

PictureMaker – February 2024

PictureMaker



Mashonaland Photographic Society



2024 Issue 2

February

“Back Light or Side Light”



“Hyena”

By

Dave Dell

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Editor's Blurb:

Bridget Henderson

I am about to embark on an overseas trip for a family event and as often is the case in these situations, I start to think that perhaps I should take this opportunity to get some gear while I am in a place where camera equipment is more affordable and there is lots of decent second-hand stuff up for grabs too.

We have all heard of the shiny object syndrome, have we not? Perhaps you too, have even fallen victim to it on the odd occasion? It's an easy trap and I have often succumbed, thinking that my photography would improve if only I had better gear. Right? Wrong! The realization is dawning that our photography will only be better if we improve our understanding and skills of photography and have the **CORRECT** gear.

It is important to remember that YOU control your gear – your gear does not control you. In other words, you can certainly produce excellent images with the gear you currently have if you know how to use it correctly. That means the very fundamental things you need to master include understanding the exposure triangle, lighting (whether that be natural or artificial) and shooting in Manual mode. Add a hint of creativity into it, and you can take your images to the next level.

OK, so you don't need to buy the "latest and greatest" as the brand companies churn out new improved models frequently but then when is the right time to upgrade your equipment or add to your photography toolbox? Upgrading is a good mentality to have but not to do often or unnecessarily.

Consider the following when upgrading:

- Have you used your camera for the purpose that you bought it for?
- Is it now inadequate for your needs and it is limiting? Are you finding that you need better features now that you have mastered it? For example, you may want a camera with better image stability, low light capability, built in stacking or higher number of frames per second? A longer reaching lens with better min f value?
- Is your current camera broken or does it have broken parts? Then yes, now would be a good time to upgrade! However, if you really love it, you may just want to opt for repair.
- Make sure that your existing equipment (lenses etc) are compatible/can be used on any new system you choose.
- What does your budget allow?

Now in writing this, I have convinced myself that I do not need to buy any more photography "stuff" (and my husband will be optimistic that I have seen sense in terms of the credit card) but I can assure you I will still be trailing through Jessops with my tongue hanging out and salivating!!!

Congrats to Dave Dell for garnering the top spots in our "back light and side light" set subject categories in Feb.

This month we showcase our own Nettie Rogers' images from her trip to Kavinga in 2023. Some great captures. Two of the RAW images taken at night (leopard and bushbuck) were run through Lightroom denoise, with decent results. If anyone else has a collection from a recent outing please let me know for future PictureMaker issues.

Enjoy!

Monthly meeting March:

27th March 2024

Venue: Meditation Centre

6 Borrowdale Lane,

Opposite Borrowdale Trauma Centre

Set Subject April 2024:

Cobwebs

Deadline: 8th April 2024

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From the President's Viewfinder - February 2024



Why bother? Of late I've spent many hours trawling the Internet questioning aspects of various computer programs with regard to the re-energizing of my laptops after various technical issues and now it seems that one can't just have a program that does what you want it to do but rather that which the machine would rather select and do for you! Microsoft appears to be forcing the change or is it just because I'm a Windows 10 user with no ambition to change to version 11 (68% of Windows users worldwide are on version 10!) but they would rather we made the switch. The fact that none of my machines can accept version 11 is another bone of contention but not one for discussion here.

I guess I'm just old school and was reminded the other day that I often heard people say when discussing pictures and various cameras that 'some of my best pictures were taken on a Brownie box camera'. Perhaps that's taking it a bit far but for me my love of photography has not been about getting the perfect picture after spending hours tweaking my effort on a computer screen but rather that what comes out of the camera should be as close to what you finally wish to achieve on a stand alone basis. This as opposed to taking a less than perfect shot and then feeding it through numerous AI programmes which eventually deliver what you hoped to achieve in the first instance! I guess it's all about what you intend to do with your pictures and for me it's simplified because they are for me and my family and friends to enjoy and not for winning salons or for sale or commercial use where the end result requirement is always a lot more different and demanding.

A recent article I read was by a professional who was talking about his career and reminiscing about the quality of pictures he managed to achieve years ago with his old Canon 5D Mk 2 without copious studio work afterwards. To quote 'The colours were vibrant, the details popped and images looked really good'. He then went on to say that now there's an easy way to achieve all that! Brings me back to my opening comment. He stated exactly what I have always striven to achieve and do I want a facility, whether it be in camera or computer program that does all that for me and take all the fun and enjoyment out of the physical act of getting out there with my camera and doing it myself? For me, no, no, no CoPilot, I'm happy doing it on my own. Recalling those heady days when we stood on the other side of the rugby ground, film camera in hand with a 70 - 300 lens mounted, hand held, unstabilised and got the perfect shot as the ball went down over the touchline. Not to say that stabilization hasn't eased the stress level but that's as far as I want it to go.

