



01-Aphid infestation.jpg

Frank Penner

Interesting subject and good exposure. Consider getting in closer in order to really bring out the story being told here as currently the aphids get lost among the rest of the details in the image.

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02-Australian Kangaroo and Joey.jpg

Chyrl Light

Such a cute subject. Good exposure and sharpness of the subject. However, the whole image seems to have a very blue color cast and compositionally it is rather static due to the animal being centered in the image and the lack of eye contact. Would have loved to see that joey's face a bit more and I think a lower perspective would have given us that along with more eye contact from the mother too.

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03-California Poppies (Escholzia Californica).jpg

Andrea Madsen

Wonderful image of poppies. I really love the low perspective and the solid exposure. The crop seems a bit tight and there is some noise in the background that can be seen in the flowers directly above the main subject bloom. But a very strong image!



04-Coast Live Oak Hide and Seek.jpg

Elke Ikeda

I can see what you were going for here and commend you on that vision. But I think there is just too much of the foreground foliage that is out of focus that it becomes distracting rather than supporting of the idea. I could see this working better if you were to crop off the right half and the little dark piece in the lower left corner. Good exposure and tones throughout the image and I really like the weaving trunks as you captured them.



05-Curious Western Gull (*Larus occidentalis*).jpg

Jared Ikeda

Good timing on this shot. I like the story here, but I think the focus was missed slightly where the camera focused was just behind the seagull's head on the rocks as that is the sharpest detail. The eye is still acceptably sharp and does have that lovely catchlight that lends life to the image. Some of the highlights are overexposed with no feather detail and I would have liked to see this from a different perspective than from above.

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06-Egret at Elkhorn Slough.jpg

Nicole Asselborn

Good pose of the bird with its foot raised. Technically, I think the focus hit the wave swell beyond the bird as that is sharp and the bird is a bit soft. White birds against dark backgrounds can be tricky to expose for and, if the camera is metering for the entire scene, it will overexpose the highlights and I think that is what happened here as we are missing detail in the back of the bird. Using single point metering can help with this as then you expose for your subject only. There is also some odd magenta and blue showing in the bird's shaded areas which could be chromatic aberrations or maybe color noise. The composition could be stronger if you were able to get on eye level with your subject, but I think you did a good job at having it more to the right third and giving it room to the left to move into.

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07-Foraging Ground Squirrels in Yosemite Valley.jpg

Rick Thau

The subject squirrel's eye is in focus and there is an eye level perspective which are both great. But there are issues here with highlights being overexposed which really detracts from the image and the subject.

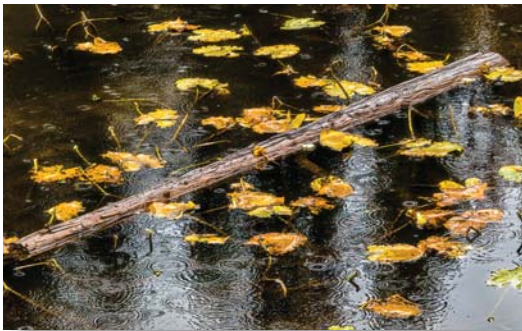
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08-Gathering pollen.jpg

Nicole Asselborn

Nice macro! The detail here is great where the wasp is sharp as are the grains of pollen inside the flower. However, the image is really dark. If the exposure was increased a bit and shadows brought up so the viewer could really appreciate those details it would make this image stronger. I think cropping the lower right corner out would also help as the light on the blossom back there draws the eyes since it is the same color as the pollen.



09 - Gentle Rain at Isa Lake, Yellowstone NP.jpg

Rick Verbanec

Very good intimate landscape and attention to Nature's details. I like the texture the rain created, and I think without it this scene would have felt much flatter so great job there. What brought this down out of the 5* category for me is that while the log is there, its not the main subject to me (the patterns of the lily pads, rain and shadows) and it has the tendency to lead the viewer directly through the image and out the other side before they can enjoy all the details.



10 - Gray Whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*).jpg

Carol Fuessenich

So I like the way the photographer captured the water pouring off the whale tail, but there are a lot of technical issues with this image. The big two are that this looks like an extreme crop so while the tail looks in focus it is not sharp. The second is that the image has very odd purple color across the whole image. This may be due to the quality of the crop or some other technical issue with the exposure.

