



Southern Illinois Photographic Society

www.sipscameraclub.com

September 2010 Newsletter

August Meeting

We began our meeting by welcoming some interesting visitors. Sue Funk of Elkhart was here to observe our club, since she is interested in starting a club in her area. Also, Monroe and Louise's granddaughter Madison was in attendance. She is taking photography in 4-H and has won some 1st place ribbons for her talents.

During the Show & Tell segment, Elaine Parker brought in an antique camera called a "Tower Box Camera." This was still in the box and originally purchased at Sears. Anyone interested in purchasing this camera please see Elaine.

Also during Show & Tell, Jim Muller displayed a Russian camera, on which he has recently taken images using some old Soviet slide film. The film expired in 1992, but reportedly B&L will be able to process it for him. B&L has some outdated film available, if anyone is interested.

Our 15 Minutes of Fame member this month was Linda Martin. She gave a very interesting presentation on "Birds and Bees" from Dolphin Island in the Gulf of Mexico. She highlighted the birds migrating north in the spring. Linda also organized a trip to South Texas, about which Dave Brewer writes later in this newsletter.

Linda also showed images from our previous outing to the Day's in Alma. She presented pictures from Jan, Jim, Mike, Bill, and Joanna as well as herself.

In announcements, the Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge "Wildlife and Wild Places" photo contest is coming up. The categories this year are Landscape/Scenic, Wildlife, and Flowers/Plants/Trees. Entries are \$5 each, up to 5 maximum. (Children may enter 5 photos for \$5 total.) Note that photos must have been taken in the CONWR (this is a change this year), and the contest is open to amateurs only. The deadline is Oct. 2, and winners will be announced at a reception at the visitor's center on Oct. 10 at noon. For additional information, see the flyers that were handed out, or visit

<http://www.friendsofconwr.com/en/photo->

contest.html

Our annual SIPS Christmas party will be Dec. 7 at the SIU Student Center. Al Perry from Evansville, IN will be our guest speaker. The fee this year will be \$20. Look for tickets from Dana in November.

Our contest this month was entitled "Ravages of Time." There were 13 entries, from 9 members.

1st place: Joanna Gray, "Old Car"

2nd place: Virginia Stith, "Barn"

3rd place: Jim Bornert, "Southwestern Building"

Congratulations to these winners! Next month's contest is "Still Life." Also, the annual Mystery Tour contest route will be announced at the next meeting. Finally, don't forget about the Technical Excellence contest, due at the November meeting.

If you've been putting off entering a contest, now is a great time to start with these several opportunities coming up. As further encouragement, Jim's Photo Op article below offers some very useful and timely advice.

Photo Op

By Jim Osborn

At the last SIPS meeting a sheet of paper was passed around asking attendees to identify topics for future programs. I noticed that someone had written down "How to win club photo contests." While I'm not sure that topic is worthy of a 40 minute program, I am happy to provide my thoughts on this for your consideration. I have had my fair share of winning entries in club contests over the years and I do think there are some "tricks" you can use to improve your chances of winning.

1. **Subject matter makes a difference.** Enter something unique. For every contest theme I ask myself, what subject is likely to be represented the most frequently. In the recent "Insect World" contest I thought that entries of dragonflies would be numerous, so I elected to enter an image of a spider (learning later that a spider is actually not



Calendar of Events

September

Meeting: Sept. 7

Program: History of Photography,
Jillian Choate

15 Minutes of Fame: Joyce Hesketh

Contest: Still Life (60 day)

Outing: Du Quoin State Fair, Sept. 4

Planning Meeting: Sept. 21

October

Meeting: Oct. 5

Program: Shawnee Multimedia
Project

15 Minutes of Fame: Dave Horning

Contest: Music (1 year)

Outing: TBD

Planning Meeting: Oct. 19

November

Meeting: Nov. 2

Program: TBD

15 Minutes of Fame: TBD

Contest: Technical Excellence (1 year)

Outing: TBD

Planning Meeting: Nov. 16

Inside...

Meeting news and Photo Op, as well as a special feature trip report!

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Centralia Balloon outing, above, right, and below (photos: Linda Bundren)

Recent Outings

Our outing for August was the Centralia Balloon Festival, on Aug. 21. Several SIPS members made the trek up there, and got some wonderful shots (such as Linda Bundren's, above). Our September outing has actually just taken place as well, having been last Saturday, Sept. 4, at the DuQuoin State Fair. The reports from this latter event are not in yet, however, so we will bring you the account in next month's newsletter.

Photo Op

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an insect). This month's contest is "Still Life" and I predict there will be numerous bowls of fruit. I truly believe you should enter images with subjects that stand out from the crowd—images that offer something unique.

