

Judging of B Grade Nature for Nelson Camera Club July 2022

What follows in the next few minutes is primarily for the ears of B grade workers so other members may have a short sleep. Just don't snore.

The Photographic Society of New Zealand PSNZ has what I might call a training course for judges. Experienced photographers who would like to be judges are mentored by experienced judges and if those wannabe judges pass a few tests at the end of their mentoring then they become PSNZ Accredited Judges. I am not and have no intention of becoming a PSNZ Accredited Judge. I prefer to do my own thing. When I have stated this to other clubs at previous on-the-floor-judging the reactions have been mixed. From sharp intakes of breaths to enthusiastic cheering. (New Brighton Photographic Club being amongst the latter). Before you consider cheering here's a short story. I heard a singer being interviewed on the radio. She had been accepted as a student at The Royal College of Music or some other such august institution but after just a year she quit the course and left. She said that she didn't like being told how to use her voice, how to sing. She preferred to do her own thing. 'Yes! Good on you. Do your own thing' I thought. At the end of the interview she was asked to sing one of the songs she was going to perform at a forthcoming concert. It was one of the most excruciating noises I have ever heard. If you wish to draw a parallel between her attitude towards singing and my attitude towards judging. So be it. If you have any complaints about my judging don't complain to the PSNZ they will tell you it's not their fault if you choose to use a none accredited judge. Complain to me or better still to Jean ... he's the one who asked me to judge.

Every judge has their pet way of assessing pictures. My method I have called the Four C's.

The first **C stands for Compliance** which simply means that the image must comply with the rules of the competition. You may have the best baby print in the world but it is not going to do well in a competition for landscape digital images. There are two golden rules for entering a photo competition. Golden Rule number one is to read the rules of the competition. Golden rule number two is to read the rules again. Tonight's entries for example need to follow the rules for Nature images as defined by the PSNZ.

The second **C stands for Competence** your image needs to demonstrate that you are a competent photographer. In other words that you have used an appropriate exposure, appropriate focusing, appropriate composition and appropriate all the other technical aspects of making an image right up to and including appropriate post processing. Note the use of the term 'appropriate'. This doesn't mean that everything has to be pin sharp with a comprehensive range of tones and with the main subject on the thirds. Over exposed, blurry images with lots of negative space certainly have their place, to depict a ballet dancer for example but probably not for a coal miner's portrait.

Compliance, competence and the third **C stands for Creativity** show me something I haven't seen before or in a way I haven't seen it before. For example a picture of a Yeti (the abominable snowman) is likely to get you brownie points in the 'wow this is new' vein straight away. However if you photograph a rose, that's fine but there had better be something pretty original about your depiction of the rose to make it stand out from the thousands of other rose images that are made every day.

The fourth, the final and the most important **C stands for Communication** show me something that imparts a strong message. That creates in me an emotional response. Be it the light in a totally beautiful landscape, the happiness of a young child, the despair of a grieving mother, the anguish of a soldier at war, the humour of an unforeseen silly situation or the reflective nature in an old man's eyes. When you visit a photographic exhibition it is those images that remain in your memory, days, weeks, years afterwards that are likely to be the images that have totally succeeded in communicating a meaningful message.

Compliance, competence, creativity, communication.

I have a reputation for talking too much, for 'going on'. The preceding commentary will have reinforced that reputation so let's quickly get on with the actual judging. There are some excellent images among some of this evenings B Grade entries. There are also some potentially excellent images. Perhaps the biggest general improvement overall could be achieved by entrants considering if and where they should crop their images to enable viewers to better concentrate on the main subject. I'll read out the names of those photographers receiving Merits or Honours. I didn't know these names until after I had completed the judging.

