

Bluenose Focus

The Newsletter of the Photographic Guild of Nova Scotia
May 2012 Volume 47 Issue 2

In this issue:

A Case for Competitions

The Camera as Therapist

Photography in Costa Rica

Cover Image: Firefly by Nanciellen Davis



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Newsletter submissions

We welcome your submissions to Bluenose Focus and will do our best to make sure that the best submissions make it into the newsletter.

Articles prepared using any current software may be submitted. Should there be a difficulty, the Editor will get in touch.

Submitted images should be JPEG format, sRGB colour space, and high resolution.

Submissions should be e-mailed to:

gmitchell@ap.stmarys.ca

The Photographic Guild of Nova Scotia

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Visit www.photoguild.ns.ca for more information



Editor's Corner

By George Mitchell

If you have given this issue of the Bluenose Focus a close look, or perhaps even a casual glance, you will have noticed that it looks different. Well, you have a new editor who lacks the publishing software skills of the previous editor, Mike McCarthy. Furthermore, the publishing package that Mike was using has no Mac version, so I have had to reinvent the wheel, so to speak. My approach has been to imitate the look of the previous newsletters with the tools at hand. Enough excuses, however. In the end it is the content that counts.

We have done very well this year in the Photographic Society of America (PSA) interclub competitions. For example, in the Nature category we are currently first of thirty-nine clubs in group B. In the four print categories of the PSA, we are second in three and third in the other. You can find the details in the PSA Annual Report on page 10. For some reason we didn't do as well in the CAPA competitions (CAPA Report, page 7).

The PSA Report includes an announcement that PGNS member Colin Campbell has been asked by the PSA to write a continuing series of articles on workflow techniques for the *PSA Journal*. Congratulations, Colin!

The article by Nanciellen Davis, A Case for Competitions (page 14), is very timely. In my first year in the Guild, which was only a few years ago, I remember very well the excitement of having my images judged, in com-

parison to others. In the beginning, I thought 9 was a good score! The true significance of the various categories was, for the first two seasons, not as clear to me as it should have been. Also, the rules for resubmission of an image are fairly complex. For a younger new member, I imagine that our whole competition process can be quite mysterious. I wonder if it would be possible to produce a brief document explaining the process?

Sean Kelly has contributed a short article which is quite personal in nature (Camera Therapy, page 18). I hope we will see more of this type. In fact, the newsletter should span the territory, from personal memoir to technical articles on software use. It can even include recipes, as long as these are accompanied by a tasty image (page 16)!

I have used (abused?) my position as editor to include an article of my own, Photography in Costa Rica (page 21). I intend this to be of general interest, and also to be helpful to anyone intending to visit that country. At the end of it, I suggest that it will be continued. Whether I do continue will depend on your interest, and also on whether I can encourage other members to write of their experiences. Many of you are frequent travellers and have taken photographic trips all over the world. I can see a series of articles with the titles like "Photography in Bora Bora" or "Photography in Nova Scotia". You will, of course, be able to display some of your great photographs!

President's Message

By Laszlo Podor



It was only a few months ago when I opened this season with a welcoming letter. Time is flying so fast – but I hope you will remember many of the precious moments of your photographic activities from these past months.

Our club is based on the efforts of volunteers who spend substantial amount of their free time on running our club. I would like to use this opportunity to thank our Executive and Committee members for their time and service to the Guild:

Esther Theriault for Vice President duties including organizing our Fall and Spring Shows. As our Honours and Awards Chair, Esther has been busy service our club. Esther is stepping down from her duties this year to have sufficient time for family matters and her writing endeavours.

Dean Hirtle as Past President, for nominating duties. Dean has served for many years on the Executive as Treasurer, Vice President and President, helping our club through the many changes over the years. He was very busy during the last few months and many of you have received a call or two from him.

Our Secretary Pam Mills has been a great help during our executive meetings and our Annual General Meetings over the years.

Our Treasurer, Doug Ward, who has been very diligent in keeping our money matters on track this year.

Mike McCarthy as Newsletter Editor and for his contributions in workshops, seminars. Mike has stepped down earlier this year to make time for his increasingly busy photography business.

I would also thank George Mitchell, who agreed to take on the Newsletter Editor's role and prepared this issue of our Bluenose Focus.

Thanks to Fred Greene for double duty as both our Program chair and Judging chair which he managed in addition to serving as an Executive in the Photographic Society of America. He has done a great job in filling our schedule with lots of workshops and field trips this year.

Thanks to Wayne Garland, our Entry Chair, our scores are recorded faithfully for cases when we need to look up any details.

My special thanks go to Joyce Chew who served as our CAPA rep and for her efforts in projection and competitions, with the constitution and by-laws, and technical assistance in the Fall and Spring shows.

I would like to thank Joe Szostak's help as PSA rep. Joe will be stepping down at the

President's Message

end of this season but he will be available as the right hand of our new PSA rep during the next season.

As Joe has been travelling extensively, Viki Gaul was helping Joe and will be our PSA rep for 2012/13 season. Thank you Viki!

We hosted a PSA Interclub Print competition in December and a CAPA Interclub Print competition in April. I would like to thank Joe Sosztak and Joyce for all their efforts in managing these competitions which gave us an opportunity to see great images from across North America.

Thanks to John William Webb for Public Relations and his efforts in field trips, and for his presentations at our Annual Spring Show. John will be stepping down as our Public Relations officer but he will be available to help when needed.

