

NANPA Highlights series



**CONSERVATION
PHOTOGRAPHY**

NANPA Highlights series: CONSERVATION PHOTOGRAPHY

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Welcome to the NANPA Highlights series

The mission statement of the North American Nature Photography Association promises information, education, and inspiration for anyone who shares NANPA's goals promoting the art and science of nature photography.

This booklet is part of a series of efforts based in our commitment to these values.

NANPA Mission Statement

NANPA promotes the art and science of nature photography as a medium of communication, nature appreciation, and environmental protection.

NANPA provides information, education, inspiration and opportunity for all persons interested in nature photography.

NANPA fosters excellence and ethical conduct in all aspects of our endeavors, and encourages responsible photography in the wild.



Photo: Clay Bolt



NANPA Highlights series: Conservation Photography

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What Motivates and Inspires Conservation Photography?

Nature photography with a mission

On Christmas Eve 1968, astronaut William Anders captured a photograph that depicted the earth as a wispy blue orb suspended in space.

The image – described by Galen Rowell as the most influential image ever taken – crystallized in our collective conscience the beauty and the fragility of our shared home. The impact of Anders’ photograph was so profound that many have credited it for the birth of the environmental movement – a testament to the power of the single image in mobilizing people at a global scale.

Conservation photography has just this century been defined as the active use of the photographic process and its products to advocate for protecting the earth and its inhabitants.

In reality, though, photographs have been used to celebrate the beauty

of the natural world, inspiring conservation for more than 150 years. In 1864, Abraham Lincoln was greatly inspired by Carleton Watkins’ stereographic photographs – which appeared three dimensional – of Yosemite, some 2,000 miles away. As a result, he signed a bill declaring the valley inviolable, paving the way for the US National Park Service.

As photographers of the natural world, we have the tools to connect people with the beauty and wonder that still exists. But we also have an increasing responsibility to shed light on the threats it faces. Our goal: to encourage and enable people to become good stewards of our earth.

The power of photography lies in its ability to elicit an emotional response. In the digital age, images transcend boundaries of language and culture. Images have come down from cave walls to gallery walls, computer screens, and right to the palm of our hands. (love this sentence) The democratization of publishing platforms provides unprecedented opportunities for photographers who

want to use their images to evoke change.

The current deluge of imagery – some 300 million photos are uploaded to Facebook every day. We no longer need to rely on the permission of

gatekeepers for our images to be seen by many thousands of people.

With the power to post directly to a global audience, our challenge now is to make our images, and the stories behind them, count. We want to

steer our audience toward a deeper appreciation of the fragility of life on this wispy blue orb. Not only that, our hope is that their actions help safeguard the wonders of the natural world from which we draw our deepest inspiration.

“The power of photography lies in its ability to elicit an immediate emotional response”



Photo: Melyssa St. Michael



Thinking Like a Conservationist

How to set and meet conservation photography goals



In a ground-breaking 1985 article in the journal *BioScience*, conservation biologist Michael Soulé helped establish some defining parameters and an expansive vision for what the field of conservation might offer the world.

They include foundational ideas about the function of conservation, as well as the values underpinning its practices.

Though much has evolved and progressed in conservation biology over the past three decades, many of the answers proposed for Soulé's question, "What Is Conservation Biology?" are a guiding inspiration for all people working in the field, including conservation photographers.

That brings up the question: What does conservation photography look like, and how are the values

of conservation played out in the practical work of making relevant photographs?

Conservationists care about biodiversity.

The interconnected ecological, population, and genetic diversity of the living world guides and motivates conservationists' work. Conservation photographers tend to explore and express life's diversity in their images, both educating and inspiring awe and wonder at the many diverse forms.

Photographers may focus on making images that emphasize the many kinds of natural habitats that living organisms occupy. They show these habitats through landscape photography or scenes that frame an animal or plant within the physical spaces they inhabit.

Photographers emphasize the amazing physical and behavioral diversity of living creatures themselves, telling visual stories about their unique aspects and surprising differences. These photographs often are made in a series -- a group

of images that reveal an important set of facts about the natural world – or explain the complicated way that living ecosystems function and change.

Often, people think they need to travel to exotic places like rainforests in order to do conservation photography, but the reality is there are conservation projects in some capacity taking place almost everywhere, and surely somewhere nearby.

Conservation expresses concern for immediate crises as well as long-term ecological health.