Apis mellifera A good attempt at capturing a suitable subject. Honey bees doesn't hang around in one place too long so the photographer needs to work fast. Lighting can be a problem as the bees prefer to work on a bright sunny day which means images with too high a contrast level may result. Here we have some rather annoying shadows and on my screen details of the bee's body might be better seen if the shadow areas were to be made lighter. The whole of the bee's body has been photographed but including a greater area at the top of the image would have strengthened the composition. Good attempt. **Accepted**

Arctocephalus forsteri The fur seal is another good choice as a nature entry. It's also a potentially difficult subject to photograph successfully. Getting sufficiently close without endangering one's safety is a concern but also fur seals at rest have the great ability to lie around looking like a giant, dead slug. When their coats are wet they can look over glossy and when they are dry they can look textureless. They also have the sort of eyes that somehow lack the glint easily depicted in other animals. Although in this image we do have a dead slug pose the photographer has shot from an angle that shows the animal's flippers to advantage. With a

lightening of the shadows the seal's coat would show some texture but sadly the seal's eyes are not evident. Showing the environment as the photographer has done here adds further information about the seal's lifestyle. My only concern is that perhaps too much of the environment has been shown particularly on the left-hand side of the image. The link between the seal and the splashing water is informative but the white of the splash can take the viewers' attention away from the seal resulting in what I describe as windscreen wiper viewing. Consider cropping off the splash and some of the sky to place more emphasis on the seal. **Accepted**

Autumn Glow The distant hills do glow with autumn colours and the water provides a good division between foreground, mid-ground and distance in this landscape shot. Alas the water is also a major concern in the image. Water finds its own level and, if it is not flowing violently, that level is horizontal. A water level depicted just slightly off the horizontal probably means that the photographer has got something a little bit wrong. Water depicted way off the horizontal, as here, usually means the photographer has decided to indulge in some brave artistic composition. For a nature competition I think it's best to stick with water in its state au naturel. Rotating and cropping this image would correct matters. Hopefully some of the foreground reeds and the distant rock jutting into the sky can be retained. This is a B-Grade competition so this is **Accepted**

Coleus scutellarioides I particularly enjoy the composition of this pleasing image. My eye goes immediately to the large central leaf and the photographer has not been afraid to go in close and effectively cut off the more subservient surrounding foliage. Truncating all the surrounding leaves indicates intended design whilst losing the end of just one leaf would imply a compositional error. Increasing the contrast fractionally would bring out the strong leaf colours to advantage. A competent image with remaining untapped potential. **A Very Good Acceptance**

Coprinopsis cinerea - Grey Shag No need for any cropping with this close-up of what I at first took to be a member of the Coprinus or ink cap genus. A visit to iNaturalist has enlightened me that the species named here has been separated out from the ink caps. This delicate image imparts a real ephemeral feeling totally in tune with the nature of fungi. In this instance the background highlights act to emphasise this feeling rather than being a distraction. Ideally for a fungus shot we should be shown the top of the fungus but in this case the photographer has decided to concentrate our attention on the underside gills. Perhaps a wider view would have underlined even further the fragile nature of the subject. Competent work and **A Very Good Acceptance**

Dancing mushrooms, Pelorus A title chosen, I presume, to accentuate the photographer's understandable feelings about the fungi. Be careful about using titles that are not scientific names, common names or strictly descriptive terms. Some nature competitions allow cute titling others reject such entries outright. The dominant subjects here are the three foreground fungi. We can see other fruiting bodies in the background but being neither sharply in focus nor totally out of focus they act more as a distraction rather than an informative element in the composition. Cropping off almost half of the picture at the top would remove a lot of these distractions and have the added compositional bonus of putting the caps of the three foreground fungi on the thirds. A good attempt. **Accepted**

Elephas maximus indicus another entry that has added to this judge's nature knowledge. Why so? I had assumed that the Asian or Indian elephant as shown here, the African savanna or bush elephant and the African forest elephant would all be different species of the same genus. Wrong! The African elephants are in the genus *Loxodonta* whilst the Asian elephant is in the genus *Elephas*. Further the lack of tusks on the larger animal suggests that is likely to be a female. Perhaps you didn't need to know any of that but Nature Photography is primarily about providing information rather than displaying pretty pictures, well as far as the PSNZ is concerned any way. Compositionally I appreciate that we have both a front and a side view of the animals though it would have been more informative to be able to see the whole of the right hand elephant. The background sets the scene well but the stalk in the foreground is an annoying distraction. With cloning being a big no-no there is little to be done about that. I certainly would not advise asking the elephants to hold their poses while you remove the offending stem. You might be greeted by a very loud trumpeting and a totally fatal trampling. The image might benefit from a slight cutting back on the contrast level. A well made creative entry. **Merit for Steve Ford**

