

# PTCC-2017 – NATURE #3

## GROUP A

47 images from 16 members

I'll try to be more brief in my comments for the more experienced photographers in this group. After previewing all the images, I'd like to preface my comments by saying that they're all wonderful shots. Given the caliber of the images in this group, my comments and suggestions may seem a bit more picky and trivial but that's because they're all so good. I have to find some way to differentiate between them.

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### **01 - Acrobatics of slugs (Arionidae) feeding on nettle.JPG**

*This is an interesting composite/collage. Each shot appears technically excellent with regards to sharpness and exposure. They all illustrate this slug behavior well. Personally, I would prefer to only see the single best of the four photos. That way, the view could see much more detail on the slug and the plant. I think either the upper left or the upper right image alone would create a much stronger composition than using all four.*

### **02 - Autograph Tree seed pods on rock -Clusia rosea.jpg**

*These are very interesting seedpods and this is a well-done photo showing their pattern and texture. Your photo is very sharp and well exposed. The composition looks a little off-balance to me. I'm trying to think of how it could be done differently but nothing is immediately coming to mind. I would like to see the pods closer up to see more detail. Perhaps moving them into a tighter grouping and getting closer would make a more compelling composition.*

### **03 - Bald eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus) taking a drink.JPG**

*Looks like a captive bird photographed at close range with a shorter focal length lens and flash. It's a wonderfully sharp photo, obviously shot at a fairly small aperture to achieve that depth of field. Great exposure too. Bald Eagles are inherently very contrasty and tough to expose well. Shows interesting behavior that you don't see very often.*

### **04 - Black Necked Stilt feeding-Himantopus mexicanus.jpg**

*This doesn't appear quite as sharp as it could be. This is another species that is inherently difficult to expose well due to the contrast between the white and black. Best to shoot these on a overcast days, rather than bright sunlight like this. Good negative space in the direction the bird is facing The reflection adds nicely to the composition.*

### **05 - Black-Crowned Night Heron with fish.jpg**

*Great shot of the heron. You don't usually get to see the iridescence on those back feathers. Very sharp and good detail. Slightly overexposed by only about half a stop or so. Shows good interaction. That eye is amazing! I'd like to see a little more space in front of the heron. The composition feels a bit too tight.*

### **06 - California Quail (Callipepla californica).jpg**

*Excellent portrait of this male CA Quail. Superb sharpness. Love that topknot and the slight catchlight in the eye! The soft out-of-focus background is very pleasing and provides good separation for the quail. There are no distracting elements at all and the composition is perfect. Beautiful portrait of the quail but not much storytelling or interaction going on in the image.*

**07 - Coyote ( Canis latrans ) In Search Of Her Next Meal.jpg**

*I love this photo! You created a great composition and the light is excellent. It's very crisp and perfectly exposed. All the colors in the habitat perfectly match the Coyote's fur. The indistinct reflection adds to the composition. The subtle lick of its tongue makes the whole image for me. It's amazing how that red tongue just jumps right out at the viewer when all the colors match so beautifully.*

**08 - Diatom frustule (Cymbella mexicana) under polarized dark field lighting.jpg**

*I do a lot of photography of the less conspicuous aspects of nature, including lots of macro work with tiny aquatic vernal pool invertebrates. I'm particularly drawn to this image because not many people have ever seen diatoms or even know they exist. They are, in fact, responsible for manufacturing a vast percentage of the oxygen you and I breathe every day! I'd love to share more with you about diatoms but let's get back to the photo itself. Very dramatic lighting. I like the black background. It's technically excellent. I know for a fact that photomicroscopy takes a great deal of effort, planning, patience, and knowledge to do well. Much trial and error occurs to get it just right. My only suggestion for this image would be to keep the magnification the same but include another diatom in the frame so there are two (I realize the challenges with trying to do this). I think there would be room for another diatom with out sacrificing the detail you've achieved and it would make for a more interesting composition. Great photo!*

**09 - Double Crested Cormorant (Phalacrocorax auritus) with a young Anchovy (Engraulis mordax) catch.jpeg**

*Great descriptive title! Sharp, although it has that high ISO look to it, so it's not as smooth and vibrant and crisp as with a lower ISO. Excellent action, showing the predator-prey relationship. You can tell the little anchovy is flopping and trying to escape. The highlights in the image are just slightly overexposed. It's always best to expose for the highlights in camera. It's much easier to bring out some detail in the shadowed areas of an image on the computer afterwards than it is to tone down blown out highlights that have no detail in them.*

