

NELSON CAMERA CLUB - JUNE 2019

SOME GENERAL COMMENTS FIRST

Nature images generally need to meet three criteria (For a fuller discussion, see the PSNZ web page on Definitions):

Educational. The primary criteria for Nature. That is, they must provide information about the subject, or some aspect of the subject. Background is an important component, in that it should give some indication of the habitat or environment. Also important is the title. This should at least be an aid to identification. Cute, colloquial, and pictorial indications are unacceptable - this is particularly true for all but one of the B grade Projected Images.

Pictorial. In a competition environment, this is usually a necessary feature, since, when faced with two images that meet the first requirement "equally well", the one having the stronger pictorial qualities is "better".

The Wall Test. Is the image one that could maintain interest over a period of time, if it was hung on a wall. Note that "interest" is not necessary "attraction", although in the case of Natural History, it is usually the case.

And a general comment about "composition", because otherwise I would say this about a fair proportion of these entries. Composition is essentially the arrangement of material within the picture frame so that the viewer's eye travels around the picture, but stays in the frame, and is repeatedly returned to a focal point. In view of this, we need to appreciate that we Westerners view/(read) from left to right. Hence, any "movement" or (eye) gaze of the subject needs to be in the opposite direction to our eye movement, encouraging our eye to circle around, and stay in the frame. Additionally, it is beneficial for the right hand side of the picture to have something "solid" that provides some "barrier" before the eye reaches the frame. Items such as branches should be considered carefully to ensure they lead the eye to something of interest, and not out of the frame, especially on the right hand side.

Finally, when there is a small number of entries in a section, setting a standard becomes fairly arbitrary. And the issue is even more difficult if the range of quality is slight, especially with the likes of the B Grade Digital.

Based on these comments, here are the results.

NATURE PROJECTED IMAGES

"B" Grade

Lazing Leopard Seal: Seals are difficult subjects at the best of time, and the lighting here is not helpful either. However, the image does meet the nature requirement well, given the above issues. The seal is well placed off centre, and in this case the placement on the left is appropriate. But the title should not have "Lazing" in it - that is a human attribute, and has no scientific justification in a "nature" competition. **Accepted**

Wandering Albatross: In the past, such images of flying birds required luck more than skill. Today, with burst shoot available on digital cameras, they are much easier to obtain, and as a consequence, we demand somewhat higher standards. In this case, the light is a little dull, and the image is just a fraction soft. But more importantly, this image does need reversing. These comments are mainly intended to help - in spite of them, this is a very satisfactory picture for this grade. (But has anyone else noticed that these birds always seem to fly from left to right in front of a photographer????) **Accepted**

The Hunter: Let's be clear, this is a very good picture. A well caught action, good lighting and focus. But it has strong competition from the other entries, particularly a second, very similar entry which is noticeable better (viz, don't compete with yourself!). Again, the title is quite inappropriate - it should identify the bird. Even White Heron Hunting (or fishing) would be acceptable. **Accepted**

Floral: If this was A grade, this image would immediately be Not Accepted because it is a "domestic" subject (see PSNZ definition of Nature). However, it is a particularly strong pictorially representation of a flower, something that is difficult to achieve these days, so we will be softhearted. **Accepted**

Penguin Prowl: Again - title. But that aside, this has a lot going for it. The light and colour are spectacular, and we can even see the black eye in amongst the black feathers. And the flipper on one side nicely removes the symmetry. However, I am disappointed to see the sloping horizon and the very central location of the bird. Mask off the left background (and a little off the right to get ride of that spare beak), and this would be up a level. **Merit**

Sunshine: Again - title. But amazingly, another original flower (but at least this time a wild flower) - it is great to see some photographers are still able to come up with refreshing interpretations of this subject. The good close-in approach allows us to see some good detail of the flower, and the small amount of green gives depth to the image. **Merit**

Curious Chinstrap: We are now clearly up a level. The bird is aimed in the correct direction, with the black nicely preventing the eye leaving the right hand side of the

picture. The viewer's eye comes from the left, and is drawn to the picture's focal point - the bird's eye, which is well placed on a 1/3. Background is not detailed or obtrusive, but strongly suggests a coldness.

Honours

The Hunted: Yet again - title! The fish is of course not only what makes this picture, but also makes it much better than the earlier one of the same bird. But again - it should be reversed!

Honours

"A" Grade

Agapanthus Morning Shower: Over and above the issue of the title, the monochrome interpretation is quite damaging to this image. Firstly, we have a subject that *appears most likely* to be a domestic item (thus not meeting the nature requirement), and the monochrome presentation prevents us from gaining any idea of its surroundings, thus preventing us from determining if it was taken in its natural habitat. Secondly, it disguises an essential feature of this plant - its colour.