I would like to thank Mervyn Kumar-Misir as our digital coordinator and audio visual advisor as well as his efforts in field trips, seminars and workshops. Merv will be stepping down at the end of this season as Digital Coordinator but he will continue assisting our club with field trips, seminars and workshops.

We were hoping that our Evaluation Groups program would help our new members in image evaluation and understanding the different categories. Thanks to Colin Campbell, we had a few evaluation nights hosted but not many new members attended these events. Thanks Colin for coordinating

our evaluation groups and your seminars and presentations during the year.

Thanks to Nick Honig who kept our competition scores up-to-date and prepared calculations for the cumulative trophies.

Thanks to Hubert Boudreau, who has been busy taking your pictures as our event photographer, he also helped setting up our judging equipment and assisting with our Fall and Spring shows.

Doug Leahy and Vic Fraser coordinated this year's Shubenacadie Wildlife Park activities. Thank you!

Thanks to Peter Steeper as our webmaster, audiovisual advisor, and his efforts in workshops and field trips.

Thanks to Etta Parker and Edie Greene for coordinating our Christmas and Awards banquets.

I would also like to thank all other Guild members who have contributed in some way this year including contributions to our spring and fall shows, presenting seminars, leading field trips, etc.

Our Guild had a great program this year filled with very interesting field trips, workshops and seminars along with the many competitions we got used to. All of this is possible only with volunteers whose efforts and valuable time is greatly appreciated. As a number of our volunteers had to step down due to change in their lives, we need your help more than ever.

President's Message

If you are able to contribute to Guild activities in any way, please contact me or one of our other Executives.

I have sent out an e-mail a few weeks ago and asked you to send me an e-mail or call me with your suggestions for our next year's program. Only a handful of people took their time to respond. I believe we can create the best program if your input is a big part of it – so please take a couple of minutes and send me an e-mail. We had a fantastic program this year and we would like to surpass that with our next schedule.

Let's grab our cameras, capture some great moments of Nova Scotia and share it with each other in our Photo Guild Flickr group. Please take a moment and sign up for a free account and be part of the flickr community.

<http://www.flickr.com/groups/pgns/>

Let's enjoy more photography together and spend some time with spreading the joy of this hobby or profession amongst other shooters in Halifax and in Nova Scotia.

Thanks,
Laszlo Podor

2012-13 Guild Themes At A Glance

December - 1st Guild Assignment
“Shaped by the Sea”

(Must have been photographed after May1, 2012)

All other themes will be announced
in the upcoming Guild Program Guide.

Watch for the program to be announced
in August at:

<http://www.photoguild.ns.ca>



CAPA Report

By Joyce Chew

The Guild did not do as well as last year in the national club competitions only placing within the top 60% of competing clubs in all the Divisions.

Unfortunately, although the club's entries in the Spring Open competition were received before the deadline, due to a clerical error they were not included in the judging. Ian Farris of the Victoria Camera Club extends his most profound apologies for the error. As these entries were not judged, they may be resubmitted in next year's CAPA competitions provided that they meet the 24 month eligibility rule.

However, in the Spring round of the Nature Division, we tied for fourth place earning an Honour award, only two points away from finishing in third place! This year we also did well in the Print Division. We placed fifth in the Spring Round only three points from forth place.

On April 1, 2012, we had the opportunity to see the high level of printmakers across Canada when our club hosted the Spring round of the CAPA interclub and individual print competition. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Laszlo Podor, Dean Hirtle, Sean Kelly, Esther Theriault, Mervyn Kumar-Misir, Wayne Garland, Hubert Boudreau and Fred Greene who helped to ensure the evening ran smoothly.

If you are an individual CAPA member be sure to check out CAPA's newly updated website. Members can login with their membership number to take advantage of benefits like discounts on programs like Proshow Gold, HDRSoft Photomatix software as well as Photoshop plug-ins from Topaz Labs. Individual members can also compete in CAPA's Annual Digital competition which is sponsored by vendors such as Sony, Adobe, Manfrotto, Hahnemühle and Blurb! Once again there are two themes which must be submitted by September 30, 2012.

“Circles and Wheels” or “Harbours and Lighthouses”.

I'll keep you posted about Canada Camera Conference. Hosted by Photo Fredericton, it returns to the East Coast on June 28, 29 and 30th 2013 and both Freeman Patterson and André Gallent will be presenting.

Next year's CAPA interclub theme is “Sports Action” so get out there this summer and take advantage of all the great events happening around Halifax.

Happy Shooting!

CAPA Returns



Digital Open- Hosted by Victoria Camera Club

Entry			
No.	Image Title-Photographer Name	Score	Awards
1	Insomnia- Peter Steeper		
2	Jidah Cistern- Clive Elson		
3	Nesting- Marg Nolen		
4	Iris In the Rain-Viki Gaul		
5	Glacier Lagoon 1- Colin Campbell		
6	Grasshopper- George Mitchell		
Total Score			

Altered Reality Digital- Hosted by Richmond Photo Club

Entry			
No.	Image Title-Photographer Name	Score	Awards
1	River Walk- Esther Theriault	18	
2	Bleeding Lily- Elio Dolente	23	
3	Starlings Pair- Viki Gaul	21	
4	Hibiscus Railway- Marian D. Boyer	21	
5	Butterfly Abstract- Jen Fried	20	
6	Landing- Mervyn Kumar-Misir	16	
Total Score		119	7 th Tied / 24

