

Six Keys to Nature Photography

by © John C. Fuller, FPSA, AFIAP, MNEC

SIX KEYS TO NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY

The main subject should be sharp throughout. Eyes, if a part of the subject must be sharp and should have a highlight. Sufficient depth-of-field is essential; which, in close-ups, calls for small apertures and slow speeds.

Once you've selected your subject (you know it's good) analyze the background and foreground. Every other element in the picture either enhances or detracts from your subject.

Generally, the closer the better. Close-up, frame-filling subjects provide the necessary impact for competition. On the other hand, shots showing the subject's environment are becoming more desirable. Overviews and scenics require an exceptionally strong center of interest to be effective in nature.

Pictorial elements are just as essential in nature photography as in any other category. Composition, color balance, texture, line and form et al. These are the reasons why nature subjects do well in pictorial exhibitions too.

Natural lighting is a must for nature. There's only one sun. Basic portrait lighting is effective but the main light must dominate. Generally, flora is more dramatic with side or back lighting and a soft reflected fill in front. Backgrounds should be subdued but natural. Black backgrounds from use of flash tend to represent night and, except for night subjects, appear unnatural.

Most subjects can be enhanced by judicious cropping. There is no magic in the 35mm format, which, in fact, violates the golden mean. (35mm @ 1"x1.5"= 1.5 whereas standard print formats are 8"x10"= 1.25; 11"x14"= 1.27 etc.) Distracting elements or excess space can often be cropped with good results. Reversing can often make for a better presentation.

And one more:

There are no rules. Only guidelines, which have historically proven effective in all forms of art. Guidelines can be broken with great effect, but only by a photographer who knows the reason for doing so and can anticipate the results.