



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>



Western Bluebird – California (a1, 200-600mm)

Newsletter Changes

Thank you to all of those reaching out after the announcement of my retirement from professional photography in my last newsletter. As I mentioned then, this newsletter will continue. I will be making some changes in the format of the newsletter but the general editorial content will continue. Going forward, the newsletter will contain up to four sections:

In The Field – this is where I will be writing about photographing experiences in the last quarter.

Gear Talk – any new equipment that I have the opportunity to test, general gear talk, what I carry in the field and why, etc... Anything photo equipment related will appear in this section.

Digital Darkroom – this is where I will write about software, computer hardware, processing techniques and anything photography related that is done on a computer.

The Story Behind the Photo – by far the most popular section in the newsletter over the last few years will continue.

What is going away is the marketing portion of the newsletter as I am no longer leading workshops or actively trying to sell my photographs. As such, I will no longer have the dedicated funds to rent or buy equipment just to test it out so the “Best Lenses for your Mirrorless Camera” section will go away.

The vast majority of the content that the newsletter has featured in the past will continue but formatted into these four sections. I can't promise that every newsletter will contain all four sections but it will contain a minimum of three of them.

This newsletter begins the 22nd year of publishing them, and I continue to be honored to have as many loyal readers as I do. I hope you continue to enjoy it!



Cottonwood – Arizona (GFX-100S, 20-35mm)

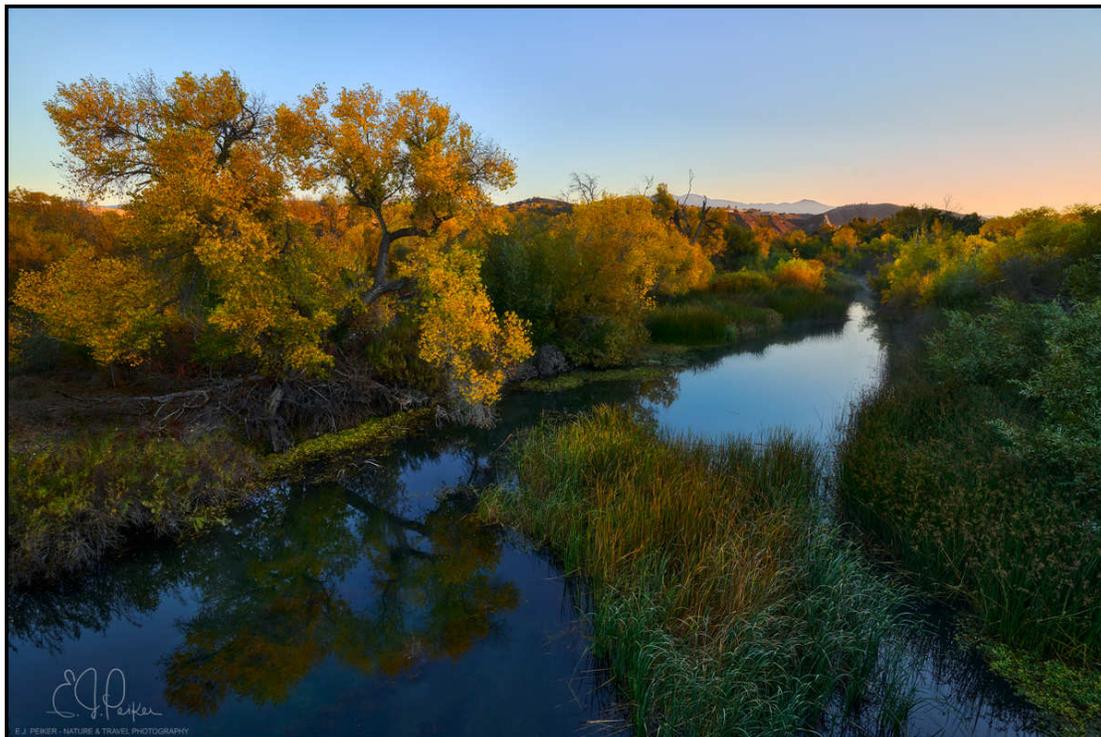
In the Field

The fall quarter of 2022 was my most prolific quarter of photography since before the pandemic. I spent several days in the field photographing fall color and then joined my long time friends Brian Small and Alan Murphy on their annual Birds of California workshop.

