

## **PTCC-2018 – NATURE 3 - "BACKYARD"**

### **GROUP A**

*51 images from 17 members*

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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.

#### **01 - A bright red cardinal on a fence.jpeg**

*Very sharp photo. Nice composition as well. Good placement of the cardinal in the frame, with more negative space in the direction the bird is facing. I like the way the bird is "framed" by the wood of the fence. I grew up in VA and saw and heard Northern Cardinals every day, so it's always been a favorite of mine!*

#### **02 - A Mother's Love.jpg**

*I really like the lines and shapes created by the positioning of the giraffes in this image. It's a very tender moment that evokes emotion. When you can get the viewer to say, "Ahhh," you've got an effective photo. I find the background to be a little distracting from the interaction of the animals.*

#### **03 - A sea otter in a divers float.jpg**

*Very sharp and well exposed. Sea otters are often very tough to photograph because they're dark and usually positioned against a very bright and glaring ocean. It can be hard to balance the exposure but you did it perfectly here. It's a super cute photo. Good job being prepared to capture it when it happened. Compositionally, I think it might be a more powerful image if there was a little more space in the direction the otter is facing. That might create more a feeling of the otter being lost and adrift in the vastness of the sea.*

#### **04 - Allens Hummingbird (Selasphorus sasin ).jpg**

*Technically excellent image! Incredibly sharp and well exposed. I love the composition as well. It's great that you show the hummingbird feeder but just a little bit of it to provide that info but not have it be a distraction from the main subject.*

#### **05 - Backyard pocket gopher.jpg**

*Excellent photo of a hard-to-photograph subject! Technically spot on with regards to focus and exposure. It's a very engaging photo, as there seems to be a connection with the gopher that's making eye contact with the viewer. The catchlight in the eye really adds personality to it. Your photo is going to make it harder for me to kill them when they're devastating our garden plants!*

**06 - Band-tailed Pigeon (Columba fasciata).jpg**

*OUTSTANDING!!! Perfect in every respect! Unbelievable timing! Any other comments would be superfluous, as the image speaks for itself.*

**07 - Barn Swallow.jpg**

*Nice portrait of the barn swallow. The image is a bit static. Often, if you hang out for a while with a critter, you can get shots that involve some sort of interaction with other critters or their environment. Portrait shots of animals are nice, however, shots with action and/or interaction typically have more impact and story-telling value.*

**08 - Black-tailed deer doe with twin fawns.jpg**

*Cute shot showing family life for the new fawns. The composition has great balance to it, with the doe and the fawn turned opposite directions and the center fawn looking straight ahead. It really does balance the image nicely. Very sharp and well exposed. The only thing I can think of that would add a little more impact to the image would be if they had a catchlight in their eyes. You might be saying, "David, you're an idiot! The light was diffused and not creating a catchlight!" Even from a distance, you can often just use the little pop-up flash on your DSLR and kick a little flash into the exposure. At that distance, it usually isn't enough to impact the overall exposure, however, it reflects off of the eyes and makes a little catchlight! Experiment with it next time and see what happens!*

**09 - Bloomin' Lithops.jpg**

*They are such fascinating plants, especially when they're blooming! I'd like to see more detail. I think a much more powerful and impactful image would be to get in close to one of the plants that's flowering so we can see the detail and interesting morphology. I'd use a macro lens (or a normal 50mm lens with extension tubes) and shoot from a more oblique angle instead of from straight above.*

**10 - Brown-headed Cowbirds.jpg**

*Nice photo of these two males. I think it's great how the brown of the cowbird heads matches the color of the barbed wire. The nice out-of-focus background really makes the birds pop out in the image. The catchlights in the eyes help give the birds personality too. Good balance in the composition and the barbed wire actually creates some nice lines in the composition too.*

**11 - Cannis Seeking Sunlight.jpg**

*Perfect! I love the detail in the wood and the nice diffused light. Ideal placement of the plant in the frame. Great storytelling component to the image: Nature finds a way!*

**12 - Cascade Creek.jpg**

*Very well executed photographically! Wonderful use of a slow shutter speed to get the soft flowing water look (looks like it was probably 1/8 to 1/4 of a second). Good job balancing the exposure so you retain detail on the dark rocks but don't totally burn out the water.*

