



The Newsletter of E.J. Peiker - Nature and Travel Photography

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Welcome to the 22nd year of the photography newsletter from E.J. Peiker, Nature & Travel Photography and www.EJPhoto.com. In this publication, I share with fellow photographers my photographic experiences, photo equipment reviews, photography tips, processing tips, and industry news. All content is copyrighted by E.J. Peiker and may not be reproduced but it is permitted to forward this newsletter in its entirety only. If you would like to be added to the mailing list, unsubscribe, or access back issues, please visit: <http://www.ejphoto.com/newsletter.htm>



Theodore Roosevelt National Park – North Dakota (a7r2, 50mm)

In the Field

This has been the hottest summer on record in my home state of Arizona, not just by a little bit but by almost unimaginable amounts. For example, the month of July AVERAGED 3.6 DEGREES (F) HIGHER than any month in the history of weather records for the state. That is so far beyond normal and even way higher than even the most extreme natural deviation would predict that it has scientist truly scratching their heads. This made it difficult to do a whole lot of photography. When you wake up at 3:30AM for a potential photo shoot and it is already 95 degrees and the temperature will reach 110 by 9:00AM, it's almost not safe. Not to mention, temperatures like this are generally accompanied with severe clear conditions which aren't conducive to photography either. I did manage to do a bit of photography on a vacation trip to the southernmost tip of Mexico's Baja Peninsula where I went on a couple of boat trips but again it was very hot and severe clear much of the time. I also got a great photo hike in along central Arizona's Mogollon Rim where I did some forest and forest stream photography on a rare overcast day. Overcast skies is key for successful photographs in a wooded environment with running water.



Neptune's Finger - Baja Sur, Mexico



Mogollon Rim, Arizona

As promised in the Summer Newsletter, here are my favorite photographs from the second half of my 22 year professional photo career. If you missed the first 11 years, you can find them in the last newsletter linked here: <https://www.ejphoto.com/Quack%20PDF/Quack%20Summer%202023.pdf>



2012 – While it was still possible to lead photo workshops/tours into the Antelope Canyon complex in northeastern Arizona, I led annual workshops on the Navajo Nation. I had to become fully accredited by the Navajo Nation to do this and in the more sensitive areas still was required to have a Navajo guide accompany the group. In order to do this I did a lot of scouting and on one such scouting trip my Navajo guide pointed out a formation that can only be seen when looking straight up out of the canyon in a very specific spot. Ironically, they call this formation “Monument Valley” even though it is located about 80 miles west of the actual Monument Valley. It has long been one of my favorite photographs in Arizona’s slot canyons

2013 – 2013 marked my long awaited return to the northwestern cliffs of Iceland for cliff-nesting seabird photography. In June, several species including Atlantic Puffin, Razorbill, Common Murre, Thick-billed Murre, Black-legged Kittiwake, and Northern Fulmar fill up nearly every nook and cranny of the 700 foot high cliffs. I spotted two puffins sleeping along a beautiful vegetated Cliffside with flowers. They were both sleeping. I was laying on the ground at the edge of the cliff with my 80-400mm lens and had them both framed but it was going to be impossible to



get them both in focus simultaneously so I knew I was going to need two exposures very close together timewise, one focused on the first bird and another on the second. Also, I needed them both to be awake at the same time with a good head angle. I decided to tackle the focus dilemma by selecting f/11 and then focusing on the closer bird and then moving my AF point to the farther bird so that I could take a photo of the first bird at the preset focus, hit the back focus button and fire off another shot. I practiced this on the sleeping birds and was able to accomplish this three step procedure in well under a second. Then I waited, and waited, and waited and finally after nearly two hours I got this final photograph of these two Atlantic Puffins.