There was much promise for a great fall color season in Arizona since we had one of the wettest monsoon years in a long time. In general, the more rain Arizona gets in the summer, the better the fall color. The stage had been set but then a massive two day windstorm with sustained winds of 35MPH and gusts to over 50 in much of the state right as the Aspens were starting to peak stripped it all bare. Fortunately, the cottonwoods, oaks and maples which peak one to two months later were not heavily affected as they were still green. Despite the challenges, I was able to photograph some Aspen on the morning before the storm hit in eastern Arizona's White Mountains. A few weeks later, I got some very nice shots of Cottonwoods in the middle elevations. While in California for the Birds of California shoot, I was also able to get some fall color shots along the Santa Ynez River.



Cottonwood - Arizona (GFX-100S, 100-200mm)



Santa Ynez River - California (a7R4, 17-28mm)

My goal for the Birds of California workshop was to get several species that are found exclusively or primarily in California. These included California Quail, Yellow-billed Magpie, California Thrasher and more. Not only did I get those (although the California Thrasher photos were marginal at best), I got several others that I didn't even think of before I went such as Oak Titmouse and Nuttall's Woodpecker. In addition to these, Western Bluebirds, Golden-crowned Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, and White-breasted Nuthatch were abundant. Alan and Brian's expertise at attracting them provided excellent perched and in-flight opportunities.



Gear Talk

Sony Alpha 7R V

In the last quarter, Sony introduced an update to its highest resolution line of cameras - the Alpha 7R V (a7R5). While many are panning this as a very minor and expensive upgrade to the a7R4, there are some things to get excited about. The reason for the disappointment is understandable since the Sony a7r series has always been the high resolution flagship and many were expecting a resolution upgrade from 61 megapixels to 100 megapixels. Sony clearly has the technology to do this since Sony's 40 megapixel APS-C sensor used on the Fujifilm X-H2 and X-T5 scaled to full frame would be 100 megapixels. They chose to not go this route relying on the tried and true and still highest resolution full frame 61 megapixel sensor. Instead, they chose to upgrade a number of other areas while keeping the same sensor as the a7R4. Let's take a quick look at what has changed:



Autofocus – the a7R5 gets Sony's most sophisticated AF algorithms to date while upgrading the number of phase detect AF points from 567 to 693 and also increasing the AF point frame coverage by 5%. The new algorithms significantly improve the subject detection algorithms. Not only can the camera now determine whether it is focused on a ground based animal's eye or a bird's eye automatically, it now recognizes insects, airplanes, cars, and trains. This exceeds the subject recognition capabilities of even the flagship action camera, the Alpha 1 (a1) but due to the slower readout of this sensor, it does not have the same mind-blowing tracking capabilities of the a1 but they should be more than good enough for all but the fastest action scenarios. In preliminary backyard testing, I find it more than adequate for the vast majority of bird photography. A new feature on the a7R5 is what Sony calls Full-time DMF (Direct Manual Focus). This allows the user to override AF with the lens focus ring on any lens including focus by wire lenses. Where this is useful is in macro or super telephoto shooting where the lens is so far out of focus that the AF system can't figure out what to do so it doesn't do anything. This happens occasionally on my 200-600 and has led me to using the focus limit switch a lot more than I'd like to limit the range of focus. With Direct DMF, you can quickly turn the focus ring to get the lens closer to being in focus so that the AF system can take over and find the subject. Previously only a couple of very high end lenses had this capability via a switch on the lens.

Raw Format – finally Sony's highest resolution camera get a losslessly compressed RAW file format. Gone are the days of having to store 120MB RAW uncompressed files in order to retain everything the camera's sensor is capable of capturing. The new files are often as low as 60MB while not losing any information meaning you can get a lot more shots on each memory card and your home computer or laptop's storage capacity won't be taxed as much. Additionally, the medium sized and small sized RAW formats that the a1 recently got via firmware update are now available. These are 26 megapixel and 15 megapixel files respectively and they are created by oversampling the full 61 megapixel output from the sensor, meaning that the image quality is exceptional in these files and better than a camera with a native 26 megapixel or 15 megapixel sensor.