Not Accepted

Flower Power: Again - title. I must admit this is quite an attractive flower picture, and it would probably be accepted in an open competition. But as far as I can determine, this is another domestic flower, and as such, is not acceptable in this grade. I have checked our books on NZ native flowers, and can find nothing with the leaf type that this image shows. It is of course possible that this was taken in the wild overseas, but because it is not identified in the title, I must treat it as a pictorial entry and not a nature one.

Not Accepted

Bird: OK, true, it is a bird. And quite a good picture at that. But we need a much more accurate title than that.

Not Accepted

Turtles: Although the title is almost acceptable, this picture really needs extensive cropping - in this case we have too much environment, and insufficient subject.

Not Accepted

Olive Grove: This picture has given me problems, in that it has moved in and out of the In and Out. It is in some ways quite an appealing picture. It has a pleasant atmosphere, although it is tending to a softness of focus, but is sharp enough to be accepted. My real issue is - what do I expect from the title? Today, Olive Groves are very much domestic (or even industrial). But there must have been a time when they occurred naturally, and they could look this wild and unkept.

Accepted

Arctocephalus forsteri: I guess this trio is still moaning amongst themselves about the damage the earthquake did to their habitat. But it is well taken, and is a good rendition of the pups in their creche. I suspect it has been taken with flash, which has left a slightly disappointing amount of reflected light, but still not really damaging.

Accepted

Cicada Emerging: Yes, a hard subject to go past. This has been well arranged, with a background that is relatively strong, but not too so. I am concerned about the title though - this looks like the shell left after the cicada has emerged. If it was "emerging" we would see the actual cicada. Furthermore, the white fungus on the abdomen and the piece inside the case behind the head indicates that this is not a fresh (i.e., active) casing.

Accepted

Cookeina colensoi: Always (well very often) an attractive subject, fungi pictures can be outstanding. Here, the fungi are very well presented, and the larger lichen on the left minimises the fact that there is an even number of fungi. The problem we have is that the fungi divide the picture in half - a situation made worse by the right hand side of the picture being relatively uninteresting - the dark area, rather than forming a barrier to hold the eye in the frame, tends to be a black hole that draws the eye in. Mask about 20% of the right hand side, and this picture is improved enormously. The small amount of green moss remaining is a small, gentle, balance to the stronger lichen on the left. Yet the orange fungi still dominate in a very pleasant one/three arrangement.

Accepted

Immature Pied Shag - Phalacrocorax varius: By now, you believe I am going to say reverse this. Actually, there are exceptions, and I don't think that it is appropriate in his case. Reversal puts a very bright blue band down the left side, and tends to keep the eye out of the picture altogether. As it is on the right, while it is bright and near the edge, the strong eye of the bird is sufficient to hold us back from the edge. But I would mask a little off the existing left to keep the bird well to the left in the frame.

Accepted

Kereru: I was initially put off this image by the bright white background. However, on reflection, its damaging effect is somewhat muted by the large amount of foliage, which surprisingly, is not too distracting. Even so, masking off some of the left would not hurt. What is most impressive about this picture is the outstanding rendition of the birds' colouring - it is unusually well shown.

Accepted

Mallard Duck: Another image that deserves reversing (are you tired of hearing that comment yet??). Otherwise, this is a great picture that is full of action. Once reversed, the picture could be left as is. The right hand side of the picture is then noticeably darker than the left, and this means that the viewer does not notice to the same extent that the bird is very much dead centre in the frame. One can overcome this by then masking off some of the bottom (those fairly strong white rings), and some of the now right. But those extras are up for debate.

Accepted

NZ Fur Seal: Sadly, seals generally do not make great subjects. I think success mainly depends on selecting a very suitable background. Concentrating on a portrait also often helps. In this case, one could argue that there has not been quite enough portriatisation (to coin a word), or sufficient attention given to the background, which in this case contains a fairly bothersome object behind the seal's head.

Accepted

Silver Eye and Crab Apple: An acceptable picture, but you have not done the beautiful silver eye justice. The apples are very dominant (yes, I know they are in the title, but...). The colours of the bird show reasonable well too, but overall the picture is somewhat excessively subdued, I think partly because the sky is so bright. Also, cutting off part of the bird does bother me. **Accepted**

Tasmanian Azure Kingfisher: Striking colour, and good pose, with subject well placed. However, it should, again, be reversed. And in this case, the background, although realistic, is slightly distracting. A little off the (current) r.h.s. would not go amiss. **Accepted**