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11-Half Dome Early Winter.jpg

Chyrl Light

Nice capture of Half Dome. I like the changing seasons captured here with both snow and fall foliage. However, this seems very static. This may benefit from a tighter crop to accentuate Half Dome. Overall, a good image but lacking a dynamic story that gets a viewer to stop and want more.



12-Hoary bat (*L. cinereus*) asleep in a cypress tree, Pt Lobos.jpg

Frank Penner

I think this is a good example of when it can sometimes just be better observing the subject rather than trying to capture the moment in an image. Considering this is a bat, I'm sure this was a very dark area that it would take high end equipment to handle the high ISO that would be needed to capture this image correctly and ethically, as you don't really want to use flash on nocturnal animals. But unfortunately, as presented, without the title, I would not know what I am looking at beyond blurry pine tree with something on it.

no stars



13-Inferno Cone, Craters of the Moon Natl Mon & Presrv.jpg

Rick Verbanec

Very engaging image and I like the choice of monochrome. Really allows the textures to come out rather than have the viewer distracted by color. For me the sky is just too crunchy though and has a lot of overexposed highlights especially in the upper right. Still a very strong image. Well done!



14-Joshua Tree (*Yucca brevifolia*) spikes and buds.jpg

Shelley Nemeth

You are brave to get this close to cholla cactus (Joshua trees do not have spines like this and they flower with soft petal flowers rather than fleshy fruit buds). And I appreciate the effort to capture all these details. However, this image has some distortion going on throughout it where some areas are sharp and others not as much. I am also not sure what the main subject or story is here. Where are you wanting the viewer to look and what do you want them to take away from the image?

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15-Northern Little Yellow-eared Bat hanging by a spider thread.jpg

Kent Van Vuren

Well exposed and sharp due to the use of light in an otherwise dark environment. Good story but due to the eyes of the bat being so close to the bottom edge I feel the focus is on the wing which doesn't connect as much as it would if we had either eye contact with the bat or the spider who's web the bat is stuck in. It does make me want to know more like, did the bat get free? From a composition standpoint I feel like I want more room for the bat to move into or a very minimalist image of the wingtip with thread wrapped around it. Really interesting sighting!

16-Sea nettles off of Wharf #2, Monterey, (Not an aquaium shot).jpg

Kent Van Vuren

I absolutely love this! Such a great eye and well captured. I appreciate you making note that these were wild and not captive. There are lots of things to like about this unique image from the layers of pattern to the contrasting colors. You were able to retain sharpness in the ones closest to the surface, not an easy thing to do. The ripples of the water highlighted in similar pattern and direction as most of the jellies just adds to the composition. If I were to change anything about this image, I would try to bring just a bit more contrast to the image as right now it does read a little washed out. There is also just a bit of grain to that should be taken care of before printing. Because this certainly should be printed!



17-Shasta Lake Caverns.JPG

Duane Peterson

This is a good capture of a unique geological cave formation. The overall exposure is good with just a few reflected highlights showing as overexposed. For me the biggest miss on this is composition. The main subject is put in the middle of the frame and while there are all these lines running vertically the image was taken horizontally with the sides not really adding anything to the story. I would have photographed this vertically, taking advantage of those leading lines and then the subject wouldn't feel cramped and cut off at the top and bottom.

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18-Spanish Moss Curtain Call.jpg

Elke Ikeda

Another image where I like the choice of monochrome treatment. But I'm missing a focal point. The moss is nicely exposed and I like the backlighting but what story is being told and where/how is the viewer suppose to look or move through the image? Maybe if the big clump on the left wasn't there and it was all one layer of moss like it is to the right it would have worked better. I like the subject and can see what you were trying to accomplish.

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19-Sunset Point Pinos.jpg

Duane Peterson

Beautiful sunset but this image could have been stronger with a better composition. Pretty much everything is going on in the bottom half of the image. The birds in flight are centered with a cloud band directly behind them that acts as a visual horizon even though the real one is lower in the frame. The bottom third is very under exposed. I would have liked to see this sunset and birds utilized to support a great foreground. By shifting the composition down with a big foreground, you still can tell the story of the sunset but you give that sunset a place rather than just as something colorful that happened.