Focus bracketing/stacking – I have often complained that the single biggest thing I hate about the Sony a7R series, as a landscape photographer, is that these cameras do not have focus stacking built in meaning the photographer has to intervene between each shot of a focus stack to refocus the camera. Not only does this take time, it introduces the possibility of slight camera movement and parts of the photograph, like clouds, can move a significant distance in the time it takes to do a focus stack when each frame needs to be focused by the photographer. Finally, Sony joins the rest of the camera industry in offering focus stacking in their landscape photography oriented camera. Set-up is very easy – you simply tell it a step size width and a maximum number of shots. You can make this a high number since the camera automatically stops when the lens focus is racked out as far as possible and won't keep shooting out to your set high limit of shots. I find, at least initially, that a width setting of 7 works well for landscape photography. Macro shooters may want to make this number a bit smaller.

Buffer Size – while the maximum frames per second remains 10 FPS, the buffer size has been increased substantially, to the point that it should never get in the way, even if shooting birds in flight since it can record several hundred losslessly compressed RAW files before slowing down.

Image Stabilization – The in-body image stabilization (IBIS) system has been upgraded substantially from being able to compensate for image shake by 5.5 stops all the way up to 8 stops.

Pixel Shift – In conjunction with the a7R5 release, Sony has also released a new version of its Imaging Edge software which puts the images shot in pixel shift mode together. This is a mode where the camera takes multiple images shifting the sensor by one pixel width internally using the IBIS system and then allows you to put those images together into a very high resolution file – over 240 megapixels for the a7R4/a7R5 and without the need for Bayer interpolation (you can look that up if you need to). The problem in the past with this mode is that even the slightest motion, measured in microns, would render the files useless when put together into a high resolution image making it completely useless on anything but a solid concrete slab with ultra heavy tripod in a basement with no air moving whatsoever. The new software is able to compensate for some movement on the a7R5 and the a1 when taking these types of photographs. While this is a major improvement, some systems are actually able to build the ultra high resolution file in camera. Testing this out, it certainly works much better than before but if clouds are moving significantly through the exposure sequence, you still get some artifacts; therefore, I still believe this to be a much better tool for still life or shooting interiors where nothing moves.

Video – maximum video resolution has been drastically upgraded from 8 bit 4K 4:2:0 video to 10 bit 8K 4:2:2 bit video. While I am not a video shooter, this is a massive upgrade in video specs although it can only do this in a cinema like 25FPS with a small 1.2x crop. It can also do 4K 60P 10 bit video in 4:2:2. Heat distribution from the sensor has been improved dramatically which is one of the reasons the camera is now thicker. The 30 minute video limitation that most cameras have due to an old EU regulation has now been removed.

Viewfinder – the viewfinder has been upgraded from the very good 5.76 megadot 0.78x magnification viewfinder to an impressive 9.44 megadot, 0.9x magnification viewfinder. While the increase in resolution is nice, what will be most noticeable to photographers is the much larger image in the viewfinder. The downside of this as an eyeglasses wearer is that I need to move my head around a bit more to see the entire image. It would be nice to be able to downsize the image just a tiny bit in the viewfinder to see the entire image – a capability that the Fuji medium format cameras have specifically to accommodate those that require glasses to see. This is not a big deal as most cameras have this problem and most eyeglasses wearers are used to it.

LCD screen – One of the biggest upgrades to the a7r5 is the rear LCD. The a7R4 had an underwhelming 3 inch 1.44 megadot display that tilted up and down only in horizontal shooting mode.

The a7R5 gets a 3.2 inch 2.1 megapixel display that is fully articulating. Touch control is now fully enabled; you can now do anything on the rear screen via touch including navigating and selecting items in the menus, setting up the camera, and basically operating the camera from the rear screen similar to a smart phone.

Image Storage – the a7R4 accepted SD cards only in its two slots. The a7R5 get the same storage capabilities as the a1 with two slots capable of accepting either SD cards or CFexpress Type A cards.

Menus – the a7R5 gets the much more user friendly third generation of Sony menus (similar to the a1) up from the much more arcane and hard to use second generation menu system found on the a7r4. Unfortunately, however, there are still nonsensical menu choices. For example the Shutter When Power Off menu selection is either Off or Not Target – what the heck does that even mean? Similarly Auto Pixel Mapping has options of Off and Not Target...???

Image Processor – the a7R5 gets the latest Bionz image processor – the computer inside the camera. The new processor offers a dramatic increase in speed making the camera feel snappier and allowing some of the new functions, especially the significantly increased video capability, as well as being able to drive the higher resolution screens (LCD and viewfinder) without any loss of performance. Sony claims that the faster processor allows for better image quality but this would be for JPEG images and perhaps lossy compression RAW files only.