En garde A very appropriate title but, as I have mentioned before, do ensure that such informal naming is permitted by the competition. The crab is well captured with that foremost claw providing a very strong "don't mess with me!" message. If the claw had been a fraction lower or the photographer a fraction higher we might have had a clearer view of the crab's eye. Such a viewpoint would have been the icing on a very well made photographic cake. No need for any cropping with this image though a darkening of the highlights and a touch more sharpening might reduce the prominence of the light stone and add more strength to an already strong image. **Honours for Tim Leyland**

Fantail on the hunt Fantails are always on the move and with an unpredictable flight path, so well done with this attempt at a difficult subject. Even more so as the Fantail's intended prey has also been included in the shot. I wonder if cropping off some of the sky at the top and

bottom of the shot would concentrate our view on the direction the bird is going and make more obvious that unfortunate little bug that is destined to be the Fantail's lunch. Although the bird's wing edges give the impression that the image might have suffered a little over-sharpening its wide open wings and delicate legs are very well shown. **A very good Acceptance.**

Flowing Water An interesting but I think a very valid choice of subject matter. A slow shutter speed has helped to emphasise the flow in the title. I think that the leaves and the red roots add to the shot. There is a tendency for my view to be drawn away from the central flow towards the very white water on the right and top right hand corner of the image. Perhaps cropping off from the top of the shot and a little on the right would ensure our attention stays with the flow in the centre of the composition. Increasing the contrast could increase the dynamism of the image. A pleasing entry. **Accepted.**

Gentianella sp. Mt. Arthur A very precise depiction of this gentian flower. The depth of field enables us to clearly see the reproductive parts of the flower and the chosen exposure has avoided the possibility of the petals being burnt out but instead permitted the depiction of the detailed veining in those petals. My main areas of concern are firstly the background which I feel is too intrusive. Perhaps the use of a suitably angled diffuser would have dulled down the bright foliage. Secondly it is a pity that the topmost gentian petal meets the edge of the frame. This may be considered a nit-picking point but the difference between a gold medal and a runner-up is often a matter of nits! An otherwise excellent image. **A very good Merit for Deb corbett**

Hedychium gardnerianum (wild ginger) I'm intrigued. Mainly because I'm unsure exactly what I'm looking at. I'm familiar with ginger it's a real pest plant in Northland where I used to live. This might be the dead flower head of the plant. For some reason that I cannot justify I want to rotate the image anticlockwise by ninety degrees. Maybe that orientates the plant towards what could be described its normal vertical position. The positive attributes of this image are the sharply defined ginger and the nicely out of focus, unobtrusive background. 'less is more' is a catch phrase we often hear but in this case the image might be improved by giving us something more. **Accepted.**

Hypholoma australicum, Pelorus Bridge Gary Speer, a photographer who specialises in fungi photos (and that's an understatement) once advised 'before you photograph the first fungus you see, take time and look around. There are often better examples of the same species nearby'. I think even Gary would have been happy with this group. Perhaps the photographer followed Gary's advice and eventually determined that this was THE group, it is

certainly appealing and a good choice of subject matter. At first I thought that the species was *Hypholoma brunneum* but I'll bow to the photographer's identification. Either way the colour of the fungus looks very red on my screen compared to the orange or brown that I would expect from the *Hypholoma* species. Although we cannot see the gills of the fungus the group is most competently depicted with an acceptably unobtrusive background. Darken the small highlights for perfection and some judicious cropping off the left of the image would remove the attention grabbing piece of small, white stick. A well made image. **Merit for Deb Corbett.**