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20-Tent Caterpillars (Malacosoma americanum nesting on Joshua Tree.jpg

Shelley Nemeth

Interesting subject that many would just walk by. I like the perspective of getting on their level. But the image is suffering in that, while in focus, the sharpness is missed. The exposure is mostly on point but there are a few blown highlights and the caterpillars are really dark. Lastly, if you are going to title an image in a nature competition be sure to label subjects correctly. Yes, these are tent caterpillars, but they are the Western tent caterpillar with the scientific name of Malacosoma Californicum and they are pictured here on a desert almond rather than a Joshua tree. Again, most people would not have even bothered with this image so kudos for slowing down and noticing the small things!

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

Carol Fuessenich

A good image of the geological layers found in the hot pools of Yellowstone. There is good detail throughout the image, but I feel that it is lacking that oomph that takes it from static to dynamic. That could come from a change in perspective, maybe an increase in contrast or maybe even going to a monochrome treatment. There is also a bright spot by the rock to the top that is distracting. Again, I like the subject you picked up on and the details you were able to capture.



22-Western Gull (Larus occidentalis) in flight.jpg

Jared Ikeda

Nice pose caught along with the catchlight in its eye. However, the image is not sharp. Maybe over cropping? It is also a bit under exposed. Had the technical been correct, I really like the background the gull is against, it's not just flat sky, and that you caught it heading into a sunset.

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23-Yosemite Valley and Half Dome June 2021.jpg

Rick Thau

Wonderful capture of Half Dome. I like the composition with the tree balancing Half Dome and almost mirroring the shape of Half Dome's shadow. The valley acts as a leading line into the image from the tree past half dome. Obviously, this was taken midday when there was little cloud cover and I think you captured the scene under those conditions very well. One thing to consider is maybe toning down the blue, especially in the shadows along the valley. Adding just a hint of warmth to this scene would just make it that much better. Great job!



24-Liquid Silver.jpg

Janet Azevedo

Another great nature abstract. I really like what you captured here. The lines and light move my eye up and down the image. The texture and sharpness you created through the scene is excellent. I just think that there needs to be a wider variance of contrast here and that the darkest area on the left is carrying a heavier weight than the lighter parts of the image. Maybe consider a square crop focused on that beautiful light path in the sand?



25-Solitude.jpg

Janet Azevedo

This is just a wonderful image of minimalist beauty. Great depth of field, great composition, love the subdued tones with the patterns on the water. Just really well done. The only reason I could not give this a 5* rating is because there is some sort of vertical line artifacting going on across much of the image. Its odd and I can't tell what could be causing it but unfortunately it does detract from the overall beauty of this image.

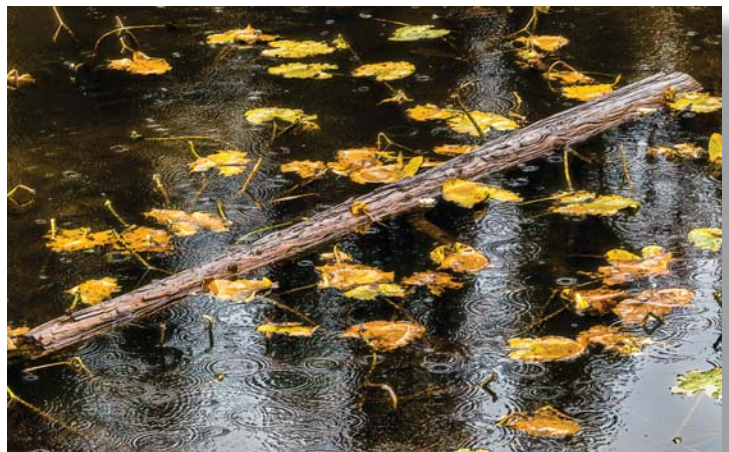
Winning Images:

Honorable Mentions:

**California Poppies (Escholzia
Californica)**
Andrea Madsen



**Gentle Rain at Isa Lake,
Yellowstone NP**
Rick Verbanec



**Inferno Cone, Craters of the
Moon Natl Mon & Preserve**
Rick Verbanec



Third Place:

Solitude
Janet Azevedo



2nd Place:

**Yosemite Valley and Half
Dome June 2021**
Rick Thau



First Place:

**Sea nettles off of Wharf #2,
Monterey,**
(Not an aquarium shot)
Kent Van Vuren