Many refer to conservation photography as a "crisis-oriented discipline." But, in fact, conservation photography is not all pessimistic or discouraging. Photographing the natural world can show the wonder of nature as it is now, encouraging people to protect it. Still, conservation photography also demonstrates the threats of rapid change – both immediate and long-term – and its disruption to the health of the environment.

Balancing what can sometimes feel like a fixation only on immediate ecological crises, conservationists also try to keep long-term stories in mind. The goal is to try to prevent

the errors of short-term fixes that unintentionally disrupt the bigger picture.

For example, conservation photographers may expose the unintended consequences of land development or resource extraction. Documenting changing habitats or the effects of pollution in photographs might demonstrate the importance of supporting public education about conservation needs.

Climate change, habitat destruction, invasive species, land preservation, population protection – these are just some of the concerns that direct the work of conservation photographers. Their photos sometimes tell the dark side of the human story, especially as it affects and alters the land around us.

They can include people at work, at home, and living their lives in juxtaposition to other living creatures, such as deer foraging for food in the neighborhood. We might see children at play in a housing development that has fragmented a sensitive ecosystem. We could witness wildlife rehabilitators who rescue and treat individual animals caught off guard by industrial activities that impinge on their lives.

Frequently these situations make us wrestle with how human communities

and the surrounding environment and animals can work in cooperation or in conflict. As a result, conservation photographers often express how humanity fits into the larger picture of life on Earth.

Conservation is informed and directed by science

Bodies of scientific knowledge are critical to the practice of conservation and touch on many fields such as evolution, genetics, biochemistry, geology, sociology, medicine, and engineering. Conservation photographers dedicated to making a difference may benefit from education in these fields.

Conservation photographers often try to capture details grounded in scientific importance. Anatomical details of animals and plants are important for identifying species. Captioning photos with true and accurate information is a top priority.

For example, knowledge of a specific bird's behavior can help a photographer make better images of that bird. Understanding a particular plant's life cycle will support a photographer's efforts in expressing the beauty and ecological importance of that plant.

Conservation photographers often

work directly with scientists in the lab or in the field. Their images help researchers, naturalists, and other scientific professionals communicate how the work is relevant to a changing world. See the section "Playing Well With Others" in this booklet for more information on this relationship.

Conservation works best in an environment of clear communication.

Ultimately, conservation photographers are driven by a desire to communicate something important about nature, in a way that supports protecting our world.

This is why conservation photographs ultimately show a scene or document an animal intended to motivate a conservation value or concern in a viewer. Many of these photos are intended to surprise a viewer with the startling appearance of an endangered species. Or perhaps a series of images evokes a sense of loss or sadness by documenting radical alterations of sensitive wetlands.

The power of photography to convey information and touch upon human emotion is one of the best ways to ensure the long-term success of conservation's goals, by motivating people to take ecological relationships seriously.

Photo: Melissa Groo



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Playing Well With Others

Collaborating with scientists and conservation practitioners in the field

Conservation photographers and scientists can be best friends

Scientists often speak in terms understandable primarily by other scientists. They generally are not trained to communicate their research in terms the public can understand. In addition, they don't have the knowledge to know who to contact with their information. Photography can help bridge the gap between scientists and the public, with the photographer acting as translator and making the research more broadly accessible. A by-product is often that the images greatly support scientists' fundraising efforts.

In practical terms, this visual support of a scientist's work might take many forms. The discovery of new species, or research into a new environmental assessment technique, or the exploration of little understood regions of the sea – these and many other science-oriented activities

are not abstract collections of data. They're events that occur in a living world. Documenting any of these with a photograph can go a long way toward explaining what the work is about.

What this requires is for a photographer and a scientist to meet together, often working side by side, in the field or laboratory where the scientific work is being done.

Setting up these opportunities to make scientifically informed photos takes planning and preparation:

- Check out the websites of local universities and NGOs to find out what research is being conducted and reach out to the scientists doing the work.
- Contact the scientists/researchers directly.
- Discuss your interests, their research, what messages they would like to convey, and how you might be able to help through photography.
- Once you decide to work together,

develop a specific plan for moving forward and how you can document the work.

- The researcher will discuss how to minimize the negative impacts of actually being in the habitat: where to step, how much noise is okay to make, how close is too close to a certain species, etc.