**10 - Eastern Fox Squirrel (Sciurus niger) Alert to Danger.jpg**

*Very cute shot. I would swing your camera to the left a bit so there is more negative space in front of the squirrel. The image doesn't appear very sharp but that may be due to a high ISO setting.*

**11 - Elephant Seal ( Mirounga ) Giving Birth.jpg**

*How cool to capture that moment! Wonderful photo of a wonderful event! Very sharp and well exposed, although perhaps another half stop of light would make the image pop a bit more. Talk about storytelling in an image! This definitely has it.*

**12 - Five-fingered Maidenhair Fern (Adiantum pedatum).jpg**

*Beautiful abstract pattern and texture! Perfectly exposed and super sharp. The precision of the composition, the great depth of field, and the overcast diffused lighting leads me to believe that the photographer used a tripod for this shot. Excellent image! This is not just a snapshot. The photographer put a lot of effort into composing and creating this wonderful photo.*

**13 - foraging black-tailed deer-Odocoileus hemionus.jpg**

*I like how this image shows the interaction of the deer and their habitat. I also like the longer aspect ratio that allows room for all three deer, yet doesn't include too much extra space above*

or below the animals. The exposure is good, however, the focus is a bit soft. Perhaps it was shot hand-held at too slow a shutter speed.

**14 - Fox Sparrow-Passerella iliaca.jpg**

Great shot showing the Fox Sparrow singing. Just a subtle difference in a photo, such as a bird's bill being closed or being open can change the whole feel of the photo. The bill open like this makes it a much more dynamic photo. Sharp and well exposed. Good positioning in the frame.

**15 - Giraffe siblings move through acacia grove copy.jpg**

Very sharp and nicely exposed. The overcast lighting is flat but that's the lighting hand you were dealt at the time and you made the best of it. Compositionally, it's cropped way too tightly. It definitely needs more space behind the giraffes, as well as even more space in front so the animals have space to move into the image.

**16 - Great Blue Heron (Ardeaherodias) about to swallow a small mosquito fish.jpeg**

The low angle of view and seeing the heron from the water makes for a nice perspective. There are a few too many distracting elements in the photo in front of the heron. The technical aspects of the image regarding focus and exposure are good. It definitely shows action and a good predator/prey story.

**17 - Haliaeetus leucocephalus - Bald Eagle.jpg**

Your composition is good, with the negative space in front of the eagle. And the exposure is good, showing detail in the brown feathers without totally blowing out the whites on the head and tail. Unfortunately, the focus is very soft. It's just not as sharp and crisp as it should be. It looks like it was shot with a longer telephoto lens, however, it appears you shot at a pretty small aperture, given how much of the background is sharp. I'm sure this small aperture forced you to shoot at a slow shutter speed, which led to the fuzziness. In this situation, the background isn't nearly as important as the bird itself. I would shoot at a much wider aperture, such as f/5.6 or wider. This will throw the background out of focus (which is fine) but allow you to use a faster shutter speed so the eagle would be nice and sharp.

**18 - Harbor Seal Pup with mom and pop - Phoca vitulina.jpg**

Nice family photo! What a cute little pup. Good sharpness and good exposure on the animals and on the sand. The two blue spots above the top seal are a bit distracting. Perhaps you can clone those out in Photoshop so they blend with the sand.

**19 - HERON EATING A SQUIRREL.jpg**

Technically a Great Blue Heron eating a CA Ground Squirrel (Sorry, I'm a stickler for titles in Nature Competition). Phenomenal image! I've seen lots of shots of Great Blue Herons eating gophers, voles, snakes, fish, frogs, etc., but never a ground squirrel! What a huge meal! This is beautifully exposed, well composed, very sharp, and it tells a wonderful nature story (as gruesome as it may be).

**20 - Honey Bee (Apis mellifera) Nectaring on California Poppy (Eschscholtzia californica).jpg**

Excellent composition! In composition, the rule of thirds states that if you divide your photo into thirds, both vertically and horizontally, the points of greatest visual interest fall at the thirds intersections. Here, the bee is placed at the lower left intersection. I love how the rest of the image is filled with the poppy's petals. The light is amazing. It looks like you may have used a

*diffused flash up close with a macro lens. Wonderful detail and exposure.*

**21 - Honey bee collecting pollen from Matilija poppy (Romneya).jpg**

*Nice detail on the bee and the flower's stamens. The stamens add a pleasing texture to the image. The colors of the flower and the bee compliment each other well. It would really add to the story-telling aspect of the image if you could see the pollen sacs on the legs. When I say that, realize that I do know moments like this are fleeting at best. I'm just providing some thoughts and ideas to try for next time. It takes a lot of patience and a lot of frames to capture shots like this.*

