

Tips for the Nature Photographer



Keep it simple and sweet ... the acronym KISS will help remind you of perhaps the most important rule in the composition of an effective nature photograph. Ask yourself, what am I trying to convey to the viewer? What is the most important element in the viewfinder? What moved me to choose this as a photographic subject? Are there any distracting elements in the photo, can I change my camera's perspective to get a stronger impact of the subject? Use the depth of field button to be sure of the background looks good and works to the best of advantage to the subject. Remember the axiom for outstanding nature photography; Keep It Simple & Sweet!

Opportunities for incredible nature photographs always seem to present themselves when they are least expected." "The steeper the climb, the sweeter the image!" Get out early and stay out late. Be the first photographer to be in the field ready to make images, and make it your goal to be the last photographer to put your equipment away.

Photograph at your subject's eye level as often as possible (or get even lower to the ground for a different perspective). Too many images are taken from approximately five to six feet off the ground; this is the approximate eye level of the photographer. Try to get down low, get down to your subject's eye level and focus on the eyes, this tends to give a much more dramatic perspective of the subject.

Use a good quality, stable tripod! Make it a habit to use a tripod and your photographs will improve. The creative process becomes more deliberate when you use a tripod. You will find yourself much more diligent in examining the composition within your viewfinder and you will be much more precise in the framing of your subjects. Your top

quality lenses will now have the stable support they need to consistently produce razor sharp images.

Make it a point to shoot more vertical images. Many magazines prefer vertical images for publication. Whether or not you are shooting for possible publication, just by shooting some vertical images you will have images that will stand out from what most other photographers are getting. Shooting vertical images will also be exercising your creativeness more, since most of us typically find it easier to see and shoot horizontal images.

When working with subjects that are low to the ground, wear a set of cushioned kneepads. They can be purchased at most hardware stores. They will make the time you spend on knees much easier to bare.

Thanks to today's new image-editing programs, stunning panoramic images are now possible without owning special purpose panoramic cameras. The use of Photoshop, or some other comparable image-editing program, now gives one the ability to put together (in the digital darkroom) impressive panoramas and thanks to the new photo quality printers, printing these remarkable images is easier than ever. When you are in the field doing your photography, and you have captured your original planned images, let the creative vision flow, start thinking panorama, and shoot some additional frames with the intent of putting them together in your digital darkroom.

Keep a pen and a permanent marker in your camera bag at all times. I find that having a writing instrument with me is imperative, and having a permanent marker gives one, so much more versatility.

Keep a photographic journal, keep track of what subjects you saw, when you saw them (the time of day and date) and the location, by so doing you will be rewarded with an outstanding reference that will prove invaluable for future photographic outings.

Carry a small point & shoot or digital camera in your camera bag; this is a wonderful tool for capturing memorable photos of friends, and acquaintances that we meet while out in the field doing our serious photography. As time passes, those snapshots of friends become very treasured images. So next time you are out there concentrating on photographing that one of a kind eagle shot, don't forget to pull out the point & shoot and get a couple of photographs of your fellow eagle photographer friends that are with you!

Carry business cards; no matter whether you're a professional nature photographer or a beginner. Having business cards with you can be a very professional way of establishing business relationships with other. Business cards can be printed very economically today, or with today's computers and publishing software, one can easily and inexpensively print business cards at home that look very professional. Carrying business cards in the field will allow you to make a lasting impression on the contacts you make in the field.

I like to carry plenty of the seal-able plastic food storage bags in my camera case. I am always finding new uses for these transparent bags, especially the heavier strength seal-able freezer bags. They can be water resistant and offer excellent protection for various items. I like to keep my maps in these bags, I fold the map so it is approximately the same size as the bag, this way I can read the map without taking it out of the bag. These bags are inexpensive, available almost anywhere and one can see exactly what is in each bag. I also like to carry several of the heavy-duty white trash compactor bags, they are much more tear resistant than regular trash bags. A photographer can also find many uses for these bags; they make excellent rain protection for your equipment, they can be used as light reflectors, or as a background for macro shots, spread out they make wonderful ground cover to keep your knees from getting wet while doing macro photography. Should you get caught in a rainstorm, a trash compactor bag and some rubber bands may be just the thing to protect your camera and lens from the weather.

A few small items that I can recommend one carry in their camera bag, a small flashlight, a film leader retriever (if you are shooting film), a jeweler's screwdriver set, rubber bands, plastic trash bags, air tight reseal-able sandwich bags, a spare key to your vehicle, an emergency space blanket, a pen & permanent marker, biodegradable string, a set of small plastic filter wrenches (to remove those hard to dismount filters), a small compass, business cards, a telephone card, a whistle, and lens cleaning tissue. Also be sure to bring sunscreen along.

When planning a long distance photographic trip within the U.S., consider using Fed Ex, UPS or USPS to send some of your film/photographic supplies to your destination. Notify your hotel that you would like to do this and have the package sent early, this would give you the opportunity to verify that the package arrived safely.

Purchase your film in bulk, by doing so one can save quite a bit of money. Film can be safely stored in the freezer for an extensive period of time, maintaining the film way past the expiration date. For storing, the film should not be removed from its airtight protective casing. Film should be removed from the freezer a minimum of one hour before use, and allowed to slowly warm up to the ambient room temperature before removed from its air tight casing, thus preventing any condensational buildup on the film.

Most of today's new camera equipment requires batteries to work, quite a savings may be realized if one purchases batteries in bulk. Store your batteries in an airtight container; the container then may be stored in the freezer greatly extending the storage life of your batteries.

Use an old insulated cooler to temporarily store film or to house some of your photographic equipment. The cooler can be packed with foam to protect the equipment. The insulated cooler will provide a somewhat more temperate environment for your equipment or film. An important side benefit of using an old cooler, few people will associate an old insulated cooler with housing anything of real value, thus helping to prevent the theft of your film or valuable equipment.

Wear a hat! Protect your head! Wearing a hat not only provides protection from the weather and the elements, but may also assist in reducing extraneous light from entering the viewfinder.