Another opportunity for people wanting to use their photography for scientific and conservation outputs is citizen science.

Citizen science is a collaborative effort to collect and analyze data is collected and analyzed data by the amateur or nonprofessional scientists.

Scientists, researchers, and others enlist citizen "scientists," kids, college students, and adults alike to record and photograph their encounters with insects, plants, reptiles, amphibians, birds, etc., helping understand what is living around us.

There is an overwhelming need for all kinds of data about the natural world to be collected, often in quantities



Photo: Andrew Snyder

“Photography can help bridge the gap between scientists and the public, with the photographer acting as translator and making the research more broadly accessible.”

too overwhelming or impossible for professional scientists to collect on their own. For example, volunteers count birds flying migratory routes, or carefully describe the various shapes and colors of moss and lichens growing within a bounded area, or listen carefully in the dark for differences between the croaks of different frog species.

There are a large number of citizen

science projects, at both the state level as well as national level, which rely on quality images. Citizen science is a tremendous way to get people outside to explore what is around them. Most important, it also provides vital information that can lead to important research papers, meeting conservation goals, management decisions, and can even impact local or national environmental policy.



Photo: Steven David Johnson

Storytelling 101

Creating compelling stories that make a difference, and telling them well



Some of the most important narratives of history and of the modern world are delivered visually. Perhaps the most

important way to success for conservation photography is a good story, well told.

Of course, elegant form and artistic beauty are important aspects of all artful photography, conservation

photography included. But beyond the aesthetic qualities shared with other expressions of nature photography, conservation photography includes the goal of communicating something about the value of conserving Earth's natural heritage of biodiversity and ecology. Telling a story can be one of the most powerful ways to achieve this.

Because of this, conservation photographers look for the elements of effective storytelling in the photos they capture.

- Strong, identifiable characters (whether human or otherwise!) that evoke feelings of empathy, or arouse other strong emotions, can draw viewers into a scene.
- Settings and locations situate these characters in context that adds depth, richness, and deeper understanding about what's at stake in the event that's depicted.
- A sense of "plot" can also add force to an image. If a photograph can imply a sense of what was happening previous to when the shutter was snapped, as well as what might be likely to happen next, a viewer can feel a stronger emotional investment in the picture's purpose.

What's the story that a conservation image is able to tell?

There are as many answers to this question as there are stories playing out all around us in the living world. Nature photographs can:

- Provide information about a threatened population of endangered species. This may include stories about the volunteers and professional conservationists working to protect them.
- Illuminate the complex social, political, and ecological relationships between human communities and the natural environments with which they interact.

- Educate, creating a wider context for challenging collective decisions about natural resources, or helping develop a deeper appreciation for biodiversity in a particular region.
- Take a long view of the land and all the creatures that rely on it, especially if there's a chance the land may be threatened by forces its ecosystems have not evolved to handle.
- Tell focused, small stories, concentrating on a single small individual plant or animal that – though often overlooked – has a rich and varied life story all its own.

Conservation photographers, because of their dedication to protecting biodiversity and raising awareness about ecological change, can be some of photography's most effective visual storytellers.

“Perhaps the most important way to success for conservation photography is a good story, well told.”



NANPA Highlights series: Conservation Photography

Photo: Twan Leenders



First Do No Harm

Thoughts to keep in mind for ethically and safely pursuing that perfect conservation photo

More than ever before, nature photographers must consider the ethics of how, where, and why they practice their craft.

For conservation photographers, this attention to ethics and best practices is even more crucial.

This is the best time in history to be a nature photographer, and this is the worst time in history to be a wild animal.

It has never been easier to find a wild subject. Online databases, photography forums, texting and social media yield instant information on the location of a bird or other animal—often with GPS coordinates.

Workshops that promise spectacular shots of wildlife in thrilling destinations abound.

Thermal-imaging devices locate dens and nests; camera traps, drones and buggies find and track elusive animals.

It also has never been easier to actually photograph a wild subject.

Current lens technology, AF systems, and gear lightness and maneuverability make stunning images easily within reach of both amateurs and professionals.

Ultimately, this new world of opportunity and hazards must be approached with a clear sense of ethical constraints and honest communication. If photographers work within the bounds of patience, respect and an understanding of the challenges wild animals face, we can minimize harm and promote safety and ethics.