Open Digital Theme- Architectural Interiors- Hosted by Welland Camera Club

Entry			
No.	Image Title-Photographer Name	Score	Awards
1	Stockholm City Hall Corridor- Bob Kerr	19	
2	Vatican Museum Interior- Hugh McKervill	19	
3	Quebec City Church 2- Elio Dolente	19	
4	Saint Nicolai at Kalkar- Keith Vaughan	18	
5	Scotties Tower Staircase- Viki Gaul	21	
6	Moroccan Interior 4- Nanciellen Davis	18	
Total Score		114	? / 22 clubs

CAPA Returns

Nature Digital- Hosted by Kimberly Camera Club

Entry			
No.	Image Title-Photographer Name	Score	Awards
1	Back Off —Elio Dolente	2 2	
2	Spiderweb in the Wind- Laszlo Podor	2 1	
3	Starred Puffin- Clive Elson	2 1	
4	Mother and Baby Jay After Rain- Viki Gaul	2 0	
5	Beautiful Puffin- Hugh McKervill	1 7	
6	Purple throated Mountain Gem- George Mitchell	2 1	
Total Score		1 2 2	HA 4 th tied of 29

Print —Hosted by Burnaby Photographic Society

Entry			
No.	Image Title-Photographer Name	Score	Awards
1 C	Pink Sand Desert- Hubert Boudreau	2 1	
2 C	Chinese Lanterns- Peter Steeper	2 3	
3 C	Bramble Through Cracked Glass- Marian D. Boyer	2 5	
4 C	Squirrel Pose- Viki Gaul	2 3	
5 C	Lucifer Hummingbird- Nick Honig	2 5	
6 C	Gaudy Leaf Frog- George Mitchell	2 2	
Total Score		1 3 9	5 th of 10 clubs



Photo By George Mitchell

PSA Annual Report

By Viki Gaul and Joe Szostak

The PSA Club Representative Report will consist of PGNS Club Standings *to date* in PSA Interclub Competitions.

Print Category:

In the Print competitions PGNS is holding the position of 2nd in Large Monochrome, 3rd in Small Monochrome, 2nd in Large Color, and 2nd in Small Color. We did not compete in Creative Prints this year.

PGNS prints eligible for the EOY 'End of Year' Competition, are en-route to Wisconsin. These include the images that received 1st, 2nd, 3rd place or an HM. This year we are represented by 10 makers with a total of 17 prints.

The prints that place **1st, 2nd and 3rd** will be taken to San Francisco for the PSA Conference and will be hung in the Print Gallery for all to see.

Note: The latest returns from Detroit, included a 3rd place, 4 HMs and all scores over 20!

EID (Digital):

There are 2 groups totaling 54 Clubs in all. PGNS sits at Number 11 of the 28 Clubs in Group 2.

Photo Travel (Digital):

17 Clubs compete in one group in Photo Travel. They have only posted one set of scores so far. February scores are not tabulated as yet and May is yet to be held.

In the one competition that is posted, PGNS is tied for 6th place.

Photojournalism (Digital):

With one set of scores yet to go in May, we sit 2nd, only 2 points behind the leader.....let's keep our fingers crossed shall we?

CPID (Pictorial – Digital):

100 Clubs participate, 25 in each of 4 sections. Currently, PGNS sits 6th out of 25 in the 'A' Section

CPID (Creative – Digital):

We currently sit in 2nd place with one competition yet to go...June 1st...

This is the one we hadn't planned on, and thanks to some early tabulation and research, the Executive had the opportunity to take special action to get images sent in for the deadline. The alternative was to finish last and be dropped to a lower level.

Nature (Digital):

Here is the good news ladies and gentlemen...In total there are 55 Clubs involved in PSA Nature Interclub. We are in Group 'B' competing with 39 Clubs from all over the world. **With one round to go we are three points ahead of our nearest competitor, sitting in 1st place !**

As you are aware we pay for postage to send our prints to each of the Interclub locations. This is approximately 25-30 dollars each time. In the parcel we need to place a draft or Money order to pay the return postage. Many clubs are not having their prints returned for this reason, and the hosting club destroys the images. I am currently investigating a way to pay the return postage with-

PSA Annual Report

By Viki Gaul and Joe Szostak

out the additional 8.00 fee for the Money order.

When all is said and done, PGNS members can be very proud of their standings in PSA Interclub Competitions overall.

We are competing with Clubs from all over the world. It should be noted that the Photographic Guild of Nova Scotia has a wonderful reputation among PSA clubs everywhere.

When I was asked by Dean to help Joe with the Club Rep duties, I have to admit, I was a little intimidated. As it turns out Joe was learning too, and so we have worked together to make sure we 'do PGNS proud'!

I look forward to working with Joe next season when we plan to share the various duties of 'PSA Representative' as CO-REPS' for PGNS.

IT IS A PLEASURE TO ANNOUNCE

Colin Campbell, PGNS member and fine art photographer, has been asked by the Photographic Society of America to produce articles based on his **WORKFLOW TECHNIQUES** for the *PSA Journal*.

The *Journal* is considered to be the best publication of its kind and is distributed throughout the world, to over six thousand households in 60 countries.

Those of you who have attended workshops and/or seminars, have witnessed Colin's ease when giving instruction, and of course, his creative eye. I am sure you will all agree Colin has the talent and ability to make an important contribution to PSA. His articles will be yet another reason to look forward to the monthly *PSA Journal*.