**13 - Cat (*Felis silvestris catus*) hunts and catches lizard in spawling flower.jpg**

*First, I'll comment on the photo. Then I'll step onto my soapbox for a moment or two. This photo has incredible impact and a phenomenal storytelling component, albeit a sad and alarming story. Your image shows the wildness of our domestic cats. It's technically very sharp and well exposed. Also well composed. It's a very powerful image! Now for my soapbox... Let me preface this by sharing that my wife and I have always had pet cats. They have ALWAYS been strictly indoor cats. I love cats. However, a 2013 study by the Smithsonian and the US Fish and Wildlife Service concluded that outdoor cats, whether pets or feral, kill 2.4 BILLION birds and 12.3 BILLION small mammals in the United States PER YEAR!! That doesn't even include our native reptiles, such as this Western Fence Lizard in the photograph. PLEASE KEEP YOUR CATS INDOORS! I'll step down from my soapbox now.*

**14 - Cat (*Felis silvestris catus*) prepares for lunch with salad.jpg**

*Many of my comments from the prior cat image apply here as well. Powerful image with a great story. I like the cat coming towards the viewer at an angle. It's a bit contrasty, with the cat in the shade and the background pretty bright. It's a little hard to tell from the photo but I believe this cuddly killer has eliminated a native vole from the ecosystem.*

**15 - Columbian Black Tailed Doe (*Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*) Cleaning Her New Born Fawn.jpg**

*Such a sweet image! Another shot that makes the viewer say, "Ahhh!" It evokes such tenderness and caring. Technically excellent! Super sharp! Perfect exposure. Great composition!*

**16 - DAMSELFLIES ON ROPE.jpg**

*Very interesting shot! Nice composition and good exposure. It would be nice if you could have used a smaller aperture to obtain better depth of field in the image so more of the damselflies would be sharp. I know that probably would have been tough if you were in the boat, moving around on the water. You would have needed the fastest shutter speed to at least keep the plane of focus sharp (subsequently using the wider aperture). I just think having more the insects in focus would yield higher impact in the shot.*

**17 - Dark-eyed Junco feeding juvenile.jpg**

*A sharp, well exposed, and well-composed image. The interaction here tells a great story. Now for the clincher... Your image tells a story that I don't even think you knew it tells!! The immature bird in the photo is NOT a young junco! It's an immature Brown-headed Cowbird! Brown-headed Cowbirds are nest parasites and lay their eggs in a host bird's nest. The adult cowbird will even shove the host bird's eggs out of the nest. The baby cowbird usually hatches before the host bird's chicks. It's instinctive for the host bird parent(s) to feed baby birds in it's nest, so it feeds the cowbird, which grows really fast, hogs all the food, and usually shoves the other babies out of the nest to their death.*

*See how much larger the cowbird fledgling is than the adult junco? Notice the cowbird's stout dark legs? Young juncos have little pink legs like the adults. Young juncos don't have wing bars, as this cowbird has. You captured an amazing nature story here! Well done! By the way, Brown-headed Cowbirds ARE a native species.*

**18 - Drifting Jelly Fish.jpg**

*This is a pretty photo of the jellies and the cropped format works well for the composition. The jellies themselves don't appear to be very sharp. It almost looks like you applied a watercolor filter in Photoshop, or something like that. To me, it looks more like a painting than a photo.*

**19 - Elle in the Lavender (Lavandula angustifolia).jpg**

*A perfectly planned puppy portrait! I love that you even put a lavender bandana on her. She appears to be a very well trained and well behaved photo subject! Very sharp and well exposed. Love the catchlights in Elle's eyes. Nice composition, although it is a bit static.*

**20 - Eyed Hawk Moth (Smerinthus ocellata) warms itself on wall.jpg**

*Beautiful moth! I find the composition a little distracting with the angles on the wall. I think it would be less distracting if you made the lines on the wall straight and the moth was at a slight angle. I'd also try using a smaller aperture so you can get more of the moth's wings and body in sharp focus. Looks like you had a pretty narrow plane of focus. Sometimes, if the light isn't sufficient to use a smaller aperture because it would make the shutter speed too slow, you can use a flash to augment the ambient light.*