2014 – This was a very prolific year with a number of big trips all over the globe but I think my favorite

photograph was one I took during fall colors in Arizona's high country. I was in the process of writing an article on the use of fisheye lenses in nature photography during a great year for Aspens in northern Arizona's Coconino National Forest. I went up, as I do most years, to get some nice shots of these beautiful trees in their full golden colors when I noticed the sun peeking through the tree trunks just after sunrise. In order to get the trees all the way to the top and capture the sun, the fisheye I happened to have with me due to this article that I was working on, became an option. By stopping down I was able to generate the starburst effect and carefully positioning the camera to allow the "hole" between the trees to diagonally reflect the sunrise in the upper portion of the photo. (link to the article here:

<https://www.ejphoto.com/Quack%20PDF/Fisheyes%20In%20Landscapes.pdf>)

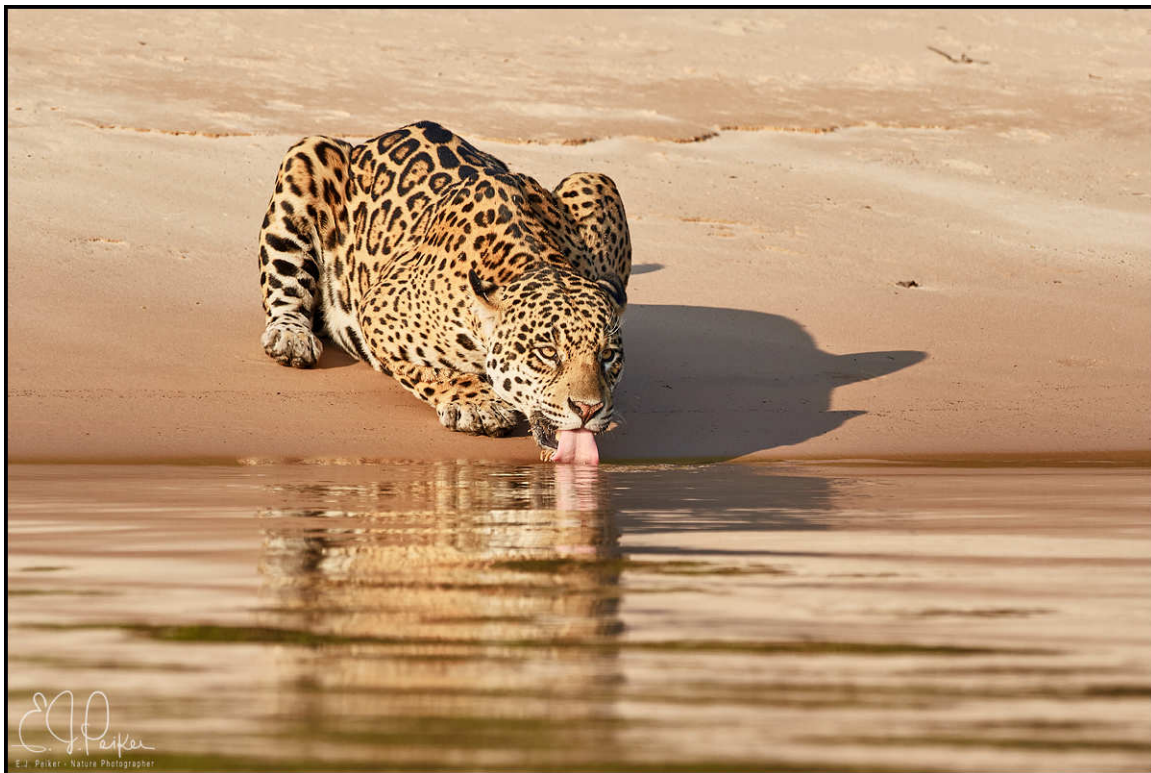




2015 – This was also a globe trotting year with visits to 5 continents. My favorite photo is one that I have featured before in my “Story Behind the Photo” segment. The photo above is from the Scottish highlands. Read about it here: <https://www.ejphoto.com/Quack%20PDF/Quack%20Spring%202023.pdf>



2016 – Looking back now, I produced more top selling and award winning photos in 2016 than any other year – judging from the images I had to select from, this was my most prolific and best year. In May 2016 I joined a group of 4 photographers led by one of my favorite photographers, Alistair Ben, for a week of shooting along northern Spain’s absolutely spectacular Asturias and Cantabria coasts along the Bay of Biscay (above). I got my favorite photo of the trip and of the year on a grey and very dreary evening. What intrigued me so much about this scene is that the small waterfall on the right side of the frame is actually caused by waves crashing into the rocks and then it falls back down in this small cascade.