If you are curious as to what he might choose from his vast collection of 'stunning images', simply log on to the PSA Website, <http://psa-photo.org> and click 'Membership' from the left side, choose New Mem-

bers from the dropdown box, click on the red '**New Member Gallery**' icon in the first paragraph and when Colin's name appears in the list under Canada, you should find his image in the corresponding month on the left hand side of that page.

On behalf of the PGNS membership, we congratulate him and wish him every success.



PSA Annual Report

By Viki Gaul and Joe Szostak

We can all be very proud of our Printing efforts during the past Guild year. Here are the 2011-2012 PSA Interclub Print results.

Club Standings, Print Interclub

Large Monochrome

1st- Merrimack Valley CC (tie)

1st- St Louis CC (tie)

2nd- Photographic Guild of Nova Scotia

3rd- West Cumbria Photo Group

Small Monochrome

1st- Merrimack Valley CC

2nd- Carolinas Nature Photographers Assn

3rd- Photographic Guild of Nova Scotia

Large Color

1st- Merrimack Valley CC

2nd- Photographic Guild of Nova Scotia

3rd- St Louis CC

Small Color

1st- Carolinas Nature Photographers Assn

2nd- Photographic Guild of Nova Scotia

3rd- East Troy Viewfinders

Creative Altered Reality (PGNS did not participate)

1st- St Louis CC

2nd- Merrimack Valley CC

3rd- West Cumbria Photo Group

Members' Gallery (1)

A collection of photographs submitted by PGNS members



Photos by Sean Kelly



A CASE FOR COMPETITIONS

by Nanciellen Davis



Where does participation in photographic competitions fit in your strategies for learning to be a better photographer and for sharing your images with others? Some may answer that formal competitions have little relevance in that regard. After all, the Internet provides many opportunities for sharing photos and receiving feedback. Photography books can be assembled and published via on-line companies; photo-sharing websites will display our latest or favorite images and provide opportunities for viewers to comment on them.

However, for me, participation in competitions, both those locally at PGNS and those beyond, has become important in my efforts to improve my photography and to share images. That does not mean that I don't experience the usual disappointments when participating in competitions and that I have not voiced complaints, most specifically about judging. But my views on competitions and judging have become more positive over the last couple of years. Partly this was due to the "You Be the Judge" seminars at PGNS, which provided us the opportunity to act as judges and to discuss issues around image evaluation. Some photos used in the seminars elicited consistency in their evaluations, others did not, and we discussed reasons for the range of evaluations of particular images. From these discussions and from our own experience, we know that no system (and no set of judges) will be perfect in assessing images. Judges try to apply general or traditional guidelines (regarding composition, exposure, sharpness), and guidelines particular to competition categories. At the same time,

they are influenced by personal factors, including their backgrounds, experience, and preferences. Judges have only a few moments in which all these various influences are brought to bear and a number selected to represent their assessment of an image.

If the system is so imperfect, why subject our photos to evaluation in competitions? One reason is to get the assessment of knowledgeable others who, though they have their own biases, are more objective about our images than we are ourselves. Am I the only one who has "fallen in love" with a photo simply because of the positive memories associated with when and where it was taken? We need outsiders, people who don't know the story behind the picture, to evaluate the picture's quality. In fact, if we have to explain the photo and why we like it, it probably isn't a photo for competition. It is a valuable record shot, useful in conjuring up positive associations and colorful stories.

In a competition, we get the viewpoint of not one but three judges, and, if we put an image in several competitions, we receive the viewpoints of several qualified judges. What we receive from judges is a numerical score. But the aggregate score given a photo provides only part of the story. At PGNS competition meetings we are able to see the range of scores awarded individual images, which is more interesting than the aggregate per se, though perhaps not always as satisfying. Is there a difference between the meaning of a "10" that is a total of "4 + 3 + 3" versus one that is "5 + 3 + 2" or "4 + 4 + 2"? I suspect

so, with the last two sets of scores being the more interesting ones but the ones difficult to interpret. We seem to expect consistency in scores, even though judges are bound to see our images somewhat differently. And a discrepancy can come about for various reasons. For example, did one judge see or not see a particular strength or weakness in an image? Or did judges differ in their assessment of how important particular strengths or weaknesses were?

The oral evaluations offered by judges following PGNS competitions provide an opportunity to clarify the meaning of scores. Sometimes those technical flaws that were not apparent on our home computer monitors are glaringly so on the large screen at PGNS and the judges will tell us that. Or those imperfections, which we hoped might not matter, do not escape the notice and comment of a careful judge. Or perhaps the judges may note that a particular image had been entered in a competition category in which it didn't fit. We don't have to agree with judges, either in their numerical or oral evaluations, but we can profit from hearing what judges have to say. By learning how judges see our images we may learn to see our images more critically and thereby influence the pictures we take in the future.

Beyond competitions at PGNS, there are literally hundreds of photography competitions around the world recognized by PSA that we can participate in as individuals. This provides the opportunity to have many assessments of particular images, if so desired. Audiences always vary and in international exhibitions we are able to show our images to

judges from a wide range of cultural and photographic backgrounds.

In these international competitions there are occasionally pleasant surprises. That "9" as assessed in PGNS may gain an acceptance in an exhibition in which hundreds or even thousands of images had been submitted. A set of judges in Serbia or India or Holland may see something in an image that local judges had not.