Perhaps in a way we've been co-existing with AI for longer than we think? Don't auto settings on cameras do that for us? You don't have to think, just point and shoot and a machine tells you what it thinks you should have set and gives you just that! Looking to the future perhaps it's time that we revise our monthly competition categories and include one for AI? Food for thought?

The competition entries for March are in and currently with the judges and it's interesting to see the interpretation that members put on the subject of 'Triptych'. Perhaps one of the most challenging set subject topics that we've had for quite some time and one which I feel will generate some thought-provoking discussion on the results evening. Be there and participate.

Meanwhile and in photography,

Nige

A Memorable Journey to Kavinga

By Nettie Rogers



In October 2023, Bruce and I were privileged to embark on an unforgettable trip to Kavinga in Mana Pools, an experience that left an indelible mark on my soul. The scorching heat and arid landscapes welcomed me as I ventured into the heart of this majestic wilderness.



The accommodation was exceptional and provided a comfortable sanctuary amidst the harsh environment. The blend of rustic charm and modern amenities ensured that I could unwind and rejuvenate and press the 're-set button'!! The hospitality of the staff added a personal touch to my experience, making me feel truly at home in the midst of the untamed African wilderness.



The real magic of Kavinga revealed itself with amazing animal and bird sightings that exceeded all my expectations. From majestic elephants lumbering to the waterhole to the abundant plains game, every encounter felt like a privilege. The diversity of species, including elusive leopards, lions, loping hyenas, and the shy serval and civet cats, painted a vivid picture of the untamed beauty of the natural world.

The most awe-inspiring moments of my journey was the time spent in a hide by the waterhole, which offered a front-row seat to the mesmerizing interactions between wildlife and nature.





The close proximity to animals in their natural habitat provided a rare opportunity to witness their behaviour up close, evoking a sense of reverence and appreciation for the delicate balance of life in the wild.

We were extremely fortunate to see the Wild Dogs twice, once in the early morning and again that evening when they half heartedly chased an impala and later a bush buck that had come down to drink at the waterhole.



As I reflect on my journey to Kavinga, Mana Pools, I am filled with gratitude for the memories of the hot, dry landscape, the comfortable accommodation, the remarkable animal and bird sightings, and the intimate moments by the waterhole will forever hold a special place in my heart, reminding me of the raw beauty and inherent harmony of the wilderness.



February 2024 MPS competition results

“Back Light or Side Light”

1st place SET SUBJECT :

“Hyena”

Dave Dell

How I got the shot:

I love Hyenas and personally think they are just the best predator of all. Their intelligence and social interactions are outstanding.

The way they preserve the Royal Family and blood line is truly amazing and I'd be happy to share some info about them if invited at the next meeting!!

Anyway we were in Kenya in October 2019 and spending a bit of time in the Mara Triangle (close to the border with Tanzania).

We saw many hyena so I was in my element and took pictures of them at every opportunity (we saw lots of lions too but they are not that interesting and photogenic so happy to pass on some "Kodak moments" with those).

We came across this particularly good looking hyena, and as they are not boring creatures, it was happy to provide us with a great opportunity to see it against the morning light and show off its beautiful coat. I had my Canon 5D MK IV at the time with a Canon EF 200-400mm lens with built in 1.4X converter. This image was taken at 480mm f/8, hand held at shutter speed of 1/320 sec so was a bit tricky but I didn't really want a pin sharp image anyway as it was more about mood and lighting.

The camera settings were: aperture priority, metering mode “pattern”, image stabilizer ON. Not sure on the ISO but probably about 200.



2nd place SET SUBJECT

"Rhinoceros"

Dave Dell



This image was also taken a while ago, at Malilangwe, as we were invited by the Director at the time. They took us on a game drive one evening and as it was getting quite late we came across these rhino with beautiful back lighting and magnificent horns so I had to try and get an image. Really tough conditions to take a decent one as on a vehicle with people moving and an engine running! I couldn't really tell everyone to keep still and I guess the engine running was just one of those things!

I was using a Canon 7D with EF 100-400mm lens at the time. The camera was set to aperture priority mode, metering mode on "spot. Lens was at 300mm with image stabilizer ON. ISO about 400.