Iceland Poppies I might consider this a garden shot rather than a strictly nature image but perhaps the image was made where the poppies grow naturally so we'll skip over that point. The image is competent but my eyes wander to what looks like a road and a different flower bed at the top corners of the shot. I suggest cropping off the top quarter or so of the picture to produce more of a panoramic image that allows the viewer to give their full attention to the central poppies. **Accepted.**

Kāruhiruhi Perhaps more commonly known as the Pied Shag. A very well made image capturing the bird in a typical pose drying its wings after dives into the water. The lighting has helped to show some good feather detail in the black wings and the angle of the shag's head has resulted in a pleasing catchlight in the bird's eye. Cropping a little off the top and left-hand side of the picture would give more prominence to the shag in this already most pleasing bird portrait. **Merit for Caitlin Cameron.**

Kōtuku, Ōkārīto These birds annoy me. Simply because I have the most awful time pronouncing their name. Anyway the Kotuku or white heron. Bird experts might look at the feathers of the heron and tell you exactly what stage of the mating/breeding season the bird was photographed. I am not a bird expert so I'll just say that I enjoy the appearance of all those extra quills extending from the bird. Against a clean non-intrusive background the heron has an most imposing and alert look or is it just putting on an accomplished air because it's demonstrating its competence in standing on one leg? The bird is very well captured but for me the fly in this photographic ointment is the attention-grabbing unoccupied branch reaching up from the base of the picture. It could be illegally but easily cloned out but, to stick by the rules, crop the image on the right and the left sides to remove the branch and reposition the bird centrally in the frame. Well seen. **A Very Good Acceptance.**

Lilium Longiflorum Look closely at the three Christmas lilies here and you will observe they are at different stages of flowering. The bloom on the right has obviously yet to open, the bloom on the left has long brown anthers that are closed and so still retain the flower's pollen whilst in the centre flower the stamens have split open and the pollen is dispersed. Technically

speaking those stamens have dehisced. Further, look carefully at the top, left petal of the centre bloom to see an insect. Possibly the means by which the pollen is dispersed! Well done to the photographer for making a 'story-telling' image. (Did you realise what a story you were telling?! You are allowed to lie!) With an unobtrusive background and attractive water droplets this most technically competent image is a pleasure to view. Is it perfect? Well I'm not that generous! For perfection I would recommend increasing the highlights a smidgen, removing the eye-catching white border and cropping a fraction off the left-hand side to centralise the blooms. Great shot. **Honours for Allan Weldon.**

Litoria Moorei - Motor Bike Frog Who would be so lacking in curiosity as to not look up how this frog gained its common name? Not I. According to Wikipedia the male's mating call sounds similar to a motorbike changing up through gears. A technically strong, close-up, detailed shot of the subject and close inspection of the rear leg reveals that the frog has a hitch-hiker ant on-board. I'm intrigued by the green highlighted areas. I have reservations about the bottom half of the image. It shows an area which looks man-made and contributes little to the story of the amphibian. Crop off most of that area to leave only a base for the frog to rest on. Another pleasing entry with a story to impart. **Merit for Carole Neame.**

Magnolia Although their blooms are often short-lived the magnolia is a much admired flower. The flowers here are just opening and are shown well against a complimentary but unobtrusive background. We do have a choice of flowers to look at and I would suggest that the photographer gets really vicious with the cropping tool and cuts our choice down to just one branch. For me the left-hand branch has the most interest. I feel that cropping to show only that branch with its blooms and buds is a real case of 'less is more'. I hope that another photograph was made when the blooms were fully open. **Accepted.**

Monarch butterfly The Monarch is always a popular nature subject and rightly so. This technically competent shot does a good job of showing the butterfly, having just emerged from its chrysalis stage, awaiting the drying and inflation of its wings before it flies off to hopefully to enjoy the summer sun and flowers. The broken discarded casing contrasts well with what we know are its now-become beautiful contents. A clean background helps to focus our attention on the star of the show. Any cropping required? Why not? Perhaps off the left hand side to centralise the monarch and off the top to remove some of the less attractive foliage. Well done. **A Good Acceptance.**