International competitions sometimes have themes that might match special interests you have. Do you have lots of pictures of architecture or water? There likely is a competition somewhere that includes one of those interests as a competition category.

The catalogues provided participants in international competitions list those who have received awards and acceptances; images receiving awards are printed in the catalogues. The catalogues provide an opportunity to learn from the successful images and underline the wealth of photographic talent around the world.

Competitions are not for everyone, whether locally in PGNS or in external exhibitions. And shooting only with competition in mind may limit potential growth in creativity. There are many ways to approach the taking of images, as photos for competitions, as record shots, and as expressions of our own artistic temperament or creativity. Doing one does not preclude doing the others. However, competitions can provide invaluable learning opportunities and, for me, are not to be missed!

Seafood in Tomato Broth With Saffron from Viki Gaul

Cover the bottom of a large pot with olive oil. Add 2 chopped gloves of garlic, 1 chopped onion, and a sprinkle of salt. Add a handful of chopped parsley, and a couple of sprigs of oregano and thyme and a pinch of red pepper flakes.

Cook for about 3 minutes and add 5 chopped plum tomatoes (I have used regular tomatoes). Watch carefully as not to scorch. When tomatoes are soft, add a splash of wine (red or white-your choice). Or two splashes...or three...or red and white...now we're cookin'!

Add a can of Italian tomatoes (crush the tomatoes)...juice and all. Now is time for the magic ingredient "a scant pinch of Saffron".

Lower the heat and barely simmer for ten minutes.

In the meantime, cut fish in big chunks and season with salt. (I use haddock, but the original recipe calls for fresh tuna). Add the fish, scallops, clams, mussels, (suit the variety and amounts to your own taste). Depending on the amount of seafood you use, you may need to add a bit of water. If you are using shrimp add them last. Now cook till the shellfish open and fish is no longer translucent. Enjoy the aroma...it is wonderful!

Just before serving I like to add some left-over cooked lobster, Yum!

For a heartier meal I add cooked new potatoes, (tiny ones with the skins on), or cooked penne noodles...you don't need much...this too is your choice.

Serve with bread that has a nice texture and your favorite wine...ENJOY !!!!!!!!!



Members' Gallery (2)

A collection of photographs submitted by PGNS members

by Lynn Ellis



by George Mitchell



by Nanciellen Davis



THE CAMERA AS THERAPIST

By Sean Kelly

We're accustomed to talking about a camera – be it analogue or digital – as a tool. A tool for seeing, for self-expression, for capturing the essence of a moment. Or, for careful reflection after the fact, to discern an originally unforeseen meaning.

But for me an old – and then a new - camera became a tool that turned a lens inward, and helped find the me that got lost in the thickets along the way.

This might seem an odd piece for a photo guild newsletter. It's not exactly a how-to article, except that in a way it is – how to use photography for your own well-being. Many of us are faced with those wonderfully difficult moments that are life. For me, it was the fun and games of divorce.

Reorganizing the house – you mean I can put whatever I want on the walls? – I dusted off the old cameras. A Canon QL17 rangefinder, my faithful Contax 139, and the ubiquitous Pentax K1000. Like many, the cost of developing film had broken the habit of photography, a habit that had been an important twitch throughout my 20s and 30s.

I work in the non-profit sector, in international development, and have had the opportunity to travel in the developing world. Twice I volunteered abroad, first in St. Vincent in the Caribbean, later in Thailand. A camera always went with me, but it didn't always see the light of day (or night, if the ASA was high enough – yes, I'm old enough

to say ASA). The SLR came out when I felt accepted in my newfound home, when I could feel the heartbeat of the community. As much as I like street photography, I've never been that comfortable taking photos of strangers.

In St. Vincent, I lived in a small cement brick house with corrugated tin roof, the tropical rain a cacophony with strangely comforting rhythms. I was 21. The Contax and the 5 rolls of tri-X I had with me stayed in an old pot in a cupboard. The lid came off towards the end of my 8-month posting. Like on this day back in '86, at the small pre-school I helped run. The young girl's name was Kenisha, caught here in the cement-reflected light of the tiny school. So many others I got to know, like these young gentlemen at their Rasta street shack.

But I didn't need a camera with me to see. Was it Dorothea Lange who said that "a camera is a tool that teaches you how to see without a camera?" Exactly.

My old SLR also went with me to Thailand in my 30s, on another volunteer stint, making an appearance when the moment was right – or at least zen enough.

But the shutter of my dear old cameras fired less and less as time wore on. A demanding job. A new relationship. A baby. A child. A mortgage. A failing marriage. And things much more mundane.

THE CAMERA AS THERAPIST

By Sean Kelly

Flash forward to two years ago to that day rearranging the house. Picking up an old film camera. Cocking the shutter, hearing the reassuring clunk.

Like seeing an old photograph of yourself – was I that young? – picking up the camera flickered a memory, a sense of what I wanted to be, to do. Decision made, I would buy a digital camera, a real camera, an SLR.

I read the reviews, I went to the stores. I handled a few. The usual Canons, the Nikons. Fortunately, one store had a Pentax. It felt good, it felt right. My old K1000 sitting at home would love the company. And I had some wonderful old glass I could use, those classic Takumar lenses.

So, new DSLR in hand, I put on my 50mm. Oh yeah. The smoothness of that old focusing ring. The colours, the bokeh. It started coming back.