2017 – One of the major highlights of 2017 was my first visit to Brazil, specifically the Pantanal region. This photo is from my very first encounter with Jaguars in the wild. We photographed this big cat and its mate all afternoon coming back to them over and over. It was such a huge experience searching for, watching and photographing these incredible animals in the wild for a week.

2018 – By 2018, at age 57 I had visited every Western European country except one – Portugal. Years prior I had established an online friendship with Portuguese photographer Alexandre Vaz so as I was planning completing my Western European tour, I contacted him and he did a phenomenal job in helping me plan out an itinerary that included the best of the southern half of Portugal’s coastal areas. I finally visited this beautiful country in September 2018. One morning I was exploring the cliffs along the south-central coast, I noticed a rope that you could lower yourself down from the cliff to the rocky seashore below. At first I was hesitant but then I saw a fisherman doing it with all of his gear so I did the same with my photo gear. One of the photos that early morning is the one below. Interestingly by the time I climbed back up with help from the same rope, this scene had disappeared as the tide swept over the foreground rocks.



2019 – The year before the world shut down was another prolific one for me with major trips to Greenland, Iceland, Scotland, England, and also several USA trips. Many memorable images were taken this year but the one that stands out most is the one I call “Deep Inside Bruarfoss” from Iceland. I featured this photo in a “Story Behind the Photograph” segment a while back: <https://www.ejphoto.com/Quack%20PDF/Quack%20Summer%202021.pdf>



2020 – As the world was starting to shut-down for the COVID-19 pandemic, I found myself in Northern India’s Himalaya Mountains, far away from any news, TV, radio or any outside communication. I just made it back home two days before all international flights were cancelled. While there, photographing the highest mountain range in the world and its wildlife, we visited a Monastery. I poked my head into a room where a monk was preparing lunch and took the photo above with his permission. While I have many beautiful shots of the mountains from this trip, this image is the one that stands out in my mind. It is also by far my most successful “people” picture I have taken.



2021 – In late 2021 I visited southern Arizona’s Catalina State Park for the first time. I got out early one morning and found a ridge with some healthy saguaros framing the Santa Catalina Mountains just before sunrise. This photo has sold well including a very large mural as well as the cover of a calendar.

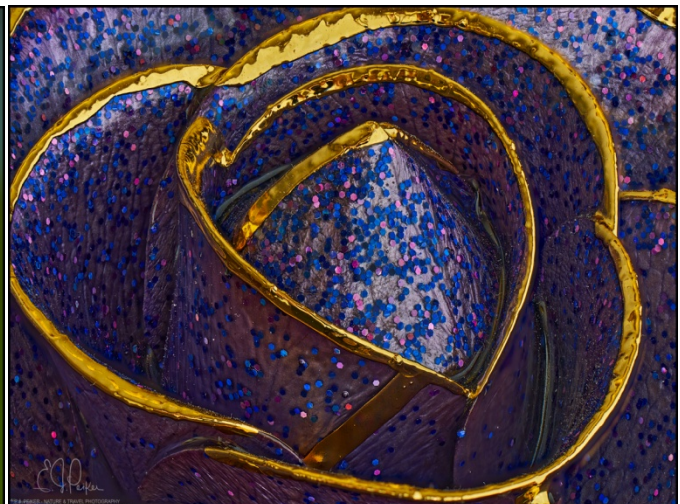
There you have it, favorites from 22 years as a professional Nature and Travel Photographer. This was extremely difficult to do as there were many photographs that I like almost equally and in some years like 2016 and 2018 I had several shots in my top 10 of all time but I had to pick just one. I’ll feature another that should be here in this quarter’s “Story Behind the Photo:.”

