

2018 Nature competition

Judge John Reid APSNZ ANPSNZ AFIAP

A Grade projected images

Swamp Forest, Mirror Tarn Lake, Oparara Basin

This composition certainly depicts the vegetation types on the edge of the tarn. I think the underlying structure of the image could be improved and I suggest that the image appears to be quite flat. I think a little bit of work in post-production would have produced a much more pleasing image with better definition and colour. This is permitted in nature competitions as long as the techniques that enhance the presentation of the photograph do so without changing the nature story or the pictorial content, without altering the content of the original scene, this can include dodging/burning and altering the contrast. I would recommend adding more contrast to make the definition between the colours more prominent and burning the foreground of the tarn in slightly to darken the surface. Accepted

Todiramphus sanctus

This Kotare or Sacred Kingfisher is nicely composed being set on the top third of this image, leaving good space on the left of the bird. I don't think the focus is set on the main subject matter as if I look at the rings in the pinus radiata log middle bottom they are in sharp focus. The king fisher lacks any real feather definition as a result. The king fisher also appears to be quite flat where I know that these birds have vibrant colours. I think a true nature composition of this species would be better without the chain sawed log as it clearly shows the hand of man. I respect that this king fisher uses this log as a perch all the time and has adapted its habitat to suit this roost as the evidence of its activities across the face of the log. The back ground has been very well handled being neutral and out of focus. Not Accepted.

White Basket Fungi ileodictyon cibarius

The composition clearly shows the structure of this basket fungi. I found that I would have liked to have some more depth of field in the area closest to the ground and perhaps a slightly wider composition, just so that the habitat could be better described in the image. The colour rendition I think is spot on. Accepted

Kaka Nestor meridionalis

This composition shows the colour and feather detail of this kaka reasonably well. The bird is nicely in focus and the back ground is reasonably clean, this can be quite hard to achieve when photographing these birds as they are forest dwellers and it can sometimes be hard to separate the background foliage from the main subject matter, so well done. I think I would just like to see a

slightly wider composition as this feels quite tight. I also suggest that adding some contrast into the image would help just to make this pop, try adding in a curves layer and play with the highlights and the shadows until the desired effect is achieved. Accepted

Mating Alpine Grasshoppers *Paprides nitidus*

I think the story has been told quite well here, there is enough information with the position of the grasshoppers and the surrounding habitat. I suggest that the image could be made to pop a little more by adding a curves layer, just play with the highlights and the shadows until the colours look really sharp and vibrant. Also remember to convert your image to a sRGB colour profile, this may be why it looks a little flat and dark on my screen. The focus has been well handled, there is good depth of field across the main subject matter, while there is just enough information in the out of focus back ground to describe it. Accepted

Female Fig Bird

I think the positioning of the fig bird in the composition is a strong element of this image. I suggest that the image has been cropped in as the definition in the bird and the resulting noise appearing across the image has degraded the final outcome. Cropping in will often magnify these imperfections, my advice get closer. The colours shown accurately describe this species and I think the background adds to this story given the quantity of fruit evident, perhaps the bird was feeding off this? Accepted

Elephant Seal Fight

I enjoyed the story being told here, these big boys have been caught at an opportune moment. Teeth are bared, body size is being displayed, and it's all about dominance. What is also important is what is going on around this, I think I spent more time looking at all the other aspects of this image. The penguins keeping out of the way, but going about their business and the other elephants seals dotted through the landscape. Well told. Merit

Female *Tadorna variegata* Early Morning

In my view the positioning of the duck in the middle of the composition with radiating rings of water moving away from the main subject matter works quite well. I suggest that there is quite a strong blue/green colour cast that has changed the true colours of the duck. The whites are not white and there is a noticeable blue fringe across the birds back, this should not be there. The definition in the feather detail itself is also missing. While the main subject is sharp the other technical elements of the image have let this down as a nature image. Not Accepted

Haematopus unicolor

This composition of a Variable Oyster catcher hasn't worked for me, in saying this the colours have been captured correctly. I think the bird is just too central in the composition and it isn't sharp, the focus seems to be on the foreground rocks leaving the bird quite soft with little feather definition. The habitat has been described quite accurately and helps to tell the story. Not Accepted

Petroica australis

The feather detail on this Robin is quite exquisite. I think that the main subject matter is too central within the composition and the background although it is out of focus really competes with the main subject matter, as it appears quite messy, undermining the main subject. Perhaps a different angle could have eliminated that strong background branch that appears strongly to the left/middle of the bird. The habitat has been reasonably well described and I can imagine the Robin foraging in the log that it stands on. Accepted

Moeraki Boulder

I think that this composition has been quite well thought out. I like the juxtaposition of the big and small rocks, these are strong elements. That warm golden light falling across the sand onto the boulder adds definition and enhances the colour of the vegetative material growing on the rock. The patch of exposed sand just helps to complete the story being told. Merit

