

Los Gatos - Saratoga Camera Club Newsletter

Vol. 30 Issue 4

April 2008

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Palo Alto Baylands Nest Building At The Rookery Field Trip

Sunday April 13, 2008

Hosted by Bernie Weinzimmer

Description

This is a Nature field trip to photograph Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, and Black Crowned Night Herons during their nest building time period. We should see all three types of birds flying with branches and twigs to work on their nests.

Location

The "Rookery" is at the Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve. It is located behind the Palo Alto airport near the duck pond.

Logistics

We will meet at the Elk's Lodge at 7:30 a.m. and caravan to the location, planning to arrive by 8:30 a.m. Light should be good until around 10:30 a.m. We'll be taking 101 north to the Embarcadero Exit East toward the Bay.

Photography Tips

You will want to bring a zoom lens if possible in the 70-200 range. You can bring a tripod and longer lens for shooting the birds while they are in the trees but for the in flight shots you will probably be hand-holding and using dynamic tracking to keep the birds in focus. If you only have prime lenses then you should bring one around 85mm and one around 200mm. There are no fees to enter the Preserve.

To Sign-Up

Contact Bernie Weinzimmer
bweinzimmer@comcast.net to sign up. Those that have large cars or SUV's are encouraged to bring them so we can carpool.

April 21 - Program: Getting Great Travel Photos presented by Jeffery Luhn

Jeffery Jay Luhn will share his knowledge of travel photography in this presentation and discussion. He will take you through the process of getting the right equipment for your destination, while avoiding common pitfalls of the tourist photographer. Jeffery delivers the straight talk for getting professional results with your equipment, your approach, and your attitude.

Jeffery knows travel photography. He has been a professional photographer for 28 years, shooting in 30 countries for United Press International and many Fortune 500 corporations.

Jeffery graduated from Brooks Institute with two degrees in 1979 and went to work in Asia as a United Press International shooter. Following his

stint as a photojournalist he opened a large commercial studio in San Francisco and did work for dozens of international corporations, often involving location shooting.

Jeffery Jay Luhn Photography is based in Santa Cruz, California. This location enables him to service clients in the central coast area including San Francisco, Oakland, Monterey, Carmel, Palo Alto, Sunnyvale, Santa Clara, Mountain View, Los Gatos, Scotts Valley, San Jose and all other Silicon Valley locations.

Jeffery is fully invested in digital photography and uses the latest computer applications to enhance digital images. Many of his photography workshops cover the operation of digital cameras,

Photoshop manipulation, retouching of portraits, leveraging the power of digital imaging for portraiture, product, architecture and commercial photography.

Jeffery and his wife Lauren have recently founded the Pacific Institute of Photography. The Institute is a small academy of professional photographic arts housed in a working commercial studio in downtown Santa Cruz. Students study the techniques of lighting, composition, digital image capture and processing with Jeffery and other professionals. The courses are intensive two-day workshops with longer programs planned for the near future. <http://www.luhnphoto.com/>

Photo Show - Vanishing Pollinators by Carl Goodpasture

Vanishing Pollinators is a traveling show sponsored by The Smithsonian Institution that features 34 photos of pollinating insects - a good example of nature photography. This display is hosted by the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum, 1342 Naglee Ave (corner of Park), San Jose, CA, and is in the museum's Lecture Gallery.

Museum Hours: Monday - Friday: 10:00am - 5:00pm; Saturday - Sunday: 11:00am - 6:00pm
The exhibit will be on display through June.

Admission to the museum is \$9.00 general, \$7.00 seniors which includes the museum, gallery, and planetarium shows.

The Digital Notebook: File Format & Image Care (1.2)¹

by Fred Drury

This column deals with the issue of whether to select JPEG or RAW format for create digital files. Depending upon which camera you have, the options may include some or all of the following: TIFF, JPEG (small), JPEG (medium), JPEG (large), RAW or even combinations of RAW & JPEG. We'll also take a quick look at image downloading and archiving ... establish good standards for both, practice them religiously and you'll encounter few problems. The alternative is problems and the occasional disaster.