Price – not surprisingly the launch price for the a7R5 has gone up by \$400 USD from \$3500 for the a7R4 to \$3900 for the a7R5

Other – Sony has addressed several other complaints that I have had since the original a7R. The exposure compensation dial is now programmable to other functions. This dial has always been a waste for me since it was dedicated only to exposure compensation which is irrelevant when shooting in manual exposure mode which I do 100% of the time. The new dial also has a push button lock out so this makes it perfect to assign ISO selection to. This means that all three exposure variables can now be controlled with dials without having to resort to button and dial combinations or menu diving just to change ISO. I can have shutter speed on the front dial while having aperture as well as ISO on the two rear dials. Another nonsensical choice that Sony has made in the past is that they offered only 3:2 and 16:9 aspect ratios in camera. The a7R5 adds 1:1 and 3:4. While others, especially 4:5 and 6:17 would be nice, it is a major step in the right direction. A feature that I have been calling for for a long time, shutter speeds over 30 seconds without needing a cable release in bulb mode, is now available. Sony has implemented this in a bit of an awkward way. Rather than just extending the shutter speeds beyond 30 seconds on the shutter speed dial, you can now program Bulb mode with any exposure time that you want. While this is very versatile since you can literally program it to any shutter speed you want (up to 900 seconds or 15 minutes) in whole second increments, it is a bit awkward to first have to turn on bulb mode, switch over to mechanical shutter as it only works in that mode, program the exposure time, and then shoot. You can use this mode with a 2 second, 5 second or 10 second exposure delay so that a remote release is not needed. Finally, something virtually any photographer that came to Sony from another system has been screaming for... you can now update firmware from a memory card, like virtually every other camera system on the planet, rather than having to connect the camera to a computer via USB cable. On an annoying front, the form factor of the camera's bottom has changed somewhat to accommodate the new fully articulating rear LCD and enhanced sensor cooling for 8K video which means my a7R4 L-bracket does not fit. The Smallrig L-bracket I have for the a1 does work although it is not optimized for the a7R5. This means another purchase once a7R5 L-brackets appear on the market.

The fundamental question is if it is worth upgrading? Despite the a7R5 being a significantly better camera than the a7R4, for many the answer is no and this is reflected by the fact that the camera was available for same day shipping on the day it was released where previous models had a waiting list, sometimes for several months. The combination of a faltering worldwide economy and the headline specification, 61 megapixels, not changing, has left many Sony a7R shooters on the sidelines, at least for now. For me, the two biggest gripes that I have had for years with the a7R series and all Sony cameras have finally been addressed – the camera now does focus bracketing/stacking and has losslessly compressed RAW files. The other features that have been upgraded are nice to have but these two are essential to me so I have upgraded and took delivery of the a7R5 the day after it was released, just a couple of weeks prior to publishing this newsletter and at time of publication am putting it through its paces.

In next quarter's newsletter I will cover the gear I am using for various types of photography in 2023 – not only will the a7R5 be in full use, I will also finally have a chance to use the incredible Tamron 35-150mm f/2-2.8 extensively resulting in an ultra-compact landscape kit when coupled with the Sony 16-35mm f/2.8 in a two lens, one camera set-up that covers almost everything a landscape photographer needs most of the time with top notch optics. The Tamron 35-150mm lens has been on backorder for 2 years but I finally got one.



Eastern Utah (EOS 1Ds Mk II, 24-70mm)

Digital Darkroom

Capture One 23

Probably the biggest disappointment of the year is the release of Capture One 23 which offers absolutely nothing to the nature photographer that wasn't available in Capture One 22. Capture One has been my RAW image development program for many years and I still feel it is a superior product to anything on the market. But in recent years upgrades have gotten much more expensive yet necessary if you wanted the latest camera and lens profiles. In recent releases, the changes have become more and more oriented toward the fashion and portrait industry – understandable since this is where they have their biggest marketshare but this should not be done in such a manner that it completely ignores all other types of photography.

Capture One 23's headline new feature introduces smart adjustment which purports to allow you to shoot many images in different light and conditions and then the software is automatically able to correct them so that skin tones are consistent – it is 100% oriented towards portrait and fashion photography and is not designed to work with, nor does it work with nature photographs.

