



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

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Welcome to the 21st year of the photography newsletter from E.J. Peiker, Nature & Travel Photography and www.EJPhoto.com. In this quarterly publication, I share with fellow photographers my photographic experiences, photo equipment reviews, photography tips, processing tips, and industry news. I also inform subscribers about upcoming workshops and products that I offer. 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>



Santa Catalina Mountains (GFX 100S, 32-64mm)

Tamron Updates and Expands Sony FE Mirrorless Lens Lineup

It is no secret that I am a big fan of the very high quality yet small and compact Tamron lenses for Sony Full Frame (FE) mirrorless cameras like the a1, a7 and a9 cameras. I have previously favorably reviewed the 17-28mm f/2.8, 28-75mm f/2.8 and 80-180mm f/2.8 lenses which provide exceptional optical performance with an economical 67mm filter size at half the price and nearly half the weight of Sony f/2.8 lenses in the same focal length range. This Tamron trio gives up some features like programmable buttons and image stabilization but all current Sony full frame cameras have built in stabilization so this is not really a significant issue. In the case of the 28-75 lens, a very slight reduction in focus speed is also an easy compromise for most photographers for a lens that weighs a lot less. Finally, the lenses cost a lot less and are physically much smaller making them easier to travel and hike with than the Sony f/2.8 offerings that cover a similar focal length range.

Tamron has recently upped the game on their lens line up with the introduction of the second generation 28-75mm f/2.8 lens, dubbed the VX G2 variant as well as a completely new and versatile offering – the 35-150mm f/2-2.8.

The new Tamron 28-75mm f/2.8 Di II VXD G2, which I will just call the G2 henceforth, upgrades the original lens which I owned and loved in several significant ways. Optically it is a redesign which improves corner sharpness at f/2.8. Stopped down the original was nearly flawless so there isn't much difference there but when shot wide open, images are very sharp all the way into the corners on the new lens. The G2 has a new AF motor that eliminates the focus speed difference between the Sony 24-70mm f/2.8 and the Tamron G2 – there is no hesitation whatsoever. A programmable button is also added which can perform several functions (I choose to make it a focus button). The lens adds a weather-sealed USB port which allows user updates and lens programmability without the need for a lens dock. The G2 lens is actually slightly lighter than the original 28-75mm lens and is approximately the same size physically. The lens build materials have been improved and the lens retains the 67mm filter thread which it shares with the 17-28mm and 70-180mm lenses making it possible to carry a single filter size to cover everything from 17mm to 180mm resulting in a very compact, lightweight, economical, and high image quality landscape photography kit.

In the field, I noticed a little less focus breathing than its predecessor to the point where it is nearly undetectable. Focus breathing is when the apparent focal length changes as you change focus distance. This is especially



Catalina Mountains (a7R4, Tamron 28-75mm)

bothersome for video shooters but can also be problematic in focus stacking. The corner sharpness improvement at f/2.8 is very noticeable. I detected no difference in flare and vignetting. Like most zoom lenses, there is a little flare when shooting into the sun but no worse than most other lenses in this range and vignetting is present wide open and largely goes away as you stop down. This is also similar to other lenses including those costing three times as much.

I did decide to upgrade my original lens to the G2 variant of the Tamron 28-75mm standard zoom.

Late in 2021, Tamron added a completely new lens to its Sony full frame mirrorless lens offerings – the Tamron 35-150mm f/2-2.8 Di III VXD. This is a completely different lens than the “holy trinity” trio that I have been covering over the last three years. It is a larger, heavier, faster and higher zoom ratio lens. But it is not like the budget oriented but highly versatile 24-300super-zoom lenses that sacrifice optical quality for size, weight and convenience. This is a professional grade optic built like a tank. It is large and heavy, extremely weather-sealed and very fast at f/2 on the wide end. This lens, due to its fast f/2 aperture cannot get away with the smaller 67mm filters and instead uses 82mm filters. It has two programmable buttons, is USB programmable and upgradeable, has much more metal in its build than the other Tamron Sony FE mount lenses and includes an AF/MF switch and zoom lock and a switch that can be programmed with three different custom modes by hooking the camera up to a computer and changing many different aspects of the lens to your liking including focus direction, ring function, focus throw, minimum and maximum focus ranges and more.



