legs and bill, the feather detail, the composition, and the bubbles from the surf. The diagonal waterline on the sand adds an interesting design element to the image too.

30 - Sea Otter with Pup (*Enhydra lutris*).jpg

It's really hard to get well-exposed photos of Sea Otters. They have very dark bodies contrasting with very light faces. And they're always on a highly reflective bright surface. It would be great if you could get closer or use a slightly longer focal length lens. This would eliminate much of the bright water and you could expose more for the otter itself. Ideally, I would want to get closer, expose for the otter's face (so it's not over-exposed), and use some projected flash to bring out detail on the dark fur and the pup. You OTTER keep trying and experiment with some different strategies.

31 - Sedentary Chinese red panda.jpg

This is a really cute photo of the panda in a wonderful pose. As I mentioned earlier, human elements are not supposed be part of Nature Division competition. Photos of animals in controlled situations, such as zoos, are usually OK as long as there is nothing in the image that reveals that was the case. This was obviously taken in a zoo, as there is a wall behind the panda. Perhaps you could have moved to your right a little to eliminate the wall and have the trunk of the tree behind the critter instead. Sometimes just repositioning yourself or waiting for the animal to change positions can provide a stronger composition.

32 - Spotted Towhee (*Pipilo Maculatus*).jpg

Nice use of flash projection to provide the exposure on the Towhee, which was clearly in a low-light situation. Great sharpness and detail. I'd probably bring the exposure value up a bit on the computer to just brighten the overall image slightly.

33 - Tioga Pass Sunset .jpg

Beautiful light, in both the sky and the foreground. The colors in the foreground, the trees, the granite, and the pink clouds are so incredible, I probably would have composed with a little more foreground and a little less of the darker sky at the top. Perhaps you could crop the original a little from both sides, which would bring it down on the top. That would really emphasize the colors and textures.

34 - Tobacco Weed Flower - *Atrichoseris platyphylla*-Death Valley Spring 2016
Superbloom.jpg

Wonderful composition! I like the plant coming into the frame at an angle from the lower right. The plant is nice and sharp too. The background is just a little distracting but not too bad. You could maintain the same angle and size of the plant in the frame by moving back with a longer focal length. The longer focal length would diffuse the background more and provide additional separation. The colors of the plant and the background go well together though.

35 - Upside-down Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*).jpg

These birds have so much personality! They are really fun to watch. If you take more time and move very slowly, stopping often, you often can approach them more closely so the bird will occupy more of the frame. Then, try not to place the bird dead center in the frame. Compositionally, it's usually more appealing to have the subject off center a bit, or placed at the thirds intersections according to the rule of thirds.

36 - Velella Stranding Asilomar Beach - By The Wind Sailors.jpg

These are such interesting animals, related to jellyfish. They are totally free-floating in the ocean, moving with the winds and on their little sail that sticks up. When I look at this photo, I really want to see one closer. I would get really close to one or two placed in the foreground of the frame and then have the wide angle expand outward, showing that there are hundreds more in the background, along with the waves. You really don't need the sky in the image to tell the story. Well exposed and sharp photo.

37 - Yellowtail Snapper (*Ocyurus chrysurus*) on Belizean Reef .jpg

Beautiful colors and composition. Technically an excellent photo. You can see another diver in the background behind the coral. Humans aren't supposed to be in nature division competition photos, although the diver does tell me it wasn't just shot through glass at an aquarium.

38 - Young western lowland gorilla nibbles eucalyptus.jpg

Adorable photo! Technically very good, being sharp and perfect exposure on the animal. I like the soft, warm light. My zoo comments from earlier apply here too. Zoo shots are OK in competition, as long as it's not evident in the photo. Two things say "zoo shot" to me: 1) the wall behind the gorilla and 2) Lowland Gorillas are native to central Africa and eucalyptus trees are ONLY native to Australia and a few nearby south Pacific island nations (although they've been introduced and propagated in many other parts of the world).

39 - Marbled godwit (*L.fedoa*) & Sanderling (*C. alba*) winter shorebirds.jpg

Gorgeous light! Very nice composition. The bird tracks in the foreground and the spots in the sand where they probed their bills add interest to the photo as well. Nice little catchlight in the eyes makes them pop right out.

Winners:

1st Place: 26 - *Peucetia viridans* (Green Lynx Spider) captures honey bee.jpg

2nd Place: 02 - Angry Western Grebe - *Aechmophorus occidentalis* .jpg

3rd Place: 15 - killdeer sheltering three chicks.jpg

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