



Southern Illinois Photographic Society

www.sipscameraclub.com

February 2010 Newsletter

Calendar of Events

February

Meeting: Feb. 2

Program: Underwater Photography

15 Minutes of Fame: Linda Bundren

Contest: "Red" (12 month)

Outing: Union County Conservation Area / Horseshoe Lake, Feb. 13

Planning Meeting: Feb. 16

March

Meeting: Mar. 2

Program: Copyright and Marketing Images, Dave Hammond

15 Minutes of Fame: Dave Morgan

Contest: Snow/winter (2 month)

Outing: Burden Falls & Belle Smith Springs, Pope Co., Mar. 27

Planning Meeting: Mar. 16

April

Meeting: Apr. 6

Program: Travel Photography: Brazil Pantanal, Linda Martin

15 Minutes of Fame: Bill Lipscomb

Contest: TBD

Outing: TBD

Planning Meeting: Apr. 20

Inside...

Meeting news, Photo Op., Dave Brewer's photo tips, plus an all-new feature gets behind the photo!

January Meeting

SIPS rang in the new year with its first meeting of 2010 on Jan. 5. We had a good turnout, including new members George O'Neill and Jennie Baer. George is from Anna, and enjoys outdoor photography, and Jennie is from Marion, where she does portrait photography ("I like people"). Also in the audience was Tom Ulrich, well-known to SIPS for his wildlife photography, visiting from Montana. Tom will be giving a presentation of his work over the last year on Feb. 22 at SIU in Carbondale (in Lawson 161). Members also took some time to get reacquainted, and Dave Horning generously invited members to visit his house and check out his studio equipment the Saturday after the meeting.

This year's club president Jillian Choate presented Mike Hicks with a plaque in appreciation of his efforts as president last year. In other club business, club treasurer Dana Tetzlaff reported on club finances, and while they are in good shape, remember that dues are due at the beginning of the year. Please pay Dana as soon as you can.

Eldorado Printers has finished the business cards for the club, and they look great. If you didn't get some at the meeting, ask Dave Horning next time you see him.

Our program this month was on nature photography, given by our own Dave Brewer. He offered a number of tips on how to improve your nature photography. His pointers are included in a separate article in this newsletter (see p. 3).

Our Featured Member presentation has been rechristened "15 Minutes of Fame" for the new year, and our first one was member Mary Jo Estrada. She shared her enjoyment of macro photography, with some wonderful images of her flower gardens, butterflies, bees, and birds. She also shared her "Kodak moment," when she won her first photo contest and her photo was on display at Disney World for a year!

In our Show and Tell segment, Elaine Parker had some beautiful turn of the century images found in a friend's

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Photo Op

by Jim Osborn

The gauntlet has been thrown down...you have all been challenged!! The first ever SIPS year-long Technical Photo Contest has started with the biggest pool of prize money ever awarded for a single contest. So, you looked over the categories and say to yourself, "How do I do that?...I don't even know what that means!" Fear not, we are here to help. For each of the next 5 months we will describe and discuss two of the ten parameters (categories) for photo imaging so you will be able to participate with confidence. We know that most of you probably set your cameras on an automatic or program setting, but this contest is all about learning to use the other bells and whistles on your camera. So let's get going!

Depth of field...what is it? Wikipedia defines depth of field as "the portion of a scene that appears acceptably sharp in the image." Several web sites I visited had pages and pages of information on depth of field, but this is a short article so I am going to take major shortcuts. If you look at a landscape photograph and everything in the image is in focus from the closest items to the most distant, then that picture has deep depth of field. If the image is sharp at only a limited focal point with the rest of the image being blurred or blurry, then the image is said to have shallow depth of field. The depth of field that a photographer chooses to use is part of the creative process.

How do you control depth of field? Here are some suggestions. F-stops refer to the size of the aperture and thus the amount of light that enters the camera. The lower the f-stop number the larger the aperture—thus more light...the higher the f-stop number the smaller the aperture, and less light. Now for the good part...a low f-stop number (e.g. f2.8) will produce a shallow the depth of field which gradually increases as the f-stop number gets higher until



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Young bison at Yellowstone (photo: Christine Keeney)

The Adventure Behind the Photo

by Christine Keeney

Hello, my name is Christine. I love to travel and I love photography; it's great for me that the two go so well together. I have often thought that as long as I have a good story to come home with from my trips then that trip was successful. If I have a photograph to go along with that story then it was just about a perfect trip. Even some of the trips that others would most likely deem unsuccessful, simply because of the things that went wrong (the numerous things as is often the case in my trips) were a triumph for me simply because those stories are usually the better ones. I thought that I might share some of these stories, and the photos that I took home with me, with you. Some of these stories I learned photographic lessons on, and some I just learned practical life lessons on!