Catalina Mountains (a7R4, Tamron 35-150mm)

Image quality is exceptional, especially for a zoom lens that exceeds a 4:1 zoom ratio which has traditionally been the breaking point between professional grade optical performance and consumer oriented compromised optical performance. In fact it is by far the best image quality of any lens whose zoom ratio exceeds 4:1 that I have ever tested. This lens is no slouch at any focal length and due to its speed is a versatile and excellent longer focal length astro lens. Surprisingly for a fast zoom, coma is very well controlled. My optical testing shows it to be exceptionally sharp in the center even wide open with the expected slight fall-off in the corners but still very good. At apertures of f/4 or smaller, the lens is outstanding throughout the frame at all focal lengths. At full extension to 150mm, the lens is excellent from corner to corner; among the very best I have seen at that focal length and f/2.8. Auto-focus is very fast and precise and vignetting is par for the course on pretty much all lenses these days – meaning there is fall-off in the corners when shot at larger apertures. The aperture ramps from f/2 at 35mm to f/2.8 by the time you get to about 85mm. The only real weaknesses I found in the 35-150mm lens is that it lacks a tripod collar or even a facility to mount one and flare performance is not as good as in zoom

lenses that limit the wide end to 70mm. Like the other Tamron FE mount lenses, this lens is not stabilized but the cameras that most would attach it to have in-body stabilization.

While the Tamron 35-150mm lens isn't really part of the previously released zoom range that I have been discussing for the last few years, it is a high performance professional stand-alone lens that would be excellent for photo journalists. However, if one wants a complete, no compromise, and fast landscape kit with just two lenses for their Sony full frame mirrorless cameras one could pair this lens with the Sony 16-35mm f/2.8 GM lens and cover the focal lengths that most landscape photographers need in just two lenses that share an 82mm filter thread. Even though this lens is much larger than something like the 70-180mm Tamron lens, by coming down to just two lenses, one of the Sony Alpha full frame cameras with these two lenses are a very compact and excellent travel set-up. While I have not yet purchased this lens due to its \$1900 price, I likely will or possibly rent it for my next international city shoot.

I continue to be very impressed with what Tamron is offering for Sony photographers by offering exceptional optics in relatively compact packages that are easy to travel and hike with and making the compromises in the right places by eliminating features that most landscape photographers don't need (like image stabilization, arrays of switches and buttons, all metal construction, etc). Demand for these lenses is high and even the used market for these lenses is good if you are selling a lens like the original 28-75 and replacing it with the G2. Traditionally third party lenses have lost a ton of value even when selling something that is as good as new. That has not been the case with these hugely popular Tamron lenses as demand is high.



Catalina Mountains (a7R4, 17-28mm)

The Nikon Z9

By far the most common question I have received in the last quarter from my readers is whether or not I am planning on getting a Nikon Z9. Before I answer that and share my thoughts on this camera, let's run down some of the major highlights of this new Nikon mirrorless flagship camera:



- 45 megapixel stacked sensor
- Full DSLR style sized body with integrated grip weighing a hefty 1340g
- 30 frames per second in JPEG mode, 20 FPS in RAW mode
- 1000 frame buffer for compressed RAW images
- Reduced resolution JPEG mode that can shoot at 120 frames per second
- Lossless RAW, Lossy RAW, 1/2 size RAW
- Full time electronic shutter (no shutter curtain but has a sensor shield)
- People, mammal and bird eye auto-focus detection
- Planes, train, auto, motorcycle, bicycle auto-focus detection
- In body stabilization that coordinates with any lens stabilization (all called VR for vibration reduction in the Nikon world)
- Dual CFexpress Type B card slots
- 3.69 million dot EVF
- Partially articulating 2.1 million dot rear LCD
- 8K/20p max video resolution

As you can see it is a very nicely specified camera and one worthy of the flagship moniker. The Z9's major market competition is the Sony Alpha 1 and the Canon EOS R3. In features it is more similar to the Sony a1, and in size and weight, it is more similar to the Canon R3.

From a nature photography standpoint, and more specifically a wildlife photography standpoint, most of the experienced shooter information that is out in the Internet space is from Nikon ambassadors which of course are touting it as the most awesome camera in the history of mankind. Real world critical information from non-affiliated wildlife shooters is still pretty sparse but what little there is bodes very well for Nikon shooters after suffering through significantly inferior AF performance in the mirrorless camera world. Up until now, if you put a camera like a Sony a1 in a Nikon shooter's hands and had them point it at a little bird out in the distance, their mind was absolutely blown as the camera found the eye and then stayed with it through the viewfinder no matter how poorly the subject was tracked by the photographer. Canon's system is almost as good but now Nikon shooters will experience this completely new way and vastly improved way of shooting too. The frame rate still lags behind the Sony a1 which can do 30FPS in RAW while the Z9 can "only" do 20 but in my experience, even 20 is rarely needed and often does little more than fill up cards at an insane rate.