**22 - Immature American Bullfrog (Lithobates catesbeianus).jpg**

*Beautiful photo of the frog! I just wish the out of focus plant in the foreground wasn't there, as it's distracting from the main subject. Perhaps just shifting your position to the right a little could have eliminated the distracting element. The frog is extremely sharp and well exposed. I love the detail in the eye! This is a female bullfrog since the tympanum is the size of the eye or smaller (the male's tympanum would be larger than the eye). The reflection of the eye in the water adds to the interest of the composition as well.*

**23 - Immature Female California Condor Portrait (Gymnogyps californianus).jpg**

*WOW! Super sharp! Definitely a face only mom could love, however, so well adapted for what they do. Wonderfully dramatic exposure. The bird really pops from the background. Great feather detail. Beautiful portrait of the condor but not much storytelling or interaction going on in the image.*

**24 - Libellula saturata - Flame Skimmer.jpg**

*I like the composition. The diagonal lines created by the dragonfly's body and the spikerush compliment each other very well, as do the colors. Great background, present but not distracting and it makes the subject really stand out in the image. Your image is very sharp and well exposed.*

**25 - Little Egret cohabitates with Common Hippopotamus in Chobe River, Botswana, Africa copy.jpg**

*Great title! Thank you for the great information! Wonderful interaction and storytelling in this photo. The lighting is a bit flat and drab, however, it also prevents the image from having too much contrast. Unfortunately, neither the bird nor the hippo are tack sharp. Maybe you could have used a slightly higher ISO so you could have shot at a little faster shutter speed.*

**26 - lupine-family, Fabaceae.jpg**

*There are lots of species of lupines but if you researched which species are typical in the area where you were photographing at the time, you could probably narrow your ID down to species. I like the idea of shooting at a wide aperture to isolate one flower from a bunch of others in a field. However, to really get a good effect doing this, the one flower stalk you're trying to isolate should be farther away from those around it. That way, you'll get the repeating colors and patterns in the out-of-focus background and the one foreground plant will be nice and sharp. You almost achieved that effect here but the flower stalk to the left of the one in front is a little too close. These can be very tough to photograph when it's the slightest bit breezy out!*

**27 - Milk thistle in bloom (S. marianum).jpg**

*Good close-up of the flower head detail. It's very sharp, both the photo and the plant! Well*

*exposed. Another good composition would be to shoot a little wider, keep that flower prominent and sharp in the foreground, and show a few other flowers in the background that are out of focus. That would provide some repeating colors in the background, which is a good compositional technique.*

**28 - Monarch Butterfly (Danaus plexippus) Sucking Nector.jpg**

*What jumps out to me about this photo is the depth of field. When photographing a butterfly from the side like this, it's usually nearly impossible to keep the wing closest to the camera AND the tip of the far wing BOTH in focus! You must have shot at a very small aperture. Fortunately, it appears you had lots of light to work with. All of the butterfly and the flower on which it's feeding is tack sharp. The composition is excellent, including the slight angle at which the flower stalk enters the frame at the bottom. The crop/aspect ratio eliminates superfluous elements and focuses the viewer's attention on the main subjects. The background is there but not distracting to the eye. Shows good interaction between butterfly and habitat.*

**29 - Ovis nandensis - Bighorn Sheep -4063.jpg**

*Nice shot of the bighorn ram, including some of its habitat, which provides more info to the viewer. Sharp and well exposed. It is however rather static. There's no real interaction or story going on in the image. Maybe if you followed it for a while, you could get a shot of it traversing a steep rocky slope, which would tell more about their adaptations, etc.*

**30 - Pelican Diving at Moss Landing.jpg**

*Nice action silhouette. We always tend to think of great nature/wildlife photos as having lots of visible detail on the subject. This photo certainly illustrates that it doesn't have to be that way. The bird is identifiable, you can see the habitat, and it has action and a story. It doesn't look super sharp but that might be because of a high ISO that was probably used. Very dramatic colors in the sky. My only suggestion would be to slightly straighten the horizon.*

**31 - Red-crested Cardinal (Paroaria coronata) Scavenges Beach for Food.jpg**

*Good shot of this bird, also known as a Brazilian Cardinal. It's sharply focused on the eye and the bill, which is where it counts. Nicely exposed. Good composition, although I might have moved the camera up a little so there's a little more space above the bird's head and a little less in the foreground.*