I started seeing again. I started buying the photo magazines. I started driving my son nuts – ‘just stop moving for a moment Evan while I focus.’ My time with my son. I didn’t want to freeze a moment. I wanted to capture an evocation. Something that my subconscious saw that I didn’t. I know, we photographers can get way too philosophical about a snapshot, but what the hell. I look at these photos, and I see something in me as well as in my son.

So here I sit two years later, needing to write this thank you letter to my cameras. I have a new girlfriend now, and while she doesn’t

always get my visual style, she gets the passion of photography. My ten-year-old is getting into photography, albeit with a Nikon. He has his own style, and I’m grateful for that.

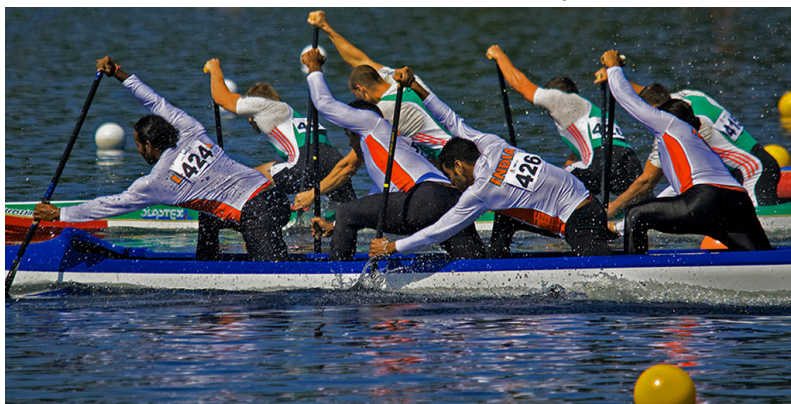
And that little girl in the Caribbean preschool all those years ago? She somehow tracked me down, to say that she is doing ok. She lives in Canada now, and is doing a Master’s degree.

My old camera saw something after all.

Members' Gallery (3)

A collection of photographs submitted by PGNS members

by Nanciellen Davis



by Lynn Ellis



by Ralph Rosere

PHOTOGRAPHY IN COSTA RICA

By George Mitchell

This is an account of my experience of Costa Rica, with particular focus (no pun intended) on photographic opportunities in the country. I hope that it might interest all PGNS members and be of some value to any of you hoping to visit the country. My wife Patricia (Pip) and I have had two extended stays in Costa Rica, namely the months of January, February, and March in both 2011 and 2012. Our practice has been to rent a house in a different location each month. We rent a four-wheel-drive vehicle for the duration, and use each house as a base for exploring the region. For both trips, before leaving Halifax I made reservations for a number of lodges and parks. Some of these I will describe later.

BACKGROUND ON THE COUNTRY: A lot of information is available in guide books and on the internet so I will be brief. Costa Rica is the safest country in Central America. The people are friendly, helpful, and proud of their country. But, nobody is perfect and there is a lot of petty theft in certain areas. Never leave your car unattended with valuables in it. We suffered an auto break-in at a famous crocodile viewing bridge over the Tárcoles river. We should have known better.

It is a relatively inexpensive country for food and lodging. If you plan well in advance, it is easy to find furnished houses for rent at reasonable cost. Many of these are owned by Americans, by the way, and are found at the web site VRBO, among others. The six houses we have rented cost from \$800/month to \$2000/month. All were fine, some having two bedrooms and two bath-

rooms. One even had its own swimming pool.

Since Costa Rica is only a few degrees north of the equator, the temperature at sea



In the cloud forest

level is high. I love heat and was generally fine, but Pip suffered. A long siesta after lunch is highly recommended. A typical Nova Scotian would be happier staying at a higher altitude. Costa Rica has a central spine of mountains and a prominent Central Valley where the majority of the people live. Since it is a small country, it is feasible to live at a higher and cooler place and travel to the low-

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lands for two- or three-day excursions. If you're planning on renting a car, you need to be aware of a couple of things. One is the condition of roads. The main highways are paved and are in pretty good shape. Many secondary roads, however, are unpaved and can be bad indeed, so plan on going slowly. The second feature of driving in Costa Rica is the absence of road signs. Once you are off the main highway, you will need to ask direc-

Tourists do go in the wet season and prices are lower, but travel to some of the more remote regions can be hazardous because of roads being flooded. As an example, the road from Puerto Jiménez to Corcovado National

A Purple-crowned Woodnymph at a bromeliad flower



tions. Pip has learned Spanish so she is my guide. The Ticos are very helpful. (Note: Costa Ricans call themselves Ticos.)

Costa Rica has considerable annual variation in rainfall. We chose to go there in part because our winter is the dry season.

An Eyelash Viper beside a La Selva trail



Park crosses six or seven rivers and there are no bridges, so it is often impassable after heavy rain (We drove this in March when the rivers were very low.)

EQUIPMENT: In Costa Rica, my main photographic interest was in wildlife, with landscapes a second goal. Of course, many landscapes contain wildlife, so I need to be ready for both. On many expeditions, I carried two cameras, one with a telephoto and the other with a wide angle lens. (Incidentally, my cameras are APS-C format, not full frame.) My telephoto is a 70-400 mm lens. It's very heavy, but it became my main lens. It has quite a small close focus and does well with flowers and butterflies as well as more distant creatures. For landscapes I found that my widest lens, a 10-20 mm, was often the best choice. Two other lenses I took to Costa Rica, a 16-105 mm zoom and a 100 mm macro, of-

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ten stayed home. The 16-105 mm range is ideal for urban photography or photojournalism, but I don't do much of that.