One of my more amusing situations happened a few years ago in Yellowstone National Park. I had spent a week driving around out west and my favorite spot ended up being Yellowstone. I spent three days driving around learning what to watch for (crowds of cars are big clue) and clicking on my camera shutter for all I was worth. I loved every second of it and I was reluctantly heading for home. I rounded a gentle curve as I was getting

close to the exit of the park and hit my brakes quickly because two young bison were on what would be considered the shoulder of the road. They were so close to the road their 'shoulders' were actually in my lane. As I braked they looked at me then trotted off a few hundred feet into the sparsely wooded field and started to head butt each other.

This was too tremendous of an opportunity for me to pass up; I had to get some shots of this. I had read all of the warning signs and I have a very healthy respect for wild animals. I knew the unpredictability of this situation - after all when you see pictures of buffalo knocking a bus over it makes an impression - but I had to see what I could see.

I parked my car a few yards past where they had stopped to play. I got out with my camera, which takes stills as well as video footage, and I took some shots over the top of my car. The young bison continued to frolic and play, and I became bolder. Leaving my car door open (quick escape plan, you know) I walked to the end of my car, snapping and filming alternately the entire time. These two enormous children were having so much fun that I was just fascinated and I did not want to stop: so I kept on.

By now I'm about five feet away from my car. I have quite a few pictures and I have now switched to video. Suddenly

they decided they were tired of playing and they wanted to return to the snacking they had been doing before I so rudely interrupted them. In tandem, they turned back to the highway, which also happened to be back toward me. Now, the video that I captured from that moment might be a bit more interesting to me than it is to others, since it is sky, ground, sky, ground, sky, inside of car, but the still shots I came home with of these two youngsters are a highlight of that trip that I happily share with all that I can force to watch my vacation slide shows.

The bison had absolutely no interest in me and they did not come anywhere near me or my car, they simply were tired of waiting for me and took matters into their own hoofs, heading back to their roadside feast. The photos (and the crutches stored in my basement) are my souvenirs of Yellowstone National Park - I will treasure them always.

January Meeting

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grandmother's attic. She is requesting information on how to transfer these slides to digital format, and how to obtain the copyright for the family. They are considering having a book published with some of these images.

Our contest this month was on "holiday." We had nine entries, with the following winners:

1st place: Mike Hicks, "model train"

2nd place: David Horning, "happy baby"

3rd place: Bill Randall, "little girl"
Congratulations!

Next month, our meeting contest subject is "red", and it's open to member photos taken within the last year. Additionally, the new SIPS Photographic Technical Excellence was announced at this meeting. See the boxed description on p. 3 for contest details, as well as Jim's Photo Op article for a head start on the first part of the contest. Starting in March, we will have short educational discussions on the categories, covering two per month. Any member is welcome to volunteer to present information for one of these discussions.

Nature Imaging Teaching Points

by Dave Brewer

Editor's note: Dave presented the following points at the SIPS January meeting. He graciously allowed us to reproduce them here.

- The manual to your camera will tell you about its features, but not necessarily how to access or use them successfully in the field. A guide book (Red Lantern, David Busch, etc.) is a good investment. Also look for on-line tutorials and tips.

- Separate AF from the shutter release (AF-ON Button). This enables follow-focusing independent of capturing an image; enables follow-focusing between images. This is essential with subjects on the move, especially birds in flight.

- For large mammals and subjects with busy environs and foregrounds (e.g. shorebirds in a surf line, coyotes in tall grass), drop multiple AF points and go to single AF point. Otherwise foreground and distractions can “capture AF independent of your chosen subject” And change the zone of focus. There is no such thing as one AF set-up that is “the best” for all situations.

- If using a single AF point, the center AF point is (1) the most sensitive, and (2) a cross-hair type permitting instant re-orientation to a vertical image. You can always crop for composition later.

- IS/VR is nice, but there is no substitute for fast glass. Faster glass for a given focal length yields less DOF, better subject isolation, and smoother Bokeh (i.e., out-of-focus background), while permitting use of a lower ISO. Remember that many nature subjects are most active within an hour of sunup/sundown, when acceptable light levels are at a premium.

- Learn the acceptable imaging parameters of your equipment; what it can and cannot do well. Don't be afraid to experiment to find those limits.