**32 - Sandhill Crane (Grus canadensis) lands in marsh.jpeg**

*Great action shot of the bird landing. It's a sharp photo, however, it appears that perhaps it was shot at a higher ISO, which leads to a perceived decrease in sharpness to the viewer due to the digital noise and grainy appearance. That may have been the only way you could get the shot, given the lighting conditions. The overcast lighting prevents the image from being too contrasty. It's a very good composition as well. Your photo is an interesting study in how the bird manipulates its feathers when landing. Notice the similarities to a commercial airliner, with the flaps going up at the back of the wing and pulling the nose of the aircraft up right before landing. Next time you fly in a plane, thank a bird!*

**33 - SANDHILL CRANE LANDING IN FIELD.jpg**

*The crane coming in for a landing is very dramatic and is a unique position to capture. Birds in flight are certainly a challenge but this is very sharp. Since so little of the lower crane is visible, I'd rather just see the crane in flight. The other crane and the adjacent corn stalk tend to distract*

*the eye from the bird in flight. Another possibility for composition might be to shoot at a shorter focal length so you get the entire crane on the ground, with the other crane coming in to join it. Each crane would then be positioned at a thirds intersection in the frame. It might provide the viewer a bit more info about the image that way. Just a thought.*

**34 - Sandhill Cranes ( Grus canadensis ) At Bosque Del Apache Wildlife Refuge, NM.jpg**

*Very dramatic lighting!! The perfect lighting on the birds against that dark sky is amazing. This shot is technically excellent and the composition couldn't be better. The placement of the birds relative to each other is ideal and the negative space in front of them is very comfortable. Photographing birds in flight is always a tough challenge but you absolutely nailed it with this image!*

**35 - SEA OTTER EATING A CRAB.jpg**

*Sea Otters are tough to photograph and have them be well-exposed. There always seem to be really bright spots and really dark areas. You achieved a nice balance in this image. It's also difficult to get the otter's eye to be visible. Here it kind of blends in with the rest of the fur on the face, which makes you search a bit for it. When viewing images of critters, peoples' eyes usually gravitate to the eye of the animal. Your photo is very sharp and the bright red crab really stands out and makes the image pop. Good story-telling component with the predator-prey relationship too.*

**36 - Soberanes Canyon Redwoods (Sequoia sempervirens).jpg**

*This is a nice scene of a redwood forest. It's well exposed and sharp. However, there's nothing particularly compelling that draws the viewer's eye to a particular subject. There's no main point of interest in the image. Perhaps trying some different compositions would yield one that's stronger. For example, having something prominent in the foreground to anchor the image. Or, being closer to a particular tree and shooting with wide angle looking upward, yet getting the rest of the forest in the background. Since you're there, you might as well try a bunch of different compositions so you're sure you get a variety from which to choose.*

**37 - Stream between Upper and Lower Qualicum Falls, Little Qualicum Falls Provincial Park - BC.jpg**

*Nicely exposed image. Often to get that amount of detail in the darker areas of the image, the white of the rapids in the water is overexposed and washed out. You balanced the exposure very well. The stream itself creates a very nice leading line that draws the viewer into the image and up the canyon. It's not super sharp. My guess is that it was shot at either a very high ISO or perhaps it was shot hand-held, not locked in on a tripod. Shots like this are best photographed from a tripod to stabilize the image. This allows you to shoot at a lower ISO, smaller aperture, and slower shutter speed, leading to a very sharp and detailed image.*

**38 - Thukuhar shore-crab (Metopograpsus thukuhar) takes a rest after digging his cave.jpg**

*Fascinating critters! I would love to see the crab closer up, occupying more of the frame. Also, having it placed in the lower left of the frame would leave more space in front of the crab. The mangrove leaves in the foreground are a bit distracting, yet they do provide some additional info about the habitat of these little crabs. The image is sharp and has a good exposure.*

**39 - Trentepohlia aurea in Point Lobos State Natural Reserve.jpg**

*This is a very interesting photo and I really like that you're portraying something that's a less conspicuous aspect of nature. This is a very cool type of algae typical of the central CA coast. I*

*think the image would be much stronger if you were closer to some of the algae. You could try a macro shot of detail on the algae. Or, you could shoot with a wide-angle lens and have some algae really close to anchor your foreground and then have more visible in the wider background. Both of these ideas would be best shot from a tripod so you can fine-tune your composition, shoot at a small aperture, and make the image much sharper than it currently is.*