File Format

For some the choice between JPEG & RAW is seen as controversial with strong proponents in

each camp and one side claiming its view is the 'correct' one. Personally, I don't think choice should be 'controversial' **because each format serves a real need the other cannot provide.** On the one hand JPEG facilitates rapid communications from the source to the ultimate use; e.g. newspaper and sports photography. On the other hand, RAW supports the higher quality necessary for larger prints and artistic interpretation. JPEG is a compressible format. JPEG (small) uses the most compression and therefore creates the smallest files. JPEG files are smaller than either RAW or TIFF, hence one can store more JPEG images on a given size flash card.

¹ Reprinted from the Fall 2007 issue of the Bulletin of the New England Camera Club Council, Inc.

The problem with JPEG is that the information lost during compression degrades the image; the greater the compression, the more the degradation. This is not a problem for small prints or the lo-res images typically used on web sites, but it is a significant issue if your objective is the ultimate in quality needed for larger inkjet prints. In JPEG mode, the camera processes each of the pixel values the camera saw in accordance with the camera settings, compresses the file, and writes the processed 8-bit (255 levels) file to the CF card. RAW uses no compression, hence files are larger and therefore one can store fewer images on a given size CF card. RAW saves the actual pixel values which the camera saw, at their original 12-bit depth (4096 levels), and also saves the camera settings that were used for that image; both are written to the CF card.

RAW processors, including the one Adobe includes with Photoshop CS2, allow one to revisit the settings, and make changes to them after the image has been made; they also deliver a larger 12-bit file. To me this is like letting me change the rules of the poker game after I've had a chance to look at my cards. The problem with RAW is both the larger file size, and the addition of the time consuming 'RAW processing' step to the overall workflow.

Shooting in RAW has the advantages of: 1) greater bit depth (and so more tonal information) and 2) the capability to make adjustments to the camera settings 'after the fact'. These two 'RAW advantages' are especially important to me as a nature photographer. Most of my photography is done in the golden hours around sunrise and sunset, where extreme tonal ranges are the norm. Consequently, I'm always pushing the limits of the camera tonal capabilities and there's the greater chance of clipping either highlights, shadows or possibly both. RAW lets me look at the image before I complete processing and make exposure adjustments to avoid clipping. Many believe the higher bit-depth (12-bit for RAW vs. 8-bit for JPEG) is helpful when aggressive image optimization in Photoshop would otherwise produce 'posterization', especially in image areas where continuous tones dominate, such as clear skies.

In a recent DDQ on the subject, Tim Grey (www.timgrey.com/ddq/) responded: "The advantage of RAW is certainly potential image quality. You have tremendous flexibility with exposure and color temperature adjustments after

the capture, and you're getting high-bit data as well. This gives you the best opportunity to optimize image quality. It doesn't mean you should be careless about the capture, but it does give you more options to optimize (or improve) the quality of what you captured. The negative is that the files are larger (so they'll fill the camera's buffer faster and fill your card faster and take longer per-image to download), and that you'll have to actually process those RAW captures after the fact. In other words, it isn't the most ideal choice when it comes to an efficient workflow.

The advantage of JPEG is performance. The files are smaller, so the camera's buffer doesn't fill as quickly and you can fit more captures on a given card. From a cumulative perspective you can capture more frames in a given period of time (not necessarily in a given burst depending on the camera, but in a cumulative amount of time). The images are already in an actual image format, so you can view them immediately, send them to anyone knowing they can view them too, and see the images much faster (because they are smaller files that don't require a conversion from RAW to be viewed). The major disadvantages related to potential image quality. If you make a mistake in exposure or color temperature, you don't have as much ability to correct it because the data from the sensor has already been converted and you don't have high-bit data. You also have the issue of JPEG artifacts that can affect the appearance of the image, especially when you want to enlarge the image significantly." So to me there's no controversy in the choice between JPEG and RAW; each serves the photographer well in different situations.