**21 - Good morning acorn woodpecker.jpg**

*The woodpecker's wonderful expression really draws the viewer into the image. The image is sharp, however, it appears to have been shot at a pretty high ISO and looks like there's a lot of digital noise in the image. The lighting is kind of flat and the colors pretty muted, again probably due to the high ISO. It's often the tradeoff you make to get the faster shutter speeds you need to stop movement in wildlife subjects.*

**22 - Great Blue Heron on Culverts.jpg**

*Nice warm light on the heron, although I think the image is a half stop to a full stop underexposed. It just appears a bit dark to me. It's super sharp. Excellent composition, with the negative space in the direction the heron is facing. Great timing to capture the bill open like that! That really adds interest and drama to the photo.*

**23 - Great Blue Heron.jpg**

*Perfect exposure! Technically excellent! Outstanding composition, with the pose of the heron. The lines of the fence really add to the impact of the photo. Tells a good story of how wild animals adapt to human surroundings.*

**24 - Handheld monarch butterfly.jpeg**

*The poor little Monarch doesn't look like it's doing too well. Looks like it was stunned*

*since its legs are tucked underneath and the antennae are down. The butterfly is very sharp in the photo and well exposed. I think it would be a more compelling composition if you could see the face of the person holding it. For example, if it was a child, have him/her hold the butterfly up higher, with arms outstretched towards you. Shoot with enough depth of field that the butterfly is in focus but the smiling face of the person holding it is out of focus. Especially with a stunned butterfly, I think that would add a bit more interest to the image.*

**25 - Heart of a French Hydrangea - Hydrangea Macrophylla.jpg**

*Beautiful photo! Excellent sharpness and wonderful detail. Makes me want to examine each little blossom. The red petals around the edges of the image frame the main subject nicely. Great exposure too.*

**26 - Himalayan Poppy.jpg**

*Very sharp and well exposed. The out of focus background really makes the subject pop and the repeating colors in the blurred background compliment the subject very well.*

**27 - Honey bees collecting pollen.jpg**

*Good job catching the bee in flight. That really adds interest and action to the image. Nice balance to the composition. The light looks pretty flat and the colors rather muted, perhaps because of a high ISO setting. It's good to know the limitations of your camera. Many new cameras do really well at high ISO, with very little noise in the image and retaining vibrant colors. If you have an older DSLR that doesn't do well at the higher ISOs, it's best to shoot at lower ISOs so the image will have better contrast, color, and less noise. As I mentioned previously, it's a tradeoff because at lower ISOs, you have to shoot at a slower shutter speed and you might not be able to capture the bee in flight. Decisions decisions!*

**28 - Leucadendron Up Close.jpg**

*Wonderful detail, color, and composition. Having the center of the plant offset from the center is perfect. My only suggestion would be to try a diffuser to even out the light a bit. There are a couple contrasty spots in the image that distract the viewer's eye a little. If you hold a diffuser up over the plant, it will even out the light. In addition to the diffuser, you can also hold up a reflector (gold for warmer color, silver for cooler color) to bounce a little light evenly across the subject to make it pop. So, you'll have the diffuser in one hand, the reflector in the other, your camera mounted on a tripod, and you trigger the shutter with your nose or your tongue.*

**29 - Lizard found inside mail box..jpg**

*Outstanding photo! Really good job creating a B&W image out of it. It works perfectly to emphasize the texture of the lizard and the hand. You did a wonderful job managing the contrast for the B&W conversion. I love the detail!*

### **30 - Local Color.jpg**

*Beautiful birds! Interestingly, both birds are the same species, the Gouldian Finch. They're just color variants of the same species. Surprisingly, I think the one on the left is the male, as I recall the males always have a purple chest. As wonderful as the birds themselves are, the photo itself doesn't have a lot of impact. There just isn't much going on, other than the bright colors. The upper part of the bird on the left isn't very sharp. I'm not sure how to suggest anything different, other than just shooting lots more images of them from different angles and perhaps trying some extreme closeups showing the feather detail. Perhaps photographing two of them sitting right next to each other on a branch would add more interest.*

