

The Traveling Nature Photographer Blog

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I started this journey when I was a young teenager. It has been very interesting and very hard to explain. I had a change of my plans as happens a lot to people on journeys like mine. I was heading back home when I made an unscheduled stop in a county park in Florida. I know this park well as I had lived close by for about 10 years.

I went into the park and drove around and seen several people looking up I a tree with many having cameras and tripods. Being who I am the crowd got my attention.

A baby-barred owl had fallen from a nest and had been put up in a tree by a park ranger. Now the locals and park visitors were gathering around the tree and photographing the owlet. I stayed in the area for a few weeks watching the owlet grow as well as a great horned owl family that had owlets.

As the owlets of both families grew I noticed the similarities and differences in the owl families. While expected to be different what I did not expect was a common problem. That problem was and is people. Some are daily walkers in the parks that watch over things like a daily observer. Many others were visitors who seen the crowd and joined in the group. Then comes the photographers with long telephotos and tripods blocking roads and disturbing the baby and its parents. Doing what I do and have done for longer than most of the others have been alive I have learned a few things about photographing animals. The technical aspect of shooting is important however I think the interaction between me and the animal is far more important.

There are so many people with high-end digital cameras and long glass it is hard to understand why they have not gotten the point that using a 200+ mm lens to photograph a bird sitting in the same area for hours less than 50 ft away is not necessary. Then the question comes in how many shots of the same bird at the same spot sleeping do you need. I understand the desire and if being paid the necessity to get images but it seems worldwide we have created a group of spray and pray or machine-gun shooters more interesting their egos than their work. If you shoot more than a couple of frames on sleeping or sitting birds to get your shot you might want to rethink your workflow and shooting technique. My camera is set to 3 frames per burst unless I am shooting high-speed subjects. Some talk about their equipment and some discuss features on the cameras while just taking up space around the poor owlet. They should learn that the owlets will sleep most of the day if left undisturbed. I heard one man say I come here almost every day at the same time to photograph the baby opening its eyes from its nap. Really? How about you wake up the baby with your talking, setting up your equipment, and shooting. Animals especially young ones need their sleep and food. If one takes their time and observes the animals without disturbing them a pattern develops. People who interfere or who are more interested in their shooting hundreds of shoots miss the patterns. I watched the family of barred owls from a shelter a lot. I got great shots of the feeding of the owlet and even the attack on the owlet and the adult owl by 11 crows. Some will say you can not predict when a baby will be attacked. The crows had tried several times and gotten real close a couple of times. They also develop a system or pattern for trying to get to the baby. It is not hard to understand. When both parents are gone and it happens more than some might think and the baby cries to them for food two things are quickly noted. The location of the baby and the fact the parents are not answering and are not close. Yes, the parents answer most of the time with one of their numerous calls. Observation and patience is the key to any good nature shoot. Knowing your subject is far

more important than knowing how to set the auto functions on the camera which include, A, S, and the menu auto sets. I heard many talk about e/v and not using it because they do not understand it. It is the true exposure control as the f/stop is the true depth of field control, the shutter speed for controlling stop action, and ISO for controlling light density on the sensor. While they all have some effect on each other all are hard levels except for e/v. If you change the f/stop for exposure control and it does work to a degree then you also will be changing the depth of field. Changing the e/v does not change the depth of field like the f/stop does. The e/v is like fine-tuning the exposure.

I consider myself an artist and with that, I use all the tools available to me to make the best image possible including shooting RAW. I do not understand spending thousands of dollars on high-end cameras and equipment and then handcuff it by shooting less. It reminds me of using crayons. If you wanted the best colors you bought the big box with 64 colors and not the 8 color box. If you did not want the most colors and vibrance in your images why spend that kind of money? A modern point and shoot would probably be good enough. In photography, I hate that phrase.