Gannet Feeding Chick

The story is being reasonably well told here. I suggest that the composition could have been framed a little better, perhaps a step to the left would have aligned the subject matter more to the right. I feel that the empty space on the right of the composition doesn't add anything to the strength of this composition. The bird in the background left competes with the main subjects. Try and look for clean backgrounds, I feel a clean option was available for this composition. Good use has been made of the side lighting, this adds another definition. I would have considered lightening the shadows around the chicks head, as the detail I want to see has been slightly lost, especially in the chick's eye area. Lovely feather detail and the whites have been exceptionally well handled. Accepted

Highland Cow

I think that this is a great open image but it does not fit the category of nature, as this cow is a domestic animal, farmed all around the world. Domesticated animals are not permitted to be entered into nature competitions. Not Accepted

Nursery Web Spider

The nursery web spider and its habitat have been accurately portrayed in this composition. The portrait alignment of the main subject matter within the composition is a strong element. The positioning of the spider at the entrance to its nest adds to this story. If I was going to be picky I may have waited until the spider was clear of the foreground flower head. Everything has been nicely exposed, the background is clean but still leaves just enough information to describe the habitat. Merit

Orange Seastars Westcoast NZ (Stichaster australis)

I liked that the author has included the rock pool in the foreground, I perhaps would have liked to see more of this element included in this composition as it tells the viewer something about the habitat that Seastars live in. My eye wandered around in this a bit as there are two groups of

Seastars and my eye couldn't really settle on any one thing. Great to see so many Seastars together though. The colours work well and the main subject matter is sharp. Accepted

Sumatran Tiger Panthera tigris sumatrae at Mogo Zoo

This is a nice shot of the tiger in the zoo. As the tiger is lying on a platform that shows the hand of man it cannot be accepted in this nature competition. Such platforms are not part of the natural habitat of tigers. Not Accepted

Fantail in Autumn Foliage

The autumn colours give this image a distinct feel. I think the background competes with the main subject matter, the light bursts are very strong elements that distract from the main subject. The black stick above and right of the bird is also very distracting. The body of the bird is nice and sharp with good feather detail, I would like to have seen the tail of the bird as sharp as the body as the tail is what gives this species its name. Not Accepted

At the Boulder Bank

No image

Young Starling

The young starling is nice and sharp. I think that the composition is a bit too tight with the starling being just too central in the composition, more space is needed above the head of the bird. Perhaps a portrait orientation allowing space above the head would have worked better. The light is very harsh especially across the birds back where the detail has been blown out and lost. The perch that the starling is sitting on is very prominent, being a highly polished surface, this distracts from the main subject matter. The iridescent colouring of this specimen is just showing but I feel if the exposure had been handled better more of this colouring would be present in the image. Not Accepted

Small Tortoiseshell Butterfly

I think that the positioning of the butterfly within the composition works quite well. The harsh lighting has created quite a prominent shadow underneath the butterfly and across the stamens of the flower, this I feel lets the image down. The butterfly is sharp with the colours being reasonably accurate. Accepted

B Grade projected images

Alexandrine Parakeet

I think that the panorama format suits this image, the body position of the bird and the long tail have been framed to put the emphasis on what's happening and describes the species. The bird preening adds to the story. I suggest that some more contrast could have been added in postproduction, just to bring out the richness of the colour that I feel I should be seeing, the image feels a little flat, with the colour just slightly blown out, as well as a loss of some detail especially in the tail feathers. The background has been reasonably well handled being quite neutral. Merit

Blue Lake

The colour and clarity in the water at Blue Lake is evident here. I think that the author has tried to capture the reflection of the back ground mountains in the water and that is why a portrait orientation has been used. I suggest that the reflection, bottom has become distracting and perhaps a landscape orientation framing the blue of the water in the foreground and the beech forest and mountain setting in the background may have made the composition stronger. The image suffers from some technical faults top and bottom, I'm unsure what has caused this. Not Accepted

St Arnaud Range

This brings back memories, having traversed these tops 25 years ago. The tussock basin with scattered tarns looking back into the interior of Nelson Lakes is the strong feature of this composition and describes the geographical features of this landscape quite well. The scattered cloud adds another desirable feature adding interest to this landscape. Accepted

Weka

I think that this Weka has been quite well described, the eye is nice and sharp and it is on the march looking for another tasty morsel. I suggest that some more space above the birds head would have created a stronger composition, situating the eye on the junction of the top left thirds would have created this effect. The feather colour detail is all there. The light falling from the right across the bird has helped to create that third dimension. Merit