### **31 - Milkyway, Carmel Valley.jpg**

*Stunning photo! Lots of effort goes into shooting excellent night images like this. You need to scout out the location, direction, and select the perfect spot from which to shoot. You need to get set up well ahead of when you're going to shoot, preferably before it gets really dark out. You need to know your equipment well so you can manipulate it in the dark and get all your settings right. And you need to know how to handle the images after shooting, when you get them on your computer. You have obviously mastered all of this!*

### **32 - Northern Mockingbird with Ant.jpg**

*The image is nice and sharp so you can actually see the detail of the ant's antennae. It's well exposed, although it would be nice if there was more light on the side of the Mockingbird. That shaded side, including the eye of the bird just doesn't have a lot of detail on it. I think you'd have a stronger composition if you swung your camera to the right a little so there was less space behind the bird and more space in the direction the bird is facing. Or, perhaps just crop the image a little tighter to emphasize the bird more and have it positioned more towards the left of the frame.*

### **33 - Northern Pacific Rattlesnake (Crotalus oreganus).jpg**

*I think this would have been a much more powerful image if you had gotten a lot closer to the rattlesnake. Don't worry, I'm just kidding! I think it's a great shot of the snake! I think the composition is perfect as it is. I love that you can see the whole snake, including the rattle, the lines of the snake create interest, and there's just enough negative space in front of the snake for it to be well balanced. Wonderful texture in the image!*

### **34 - Painted Desert Duet.jpg**

*This photo just makes me smile! Ravens have such incredible personalities. I've always enjoyed observing them, listening to their amazing vocalizations, and photographing them. They make great ambassadors for places like that. Your photo definitely captures that decisive moment when both their beaks were open (which they do when it's really hot and they pant also). It tells a really good nature story, providing information to the viewer about where it is and what critters are there. I like the nearly monochromatic look to it too.*

### **35 - Poppy flowers in the mist.jpg**

*WOW! Incredible detail! Perfect diffused lighting and great exposure. The dew drops really add interest to the image. The poppy seed heads to the right of the blossom add to the composition, however, the flower encroaching into the frame at the top is a little distracting. Maybe you could change your position a little to eliminate the distracting element. Or you could gently tie the flower at the top out the way while you shoot and then let it go back to where it was when you're done.*

### **36 - Protea.jpg**

*What an amazing flower! You have a great composition, beautiful diffused lighting, perfect exposure, and excellent detail. I'm so intrigued with the plant, I catch myself just staring at every detail of that flower.*

### **37 - Ready to Launch.jpg**

*Compositionally, I think the out of focus leaf in the foreground draws the eye away from the butterfly. Also, it might be a stronger image if there was a bit more space in the direction the butterfly is facing. I like the out of focus background because it really helps isolate the subject and is very pleasing. I love the little curled tongue. That really adds a lot to the shot. It looks like you had the butterfly in focus, although it appears a little soft, as though it was shot a very high ISO. The high ISO can mute the colors a bit too.*

### **38 - Red Panda (Nigalya Poonya) at San Diego Zoo.jpg**

*Very cute and engaging photo, especially since the red panda is heading toward the viewer. Catching it when the tongue is out adds so much to the image. The light and the colors are really flat (perhaps high ISO again) so the image overall lacks punch and vibrancy. The catchlight in the animal's eyes really makes the eyes pop out from the black mask.*

### **39 - Rooster Strut.jpg**

*Beautiful color and detail in this image. The placement of the bird in the frame is good, however, I find the metal chairs behind the fence a distraction. The fence itself isn't distracting. The iridescence on the feather is rather mind boggling.*

### **40 - Sandhill crane, foraging.jpeg**

*This is a very dramatic shot of the Sandhill Crane! Talk about up close and personal! I love the angle from which you shot this, looking up at the crane. That really sets your image apart from all the other crane photos out there. I know for this competition the bucket is an acceptable element in the photo, however, I find it very distracting from the bird itself. Also, I think you went a little too heavy with the sharpening adjustment on your computer. Too much sharpening leads to those light halos around the edges and makes it look a little too contrasty.*

#### **41 - Sharp Shinned Hawk.jpg**

*This is one of the nicest portraits of an adult Sharp-shinned Hawk that I've seen! Everything about it is perfect, including the angle of the bird in the frame, the feathers blowing to the sides, the intense stare, the bright red iris, the detail on those needle-sharp talons, and the diffused background. My only suggestion would be to brighten the image ever so slightly to make it pop just a little more.*