- If you have a trip lined up to image large mammals or birds and you have never successfully imaged same before, practice to perfect your techniques and acquire some skill; go to a zoo, a farm, etc. When confronted with the image opportunity of a lifetime, you want to know what to do and have a confidence level about your skill level and technique;

SIPS Photographic Technical Excellence Contest

This year, we have a new yearlong contest: the SIPS Photographic Technical Excellence contest. The goal is to focus on specific technical skills in photography and use them to create great images. The contest runs from Jan. 5 to Nov. 2 (our Nov. meeting). Entrants should create a portfolio of 10 images, each of which covers a different technical area, in the following list:

1. Shallow depth of field
2. Far depth of field
3. Macro (DOF, sharpness of image)
4. Low light outdoor (between sundown and sunrise)
5. Indoor portrait or still life - no flash (higher ISO?)
6. Indoor portrait or still life - with flash
7. Moving image - stop action (fast shutter speed)
8. Moving image - blurring effect (slow shutter speed)
9. White or very light colored subject (exposure control)
10. Black or dark colored subject (exposure control)

Pictures should be no larger than 5x7, in a portfolio, annotated only with the name of each category. Pictures will be judged individually on technical merit relative to the category and visual appeal.

do not leave it to chance you will do it correctly.

- Auto-ISO is great. Learn to use it when light levels DECREASE and enable you to save and use essential imaging parameters (aperture for DOF and SS for action).

- When imaging landscapes and macro, exercise maximum control of the imaging parameters to get the image you envision (WB, focus point, DOF, SS, ISO). This especially important if you anticipate merging images into panoramas.

- When imaging large mammals, DO NOT USE FLASH; THIS INCLUDES DISABLING YOUR AF ASSIST. This is

especially true when imaging male animals during mating season (e.g., elk, moose, deer, bison), females with young (anytime), and predators on a kill (anytime). Don't endanger yourself, the animal, or other observers/photographers.

- Birds and animals choose the opportunity (unless a studio setup is used), the lighting, the setting, etc. Make the most of the opportunity without disturbing the animal. Use a vehicle as a blind, respect animals' safe distance zones, learn stalking techniques (especially visible stalks). Spooking or disturbing an animal, especially one that other photographers are imaging, will not ingratiate you with your fellow photographers, will stress the animal, and possibly make for a dangerous encounter.

- Know when to go to manual focus (especially in macro, landscapes, and panoramas).

- Pre-focusing or establishing a pre-determined zone of focus will speed AF acquisition.

- Acquiring the image is but half the equation; with both film and digital capture, the final image will only be as good as the development/post-processing and printing/display.

- A camera is but a tool; each model has innate capabilities and limitations. Get the right tool for the job.

- Whenever you are going afield (i.e., away from a base of operations) plan for redundancy and contingencies (e.g., extra batteries, extra body, extra tripod, etc.).

- If using a long lens, proper support is a must; learn long lens technique.

- Never stop learning; always be open to learning. See what others are doing; it might improve your imaging.

- Remember, IT IS ALL ABOUT THE LIGHT. And its qualities. Learn how to evaluate those qualities and incorporate them into your imaging to maximize the possibilities.

- All camera meters are reflective light meters and are therefore not infallible; they can be easily fooled. Develop your sense of what the proper EV is for a given exposure.