2. Differentiate your image to make it stand out. There are other ways you can make your images stand out. For the contest on "Ravages of Time," I entered a black and white image—it was the only one rendered that way. Last year for the contest on "Faces," I entered a picture that was cropped to 6" X 12"—a unique size. Sometimes members enter pictures with borders or pictures that are matted or framed. Those little things will make your image stand out from the crowd..

3. Choose your photo paper wisely. Believe it or not I think your choice in photo paper makes a difference. I truly believe that images printed on glossy paper stand out more than images printed on matte paper. You want people to take that second look—go glossy!

4. When in doubt include kids. Voting members of our club seem to like pictures with children. Incorporating children into the month's topic isn't always appropriate, but those images

seem to work, none-the-less.

5. Enter theme-appropriate images. Sometimes I have a hard time seeing how an entry relates to the contest theme. There were some entries in the recent "Bounty of Nature" contest that I questioned. I didn't vote for any of those images.

6. Technical merits of the image make a difference. For the "Insect World" contest I entered an image of two Monarch butterflies mating. I took the image with a telephoto lens at a distance of about 12 yards. I knew the image was a little "soft" because I missed slightly on



the depth of field...but I really liked the image. Guess what?—that only works to a point. You can enter photos that have technical "issues" and hope that people don't notice the flaws, but the reality is that everybody sees the same things you see. Frequently, club members enter images that are "over-sharpened." There seems to be a belief that if your image is slightly out-of-focus you can fix it in Photoshop. Don't kid yourself, and don't enter flawed images.

None of these ideas will necessarily win photo contests for you; but, if you consider these points, your chances of winning should improve. Now that I've shared my contest secrets with you I'll probably never win a club photo contest again!



CONWR 2010 Amateur Wildlife & Wild Places Photo Contest

Rules:

- Up to five photos per person.
- \$5 charge for each photo, \$5 for up to 5 photos for kids.
- Submissions must be original photos. Photographer must be an amateur.
- Photos must be taken on Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge.
- Photos between 5x7 and 8x10 (inclusive).
- Must be matted, finished size no larger than 11x16
- No glass, frames or hangers

To Enter:

- Submit photos at the Crab Orchard NWR Visitor Center Sept. 1st - Oct. 2nd
- Three categories: Landscape/Scenic, Wildlife, and Flowers/Plants/Trees/Fungi
- Prizes for best in show and 1st, 2nd, and 3rd in each category

Sponsors:

- Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge
- Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge
- For more information call 998-5933

Imaging in South Texas and the Lower Rio Grande Valley

by David W. Brewer, Ph.D.

In early August, 2010, five members of LEAA (Little Egypt Arts Association) and the Southern Illinois Photographic Society (SIPS) traveled to the Lower Rio Grande Valley in South Texas to image birds and wildlife at the Santa Clara Ranch, a privately-owned ranch dedicated to the preservation of the flora and fauna of the South Texas brush country. The trip was organized by Linda Martin. Jan Sundberg, Jo Dodd, Kris Killman, and I joined her for this excursion, along with Kent Taylor from Plano, Texas. We had reservations at the Ranch for August 6 – August 10, with the use of a new bunkhouse on the premises, and four photo blinds, each placed adjacent to specially-constructed waterholes and oriented so as to make efficient use of either morning or evening light. The ranch owner, Dr. Beto Gutierrez, has recently signed a conservation easement, insuring that the property will remain dedicated as a wildlife sanctuary for perpetuity. One may find out more information about Santa Clara Ranch at www.santaclararanch.com.

Linda, Jan, and Jo flew down to McAllen, Texas, met up with Kent, and rented a vehicle to drive the remaining distance to the ranch. Kris and I drove, allowing us to haul equipment of the other people and free up luggage space on the airlines. In addition, Kris wished to do some architecture imaging, so we rearranged our travel itinerary to allow for a day and a half in San Antonio, where we imaged the old missions along the San Antonio Mission Trail. These missions, including the Alamo, date from 1718-1735, and are exquisite examples of Spanish colonial architecture. The four missions other than the Alamo are still active parishes today. More information about the San Antonio Missions National Historical

Park may be found at www.nps.gov/saan.

The accommodations at Santa Clara Ranch are first-rate. The bunkhouse was completed this year and consists of four bedrooms to accommodate eight visitors, two full bathrooms, a lounge area with extra power outlets to accommodate computers, battery chargers, etc., a full kitchen and laundry facilities. The bunkhouse features central air-conditioning, something of a necessity for



Black-throated Sparrow at Santa Clara Ranch, Lower Rio Grande Valley (photo: Dave Brewer)

the South Texas climate. We stopped enroute to stock up on groceries as we prepared our own meals. We decided early on to make the noon meal the big meal of the day, sandwiched in between extensive hours in the blinds during the mornings and afternoons/evenings, taking advantage of the good light and the periods of time in which birds and other wildlife would be active. For those who need same, guide service can be arranged, with individuals who are both knowledgeable about the flora and fauna

of the South Texas Brush Country, as well as outstanding photographers, being available.

