



01 - Colorado River.jpg

David Eisen

At first look, I really enjoy this image and the story of the river that it brings. The layers built with the addition of the foreground ocotillo and the leading line of the riverbank and the tones in the cliffs are excellent. I know this can be a tricky scene to capture but where this image falls down a bit for me is the overexposed sky, haloing around some of the cliffs, and a general lack of sharpness. That all being said, I still like the image a lot, but those technical flaws hindered the rating.



02 - Great Horned Owllet Being Mobbed By A Crow.jpg

Jeff Hobbs

What a unique encounter with a great horned owl fledgling! Good sharpness on the eyes, but the whole image seems under exposed. I'm sure that this was either near dusk or dawn so there was little light to play with, and this is where increasing the ISO and/or adjusting exposure in post can be helpful. Due to this underexposure, we lose a lot of detail in the crow, especially the eye. I also would have liked to have a bit more eye contact with the owl which could have been achieved by getting lower. This would have made for a stronger image and made the crow more threatening where the title would have made more sense for this image. But again, what an opportunity to even spend time with such a young raptor. Not something we all get to do!



03 - Great-tailed Grackle (Quiscalus mexicanus) with frog.jpg

Chris Johnson

Great capture! I like the way you handled the bright light; there is still detail in those feathers. This image tells a story before I even look at the title. Great choice on shutter speed as the action is frozen and the depth of field is spot on with each finger of the frog's sharp as well as the eye. We see a bit of sharpness taper off towards the tail and the back is blurred nicely to not detract from the action. There is even catch lights in both the bird and frog's eyes. If there was one thing to make this image better, it would be if the bird was pointing towards us rather than away. But again, that can be very difficult as that is reliant upon the wild subject. So awesome job!

Side note: funny title suggestion "And dip..."



04 - Lazuli Bunting.jpg

Jeff Hobbs

Beautiful bird! I really like that you captured it singing, beak open, so the viewer can imagine in their head what sound the bird must be producing. Where this image loses me is that the image seems underexposed. I wish some of the shadow/darkness had been lifted, especially from the eye or if there had been a catchlight in the eye, that would have helped as well. The other part that detracted from this image was the crop. It showed up to me as a square and I feel that I would have liked a tiny more space below the tail and/or some of the negative space removed from the right side. Overall a good image though.



05 - Long-eared Owl (Asio otus).jpg

Bill Shewchuk

This image suffers from some several technical issues that seem to stem from either severe crop or improper resizing? There is a lot of grain to the image making it so that none of it is sharp. Also, there is superimposed text (watermark) in the bottom left corner. Had this image been sharp, it would have been great as the owl's expression tells a great story. Was this wild or in a controlled environment such as a zoo or raptor rehab center? If in a controlled environment consider including "captive" in the title as many contests do require that distinction to be made. For further information on this check out the North American Nature Photography Association's position on Truth in Captioning.

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06 - Luna Moth (Actias luna).jpg

Bill Shewchuk

Interesting subject and something I am sure many of us would like to come across while out on the trail or in our backyards. However, the thorax of the moth has been overexposed and we have lost some of the great silky detail of the hairs there. Additionally, as that is the brightest part of the image it is also where the viewer's eye goes first and can give the lingering effect that the moth has issues with sharpness. Yet, if I take the time to look past that the antennae are sharp, and I can see the details there. I also see all the details of the ground making the background a bit distracting too as the eye moves from the bright spot without detail to the grasses that are sharp. To improve this as well as the story telling aspect of the photo, I would try approaching the subject from a different perspective. This would be most easily accomplished by waiting until the moth flutters to a higher position.

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07 - Northern Harrier (Circus cyaneus) with Coot meal.jpg

Chris Johnson

Excellent capture and treatment of what can be an unsettling subject for viewers. Great light and detail in the bird while the use of a shallower depth of field allowed the grasses in front and behind to blur nicely so it would not become too busy of a scene. One thing to consider if this is not full frame is going with a slightly looser crop and giving the bird and action a bit more breathing room. I feel the image is just slightly cramped. But overall, very nice job!



08 - Pygmy Nuthatch - Weightless.jpg

Bill Brown

Beautiful capture! Classic nuthatch pose with wonderful catchlight in an eye that is sharp. The shallow depth of field works with this as the simple green background works to show off what is usually thought of as a rather drab bird. Excellent detail and image!



09 - Siren Street Secret.jpg

Bill Brown

Wonderful long exposure with great sharpness where things should be sharp and movement where things are moving. Good moody atmosphere to boot. The one element that draws my eye is the vegetation in the lower right corner. It is out of focus and out of place in the scene and I really wish it weren't there as that would have just pushed this image over the top. Personally, I would try to revisit this spot under similar conditions to what you had on the day you shot this and see if you cannot get another very similar image, minus the vegetation. If, due to safety and geography you are unable to clear that corner, consider recomposing in such a way that the vegetation is included meaningfully and add it to the story.



10 - Snack Time!.jpg

Lillie Grossman

Great action shot! It takes some skills to capture herons and egrets eating small meals like this. While the story here is well told, the image has some technical issues. There is a general lack of sharpness, we lose a bit of detail in the highlighted areas along the bird's neck and back, and the white balance is off giving the bird a distinctive bluish-green look. Again, the timing and story could not have been better, but the technical needs a bit of work.