Photo Op

cont'd from p. 1

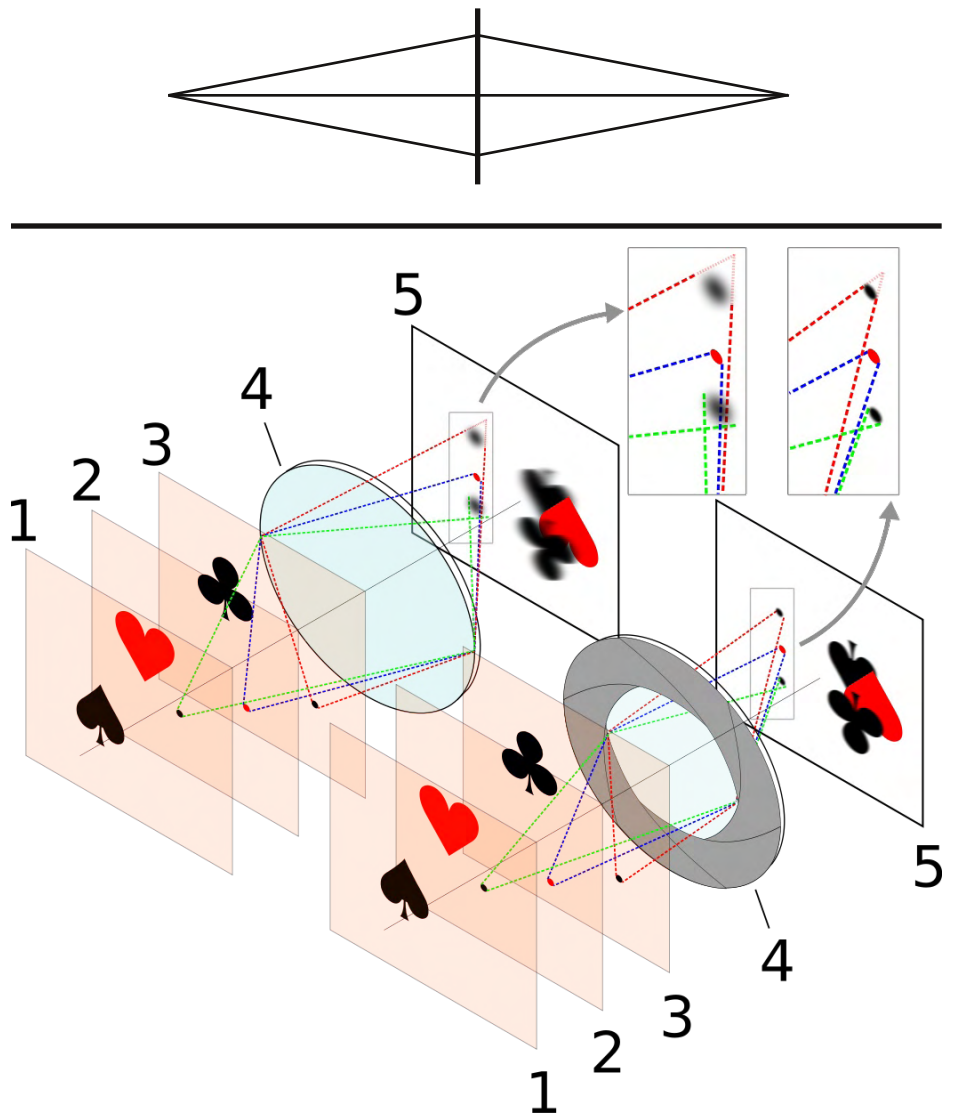
everything in the image is sharp and a deep depth of field is achieved (e.g. f22). On both point and shoot cameras and DSLRs, the depth of field is controllable. First set your mode dial to “A” for aperture priority. Then before you shoot, use another dial (which will be in a different location depending on your make and model of camera) that adjusts the depth of field up and down. REMEMBER, though, if you are trying to take a picture without the use of a tripod or steadying device, the shutter speed needs to be faster than approximately 1/250 of a second (usually just shown as 250) AND the less light entering your camera means a LONGER/SLOWER shutter speed. To be on the safe side, always use a tripod. To get shallow depth of field, use a wide open aperture (small numbered f-stop). That is really all you need to know. Try taking the several images of the same thing from a tripod using a range of f-stops and view the differences on your computer. You will see what I mean. If you have questions, feel free to ask me directly or email me at jro320@yahoo.com.

The Technical Side

by Jonathan Springer

Here is an adjunct to Jim's discussion of depth-of-field, for those interested in the technical side. If you're not, don't worry—this is not at all necessary in order to make good use of depth-of-field!

In the diagram above, we see two cases, one with a wide aperture (on the left) and one with a narrower aperture (on the right). In each case, the light is coming from the foreground subjects (1, 2, and 3), passing through an aperture and lens (4), and being projected onto a film or sensor plane (5). In each case, the lens is focused on the heart (2), so that appears perfectly in focus. Objects farther away (1) or closer (3) will always be less in focus—by how much depends on the aperture. With a wide aperture, as on the left, the focus degrades rapidly, so the spade and the club are obviously out of focus. With a narrower aperture, the decrease in focus will be imperceptible, so the spade and club appear sharp.



The effect of aperture on depth-of-field (diagram by Chabacano, Wikimedia Commons)

Why does the aperture affect the depth of field? First, we need to understand why the blurring happens in the first place. For each point on the object the camera is looking at, light rays are radiating in all directions, and in particular are passing through all parts of the surface of the lens. For a point in the plane of focus (2), the lens is arranged such that it will redirect all those rays back to one single point on the film plane. Objects that are not in the plane of focus (1 and 3) are fuzzy because light rays coming from the same point are being directed to slightly different points on the film plane. In other words, a ray of light from a point in the spade passing through the center of the lens will go to one point on the film plane, while another ray from the same point in the spade passing

through at the edge of the lens will go to a different point on the film plane.

Now we can see why aperture makes the difference. It happens that the farther from the center of the lens the ray of light passes (i.e. closer to the edge of the lens), the bigger the difference in where it is projected in the film plane. By closing the aperture, we are blocking those more off-center rays of light, leaving behind the ones that are better clustered together. If they are sufficiently close together in the film plane, the point appears sharp. The technical term for this is the “circle of confusion,” which is defined as the maximum diameter that a point can blur without being distinguishable—by the film grain, sensor pixel, or human eye, depending on what's looking through the lens.