As there was very poor light and not wanting the subject to be just noisy dark blobs, I had to choose an aperture of f/ 7.1 to get a reasonable depth of field and a very slow shutter speed of 1/80 sec. Hand held which was tricky especially at that focal length.

Rather lucky with the result but the mood and background lighting is lovely.



3rd place SET SUBJECT
"Laughter and Light"

Bridget Henderson

Camera: Canon EOS R5
Lens: Canon RF 24-105mm f/4 L IS USM

Aperture: f/6.3
Shutter speed: 1/100 sec
ISO: 160
Focal length: 100 mm

February 2024 MPS competition results cont...

1st place OPEN CATEGORY “Passion Flower Pollinator”

Kerry Orphanides



Adventure. Unfamiliarity, yet very Nyanga like in comparison. Venue: Wriggleswade Dam, Eastern Cape. Naturally beautiful although the weather is far more moody than home. Landscapes, fields of wild flowers, birds, butterflies and water. Heavenly. I was trapesing after a long-tailed widow bird barley able to carry its courting adornment when this wild granadilla flower caught my eye. Whilst adjusting my camera to take the shot of the flower I noticed the bee visitor. I took quite a number of shots trying to get the right one. It was a tricky balance of how much of this intricate flower to include but this is the shot I liked the most.

Taken using Canon Powershot SX 70 HS bridge camera at f/8 with a shutter speed of 1/400 sec, ISO 160 and focal length of 247mm.



2nd place OPEN CATEGORY

“Proud”

Chris Sheppard

Camera: iPhone 13 Pro

Aperture: f/2.8

Shutter speed: 1/250 sec

ISO: 25

Focal length: 9 mm



3rd place OPEN CATEGORY

“Whites with a Splash of Colour”

Caro Dean

Camera: Nikon D5100

Lens: Nikkor 55-200mm f/4-5.6G ED

Aperture: f/8

Shutter speed: 1/15 sec

ISO: 500

Focal length: 55 mm

Important MPS Dates and Set Subjects 2024

This year sees a change in format for our set subjects in that there will be no rules applied on a monthly basis i.e. It will be up to the author's own interpretation of a particular topic as to how he or she sees it and produces a picture. Every month pictures may be in colour or black and white, manipulation is allowed. Images are due by Noon on the deadline date.

~~JANUARY~~

~~Emptiness~~

Completed

~~FEBRUARY~~

~~Back or side Lighting~~

Completed

~~MARCH~~

~~Triptych / Multi-frame~~

~~Deadline: 4th March~~

~~Meeting date: 27th March~~

APRIL

Cobwebs

Deadline: 8th April

Meeting date: 24th April

MAY: Two trophy events

President's Platter : Still Life with Movement

Deadline: 6th May

All paid-up MPS members may enter this Set Subject. No 'Open' in May.

Best Picture of 2023

Deadline: 6th May

For Members who entered from Jan–Nov inclusive in 2023, your best 3 entries. Indicate month entered for each entry.

Minor editing allowed to improve entries from 2023 in line with judges' comments.

Meeting date: 29th May



JUNE

Midday Sun

Deadline: 3rd June

Meeting date: 26th June

JULY

Creative Ice

Deadline: 1st July

Meeting date: 24th July

AUGUST

Surrealism

Deadline: 5th August

Meeting date: 28th August

SEPTEMBER

A Winding Road or Path

Deadline: 2nd September

Meeting date: 25th September

OCTOBER

Vanishing Point

Deadline: 7th October

Meeting date: 30th October

NOVEMBER

Sensational Summer

Deadline: 4th November

Meeting date: 27th November

Cobwebs

Deadline: 8th April 2024

Cobwebs:

Cobweb is another word for a spider web. But *cobweb* is most commonly used to refer to the kind of dusty old spider webs that hang in the corners of places that haven't been used or cleaned in a long time, like attics and abandoned houses.

For that reason, *cobweb* is often used in expressions like *clean out the cobwebs*, meaning to do something to clear your mind or make it function normally again, perhaps after a period of inactivity or confusion. So for the purposes of this set subject "cobwebs in the mind" might be something to consider as well as the real tangible thing.



The real cobwebs delicate structure and fascinating shapes are highly engaging to look at, and they are covered in interesting details which make great close up studies.

It's amazing just how different each spider web can be when you look at it closely. Combine this with varying surroundings, lighting, and weather conditions and you'll soon discover that spider web photography offers a huge range of possibilities.