Blue Heron: This comes close to being in a higher grade. Why not? Well, firstly, the usual - reverse the picture. But in this case this is not the main problem - it is the identification - this is a White Faced Heron. Also, a lot of the beauty of this picture is the water, and I feel that the picture would be improved by masking off about the top 25%. This has the additional advantage of removing that annoying white patch in the (current) upper right. **Accepted**

Northern Giant Petrel: A quality picture that lacks just that little spark to place it in a higher category. The bird is nicely sharp, the water very satisfactory, but the large amount of featureless sky is, I think, what mainly disappoints. **Accepted**

Seagull on Nest: This is a very satisfactory picture - good light, bird well located in the frame, and gives an excellent indication of the habitat. However, one can argue there may be just too much habitat, and masking off some of the more obtrusive rock in the upper half would make this rough rock a little less eye catching. Also, you really should have been able to identify this as a Black Backed Gull, given how common it is. **Accepted**

Wandering Albatross Above Kaikoura Mountains: As with the earlier Petrel, this also lacks that last bit of sparkle to lift it into a higher rating. Here, the sky is not so washed out, but it is still a large featureless area. The Kaikoura Mountains are an unusual touch, although the "above" in the title does rankle a bit - "at Kaikoura" may be more accurate. **Accepted**

Megadyptes antipodes: Here the bird is nicely contrasting with a very acceptable, unobtrusive background. Plenty of good detail, because of the view point, and the excellent exposure gives good colour, without burnt-out whites. **Merit**

Moorhen Chick: Similar comments apply to this picture. Maybe a little too central across the frame, but the bird stands out well from the excellent background. **Merit**

Oystercatcher: Yet another well presented image, showing grooming behaviour well. It would be helped a little by having some of the right hand side masked off, but not critical. **Merit**

White Heron - Kotuhu: A very nice picture, showing excellent detail. I do like the arrangement, with the shoulder at the bottom right, leading the viewer's eye back to the head, holding the eye in the picture. (And it does not need to be reversed!) **Merit**

Young Male Galahs Playing: Well caught action, and I particularly like the fact that the stronger figure is on the left, allowing us to look at the right hand bird, but strong enough to pull our attention back and keep us in the frame. The slightly sharper head of the left hand bird helps too. **Merit**

Praying Mantis: A change from the more traditional side view of the creature. It has allowed a superior depth of field to be obtained, so that we see the whole insect is sharp. **Merit**

Blechnum novae zelandiae: A somewhat ordinary subject, but exceedingly well presented. Strong colour helps, but it is the excellent detail, and the placing against the background that really makes this such a successful image. **Honours**

Falco novaeseelandiae Taking Flight With Prey: Although this is a slightly messy picture due to the large amount of foliage, it is still a fantastic picture, full of action, detail, and information about the bird. The exposure has been particularly well handled, in that there is good colour in both the sunlit and shadow areas of the bird. **Honours**

Stewart Island Robin: Another outstanding image. The bird is exceedingly well placed in the frame, the detail is exquisite, and the background very pleasant, with those exceptionally well placed areas of green. And the overall cuteness is just a bonus. **Honours**

Weathered Coastal Rock Golden Bay: It is always a delight to be able to give a good award to a geological image. No, I am not a geologist - it is just that all too often geological pictures are rather unexciting and thus don't make interesting pictures - except to a geologist. Here we have not only interesting material, but it is very well selected and presented. **Honours**

Flying Buller's Albatross: At last we have a very successful flying bird. Not only excellent nature features, but outstanding pictorial presentation. The water is interesting to look at, without being overwhelming. But the crowning touch is the bird's location relative to the background. But always, our eye gets hauled back to the bird's face. **Honours**

Morepork Ninox novaeseela: Unlike the earlier monochrome presentation, this one works exceedingly well, in that, while it does not tell us anything about the colour of the bird, it illustrates its camouflage brilliantly (well, provided one does not pay too much attention to those eyes). **Honours**

NATURE PRINTS - "A" GRADE

Rainforest Lake Kaniere: The NZ rain forest is truly beautiful, but exceedingly difficult to turn into a great picture. Too often, the reality does not translate well into a satisfactory picture. This picture has been heavily "modified", and this has actually made the situation worse. Firstly, from the point of view of the set subject requirement, such an adjustment is not allowed (see PSNZ nature definition). But also clearly illustrated is the more common problem of light. Here we have very bright areas lit by sunlight, and very dark (wet?) trunks, so that overall, we get an exceedingly messy picture. Even the tree fern focal point fails to really stand out in this image. Sorry for the very blunt comments. **Not Accepted**

Hellish Wasp: A spectacular image, but regrettably it does not fit the set subject. The nature component is far too slight, even though the pictorial is so good. Better you are free to enter this in an open event. **Not Accepted**

