



Arlington Camera

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Wildlife and Scenic Photography

by Tim Ostermeyer

BENEFIT OF SELLING WILDLIFE AND SCENIC IMAGES: What is the biggest advantage of shooting wildlife and scenic images over your client images? The answer is repeated sales of the same image. Has anyone ever sold a portrait of one family to another non-related family? I have been fortunate to sell the same enlargement of the same scenic image to 62 families at one art-fair in a single weekend. I wish I could say that for each of my bridal portraits. Remember, that getting a spectacular outstanding image (not just a nice image) is the key to scenic or wildlife sales.



SELLING WILDLIFE BOOKS: If you have enough great images, you can consider writing and publishing wildlife or scenic books. My trip to Antarctica to photograph Emperor penguins went so well, that I wrote an entertaining and educational scenic wildlife children's book titled "Growing Up in Antarctica." An album of all the pages in this book won "Best of Show" in the 2007 SWPPA photo contest. This book is currently sold via www.ostermeyer-photography.com and thru Arlington Camera. Printing at a book printing company "four color press" is much different than the latest high tech printers at photo labs. I made a trip to Minnesota to reorganize the printer's quality control process so that my book would have the same quality prints as that obtained from a professional photo lab. I have made 2 of 3 trips to Japan so far this year to photograph baby Snow Monkeys in the winter snow, summer foliage, and fall foliage and have begun writing my second wildlife book "Growing Up in the Japanese Alps".



SELLING AT ART FAIRS: To market the wildlife and scenic images, I sold images at art fairs. I dry-mounted, matted, and shrink wrapped or framed hundreds of images to sell at art fairs. A summary of the image on the back of each dry-mounted and matted print described the title of the image, the location photographed, the camera gear used, and the story behind the image. I found that if the client knew the story behind the scenic or wildlife image, that the chance of a sale increased significantly. I sold these images at the Mainstreet Art Fair in Fort-Worth, Dallas Art Fair, Salado Art Fair, and was also accepted into the Cottonwood Art Fair in Richardson. The size of the fair had a huge

impact on sales. At the largest of these fairs, there were long periods of time writing one sales ticket right after another. Through trial and error, some images sold well, and others did not. Bluebonnet sales in Texas were popular, lighthouses were popular, bald eagles were popular with males, polar bears and tigers were popular with females. A poll ten years ago showed that tigers were females favorite animal. I have recently found, that Penguins are now the most popular animal. Remember that whenever someone buys your scenic or wildlife image to hang on their precious wall space, they will have to like it better than any other scenic image than they have seen in every craft-shop, art air, antiques shop, and store in their entire life prior to purchasing your image. As a result, I have always considered it an honor, when someone would purchase and hang one of my scenic or wildlife images on their limited wall space. One of the big advantages of wildlife and scenic photography over portrait or wedding photography is that of repeated sales. Sales of the same outstanding wildlife or scenic image can be repeatedly sold over and over again, year after year, decade after decade.

CHALLENGES OF WILDLIFE

PHOTOGRAPHY:

What are some of the challenges of getting great scenic wildlife images? A great deal of research, planning, packing the right camera equipment, financial investment,



pain in carrying heavy camera gear (in forests, through swamps, up mountains), endurance in below freezing weather (Arctic Circle, Antarctica, Alaska, Japan), and patience (waiting days for wildlife to show up) has resulted in many nice scenic wildlife images. Wildlife photography can also be very challenging when compared to studio portrait photography since 1) you can never get great studio lighting on wildlife, 2) you can't ask wildlife to correctly pose, 3) you can't ask wildlife to stand in front of a more scenic backdrop, and 4) you can't ask wildlife to change clothes to better color match the tonal range of the backdrop.

WILDLIFE & SCENIC PHOTOGRAPHY PHILOSOPHY: Outstanding wildlife and scenic images can be sold when marketed well, and these images can become big repeat sellers. Success in the area of wildlife and scenic photography can be obtained by following these 10 guidelines:

1) Go to the Best Location for Wildlife of Interest: When I decided to photograph baby Emperor Penguins, I did not go to the Mohave Desert, I went deep into the Antarctic. If you just take an average trip to Antarctica, you will only see Adelie, Chinstrap, or Gentoo penguins, none of which have cute babies. If you travel deeper into the Antarctic, you can then find the cutest penguin babies of all, the Emperor Penguin babies. To obtain outstanding images for big repeat sellers, the goal should be to go to the best location in the world to locate that specific type of wildlife.

2) Shoot in the Correct Season: It is important to photograph wildlife at the correct season of the year. You can go to Colorado to get mountain scenics any time of year, but if you want fall color, shoot in the middle of October. Be sure on your timing for fall color in a particular area. Fall leaves can drop quickly over a period of just one week, which would eliminate opportunities for great fall photographs. Schedule your trips carefully to ensure peak color foliage scenic images and wildlife availability (if your goal is to photograph wildlife).

3) Devote Sufficient Time for Opportunities: Don't set up your trip for just a few days. At times, you will need a full 7-10 days to find what you are looking for (even when you are somewhere in the world where you are most likely to find this wildlife). On a trip to Canada one year, I did not find or photograph a white goat until the 9th day. The longer you spend with wildlife and scenics, the better the chance you will have for an outstanding repeat seller image. I have spent 11 different evenings photographing sunsets at the same lighthouse. Only 2 of these 11 evenings at this lighthouse resulted in gorgeous colorful sunsets, but the lighthouse images obtained with these 2 sunsets have become excellent repeat seller images.