My tripod and cable release got quite a



bit of use. Carrying a tripod on a hike is a nuisance, of course, but it is often essential. For example, in the Costa Rican forests, the light level is so low that hand-held landscape pictures are impossible. Sunsets at the beach also need a tripod, for obvious reasons. I rarely use a tripod for wildlife because you don't know where the animal will pop up or where it will go. Macros of flowers and some slow-moving insects are an exception and a tripod is very useful. In using the 400 mm lens handheld, I set the shutter to 1/500 sec and the ISO to Auto. In the dark rainforest,

fill flash is good, so I often used an external flash. I am still not good at getting the right balance between natural light and flash light. A few days before we left this year I ordered a flash extender from B&H. This is a simple device with a Fresnel lens. Henry's does not carry them, by the way. Unfortunately, the thing arrived the day after we left the country and I still have not tried it.

What else should you bring along? I strongly recommend two spare batteries per camera and a few spare memory cards. I also lug along my laptop because I like to do some post-processing right away. For backup, I also brought two small disk drives, WD brand in my case. They are now inexpensive even for capacities up to 1 TB. I do backups on both, generally daily, and carry one with me always. On a shorter trip, a computer would be less necessary. In our case, the computer was also our contact with the out-



side world. By the way, wireless internet is available throughout the country. In the following, I will give descriptions of some of the parks, lodges, nature preserves, etc. that I have visited.

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La Selva Biological Station is a 4,000 acre section of lowland rainforest that is being used for research in tropical biology. It is one of three research stations in Costa Rica operated by the Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS), an international consortium of universities. As well as scientists and students, La Selva can accommodate a dozen or so visitors. The cabins are not luxurious (no radio, TV, or internet!) but are clean and comfortable. Meals are cafeteria-style and we found them very good. Incidentally, the Harvard sociobiologist E. O. Wilson visited La Selva



A Keel-billed Toucan at Laguna del Lagarto

many times to study ants.

La Selva has an excellent network of trails that take you deep into the forest. Because the number of visitors is small, you are alone with the birds, monkeys, butterflies, etc. It is the best place I know in the country to experience lowland rainforest. We spent two nights there in 2011 and liked it so much we went back for three nights in 2012.

Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve is a world-renowned ecotourism destination. It is



A Capuchin Monkey in Carara National Park

at an altitude of about 1500 meters, near the Continental Divide separating the Caribbean slope from the Pacific slope. Cloud forest differs from rainforest in being cool, having



A Three-toed Sloth in Manuel Antonio National Park

somewhat smaller trees, having clouds blowing through almost constantly, and having a different mix of wildlife. The presence of

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cloud leads to a constant dripping which in turn favours the growth of epiphytes. The



A Violet Sabrewing

trees are laden with epiphytes, including bromeliads, orchids, and ferns.

This is a good place to talk about guides. If you are staying at a park or preserve, a half-day guided tour is often included. These are well worth your time. The guides are usually very knowledgeable and



Playa Matapalo on the Osa Peninsula

most speak reasonably good English. Any additional guided hikes cost money, of course. The cost may seem high, but keep in mind that your fees are helping to preserve the forest. You will see much more with a

guide. Pip and I usually go off on our own at parks and preserves, partly because I don't care to be constrained by the group. I am thinking about taking great images! If you are lucky, you can have a guided hike with only two or three people. The well-heeled individual (or couple) can have their personal guide



Playa Ventana near Ojochal

for their entire Costa Rican adventure. In the picture on page 23, the man standing in front of his big lens is an English physician and the man seated is his guide. I recommend that you take night tours with a guide. The rainforest at night is quite scary, even with a headlamp. At night you might see katydids, frogs, wolf spiders, a snake or two, and olingos (an arboreal mammal).

In the rainforest and cloud forest it is common to encounter hummingbirds. More accurately, it is common for a hummingbird to encounter you. The tiny bird comes for a look, hovers briefly, then zips away. You will not get a photograph! The best places to see and to photograph hummingbirds are hummingbird gardens, where they are fed. There is one just outside the entrance to the Monteverde Preserve, where you will see six or

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seven species of hummingbird, including the Violet Sabrewing shown on page 25. They are accustomed to humans and, with a little patience, you can approach to within a couple of feet of them.



Sunset at Playa Ballenas

Laguna del Lagarto Lodge is a small lodge with 250 acres of primary lowland rainforest in northern Costa Rica, just 15 kilometers from the Nicaraguan border. It is very remote, the last stretch requiring two hours of driving along a dirt road. The rooms are reasonably comfortable and there is an open-air dining area where you can watch parrots, toucans, and oropendola at the fruit feeders. The lodge is surrounded by lagoons with resident caymans (lagarto in Spanish). Visitors have free use of canoes to access the lagoons.

Of the many places I have visited in Costa Rica, Laguna del Lagarto is the best for bird photography. Bananas at the feeder attract toucans, aracari, parrots, and many brilliant tanagers. A nearby lagoon is home to the curious Boat-billed Heron. Best of all, and little-known, is Adolfo's garden! Adolfo is the manager of the lodge. He is from the nearby tiny community and he invites visitors

to his garden. He lives in a very modest little house with a small garden. Adolfo has planted the garden with flowers and bushes and he and his wife put out bananas in various places. Many birds, particularly brilliantly-coloured tanagers, come to this garden.