Print Images

A grade

Dracophullum traversii – With Flower Spikes

I like the way that heads and flowers of the Dracophullum have been placed in this composition and have been isolated from the background vegetation. The timing to include the flower spikes has helped to describe this plant in more detail. The lighting isn't harsh allowing the true colour and definition of the plant to be well described. Accepted

Oudemansiella australis

I think that this nature print has an artistic quality that makes it stand out. The back lighting has allowed the detail in the gills of the main subject matter to be defined with exquisite detail. Having the smaller *mycena sp ?*, included adds scale. The positioning of the main subject matter within the composition adds strength. I think there is just enough detail in the habitat to describe it. This has been beautifully printed and presented. Honours

Takahe Notornis Mantelli

There is some beautiful detail in this Takahe. In my view I think that the composition is quite tight, I would like to see some more space above the bird's head bringing the eye down to the junction of the top left thirds. The bird's eye has gone opaque, this can be quite frustrating when photographing many bird species, my recommendation keep shooting as there is an inner eye lid that acts as a third eyelid and is called the nictitating membrane. It is this membrane, or third eyelid, that birds primarily use to blink. In most birds this is a thin, semi-transparent eyelid which moves horizontally or diagonally from the inside to the outside of a bird's eye. This is what we are seeing here. I like that the action of the bird lifting its fore foot has been caught, this is often a strong element in wildlife images. Accepted

Fungi Sp

I think what makes this print interesting is the sheer number of fungi present. I suggest that to make this theme even stronger in the composition eliminating the plant matter on the right by shifting the composition to the left, allowing only the fungi species to be seen. In my view the plant stems have become a distraction. The angle that the composition has been taken works well, both the gills and caps of the fungi can be seen. The spider web adds interest. Accepted

Pleurotus purpureo-olivaceus

I think that this composition is very strong. I like the way the size of the smaller specimens' bottom left flow diagonally to the bigger specimens top right. My thoughts are that this really good underlying structure has been slightly undone by the soft focus on the middle to right/top gills of the right specimen. My eye goes straight to this and gets stuck, probably because this area is situated in an area of the composition that should be tack sharp. Apart from this small imperfection the fungi and the habitat have been really well described. Merit

Pair of White-fronted Terns with Newly Born Chick

I really liked the story being told here, that first meal looks daunting. The placement of the birds in the composition works well, the adults' eyes are where I want to see them, very close to that top third line. In my view I felt the print was just a bit flat and didn't quite pop the way I would quite like it too. Perhaps a curves layer just to lift the whites slightly may have helped. The focus has been handled really well, putting the emphasis on the subject matter and the immediate habitat of the nest. Merit

Pied Oystercatcher Haematopus ostralegus

I really enjoyed the posture of this Pied Oyster Catcher, this is a very strong element of the composition. I think that the whites here are slightly blown out resulting in some loss of feather

detail. I also think that the clarity slider has been pushed a little far to the right resulting in that white halo we can see around the outside edges of the bird. This may not have been apparent until the print was sharpened, reducing the amount of clarity around these hard edges will reduce this effect. The habitat has been beautifully described. Accepted

Snares Immature Sea Lions Play Fighting

Timing has been everything here, well caught. The action has been impeccably stopped creating an interesting effect of the water falling off the seals bodies, thus appearing as the jelly like sheen across the main subject matter. The placement of the heads in the composition is a very strong element, the story is completed with teeth, eyes and whiskers. I think the gloss finish of the print helps to complete the effect. Honours

Geothermal Mud Pool

The fast shutter speed used here has stopped the action perfectly and I think that the story is being told quite well within the composition. The steam is quite evident telling us that this is hot. Perhaps the steam has obscured some of the detail bottom foreground. The side lighting has defined the cone of mud as it explodes, this I think is what makes this composition effective. Merit

Mallard Duck

The feather detail of the duck is superb and I think the softness through the wings helps to tell the story as this depicts the movement of the ducks wings. I'm not sure if it's just having a stretch and a flap or it's about to explode out of the water. I suggest the duck is a bit too central in the composition, I think lower and to the left would have been stronger allowing more space to the right for the subject to move into. The green tones on the water make a nice backdrop. Accepted

B Grade

The Robin

The feather detail and colouring of this Robin is beautiful. The eye is perfectly exposed. I think that to make this composition stronger, more space is needed around the Robin, bring the eye down to that top third line and include the feet of the bird. I think in this case the matt has cropped the print just a little, always allow for the matt. Perhaps a little more depth of field to get the tail more in focus, otherwise the background is perfect. The semi-gloss effect works well. Merit

West Sabine River

I think this rapid in the river is quite well described, the slow shutter speed used, has added an artistic feel to this print. A strong element in this composition is the use of the diagonal running from top right to bottom left and having the river flowing along this line. The greywacke boulders form the other vital element as the river tumbles its way down to the lake. Merit