For landscape photographers, this camera is overkill and underkill at the same time. You simply do not need this level of AF performance and frame rate performance for landscape photography. The higher resolution Z7 II would be my first choice for landscape photography in the Nikon world.

Am I going to get a Z9? No! I am done with big full sized and heavy DSLR style bodies and left those in the now distant past. At nearly double the weight and really not providing any features that outshine what I am shooting wildlife/birds with now, there is simply no point. For those that really still prefer a large heavy body, then this camera is a fantastic choice and brings Nikon back into the game, especially on the AF technology front.

The Story Behind the Photo(s)

In January of 2013, I made my first winter trip to Iceland after having been there several times in the summer months. While it is hard to believe it has been 9 years since the incredible experience portrayed in these three images all taken on the same day in the same general location, I remember it like it was yesterday.

No trip to southern Iceland is complete without a stop at the famous glacial lagoon named Jokulsarlon which literally translates to Glacial Lagoon in English. The lagoon flows out to the North Atlantic under a bridge which is also famous and known as Iceland's Black-sand Diamond Beach. The two locations are just a couple of hundred yards apart on either side of Iceland's ring road that one travels to get around the coastal parts of the island nation.

On this morning, in late January, we arrived in the morning well before sunrise which does not occur until about 10:00AM this far north in the deep winter. It was a gray dreary morning and the glacial lagoon was completely filled with "ice cubes" – small icebergs that were being fed to it by the massive glacier that makes up a large chunk of southeast Iceland called Vatnajokull. It is the largest glacier in Europe. The top photo in this trio of photographs was taken then.

While photographing various formations and looking for details from a higher vantage point through the viewfinder, I suddenly became very disoriented and thought I was losing my balance or the ground was moving. What had actually happened was that the tide in the Atlantic was cresting and starting to reverse causing outflow under the bridge and into the Atlantic Ocean just after sunrise. This started an emptying process of the lagoon. In one of the most amazing things I have ever seen, this massive lagoon completely filled with ice chunks almost completely emptied out in about a half hour. The second image depicts the emptying process. I chose a longer exposure, to show the outflow towards the inlet and under the bridge. By focusing on a single chunk that had become stuck, I was able to show the water rushing out.



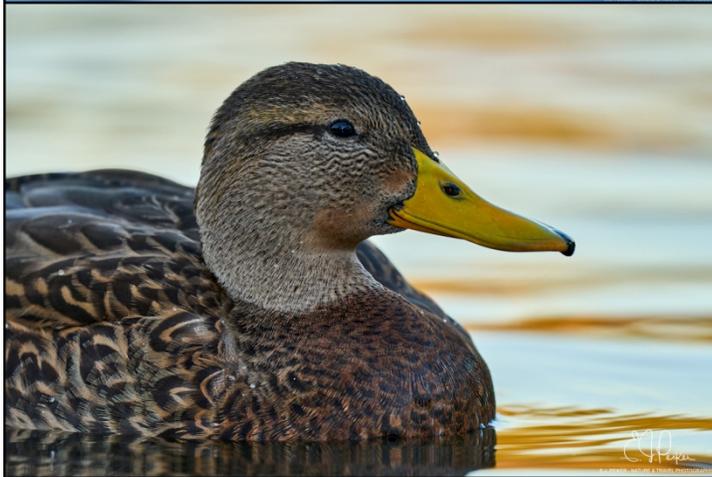
The third image was taken about two hours later across the ring road on the black sand beach which had been devoid of Icebergs early in the morning. All of the ice that had come out of lagoon had been deposited onto the beach by the ocean's waves. The sun does not get very high in January on the southern shores of Iceland. This was a 1:00PM image!!!

I think these three images depict well just how fast and complete an environment can change in just a few hours based on external influences – in this case the ocean tides.