Mycenta interrupta: An interesting picture where the pictorial aspect is noticeably stronger than the nature features. This arises because the depth of field is inadequate, so that while the front row of caps are acceptable sharp, there are no stalks that are. **Not Accepted**

Limestone Rocks Uplifted by Kaikoura Earthquake: I made some comments about geological images before, but here we have an example to illustrate my somewhat controversial comments about the subject matter. There is no doubt that this is an excellent record of a remarkable feature of the Kaikoura earthquake - the spectacular uplift that occurred. But to the untrained eye, it is a rather uninteresting image of shoreline. Thus we have excellent nature content, but rather mundane pictorial content. Never-the-less, it is an acceptable image. **Accepted**

Takahe, Kapiti Is: This is one of a number of entries that is suffering from the very high standard in the competition. There is essentially nothing wrong with these entries, other than the fact that some have just that little extra. OK, so it maybe should be reversed, but that is a minor issue. Here, the light is great and the amazing colour on these birds is well presented. Background is quite natural, although a little unexciting. **Accepted**

Tui: Interestingly, the colour in the pdf/jpg supplied with the entries shows much better colour. It too is a little subdued, but shows a little more sparkle. I would definitely like to see this image reversed and because I have seen the original unmasked image, prefer seeing the branch in front of the bird, but with the area behind the bird masked. This new arrangement improves the pictorial aspects by having the branch become a leading line to the bird, which now looks against our eye, and has room for lift off to the left. **Accepted**

NZ Pied Shag: A picture, which from a nature point of view, is remarkably good. The colour is realistic (although the range of white is just very slightly over the limits),

especially around the face. And I do like the way we see the webbed foot on the small branch. But the background is very uninteresting, and significantly limits the pictorial appeal.

Accepted

Mother And Baby Fruit Bat: This really hurts - here is the picture of a lifetime, but it cannot be better rewarded. To get mother and baby together is remarkable. And the wings are not only well displayed, but they are also perfectly caught. Yes, the baby is a little hard to make out clearly, and there is a slight fall off in sharpness, but these are minor. The real disappointment in this image is the pictorial limit - all that pure blue background takes too much away from the rest of the picture. (Yes, and I agree, how could you otherwise.)

Accepted

Haastia sinclairii var: This may not have all the luck of the previous entry, but it meets both nature and pictorial requirements exceedingly well. Firstly, the subject is not all that common (minor issue) but it is caught at the right time to show many of its natural features. It also shows the habitat brilliantly, and it has great pictorial impact.

Merit

Australian Darter With Dinner: There was some discussion in the committee about this picture, but eventually we kept at this level. The colour cast is somewhat disturbing, but given the white on the bird's neck, we have accepted that it was taken about dinner time. And maybe some of the right hand side could be masked off before it is reversed, and maybe you could argue that these are grounds for just an acceptance, but the look of shock on the dinner's face, and the twinkle in the bird's eye, and the chairmans casting vote, we decided it was a worthy picture for...

Merit

Buller Albatross: A wonderful portrait. Maybe a little dark in some areas, but great background, good facial detail, and sufficient focus, and let's face it, how could one defy that gaze?

Merit

Sulphur Volcanic Fumeroles, White Island: An interesting arrangement. One could debate that although the individual pictures on their own might not even gain acceptance in many competitions, this arrangement as presented is truly eye catching. And although they are somewhat similar, this only to the extent that it unifies the set, and the resulting combination gives us a really strong feeling for the environment. Well done.

Honours

*NZ Sealion (*phocarctos hookeri*) and Suckling Pup*: Many a time I have had to say that seals/sea lions are difficult to make into a good picture. But at long last, here is the image that I have been waiting for. Not only do we have the mother in a good pose in an excellent environment, we have the sucking pup being affectionately held. Fabulous.

Honours

Hypholoma brunneum in Sphagnum Moss: OK, so fungi are a somewhat hackneyed subject, but there are still many occasions where they make exceptional pictures, and this is one such case. There is just plainly and simply nothing wrong with this picture - colour, focus, arrangement, depth of field, all main characteristics

exceptionally well shown. And one could look at it for a long time without losing interest.

Honours

Cornu aspersum: This may be a human's pet hate, but what a marvellous image. Beautifully lit, great depth of field, and excellent background. (OK, maybe we should reverse it, but let's not quibble about such a great picture.)

Honours

White Fronted Tern with a Fish: Although one of our most beautiful birds, I have seldom seen such a wonderful picture as this. The rocky ground makes a change from the more usual sand, and in spite of its huge amount of detail, it does not become a serious distraction.

Honours

Errol Kelly,
Wanaka
June 2019

PS, Again, sorry there are so many Honours/Merits, but this is my best solution to the guide lines provided.