

The Well Being of Your Nature Subject is More Important Than Your Photograph

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Fig. 1 – Take special precautions near nests.
© Bob Griffith, FPSA,
EPSA, Flicker Family

The Nature Division of the Photographic Society of America (“PSA”) sets forth the principle in its Code of Practice (“Code”), that the care and understanding of the subject takes precedence over the image captured. The first of this three part series on the Code explored the Nature and Wildlife definitions, and the second examined the rules regarding editing or adjusting images, especially digitally. This article presents some examples of suggested photographer conduct of a general nature, and specific conduct in respect to animal, plant and geology subjects. There is much more to be found in the full text of the Code at the PSA web site: www.psa-photo.org, then to Divisions, then to Nature, then to Resources and then to Code. The Nature Division can provide copies of the Code on request by those without access to the PSA web site, by contacting the Membership Information Director.

General

Be considerate of nature subjects. Killing or injuring living things is not part of nature photography. The ethical nature photographer should neither participate in nor endorse the practice of sacrificing a living animal specifically for the purpose of photographing a predator killing live prey under controlled conditions. Learn about

and be familiar with your subject, for the subject’s sake and to help capture a better nature story. Follow the rules and requests at all photographic sites, parks and wildlife refuges. Observe the requirements and rules of a site, of permission to enter a site, and courtesies to others including fellow photographers. Causing an animal to leave its accustomed surroundings or change its position for photographic advantage is discouraged. Be an observer, not an intruder.

Birds And Other Small Animals

Observe and photograph, if possible, without being observed by birds and other small animals. If photographing at or near nests or dens of animals, special care should be exercised. Don’t unduly expose the nest to sun, cold, rain or snow which could injure or kill the eggs or young. Branches should be tied back, not cut, then replaced after photographing. Don’t keep a blind up on a nest or burrow if the parents do not return within a half hour, especially on very hot or cold days. Don’t purposefully frighten birds away from a nest in order to photograph them returning. Don’t take longer than 15 minutes to set up a blind, because of the risk of delay of return of the birds. Animals will abandon their nest, burrow or den if you get too close. Don’t handle small birds or animals because that risks abandonment by the parents. Restore the nest area and the access to the nest after you leave. Don’t locate a blind on the animal’s regular route to or from the nest, den or burrow, and don’t allow the blind to flap in the wind. Capture of cold-blooded animals and invertebrates for studio or aquarium photography should be done with caution, as some states and countries have laws against this practice without a permit. Release in the original habitat if possible. (See Figure 1).

Botany

Wildflowers and other botanical subjects should be photographed without picking, and in many states, National Parks and Monuments, picking is illegal. If objects like rocks or logs natural to the area are added to provide a correct and more photogenic background, put these objects back to the place where they were found after photographing. “Gardening” or cleaning up the immediate area for an image should not include destroying other plants in the area. Avoid damage to fragile habitats, because it will adversely affect the species in that ecosystem. (See Figure 2)





Fig. 2 – Wildflowers may be given a photogenic background, with objects natural to the area, as was done here, but don't damage the habitat and return it to the state you found it. © Bob Griffith, FPSA, EPSA, Lupines

Insects

Photographing insects and arachnids in the field will probably tell a more accurate story. If captured for photographic purposes, release where captured within a reasonably short time. Do not freeze insects, but chilling is suitable for some insects, such as beetles and grasshoppers. However, butterflies, most moths and almost all insect larvae may be irreparably damaged by cooling. Day flying insects like butterflies and wasps, are best controlled by working in a darkened room at night, focusing by means of a weak flashlight. (See Figure 3)

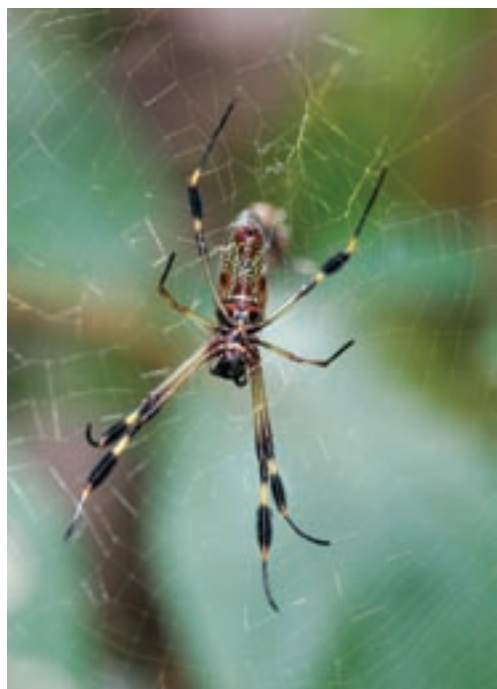


Fig. 3 – A photograph made in the field, in the place you would expect to find the subject, will tell the most accurate nature story. © Bob Griffith, FPSA, EPSA, Costa Rican Spider