4) Proper Camera Gear Packing: Over the years, it has become more difficult to travel with camera gear because of the tighter baggage regulations. It is essential to hand carry fragile camera gear (camera bodies, lens) on the plane. Less fragile camera gear (tripods, tripod mount, filters, etc) can be sent in checked baggage. You are at risk that the airline may lose your checked bag, but with carry-on limitations, you have to limit what you carry on. Now that a computer is helpful to download images and burn DVDs during trips, a laptop adds to the equipment that you have to carry-on. Camera backpack bags (that meet airline maximum bag size guidelines) are now available that hold camera gear and laptops.

5) Shoot at the Best Times of the Day: Of most importance for award winning scenic images. You should shoot in the sweet light of the early morning or late afternoon. The first 15 minutes of daylight, and the last 15 minutes of daylight are the best. Do not stop shooting after the sun has passed the horizon; there are spectacular sunrise and sunset images when the sun is below the horizon. When shooting wildlife or wildlife scenics, you would love to get them in the sweet light, but you are generally fortunate to see them at any time of the day.



6) Be Flexible: Be flexible in your plans. In 1 of my 3 trips to New England to photograph lighthouses, it rained from the entire 7 days of my vacation. While rain and overcast skies are horrible for lighthouses, they are great for waterfalls, so I searched New England for waterfalls (which look great with the extra rain water and even overcast skies) during this week of rain and received a PPA national award winning recognition (loan collection book image) from a Vermont waterfall shot I took on this trip. This Vermont waterfall has been a good repeat seller.

7) Have Patience: I waited 5 days to find a moose in a beautiful fall color backdrop Maine blue lake most likely to have a moose. I waited 5 hours with my camera positioned on a tripod waiting for a bald eagle to land in front of me with the 7 foot wing span and sharp talons fully visible. Have patience in traveling to get to some remote locations. It took 5 days of travel in each direction (2 airplanes, a Russian icebreaker, and a helicopter) to photograph penguins in Antarctica. It took 2 buses, 4 trains, 1 subway, and a 1 mile climb

up a mountain to photograph Snow Monkeys in the Japanese Alps.

8) Ensure Long Lens Stability: Have wildlife long lens stability compensation by using a) cable releases, b) image stabilized lens, and c) stable tripod & tripod heads. The r-theta (or lever arm) motion you get from long lens can only be compensated by these 3 items or by shutter speeds faster than 1/500th of a second when hand holding a long lens. The Wimberly tripod head allows center of gravity balance of your camera & lens for ease of motion and optimum stabilization. The Wimberly tripod head was beneficial to obtain sharp enlargements while panning the camera to get a bald eagle picking a fish out of the water and another bald eagle flying in the air at 200 miles per hour.

9) Use Correct Equipment: Most wildlife photographers will use the following 2 best Canon L-Series lens: a 70-200 mm image stabilized and 500 mm image stabilized for their wildlife photography. Multipliers of 1.4 and 2.0 are occasionally used to extend the 500 mm lens (1.4 is a slightly sharper multiplier than the 2.0). If you are looking for a cheaper alternative to a long lens, the Canon 100-400 mm lens (sharpest at 400 mm) is a decent alternative but will not get you as sharp an image at any focal length as the two previously mentioned lens.

10) Be Alert and Prepared: Be alert and prepared for the unexpected. Be alert for getting too close to wildlife, be prepared to protect yourself with an escape route, mace, or other form of protection. Be alert and prepared for bad weather conditions by having the correct warm clothes or rain protection. If the wildlife notice you, you are too close. If the wildlife are chasing you, you are really too close. If the wildlife catches you, you were definitely too close. Be prepared to have external turbo charged battery packs for your camera power in very cold environments, extreme temperature compact flash cards, and backups for everything when you are in the middle of no-where photographing wildlife. The digital chip inside cameras will freeze up at -20 C. If traveling to extreme cold condition locations, warm up the camera to get the chip to work again or use film cameras.

TECHNICAL KEYS TO SUCCESS: While using a 600 mm lens, experience showed that the depth of field focus range was only about 3 inches at an f-stop of F8. This was not a deep enough depth of field to get the bald eagles head and his body feathers in focus at the same time. I learned to shoot 600 mm close-up portraits of a bald eagles head at an f-stop of f-22 to get the entire head and body feathers in focus. This was later confirmed by Canon with depth of field data that I plotted to show the depth of field for different focal length lens. Image stabilized lens come in very handy with moving platforms. When the wind is blowing the tundra buggy back and forth while photographing polar bears or sea waves rocking the ship when photographing bald eagles, the tripod is not any help because motion of both the tripod and the camera on this moving platform. This motion can be minimized with image stabilized lens to gain 2 extra stops of light. These 2 extra stops of light allow for faster camera shutter speeds to help ensure sharp enlargements.



CONCLUSION: Taking wildlife and scenic photographic images has many advantages; travel tax deductions, joy in seeing wildlife, possible competition winners, and repeated sales of portraits, calendars, magazine articles, and books. Using the guidelines included in this article should help you obtain some outstanding wildlife and scenic images.

Tim Ostermeyer has a passion for photography and has taken a minimum of one trip a year to photograph wildlife somewhere in the world. Tim owns a beautiful Allen Texas studio. This studio has 5 rooms and an outdoor waterfall devoted to photograph high school seniors, families, and children. He has also photographed over 750 weddings in the last 20 years. Tim is a Master Photographer who also has a Craftsman degree from teaching professional photography guilds. Tim has 11 PPA loan collection images, 6 DPPA Best Illustrative trophies for his photography, and was the Dallas Professional Photographer of the Year in 2002. Tim has won over 250 first place photographic awards.

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