If you're planning to make larger prints I think RAW is the best choice. If you're trying for a rapid workflow and want to be able to immediately deliver images to a client, or to make a record of the grandchildren's visit, JPEG is likely the best choice. As noted above, some camera manufacturers (e.g. Canon) even provide the option of simultaneously saving the image in both RAW and JPEG formats. This last option may be the answer for the wedding photographer who would like both the speed of JPEG in order to be able to quickly deliver proofs, and the processing advantages of RAW in order to deliver the ultimate in quality in a final print.

Of the several media available for in-camera storage, Compact Flash cards are preferred. I think

it makes sense to stay with the best brands, and the most popular are SanDisk and Lexar. Lexar offers an 'Instant Rescue' utility which they claim can 'recapture those lost images': see: www.lexar.com/software/index.html.

Downloading Images

My practice is to download after each shoot. As most of you know I'm primarily an underwater photographer, so this means I most often download after each dive. On land, I usually download after the AM shoot and again after the PM shoot.

My procedure is always the same. Whenever I remove a 'full' CF card from the camera, I always insert a replacement which I know has been previously downloaded. I then reformat the CF card in the camera and check that the appropriate number of images is now available. To transfer images from CF cards to my laptop, I have a PCMCIA card which has a receptacle for my CF card. The combination plugs into the slot in my laptop. I use Explorer to select (Ctrl-A) all the images on the card, copy them (Ctrl-C), and then paste them (Ctrl-P) in the appropriate folder on my hard drive. I then use Explorer to make sure that the images have indeed been copied to the desired folder and may even go into Bridge to make sure I can 'see' the images.

My practice is to place images in folders which are defined by the location and year of the shoot. For example, when I went to south Asia in March 2005, I opened a master-folder titled 'CamThiMa'05' for all the images I would shoot on that month-long trip. Within the master are 28 subfolders titled Anggun 01-06 (dive boat in Thailand & Myanmar), Siem Reap 01-11 (location of the Ankor Wat temples in Cambodia), etc. Within each subfolder, there may be a further sub-sub-folder which further

identifies specific locations (e.g. specific temples within the Ankor complex, which covers an area in excess of 100 square miles). In all the 'CamThiMa'05 master-folder contains all of the 2000 odd images I made during this trip.

Archiving

I'm sure that I'm not alone in being paranoid about losing my digital images. I've heard too many stories about lost luggage, damaged hard drives and stolen laptops not to be extra careful... and I don't think there's any such thing as being 'too careful'. There are many alternative procedures that can be used to assure that important files are not lost or destroyed. I think the keys are that a) there is more than a single copy of important files. b) at least one copy of these files is in a separate 'protected' location, and c) whatever procedure you decide upon is followed in a disciplined way.

My own procedure calls for triple redundancy. As soon after I've downloaded the CF card as is practical, I like to copy the new images to a portable hard drive that I always carry with me on trips. The third copy is made by using the DVD RW on my laptop to burn a DVD. Typically I'll make this 3rd copy whenever I've enough new images to fill up a DVD. Once I return home, I prefer to store the DVDs outside my home... that way, no home catastrophe will result in the loss of the RAW images. When at home, I generally use my desktop computer, rather than the laptop for image optimization. That desktop system is connected to an external hard drive which regularly mirrors any changes to files on the internal hard drives and thus provides an independent backup for working files. In our next column we'll take a look at Bridge and the RAW Processor; two essentials for those who choose to work in RAW format.

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The official publication of the Los Gatos-Saratoga Camera Club. Meetings : first and third Mondays, 7:30PM at the Elks Club, No 1857 of Los Gatos, 105 Newell Ave. (At Winchester near Lark). Member of the Photographic Society of America.