Tidepool Subjects

It is important to replace rocks that animals live on or under, that ecological niches are preserved and animals returned to the place they are found. Some animals like brittle stars are quite fragile—handle with care. Marine animals requiring oxygenation and temperature control will die if not properly cared for. (See Figure 4)

Fig. 4 – The Blood Star is not brittle, but should be left in the pool where and how it was found, as it waits for the incoming tide. © John M. Davis Jr, APSA, PPSA, Blood Star Exposed





Fig. 5 – Amphibians are more sensitive than many animals to handling and removal from their natural environment. © John M. Davis Jr, APSA, PPSA, Bullfrog 1

Newts, Salamanders and Other Amphibians

These animals from the wild should not be kept for more than a few hours while being photographed, unless they have proper food and natural conditions. The practice of chilling these or other animal subjects should be done carefully and for brief periods only. (See Figure 5)

Reptiles

Reptiles should not be held for more than very brief periods. Artificial feeding is usually not successful. If holding them overnight, give them protection equivalent to that which they would find in the wild. Don't lift snakes by the neck alone, or by the tail alone, because of potential spinal injury of the snake. (See Figure 6)

Geology

Pictographs and petroglyphs should not be touched or altered in any way, and are not eligible in PSA Nature recognized exhibitions and competitions as nature subjects because of the human element. (See Figure 7)

Don't damage fragile cave or crystal formations, and don't damage geologic formations which may have taken thousands or millions of years to form. Erosion features should be left untouched. (See

Figure 8)

Fig. 6 – Holding the viper by the neck or tail alone can harm the animal, and handling less than carefully may harm the photographer!
© Jack Templeton, White Lipped Viper



The Code of Practice is not meant as an exhaustive list of acceptable and unacceptable nature photography practices. It does provide specific examples of conduct, however, which will guide photographers in other areas of nature photography. DOING NO HARM should be in the front of every nature photographer's mind, regardless of the subject, no matter where in the world the photography is taking place. The Code asks each nature photographer to use good judgment in practicing his or her art. Learning about the subject and its environment before photographing will help the photographer make

Fig. 7 – Even though this image does not fit the nature definition because of the human element, the Code makes a special point not to touch or alter these significant places found in natural environments. © John M. Davis Jr, APSA, PPSA, Utah Pictographs





Fig. 8 – These ancient Carlsbad Cavern limestone columns can be easily damaged. © John M. Davis Jr, APSA, PPSA, Carlsbad Stalagmites



Fig. 9 – The Code is about best practices, doing no harm, using good judgment, learning about the subject, telling a good nature story, protecting and appreciating the natural environment, and capturing its beauty and order. This image was taken south of Yellowstone National Park. © Gerry Emmerich, FPSA, EPSA, Oxbow Splendor

reasonable and ethical decisions before setting up to photograph. That knowledge will enrich the photographer's experience, lead to more satisfying images and a produce a better nature story. Learn through photography to appreciate and protect the natural beauty of places and things. (See Figure 9)

This concludes the three-part series on the Nature Definition, Editing, and the Code of Practice. Please join many others who will be attending the PSA Annual Conference in Yellowstone this year, and enjoy one of the richest nature and wildlife photography environments in the United States of America. (See Figure 10) ■

Correction for the June PSA Journal

On page 30, above the *Havasu Falls* image, the statement should read as follows: It is clear that the elements of an image must remain in the final image in the place they were captured, and cloned or new elements would not be truthful, and are *not* allowed. (See Figures 1 and 2).

The *Journal* apologizes to John Davis, APSA, PPSA, and PSA members for any confusion this typo may have created.



Fig. 10 – Yellowstone and its fauna, flora and geology await you. © Jacob Mosser, Bison and Geyser Plume