Some tips on capturing images of real cobwebs/spiderwebs:

1. Shoot on a still day

Spider webs are incredibly light, and if there's even a *hint* of wind, they'll sway back and forth as you photograph them and the moving web will create motion blur and you will struggle to lock focus, so you must take care to shoot *during still conditions*. Look for spider webs in the early morning; just after sunrise tends to offer little wind, plus the light is often beautiful and golden.

2. Focus manually (and use your highest-magnification/ macro lens)

Spider webs are usually small, which means that you'll need to focus close if you want to capture detail. The camera autofocus system may struggle to focus and start "hunting" so manual focus may be the necessary option. Macro lenses, with short minimum focus distance, are the best option for this set subject.

3. Find a plain background that makes the web stand out

For spider webs, a plain, dark background is often preferable. In the right light, a dark background will highlight the translucent web, creating an eye-catching photo, without distraction from other elements.

At the very least, make sure the background is non-distracting. Keep colours to a minimum, and aim for large subject-background separation. Find the right backdrop for your web. Look for small points of light behind it. Sunlight filtering through leaves, for example, can work wonders. The trick is positioning yourself so those points of light appear behind the web.



4. Carefully choose your aperture (and depth of field)

Spider web photography is all about *emphasizing* your main subject – the web – while ensuring the background remains unobtrusive and (ideally) complementary, so be sure to use a wide aperture.

If you are using high magnifications, make sure you have decent subject-background separation and then you can increase your aperture a bit to get a better depth of field without compromising background bokeh.

5. Shoot from a head-on angle

Photographing spider webs from all angles can leave you with interesting results. Start by positioning yourself directly in front of the web and shooting straight on. This will enable you to keep the full web in focus, as the distance from your lens to all parts of the subject will be similar – preventing the shallow depth of field effect (discussed above) from blurring out part of the web.

Of course, you don't *always* need to keep the entire web in focus. You might also like some shallow depth of field shots from different angles to achieve interesting abstract effects.



6. Don't forget a tripod (or shoot with a fast shutter speed)

At high magnifications, camera shake is increased – and this can lead to blurry photos. So make sure you either use a tripod to stabilize your camera if using slower shutter speeds, particularly in low light or be sure to check that your shutter speed is high enough if you are shooting hand-held.

7. Look for webs with dew

Many classic spider web photos include dew or rain droplets. Dew or rain creates interesting bokeh effects in out-of-focus areas.

8. Shoot into the sun

Try capturing your spider web images in the early morning or late afternoon. That's when the sun is low in the sky, offering softer light and intriguing angles.

Aim to have the sun behind the spider web or position the sun just outside your frame. It acts as a powerful backlight, illuminating every intricate detail of the web. It transforms the strands into glowing threads of light. Never look directly at the sun through your lens. Instead, use the live view function on your camera's LCD screen to compose your shot.

Sometimes, a spider web can look quite dull and lifeless from one side, while the other side looks great – either because the light is falling upon it in the right way, or because the background looks far better.

9. Composition

Generally filling the frame is the best bet in these shots as you emphasize the main subject, plus you can highlight abstract patterns and even capture images veering into fine art territory.

But what about context? There's a whole world around that web. Sometimes showing that environment adds an extra layer to your photos. Imagine a spider web strung between rusty fence posts. Or maybe it's spanning the gap between two wildflowers. These settings can bring a narrative quality to your images.

Switch it up a bit. Use a wider lens to capture more of the environment. The setting becomes a character in your photo's story. From a dewy meadow to an urban setting, where the web is makes a difference.



10. Go abstract

A spider web doesn't always have to look like a spider web in a photo. It can be an abstract work of art. A dance of lines and light. To achieve this, zoom way in using a macro lens. Zooming in allows you to focus on a single strand or a small cluster of strands. Getting the focus right is crucial. To make one strand really stand out, focus with pinpoint accuracy. When you nail it, that strand will be tack-sharp, making the rest of the web look like a soft, hazy backdrop.



11. Photograph with and without spiders

Spider webs can tell two different stories: one with a spider and one without. An empty web speaks of mystery, perhaps abandonment or a lurking predator. On the other hand, a spider proudly centred in its web could be the showstopper.

When you find a web with a resident spider, you've got options. Experiment with various angles and distances. Capture some shots where the spider takes centre stage, and some where it's just a small part of the web's design.

Try capturing an empty web from angles that emphasize its structure or the way it interacts with light. You may find that the absence of a spider adds a moody or enigmatic quality to your photo.



12. Experiment with flash

sometimes adding artificial light via a flash can illuminate the web nicely and create some good catch-lights. This can be especially effective when the natural light is low; a flash will keep the web sharp (no high ISO necessary!).



**February
2024
montage**