Gear Talk

It is really hard to get excited about a 70-200mm f/4 Macro G lens. It isn't particularly fast; it's a run-of-the-mill focal length range, and for most photographers, they already own one or more lenses that cover these focal lengths. With that in mind it's going to sound like I am insane when I say, the new Sony 70-200 f/4 OSS G II lens is one of the most exciting releases for the nature photographer in some time. Here's what makes it special – it is way sharper than the lens it replaces, it is lighter and more compact, it has a state of the art dual linear motor AF system that is extremely fast, has the latest and greatest 7 stop optical image stabilization built in, and... wait for it... it is the only 200mm "macro" lens on the market for mirrorless or any system at this point. While it's reproduction ratio is only 1:2 meaning it renders a subject half of its actual size on the sensor plane, it accepts both Sony's 1.4x and 2x teleconverters with little to no visible image degradation and maintains exceptional AF performance. This results in a 1:1.4 and 1:1 reproduction ratio. Not only does this lens replace a 70-200 f/2.8 which is large and heavy and arguably completely unnecessary for nature photographers or a 70-200 f/4 which are often somewhat compromised in optical and AF performance, it also replaces the need for carrying a separate macro lens. What's not to love? Well maybe the \$1700 price but it basically two expensive lenses in one.



When Sony announced the 70-200 f/4 II, it was the first time I have been truly excited about a new lens in some time and I immediately pre-ordered it. I received it the day after it was released and am thrilled with the lens. It replaces my Tamron 70-180 f/2.8 which was an outstanding lens but this lens is 20mm longer on the long end, has the macro capabilities, and is stabilized in a lens weighting exactly what the Tamron weighs but actually packs smaller. It basically leaves no stone unturned with regard to features. I have found it a pleasure to use and it has made dabbling in macro fun again given the longer working range that a 200mm macro gives you compared to the more common macro lenses in the 100mm range. It is a pleasure to use when coupled with the Sony a7R5 camera which has focus stacking (bracketing) for the first time in a Sony camera. Two macro examples are shown below – the first, a real flower at 1.7:1 and the second, a gold dipped rose at 1:1. For you Sony shooters, unless you absolutely need f/2.8, consider selling whatever lens you have in this category and get this lens. You won't be disappointed.



There are other exciting new products that were just hitting the market as I prepared to send out this newsletter including the new Fujifilm GF-X 100 II, tilt/shift lenses for the Fuji GFX, a couple of new Tamron lenses for Sony and Nikon and more. I may (or may not) have more to say about these in the next newsletter once there is some independent testing and/or I get to try them.