I am going to digress here for a few remarks on species diversity in the neotropics. High species diversity means the presence of many species but does not imply that a given creature is numerous. The diversity is, however, astonishing and was a revelation to me. For example, Costa Rica has 880 recorded bird species, about 2,000 butterflies, possibly a million beetles, 600 fern species, thousands of orchids, and so on. Mammal species are, of course, lower, with four monkeys, six (I think) wild cats, two sloths, but a



Butterfly at our San Ramon house

hundred or so bats. In the rainforest there can be two hundred species of tree in a given hectare. The reason for such diversity is not understood by biologists.

Carara National Park protects 11,600 acres of land on the Pacific side in the transition zone between tropical dry forest to the north and tropical wet forest to the south. For the bird

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specialist, Carara is of special interest because North Pacific and South Pacific species live side by side. Because Carara is less than a two hour drive from San José, it is a popular destination and, indeed, it may be the only



national park that some short term visitors will see.

Inside the park and in the park vicinity, there is a good chance of seeing Scarlet Macaws. These noble birds were declining in numbers for years but the population is now recovering, thanks in part to breeding pro-



grams and in part to conservation. Poaching for the pet trade probably still goes on, but you can see Scarlet Macaws in many places

on the Pacific side, from Jaco down to the Panama border.

Manuel Antonio National Park is the smallest national park in Costa Rica. It is located in the middle of the Pacific coast south of Carara. As well as being small, it is popular and, therefore, has a crowded feel compared to other parks. It has, however, stunning beaches. In spite of the small size and high



density of visitors, Manuel Antonio is very rich in mammal species. In a single visit I have seen deer, two-toed and three-toed sloths, capuchin monkeys, squirrel monkeys, howler monkeys, raccoons, and coati.

Squirrel monkeys are rare and are only seen in the Manuel Antonio area and points south. Capuchins, on the other hand are doing fine throughout the country. In Manuel Antonio National Park they are given food by visitors, especially by Ticos. This is against the rules and is bad for the health of the monkeys, but it has an amusing side. I once saw a Capuchin up in a tree munching on a whole baguette! Also, they have taken to theft. Pip had a package of cookies stolen by one. They are very fast! In other places, capuchins are

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quite wild and, in fact, resent people encroaching on their territory.

Beaches: Look at a large map of Costa Rica and you will see “Playa this” and “Playa that” all the way down the Pacific coast. Playa means beach and there are many of them. I have not visited the Nicoya Peninsula in the North Pacific. My remarks here will apply to the Pacific coast from Tárcoles through Manuel Antonio, Dominical, Uvita, the Osa Peninsula and on to Panama. The towns of Jacó and Manuel Antonio/Quepos are popular with tourists and so the beaches there can have a certain number of people. South of Quepos, communities along the coast are small and the beaches are often deserted. It is striking to find a beach of great beauty and without people.

Returning to photography, the golden rule for landscapes is to take your pictures in the brief time when the sun is low, either near sunset or just after sunrise. I agree that this is generally true, but there is also a place for images taken when the sun is high, to show the colours of the sky, sea, and beach, as at Playa Matapalo above. That picture was taken hand-held because I did not have my tripod. The light was intense so that was not a problem. The Playa Espadillo and Playa Ventana images were taken using a tripod and cable release, permitting use of a small aperture to achieve large depth of field and small ISO for image sharpness. When the light level drops at sunset, it becomes easier to use a longer exposure time to get interesting blur effects with water in motion. I should admit that I did get some such pictures, but usually by accident! That is, when the camera is set for aperture priority, as the light goes the ex-

posure time will increase. Manual mode is much better for sunsets and I did use this sometimes.

I have a story about Playa Ventana. It is the most beautiful beach we found in Costa Rica, with a horseshoe shape and surrounded



by tree-covered hills. Although we were living all of March within a few kilometers of this beach, and although we visited other beaches on either side of it, we only discovered it a few days before we left the country. As is often the case in Costa Rica, there was no sign on the main road telling of its existence. Access requires a ten-minute walk along a trail which crosses a stream and passes through a wooded area.

Incidentally, when travelling to a secluded beach or park in the afternoon in the tropics you should carry a flashlight or headlamp. Darkness falls very quickly! On my first visit to Playa Ventana, I had to forego

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sunset pictures because I had brought no light.

Arenal Volcano and La Fortuna: Volcán Arenal is an active volcano which has been doing dramatic things for the last several decades, including explosive ejection of debris. Pictures taken at night often showed a red glow and rocks shooting into the air before rolling down its steep slopes. Arenal became a big tourist attraction, leading to a boom (economic not sonic) in the small town of Fortuna nearby. Unfortunately, the volcano has been quiet for the last year or so. Tourists still come, however, because the area is beautiful and has many birds (always birds!), as well

as waterfalls, forests, etc. At an elevation of 600 meters, the climate is temperate (i.e. June/July in Nova Scotia). The Arenal Volcano National Park partially surrounds the volcano.

The town of La Fortuna and its surroundings have many small hotels and lodges. We stayed for three nights at the Arenal Observatory Lodge, the closest to the volcano. This lodge is fairly luxurious and, therefore, fairly expensive, but I think it is good value. It has extensive gardens and a number of trails, one to a waterfall. The gardens and trails were so seductive that we never got to the national park!

(TO BE CONTINUED)