Truth in captioning

After years of work, NANPA has



Photo: Donald Quintana

“If photographers work within the bounds of patience, respect and an understanding of the challenges wild animals face, we can minimize harm and promote safety and ethics.”

developed a “Truth in Captioning” statement that addresses these and other issues. Crafted by NANPA’s Ethics COmmittee working closely with NANPA’s President and Board of Directors, the TIC statement sets clear guidelines for how photographers honestly represent their work.

Clear, honest, and accurate captions removes any photographic deception, and identifies instances of photographic practices such as baiting or photographing captive animals.

The goal of NANPA’s TIC statement is not to dictate captions to NANPA members or anyone else, but rather it’s to educate. It’s a resource that nature photographers and photo editors can look to if they are interested in using captions in a way that is accurate, honest, and useful. NANPA also welcomes partners from outside organizations to help reinforce the message.

Photographers often have to wait hours, frequently in harsh weather conditions, to naturally obtain a good image of a wild animal in their habitat, engaging in normal behavior. If an image is made of a baited or captive animal, more sophisticated post-processing techniques may make this not so obvious. The caption should include those details.

Professional conduct

In addition, the stress on bears and other wildlife is high when throngs of people are there photographing. Moreover, sometimes photographers are often not very considerate of other photographers or of other people when wildlife is present. So, ethics is a big issue, and it goes well beyond the accuracy of a caption.

Understanding your subject

The best way to make a great photograph as well as to bring no harm to a habitat in which you’re

shooting is to do research and educate yourself.

It is important to know as much as possible about your subject before going into the field, and knowing what stage of the animal’s life cycle it’s in at the time.

There is so much information on the internet, so that’s a good place to start.

Be careful, however, to choose reliable sources. For example, for just about anything you want to know about birds, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website is excellent. Many zoos have good educational tools. NANPA resources are good, too, as well as seeking advice from seasoned NANPA members.

Another consideration is to offer help to scientists. Young researchers need photographers to help them document their research. Work with a researcher when they’re drafting their research grant, and they might be able

to request money for a photographer.

The education you can get from working with a researcher can enable you to write articles about the work you’ve done.

Keep in mind, though that the field work can be physically demanding. If all of this is more than you want to do, remember that there are lots of stories to tell just by checking out your backyard.

To read NANPA’s full TIC statement, as well as learn more about the important ethical issues of conservation photography, please visit us online:

<http://www.nanpa.org/advocacy/ethics/>



Conservation Photography Voices

Conservation photographers summarize their feelings about the challenge and value of their work

Gabby Salazar



“For me, conservation photography was a natural outgrowth of my love for nature - I wanted to help protect the places and creatures that I loved to see and photograph. Now, my camera helps me achieve my personal mission to support conservation goals and outcomes. In my work, I collaborate with conservationists and scientists who need strong visuals to inspire supporters and to evoke empathy. Being involved in the conservation photography community also connects me with passionate, creative people who keep me inspired and make me more optimistic about the future.”

Robin Moore



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Donald Quintana



“My passion for capturing images of the natural world is given deeper meaning when they are used for conservation efforts. Working on the local level, my photographs bridge the gap between scientists and the public in an area where I am able to see results on a daily basis. Highlighting the needs of these organizations helps protect and preserve my neighborhood’s open spaces and the critters that live within them. Working within my community has brought me closer to my neighbors and helped me foster lasting friendships as we all work to improve our environment.”

WHO WE ARE

NANPA (North American Nature Photography Association) promotes responsible nature photography as an artistic medium for the documentation, celebration, and protection of our natural world.

Learn more – <http://www.nanpa.org/info/about/>

WHY JOIN?

Meet fellow photographers, network, share your images and talent, learn and explore nature photography with experts and help NANPA stand up for nature photographers!

Join now – <https://nanpa.site-ym.com/page/MemberRegistration>

ADVOCACY

NANPA fights for the rights of all nature photographers, professional and amateur, on numerous issues including access to public lands, copyright issues, etc.

Learn more – <http://www.nanpa.org/advocacy/>

GET INVOLVED!

NANPA offers many ways to get involved, such as local Meetups, workshops, Summits, online resources, volunteer opportunities, and conservation projects.

See how – <http://www.nanpa.org/membership/get-involved/>



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About the North American Nature Photography Association



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Photo: Sean Fitzgerald

Visit the North American Nature Photography Association online: nanpa.org



Photo: Gabby Salazar