First Duck Shoot in Two Years (First Sony a1 Bird Photography Experience)

Due to my injuries last year, the winter of 2020/2021 was the first time in 22 years that I did not get out to photograph some of my favorite critters on earth – ducks! Arizona is blessed with many species of ducks in the wintertime and I always look forward to photographing them. Some individuals I even recognize and there are a few that even recognize me. While spending a few days in the Catalina Mountains near Tucson, I also got out one morning to a local duck pond that was already teeming with many ducks including American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, Mallard, and even one Mexican Duck couple (middle image). It was my first opportunity, other than in my own yard to really use the Sony a1 with the Sony 200-600 and try out all of the AF modes that, on paper, should make bird photographer's life easier.



I am happy to report that I did not forget how to shoot ducks but at first I was quite rusty at finding my subject in the viewfinder or on the rear LCD but that got back to normal after about a half hour or so. It was great to test out the bird eye focus on the a1 in earnest after so many of my friends and bird photographers I respect raving about it. It was truly next level! Even in low light before sunrise, or the bird partially looking away or even looking head on where only part of the eye was visible, it found the eye instantly and then stayed on it – even when another subject temporarily blocked it. This is also the first time I have shot in a situation like this with a completely silent shutter and at first I thought I wasn't shooting but then I looked down and I had taken 45 shots!!! I then switched it to 20 FPS and I was still shooting way too many identical shots.



Even at 15FPS I have many nearly identical photos. As a result I have reprogrammed my mid speed to 15 and my normal shooting to 10FPS and only plan on using 20FPS or faster for fast moving birds in flight. Overall I spent a nice hour and a half with my waterfowl friends.

Once I got back to my hotel, I was shocked that I had taken 1300 photos, of which 900 were in the first 15 minutes. I was even more shocked that virtually 100% were absolutely dead sharp on the eye – totally next level stuff! The hit rate is just insane and something we could not even have imagined just a couple of years ago. The AF mode I had settled on was AF-C, Zone Focus, Bird Eye Focus, Priority Set Release, and AF Tracking Sensitivity 1. This seemed to work exceptionally well. As long as the eye is in the zone selected initially, it will track it anywhere in the frame even when the eye moves out of the zone. By setting the zone in the upper half and center third of the viewfinder, the eye was always in the right zone initially for the composition that I wanted and I never missed a single shot due to not having the eye initially in an area where my chosen AF mode could find it. I expected the AF to be good just based on my own backyard testing for my previous articles on the Sony a1, but I did not expect it to hit the eye perfectly 100% of the time. Truly amazing! I literally would not ever want to shoot birds with a DSLR again.

The Best Lenses for Your Nikon, Canon and Sony Mirrorless Cameras

The table of best lenses for your camera is a living document that gets updated every quarter. Changes from previous tables can be seen in **bold** but there are no changes this time because none of the new lenses that would likely make this list are actually available. As development of DSLR lenses for Nikon and Canon have essentially stopped, I am switching this section to covering mirrorless only. On all systems, areas left blank means that there is no lens currently available (or there isn't one that I can recommend – e.g. the Canon 600/800mm f/11 lenses) with that native mount; however, in virtually all cases, a DSLR lens can be adapted to the mirrorless system often with some minor to moderate compromises, primarily in autofocus capability. Currently there are no electronically coupled third party lenses for the Canon and Nikon mirrorless systems due to both manufacturers using a proprietary mount strategy. For my final DSLR lens recommendations for Canon and Nikon, please see the Autumn 2020 Newsletter linked here: <https://ejphoto.com/Quack%20PDF/Quack%20Autumn%202020.pdf>

Lens Category	Canon RF Mount	Nikon Z Mount	Sony (F)E Mount
Full-frame Fisheye			Sony 28mm f/2 + 16mm Fisheye Conversion Lens
Hyper Wide Prime			Sony 14mm f/2.8 GM Sigma 14mm f/1.8 Art
Ultra Wide Prime		Nikkor Z 20mm f/1.8S	Zeiss Batis 18mm f/2.8 Voigtlander 15mm f/4.5
Extra Wide Prime		Nikkor Z 24mm f/1.8S	Sony 20mm f/1.8 G Zeiss Loxia 21mm f/2.8
Standard Wide Prime			Sony 24mm f/1.4 GM Sigma 24mm f/1.4 Art
Moderate Wide Prime		Nikkor Z 35mm f/1.8S	Sigma 35mm f/1.2 Art Sony-Zeiss 35mm f/1.4
Standard Prime	Canon RF 50mm f/1.2L Canon RF 50mm f/1.8	Nikkor Z 50mm f/1.2S Nikkor Z 50mm f/1.8S	Sony 50mm f/1.2 GM Sony-Zeiss 55mm f/1.8
Portrait Prime (short telephoto)	Canon RF 85mm f/1.2L Canon RF 85mm f/2 Macro IS	Nikkor Z 85mm f/1.8S	Sigma 85mm f/1.4 DG DN Sigma 105mm f/1.4 Art Sony 85mm f/1.4 GM
Medium Telephoto Prime			Sigma 135mm f/1.8 Art Sony 135mm f/1.8 GM Zeiss Batis 135mm f/2.8
200mm Prime			
300mm Prime			
400mm Prime	Canon RF 400mm f/2.8L IS		Sony 400mm f/2.8 GM
500mm Prime			