Layers in Styles is another new feature. Capture One is constantly pedaling styles – these are canned adjustments that you can apply to images. 99% of nature photographers do not use these since every image deserves its own custom treatment. This new feature allows adjustment layers within styles. If you are going to make adjustments to various layers in a style, isn't that the same thing as custom processing each image? This seems simply as a way to sell more styles since you can now adjust them in layers.

Faster Culling – perhaps if you use the image importer in Capture One (I don't) then this updated importer could be useful. It allows you to rate or color tag images during ingest, Set-up groups during ingest and gives you a new cull view workspace option.

Capture Time changing – have you ever forgotten to change the time on your camera when traveling to a different time zone? In the past you would have to do a hex edit on each file to correct for this after the fact – something time consuming and just not worth it. Capture One 23 allows you to bulk change capture time and date.

While I have upgraded to Capture One 23 for full a7R5 support, if you don't need camera or lens support for new gear not supported in previous versions, I can't find a compelling reason to upgrade.

Just before this newsletter was published, Capture One has announced some significant changes to its perpetual license upgrade model. The subscription model appears to be unchanged. They are moving



away from an annual upgrade cycle, usually in the 4th quarter. In the past, they would issue updates with new features a couple of times per year that were no additional cost if you had the latest version. They will no longer be doing this. If you want new features, you will need to upgrade to the newest version at some yet to be specified cost after it is released – reading between the lines, it seems they will update these mid cycle feature updates will now be new versions of the software and each one will cost you if you are not on the subscription model. They will continue to do bug fixes and maintenance releases between versions. It is not clear if the maintenance updates will include new camera and lens profiles for gear that comes to market between versions. Time will tell how this affects photographers using the perpetual license model or if this is just a ploy to move everyone to a subscription based model by making the perpetual license model more and more costly and painful.

The Story Behind the Photo



This may be the oldest photograph I have ever published in my newsletter. It was taken at the annual Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta in 1987 with a Minolta Maxxum 9000 and a Minolta Rokkor 85mm f/2 lens on Kodachrome 64 transparency (slide) film. The Maxxum 9000 was the first professional grade camera body that featured autofocus.

From the first Saturday through the second Sunday of October, Albuquerque, New Mexico is the home of one of the most photographed events in the world – the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta. This is a gathering of hot air balloonists from all over the world with mass ascensions of balloons each day

and weekend balloon numbers exceeding 700 in some years. The number of people in Albuquerque and its surroundings can go up by as much as 50% during the 9 days of the festival and often visitors have to find hotels as far as a hundred miles away. I lived in ABQ from the mid 1980's to the mid 1990's and photographed this event on several occasions. In 1987, the fiesta added an evening balloon glow where balloonists would not launch at dusk but stay tethered to the ground while using their burners to light up the balloon envelopes creating a spectacle of color against a dark backdrop. Of course I wanted to photograph this event so I braved the massive traffic jam and got there before dusk. I realized right away that getting a clean shot was going to be a challenge and even back then I tried to avoid silhouetted people in my shots. How would I be able to not get people in the shot yet not end up with a composition that looked cut-off at the bottom?

After taking a few shots that I knew was going to be unsatisfying I had an idea! Remember that this is film so I really did not know how the captures were going to look given this impossible to meter event for slide film; which had absolutely no tolerance for overexposure or underexposure. There were no LCD's or any way to judge the exposure other than bracketing and hoping for the best. My idea was to place a small mirror at the bottom of the lens just above the people reflecting the sky and the bottoms of the balloons. I could see through the viewfinder that the effect was interesting and much more pleasing than blocked up silhouetted heads at the bottom but had no idea if the exposures were going to work.

I went home after the balloon glow and on Monday I took the film to the local lab that I was using at the time. Due to the backlog of literally tens of thousands of rolls of film from the fiesta, it took about three weeks before I finally got the slides back. As I started looking at them on my slide viewer I came upon this one and was quite pleased. To this day it is my favorite hot air balloon photograph that I have taken.

Gear Garage Sale Continues

I have recently added a nearly perfect UniqBall UBH45XC with Cross Clamp for the incredibly low price of \$350 – that's a \$200 savings off of retail. This is an excellent way to get a gimbal type shooting experience in a much smaller and easier to travel with ballhead format capable of supporting even large 600mm f/4 or 800mm f/5.6 lenses.

Many filters and camera support items are still available in my ongoing gear sale. 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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Arctic Norway (a7R3, 50mm x 7 exposures)

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