The four blinds, as I previously mentioned, are situated adjacent to specially-constructed waterholes, since all wildlife in this part of Texas revolves around the availability of water. Each waterhole is made of concrete, sunk into the ground to disguise its man-made construction, but constructed such that it cannot be destroyed by wildlife. Each is

plumbed with a pump to ensure that it will not go dry and can be instantly filled to optimal levels. Because the plumbing ensures that the waterholes never go dry, wildlife knows the location of the available water and is used to coming to these locations for same. The blinds are located immediately adjacent to the waterholes, one per waterhole, situated to make maximum use of either morning or evening light. As such, there are two “morning blinds” and two “evening blinds.” Dr. Gutierrez is presently contemplating the installation of additional blinds. The blinds themselves are sunk into the ground, such that one may image at ground level. Space is provided for four – five photographers/birders and their gear. Camouflage curtains mask movement

within the blind, and one arranges the curtain to permit effective imaging and/or observation. Folding chairs are provided for seating, with cushions available for additional “creature comfort.”

The Lower Rio Grande Valley is ranked one of the top birding spots in the continental United States. Many species are native to this area, and migrating birds, which choose not to cross the Gulf of Mexico, pass through this area adding

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Lower Rio Grande

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to the number of species which may be observed and imaged. It was the opportunity to image these birds which attracted me to this trip. Although August



Cardinal at Santa Clara Ranch (photo: Dave Brewer)

in South Texas is usually hot (and this year was no exception ...although it was hotter here in southern Illinois than in Texas when one factors in the humidity), that is a plus for imaging birds and wildlife. The South Texas Brush Country is semi-arid country. Here we were on a 300 acre ranch, where hunting is not allowed, situated around the only waterholes on the property. Any creature desiring water has to come to those waterholes, and come they did. We imaged some twenty species of birds, including some endemic to this area such as Groove-bill Anis, Green Jays, Roadrunners, and Pyrrhuloxias. In addition, we imaged insects, deer, Collared Peccaries, rabbits, tortoises, ground squirrels, snakes, scorpions, and plants. Each of us came away with thousands of images captured during our stay and plenty of good memories.

As for equipment, each of us was using a good digital single lens reflex camera with an assortment of lenses. Each blind is situated 6-8 feet from the nearest edge of the waterhole; the farthest edge being

another 10-12 feet away. Perches and feed are arranged to position birds and wildlife in camera range and for posing. Primarily we all used zoom lenses for ease of composing images on subjects varying in size from insects to deer. These lenses included 100-400mm, 120-300mm, 70-200mm, 150-500mm, 200-400mm, and 50-500mm, with some teleconverters added as necessary. For macro work with small subjects and flora, some people brought along macro equipment. A good, sturdy tripod is a must, as one will be in the blind for extended periods of time, and the camera equipment needs to be ready for the sudden appearance of whatever wildlife decides to appear. A tripod keeps the equipment poised, ready, and in position, without undue stress on one's arms. Because of the heat, we took along small coolers in the blinds, with lots of liquids to ensure adequate hydration.

One evening we arranged to share our provisions with our hosts, Dr. Gutierrez and his wife. Their hospitality and efforts to ensure that we had a pleasant and successful trip were an integral part of the experience. I cannot say enough good things about them. With most of the land in Texas being under private ownership, and big bucks involved in hunting rights, to see this couple devoting their efforts at Santa Clara Ranch towards conservation is heartening. They have consulted with experts in the areas of ornithology, conservation, botany, etc., to ensure that this ranch is run "as green as possible." Dr. Gutierrez is an award-winning photographer himself, so he is knowledgeable about what it takes to provide for excellent imaging opportunities.

Our take on this trip

is totally positive. We all decided we would do it again in a heartbeat. In fact, we had such a positive experience that we have talked of a reunion trip. The cost was acceptable, considering there is a ranch access fee, guide fee, bunkhouse fee, and travel expenses. However, once on site, one discovers the amount paid is very similar to the daily expenses at a vacation location. Kris and I had the additional pleasure of imaging the San Antonio Mission National Historic Park; the only "penalty" being a long drive and one night's stay in San Antonio. For anyone who is a dedicated birder, or who wishes a unique bird imaging experience, I heartily recommend the Santa Clara Ranch.

David W. Brewer is an author and professional nature photographer based in DeSoto, Illinois. His images may be viewed on the Internet at www.pbase.com/dwbrewer and www.dwbrewerimaging.com.

Photo Trip?

If you have recently or are soon taking a photography-related trip, we'd love to hear from you. Send in your account for inclusion in the newsletter, and inspire others to broaden their photographic horizons. You can contact the secretary at info@sipscameraclub.com.



Indigo Bunting at Santa Clara Ranch (photo: Dave Brewer)