600mm Prime	Canon RF 600mm f/4L IS		Sony 600mm f/4 GM
800mm Prime			
Wide Angle Zoom	Canon RF 15-35mm f/2.8L	Nikkor Z 14-24mm f/2.8S Nikkor Z 14-30mm f/4S	Sony 16-35mm f/2.8 GM Sony 12-24mm f/2.8 GM Sigma 14-24 f/2.8 Art Tamron 17-28 f/2.8 Di
Standard Zoom	Canon 28-70mm f/2L Canon 24-80 f/2.8L Canon RF 24-105mm f/4L IS	Nikkor Z 24-70 f/2.8S Nikkor Z 24-70 f/4S	Sigma 24-70 f/2.8 Art Tamron 28-75mm f/2.8 G2 Sony 24-70 f/2.8 GM
Telephoto Zoom	Canon RF 70-200 f/2.8L IS	Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR	Tamron 70-180mm f/2.8 Sony 70-200 f/2.8 GM
Super Telephoto Zoom	Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1		Sony 100-400 f/4.5-5.6 GM Sony 200-600 f/5.6-6.3 G
Macro	Canon RF 100mm f/2.8L Macro IS	Nikkor Z MC 105mm VR S	Sigma 105mm f/2.8 Macro Art Sony 90mm f/2.8 Macro Voigtlander 110mm f/2.5

Gear Garage Sale Continues

Thank you to the great response to my gear sale. I have sold a lot of high quality items in the last quarter including some essentially new stuff. Many filters and camera support items are still. 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 is now also accepted. See the full and up to date listing here: https://ejphoto.com/gear_for_sale_page.htm

Workshops

I currently have no group workshops planned until the COVID-19 pandemic is behind us. Private instruction in camera operation, landscape and wildlife photography is available as well as image processing training in Capture One, Topaz, Nik, and Photoshop. Photo workstation consulting services are available. These services are currently only available via telephone or video conference. Contact me at ejpeiker@cox.net for more information.

Facebook and Instagram Pages

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/ejpeiker/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/EJPeikerNaturePhotographer>

Newsletter Info

This is the 21st year of my quarterly Newsletter. I try to cover the wide array of digital imaging and products from mirrorless to medium format and everything in between. Throughout the years, the information contained herein has always been free and will continue to be free despite the many hours it takes to put it together and significant equipment and travel expenses. Most of the products that I have tested and reviewed, I have purchased myself. A small minority have been made available to me for review and evaluation by loyal readers and a few by the manufacturers themselves. While the newsletter is free either via eMail subscription or via accessing it on my website at <http://www.ejphoto.com/newsletter.htm>, if you find the information useful to you and you do wish to donate for my continuing efforts, you may do so via PayPal and sending the funds to ejpeiker@cox.net.

Disclaimers

E.J. Peiker conducts consulting services and product design services for a number of photographic product companies. Those that know me know that I would not endorse a product, even for compensation, if I did not feel it were a superior product.

E.J. Peiker is a co-founder of www.Naturescapes.net and leads photographic workshops under the **NatureScapes** Certified Workshops banner.

E.J. Peiker is a member of **Fujifilm** Professional Services and receives some services at a substantial discount or free of charge from Nikon USA. www.fujifilm-x.com/en-us/fps/

E.J. Peiker is a **Sony** Digital Imaging Pro and receives some services at a reduced cost or free of charge from Sony USA. <https://alphauniverse.com/prosupport/>

E.J. Peiker promotes **LensCoat** products and receives some of their products at no cost. www.lenscoat.com

E.J. Peiker is a **Wimberley** Professional Services featured photographer and receives non-monetary compensation from Wimberley. Visit Wimberley at www.tripodhead.com

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