

Swamp Shoot Review

4/14/09

A compilation of Pamela's remarks from the session reviewing participants' photographs

General:

- Try to show the bird's personality in the photo.
- Pay attention to composition.
- Try to focus on bird's eye.
- Catch light in eye is good.
- Try to show eye and beak.
- Telling a story is good.
- Know why you are taking a particular photo. Ask 'What do I want to do with this one?'
- It is a game of patience to get wildlife in good position.
- Can't always get the perfect shot. They don't pose!
- Move camera. Take both vertical and horizontal shots for best effect.

Windy weather:

- Tripod can be most helpful tool for stability when the wind is blowing.
- Windy day can lead to good effect with breeding plumage. Can emphasize breeding plumage.
- Windy days are not good for photographing plants. Too much movement.
- Can purchase PLAMP (type of clamp) to hold plants still in nature for photographing.
- Use high shutter speed to stop motion.
- Hold arms close to body to steady camera.

White subjects:

- White subjects (egrets, white flowers) may benefit from over exposure. You need to get enough light and the camera wants to limit light...so you may need to fool the camera by over exposing by a stop or two.
- White subjects are difficult to record digitally. The camera tends to blow them out or overexpose.
 - The camera's meter the exposure will meter at 18% gray.
 - Since the subject is not gray, you must fool the metering system and actually overexpose the composition.
 - Do this by overexposing an f stop or two, or using exposure compensation settings to +1 or + 1.5.
 - This doesn't always work; it depends on the background colors as well.
 - **Use trial and error.**
- Can use grey card for good custom white balance effect.
- Can adjust some with Photoshop.

Photoshop

- Good for artistic adjustment/effect.
- Use to change photo to black and white or sepia for best effect.
- Add black to bring out detail.
- May cause some degradation of image which can impact very large prints.
- Must be aware that certain manipulation is not acceptable for some competitions and magazines.

Lenses:

- Learn to know your lens. All are unique.
- Most lenses are sharpest at 2 stops from maximum aperture.
 - Many are best around f/9. A 2.8 lens may be best at f/5.6.
 - Creamy **bokeh** (bow-kay') is pleasant blurred background....the out of focus points created by a lens.
 - Most effective with shallow depths of fields.
 - Very beautiful when isolating a single subject against a blurred background.
 - Each lens has its own effect. Get to know yours.
- Macro lens great for flowers and insects.
 - Macro lens: must use much greater depth of field to get the whole plant in focus. (smallest opening/largest number) 14 or more.

Composition:

- Be aware of background and foreground distractions
- Watch for sticks that come out of heads
- Change position to get rid of distractions (branches, grass, bird house).
 - Move left, right, closer.
- Move a bit for best composition.
- Use water for reflections.
- Take advantage of the lines and reflections in the water.
- With flowers watch what else is in the photo to distract.
- Sometimes go very close. Shoot it a few different ways.
- Also step back and take the wide angle view.
- Crop out distractions.
- Crop to change orientation for best effect. Vertical to horizontal and vice versa.
- With nature photography, it is often fine/good to put birds and flowers in center of photo. Especially with close ups.
- Sometimes it is more powerful to move subject off center.
- Use lines and texture and background color for emphasis.
- Use environment to frame birds. Beware of too much clutter. Or too heavy look.
- Green is especially nice as a background.
- Blurred background can be good to make the bird stand out.
 - Use shallow/narrow depth of field (largest opening/smallest number).
- Can also be effective to show background detail if not too busy or distracting.
 - Use deep depth of field (smallest opening/largest number)

Polarizing filter:

- Can cut glare from water and eliminate hot spots.
- Allows camera to see into the water.
 - Good for fish.
 - Makes sky bluer.
- Needs to be rotated for best effect.
- Light must be coming from side (90 degrees).
- If light is straight on, you won't see a difference.

Car can make an effective 'blind' for shooting wildlife. Best to shut off engine. Slight vibration can affect shot.

Watch for texture. Gnarly tree. Feathers. Duckweed on water.
Low fill flash can bring out texture.

Light:

- Use your eyes to judge the light and decide if you can get a particular photo.
 - Light is harsh around noon. Best to avoid that time.
 - Back lit moss can be nice.
 - Some shadows are OK...as in nature.
 - Black things are difficult to capture. Detail is lost
 - Fill flash can help, especially with flowers.
 - Use at low level. Full flash is too much for close flowers.
 - If the sun is too bright:
 - Sometimes you just can't get the shot. Accept it!
 - Can try to underexpose
 - Can try shading. Hold an umbrella, reflector, jacket, whatever over the subject to create shade. Can work with flowers.
- Back lit moss can be nice.

Metering:

- Set for matrix metering if you want it to meter a lot of zones.
- Spot metering on birds can give a better result than matrix/evaluative (multi spot) metering.

Bird specific comments:

- Use high shutter speed for flying birds (1/1000 or faster)
- Great blue herons are solitary most of the year but nest in groups.
- Chicks are hard to capture. Take several shots and hope for 1 good one.
- Watch position of head and neck. Egrets can look awkward.
- Can show motion/action with feet and wings, walking and flying.
- Lores. The bright green around the eyes of egrets during breeding season. From beak to eye. Starts to fade after eggs are laid. Males may be darker.
- Male egret brings sticks to her. Male does a 'display' of plumage and head up and down, wings out as mating ritual.
- Detail of anhinga feathers may stand out more against simple background (or blurred) than against busy foliage.
- Perfect position of wings is highly desirable. Try continuous firing to get multiple shots of flying bird.
- Back light of bird wings is nice.
- Isolate birds against greenery for nice effect.
- When shooting 2 or more birds probably use f/10 or f/11 to have all in focus.
 - Wider aperture (smaller #) will give a shallower depth of field and may leave some birds out of focus.