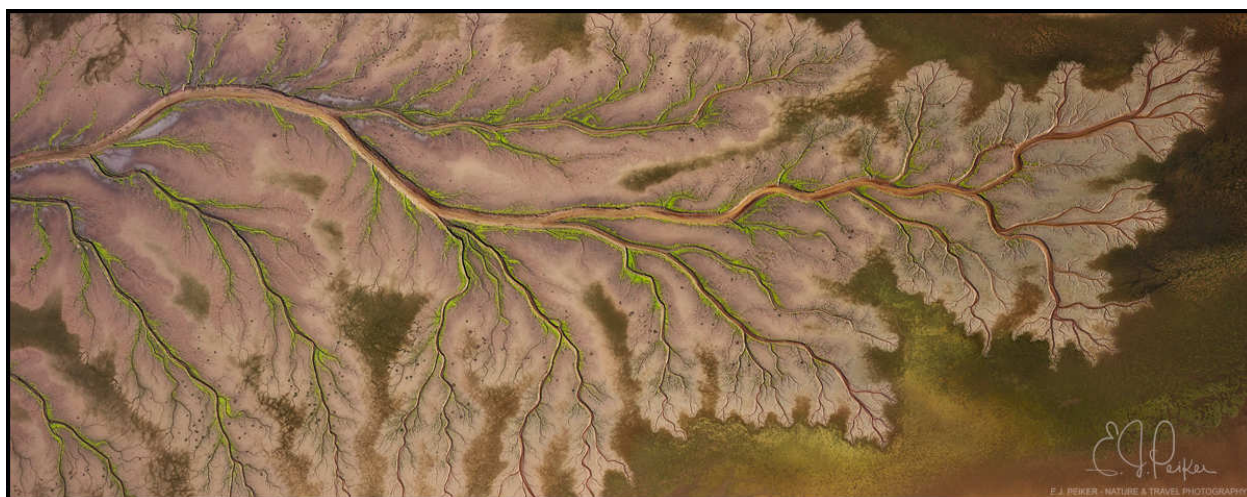
The Story Behind the Photo

In 2016 I went on a Phase One Sponsored guided trip to the Kimberley Region of Western Australia. This is a truly spectacular part of the globe and one could spend months there exploring it photographically. One of our guides was a well known photographer named Tony Hewitt. I was not familiar with his work prior to this trip and was much more familiar with the other leaders, Peter Eastway and Christian Fletcher – all three at the very top of Australian landscape photography. Surprisingly, the imagery of Tony Hewitt blew me away the most once meeting them and getting a more in depth look into their portfolios. One of the genres of photography Tony specializes in is straight down (or nearly so) aerial images. Two of the days on this adventure included doors-off helicopter photography sessions in two different parts of the Kimberley. The area that really intrigued me was the area along the delta of the Ord River and the Timor Sea that separates Australia from Indonesia. This area had the potential of

producing some photographs similar to some of the stuff from Tony that just blew me away with during his portfolio review.

I have done a lot of helicopter based landscape photography over the years so I was familiar with the tricks of the trade and have even written articles published in magazines on it so I was certain that if I were presented the opportunity, I could come away with some great photos but I had never really tried the straight-down shooting style (this is very popular nowadays among drone photographers but wasn't yet when I took this photo) Armed with a PhaseOne XT 100 megapixel camera and an 85mm Schneider-Kreuznach lens we took to the sky (approximately 50mm in full frame terms). I set the camera at ISO 400 and 1/2000s in shutter priority and just let the aperture wander to whatever was required for the shot. This method works well when everything is essentially at infinity focus and you want to make sure to not pick up any vibrations or record any movement due to shooting from a helicopter. Strapped in with the camera also fastened securely to me so there would be no chance of dropping it, losing a \$55,000 camera/lens and potentially damaging the aircraft, we took off. I was amazed by the scene as we approached the Ord River delta. From the many photographs taken that afternoon, the photo above really stood out. This is one of many veiny extensions that come out of the river that are actually formed by tides in the Timor Sea pushing water upstream and resulting in a flood plane around the veins. For scale, the small blackish dots are trees. It looks absolutely amazing printed on a metallic pearl paper where it takes on the qualities of a copper etching. I submitted it to an international photo contest later that year and it actually won first prize out of 235,000 submissions. You can see the entire catalogue of images from this shoot here. Ironically the prize was a full DJI Mavic drone outfit.

https://www.ejphoto.com/ord_river_delta_page.htm



Digital Darkroom

It has been a bit quiet on the software front during the summer months and I haven't really tried any new software or developed any new techniques. On the day that I am sending out this newsletter, CaptureOne announced an October release of CaptureOne 24 as well as details on how their new incentive based loyalty upgrade pricing model works. I'll cover the new features in the next newsletter after the product is released but the most interesting one on paper is AI driven auto-masking which they promise will ease the work burden of complex masks. As for the new pricing model on upgrades, for every year that you upgrade in an uninterrupted fashion, you get 20% off in an escalating manner. The clock started in late 2021 with CaptureOne 22. Since I did both the CaptureOne 22 and CaptureOne 23 upgrade, my discount for CaptureOne 24 is 40% and next year it will be 60%. This means that every fifth

annual upgrade, as long as you do all the major version upgrades, is free. These discounts apply whether you purchase a perpetual license product (as I do) or the monthly subscription product.

Gear Garage Sale Continues

I have recently added several new items due to my liquidation of my medium format gear. This includes small items such as Fuji batteries, L-brackets for the GFX-100S and GFX-50S, and more. Additionally, Sony a7R4 support gear is now listed. The headline item now for sale is the fantastic Arca-Swiss Core75 geared leveling tripod head. Many filters and camera support items are still available. All sales are within the USA to USA addresses only. Prices include ground shipping and I am not charging extra to cover PayPal fees – the price you see is what you pay, no hidden fees. Venmo and Zelle are now also accepted and the preferred method of payment. See the full and up to date listing here: https://ejphoto.com/gear_for_sale_page.htm

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