Nasalis larvatus Judging at home always takes me a long time because I end up looking up details about the subjects on-line. For example I now know that the Proboscis Monkey, as shown in this shot, apart from having a large nose has webbing between some of its toes which

helps it be a most proficient swimmer, even out-swimming crocodiles. They have large stomachs and the males have a bright red penis and a black scrotum but perhaps that's too much information for these circumstances. Apart from the appearance of over-sharpening in some areas this is a most competent and creative shot. The diagonal branch makes the image dynamic and indicates the natural habitat of the animal without becoming distracting. For perfection I would have liked to see all of the monkey's tail . It's a small detail (not for the monkey of course) but for the photographer it could be the difference between a gold medal and a 'nearly was'. Excellent work. **Honours for Steve Ford.**

Zosterops lateralis lateralis The White eye, Silver Eye, Wax Eye ... take your pick. A pleasingly competent portrait of this delightful bird. The orange flowers in the background (possibly abutilons, which the White Eyes love for the nectar they contain) tell a story but rather distract our attention from the primary subject the bird. By now you will know what I'm going to suggest! Yes crop off the top of the shot to remove that higher flower but also crop off the dead flower head on the left. The resulting image strengthens the presence of the Wax eye whilst still leaving an out of focus abutilon flower to tell the story. I think you may also get away with an extra touch of sharpening to ensure that the bird's eye is shown to perfection. Good work and a **Merit for Carol Mitchell.**

On to the B-Grade prints

Conolophus subcristatus The title on the back of this print is incorrect. Please take care to name your entries correctly; you don't want to upset the competition organisers ... or the judge. We are in the Galapagos Islands for this land Iguana. Apparently "*They are ugly animals, of a yellowish orange beneath, and of a brownish red colour above: from their low facial angle they have a singularly stupid appearance.*" or so wrote CHARLES DARWIN in 1835. I'm not too sure that I agree with Darwin but I have to admit that looking at this iguana with its feet resembling human hands and the loose flaps of skin around its neck I can't escape the thought that we are really viewing somebody dressed up in an iguana suit and wearing an imitation iguana head. My apologies to the photographer for that slur on what is an excellent image. The subject is beautifully focused, exposed and framed with a suitably none intrusive background. I read that these iguanas can grow to a length of a metre or a metre and half in length. I'm happy to stick with viewing a photograph! Great work and an **Honours for Steve Ford.**

Pongo pygmaeus pygmaeus From the Galapagos we travel to Borneo for this shot of an Orangutan. It's hard to stop anthropomorphising when a great ape looks at you as this one in the image is doing. Those eyes seem to be either questioning the viewer's motives or asking for some understanding of the animal's situation. This is another great shot. The texture of the orangutan's hairy body is particularly well depicted and the composition positions the animal neatly against the out-of-focus background trees. A touch more sharpening would emphasise

those eyes even more but that really is getting to nit-picking. Well done to the photographer and an **Honours for Steve Ford.**

Taraxacum magellanicum Seed head If this entry is accurately named then, from what I read, we are viewing a plant that is difficult to propagate and although it can be grown from fresh seed or transplanted it is hard to maintain in cultivation for any length of time. Those of us who have dandelions growing in our lawns may be sceptical of such claims. However this is the seed head of the New Zealand NATIVE dandelion; a different plant to the dandelion which invades our gardens. This is a pleasing, competent image, well positioned in the frame with the central seed heads sharply depicted. Having said which, although I appreciate the print, it needs evidence of more creativity to lift it above the level of the many similar dandelion shots that are made. **A Good Acceptance.**

Red Bill Gull A compliant and competent image where once again I have to contain my anthropomorphisation of a scene where the right hand gull has an expression which indicates that it is nearing the end of its patience with its pestering companion and at any moment is going to give him or her such a peck as they will never forget. A very neatly presented print showing well the birds in their natural environment. I suggest that leaving a greater distance between the right-hand bird and the edge of the frame would enhance the composition of the image. Simple and effective and a **Merit for Jane Pordon.**