**40 - Tufa Towers of Mono Lake at Sunset.jpg**

*This is a very dramatic and creative landscape photo. Silhouettes can be a powerful element in an image. The detail and smoothness of the shot makes me think the photographer took the time and went to the effort to stick the camera on a tripod. That way, you can precisely compose the image, use a low ISO, and subsequently shoot at a relatively slow shutter speed. My only suggestion would be to tilt the camera up so you show less black in the foreground and to show a little more sky.*

**41 - Twelve-spot Skimmer (Libellula pulchella).jpg**

*I love how sharp the dragonfly and its perch are, in contrast with the out of focus and diffused background. The background is very pleasing and allows the subject to just pop out of the image! Great exposure. Technically excellent. I think the composition would be a little stronger if there was more negative space in front of the dragonfly instead of behind it.*

**42 - Vervet monkey suckles baby while older daughter waits copy.jpg**

*I really like this shot. It's a very calming and soothing image because of the subject matter, the lighting, and the peaceful interactions. It looks very sharp and well exposed. Great storytelling component to the photo. My only suggestion would be to have a little more negative space to the right of the monkeys as you view the photo. In other words, when you shot the image, if you had moved the camera to your right a bit, I think it would be a slightly stronger composition, rather than having the monkeys dead center in the frame.*

**43 - Water's Edge at West Thumb's Hot Pool in Yellowstone National Park.jpg**

*Your image/title combination could have a stronger story-telling component with, "Mineral deposits along edge of geothermal pool in Yellowstone National Park." Exquisite detail and sharpness. Very interesting composition, with the layers forming the concentric lines around the water.*

**44 - Western Gull (Larus occidentalis) chicks eating a regurgitated meal.jpg**

*Yummy! I think this is the epitome of a good nature/wildlife photo. It's sharp, the exposure is right on, it's well composed, it shows interaction between multiple individuals, and it has a great nature story. The longer crop, or aspect ratio, adds interest to the image as well.*

**45 - White-Lined Spinx Moth (Hyles lineata).jpg**

*Amazing image! The body of the moth is tack sharp. The slight motion in the wings creates the sense of motion, making the photo more dynamic. That long proboscis extending into the flower (which looks like a species of sage) creates the strong story-telling aspect of the photo, showing the interaction of the moth and it's surroundings. The colors and composition are wonderful. Obviously shot a really fast shutter speed to get that amount of detail. Well done!*

**46 - Zabraskie Point Death Valley National Park.jpg**

*You photographed this at the perfect time of day to get that early light. That really gives the*

*image depth and relief due to the shadows. If you shoot here at midday, the resulting image appears pretty flat. It's a great exposure. You have good sharpness in the middle portion of the image but the foreground and the background aren't quite as sharp. For landscape shots like this, it's best to shoot from a tripod so you can fine-tune your composition and then shoot at a smaller aperture, resulting in a slower shutter speed. That will give you better sharpness from foreground to background. Another thought... This is one of the most photographed spots within the National Park system. Experiment with your composition and try to shoot something that's different from all the other shots you see. For example, you can use a telephoto lens and isolate smaller portions of the scene to create interesting abstract images with lots of texture and patterns. Telephoto scenics are fun to experiment with.*

**47 - "Cresting" or fasciation abnormal cell growth on Euphorbia.jpg**

*Excellent descriptive title! Very interesting growth pattern. I've seen and photographed this rare pattern on saguaro cactus in AZ. On the saguaro, this growth pattern is referred to as "crystate." Your image and title tell a wonderful nature story and you illustrated it well. It is sharp and perfectly exposed. The composition is very pleasing as well. That nice even lighting eliminates extreme highlights and shadows.*

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**WINNING IMAGES:**

**1st Place: 19 - HERON EATING A SQUIRREL.jpg**

**2nd Place: 45 - White-Lined Spinx Moth (Hyles lineata).jpg**

**3rd Place: 07 - Coyote ( Canis latrans ) In Search Of Her Next Meal.jpg**

**Honorable Mention: 34 - Sandhill Cranes ( Grus canadensis ) At Bosque Del Apache Wildlife Refuge, NM.jpg**

**Honorable Mention: 12 - Five-fingered Maidenhair Fern (Adiantum pedatum).jpg**

**Honorable Mention: 20 - Honey Bee (Apis mellifera) Nectaring on California Poppy (Eschscholtzia californica).jpg**