#### **42 - Sharp-shinned Hawk on my backyard feeder pole.jpg**

*Your image is nice and sharp and shows good detail on the feathers. The bird just doesn't connect with the viewer because it's back is towards you. It just isn't as personal as if you got a front view or a side view. The overexposed background is pretty distracting as well. Backlit situations like that are really tough to deal with and sometimes you just have to wait for better conditions or a different position.*

#### **43 - Squirrel gnawing on jaw bone.jpg**

*What an excellent photo! It's technically very sharp and perfectly exposed. What I most like about it is that it tells a very cool nature story! It's one species of rodent gnawing on the bone of another species of rodent. It looks like the bone is probably the lower left mandible of a beaver! Rodents are known for gnawing on bones they find, as well as shed antlers from deer, elk, moose, etc. The rodents get calcium and other mineral they need from the bone. Great composition too!*

#### **44 - Stunned Cooper's Hawk.jpg**

*I'm going to go out on a limb here and say this is an immature Sharp-shinned Hawk. Sharpies usually have that "surprised" look on their face, whereas Cooper's Hawks have a more severe and fierce look to them, with a more prominent brow ridge over the eye. Cooper's Hawks also tend to have longer necks than the short little neck on this bird. The legs and talons on this bird look a little too gracile for a Cooper's. It's tough to tell for sure with out seeing the end of the tail (rounded for Cooper's and square or notched for Sharp-shinned). Anyway, the shot itself is great! Nice diffused light, very sharp, and well exposed. Good composition. I love the expression!*

#### **45 - Syrphid Fly (Allograpta obliqua).jpg**

*Phenomenal image! I can't find a single thing that's not perfect! It's as tack sharp as can be. The blur of the wings creates a dynamic feel to the image. Just enough of the flower is showing to anchor the image and provide information to the viewer. There's a perfect amount of negative space in front of the fly. Great use of flash to stop action, create the dramatic dark background, and provide enough light to use a small aperture for maximum sharpness!*

#### **46 - Violet Green Swallow(Tachycineta thalassina).jpg**

*Great interaction and behavior shown in your photo! The composition is very good and it's really sharp as well. The image looks pretty noisy though, probably from a high ISO when shooting.*

**47 - Watchful Mother Takes Her Fawns on a Tour of the Neighborhood.jpg**

*Your photo is a good example of wild animals adapting to living around humans. It's a cute shot, however, you don't get to see enough of any of the deer. The image doesn't create that personal connection with the subject that draws the viewer in. You captured a fun moment to have had them in your yard but it just isn't a very compelling image.*

**48 - Western Bluebird Feeding.jpg**

*This nicely captures the intensity of the blue on these birds! It's almost electric the way it glows. Very sharp image. The composition is a little too tight right behind the bluebird. Just a little more space would create a more comfortable feel to the composition. It looks like you used a flash to kick a little more light onto the bird. That works well here. I would lighten the image just a little to make it pop a little more. Seems just a tad dark.*

**49 - Wisteria Fence.jpg**

*Impeccably sharp and well exposed! I love the composition as well. The combination of the buds and the open blossoms is beautiful. The contrast with the wood on the fence is perfect. I can practically smell the wisteria by looking at the image!*

**50 - Yin and Yang.jpg**

*Adorable photo and perfect title! Very creative! Great sharpness and exposure. The reddish orange elements along the right edge are a little distracting.*

**51 - ZOO TIGER.jpg**

*Excellent sharpness, exposure and composition! Being able to see those massive teeth really draws the viewer into the image.*

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**WINNING IMAGES:**

**1st Place:**

06 - Band-tailed Pigeon (Columba fasciata).jpg

*This truly says, "Backyard Nature!"*

**2nd Place:**

29 - Lizard found inside mail box..jpg

*Creative and technically superb!!*

**3rd Place:**

13 - Cat (Felis silvestris catus) hunts and catches lizard in sprawling flower.jpg

*The powerful message and story contained in this image can't be ignored!*

**Honorable Mention:**

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