11 - American bullfrog (Lithobates catesbeianus).jpg

John Avera

Such great detail! From a technical standpoint this ticks pretty much all the boxes, however for me, the part that is lacking is the story or a fresh perspective on a frog sitting in a pond. The image reads as rather static. That being said I really do enjoy the image, especially the reflection of the eye.



12 - California Poppy (Eschscholzia californica) shedding calyx.jpg

Mary Ann Avera

Beautiful capture of such a small detail in nature. Kind of reminds me of a gnome with a hat. The background with hints of color but being so creamy is just downright dreamy. Yet, I think there was just too shallow of a depth of field used and the very front of the flower, the petal line facing us and the bottom edge of the "cap", are not sharp. I also think for such a bright subject, it may be half a stop underexposed or there has been just a shade too much of a vignette added. But again, overall a wonderful image of a California nature icon.



13 - California slender salamander (Batrachoseps attenuatus).jpg

John Avera

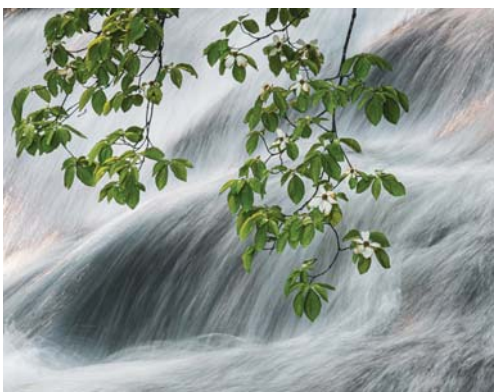
Wow! How cool to capture these three salamanders all in one image. I like the choice of depth of field so that all three have sharp heads, but the background softens, helping lessen the busyness of their environment. However, the composition with them all in the middle and pointing down makes me wish they had more space at the bottom of the frame to be crawling into. The top half of the frame isn't really adding to the story so it could have been cut had there been more environment in the lower section. If this is cropped and there is more space that way, I would consider recomposing the crop. Otherwise though, this is an excellent image! Side note: Was this a captive situation or in the wild like near a vernal pool? Would love to know just for knowledge's sake.



14 - Matilija Poppy (Romneya coulteri).jpg

Mary Ann Avera

Nice image of a poppy. Good detail in the center without blowing out highlights and losing detail in the petals. But I think in trying to keep those highlights from being over exposed, you under exposed the image. It is also lacking in story to me. Maybe consider getting in really close next time to capture the center detail and the petals but without the distracting elements of the attached bloom/seed pods. Love the detail in the flower itself!



15 - Mountain Dogwood (Cornus nuttallii) over the Merced River.jpg

Patricia McKean

Well done and well found! Such a classic spring image of dogwoods over a flowing river and yet those scenes are surprisingly hard to find so kudos there. There is a lot to like about this image from the use of the long exposure to capture the water movement and yet being able to keep sharpness in the leaves. What brought this down for me was that while the dogwood is obviously the subject my eye is drawn to the highlights in the river on the upper right and lower left. I would see if you can increase the exposure slightly and then bring down the highlights in those select areas with a simple burn technique. Also, super important especially when working with long exposures, need to clean up the dust spots in the lower left corner. Overall great image that has beautiful painter like qualities.



16 - Stratus Clouds envelop Douglas Fir (Pseudotsuga menziesii) during Sunset on Bolinas Ridge, July 2017.jpg

Patricia McKean

Another great capture. Love the atmosphere with the rays and the low-level clouds, however, I feel that the color saturation/tone has been pushed just a bit far. There is a spot on the tree to the far left that looks like maybe there was a dust spot removed or something. Maybe its just the way the fog was but it stands out since there is more contrast/sharpness to that one spot then everything around it. Also try and pare down your title. Let the image tell the story while the title hints at it. It is a really wonderful image overall and with just those few tweaks would be top notch.



17 - Hungry Anemone.jpg

Jerry Loomis

Shooting through glass or water can be difficult for a multitude of reasons. In this image the water hindered the image from being sharp. There are also two distracting dark spots right in the middle of the image. Most likely these were something on the glass or in the water, but, none the less they take away from the image. I will say that the white balance is great in the image and that is often hard to do when working with underwater subjects so good job there.

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18 - Mom Likes me Best.JPG

Jerry Loomis

Again, another great action shot, this time the interaction between two fledglings. But the image needs some work on the technical side. It is underexposed and the whole scene seems overly warm in temperature. There is some issue with the softness throughout the image. Once more, I'm not sure if that is from a heavy crop or some other process, but it is an issue. I would have also liked to see a bit more space given to the subjects as far as the composition goes, especially where the toes have been cut off.

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Winning Images:

Honorable Mentions:

Siren Street Secret
Bill Brown



Mountain Dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*) over the Merced River
Patricia McKean



California slender salamander (*Batrachoseps attenuatus*)
John Avera



Third Place:

Great-tailed Grackle
(*Quiscalus mexicanus*) with
frog.jpg
Chris Johnson



2nd Place:

Northern Harrier (*Circus*
cyaneus) with Coot meal
Chris Johnson



First Place:

Pygmy Nuthatch - Weightless
Bill Brown

