

PHOTOGRAPHY: THE PROCESS IS THE RESULT

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By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

Many of you are interested in nature photographs and want to know a little more about my work. Perhaps most important to know is that I have been a naturalist since I was six years old, and very intense about it at that. Nature study is mostly what I did from an early age onward until my late teens, and I took my parents with me. My whole family learned probably more than they wanted to know about the natural world because my room and our house was soon filled with every kind of animal and collection you could imagine. I raised skunks, squirrels, boa constrictors, copperheads, rattlesnakes, rabbits, possums, raccoons, frogs, etc., and I had collections of insects, fossils, rocks, leaves, shells, and you-name-it.

Familiarity and love for the natural world is the key to my interest in photography, not photography itself. Photography was just a tool to express my love for nature. I have been photographing nature since 1956 when I went on a bus trip across the country with a bunch of kids my age. I was fifteen years old.

Before I left, my father, who loved photography, loaned me one of his cameras. When I left on the trip, dad handed me a fixed-lens 35mm Kodak Retina IIa, along with a light meter, a small tripod, and some rolls of film. He then carefully explained how to use the equipment and that was that. I don't think he expected much from me in the way of photos from the trip. However, I religiously followed his instructions.

When I returned from the trip and the film was processed, dad was knocked out by how good the color slides were that I took. And I had used up most of my extra spending money buying more film and then had written home for more film yet. That was the beginning of photographing the nature that I love.

After that I continued to take photos of the natural world, and so it goes. Some years ago my photography became more intense during a very difficult time. I had grown away from looking closely at nature, not only because I was busy raising a family, but because nature had become painful for me to look at because of its message of impermanence and the lack of compassion of one animal for another. Mother Nature is a harsh mistress indeed, and I had fallen out of looking it in the eye.

Anyway, during this difficult time I found myself wandering out into nature once again. In fact I believe I watched the sun come up every day it was not raining for something like six months straight. There I was, soaking wet, walking in the fields and woods at dawn just observing nature. And I once again photographed what it is I saw out there, but with a twist.

I began to mix my meditation and mind-training dharma practice with looking through camera

lenses at the perfect miniature worlds around me. I was doing close-up and macro photography, but I cared very little for the resulting photos. I fell in love with the process of 'seeing' through these very clear lenses. Actually, it is somewhat of a long story and I wrote a book about it for you folks that want to understand how mind training can be mixed with photography, a kind of "Zen and the Art of Photography." The book is called "Experiences with Mahamudra: The Dharma of Meditation." It is a free e-book (with hundreds of color photos) here:

<http://macrostop.com/>

And, although I cared more for the daily process of being out in nature and seeing the miniature world of nature through perfect lenses than I did the resulting photos, as I painstakingly worked on the process, the photos also seemed to get better and better. I became somewhat of an expert in very fine lenses, and learned the very laborious technique of focus stacking, where upward of 100 single photos of a subject taken at tiny focus increments (from front to back) and then are combined into a single photo. Many of my photos are done that way. It is very careful work.

And some years ago I began to hang out at what I consider the most prestigious lens site in the world, NikonGear.com, which is mostly for professional photographers. Eventually I was appointed the mentor on that site for macro and close-up photography, even though I am not a professional photographer. I am very proud to be in that company.

I try to do some photography every day. I use Nikon camera bodies and a great many lenses, including those from Nikon, most of them close-up or macro lenses. Practice makes perfect, and by this point I have taken many hundreds of thousands of photos. There are a number of "how to" photography books I have written on the site (listed above) for those interested.

Here is an image of an earwig that I took yesterday. If you have any questions, just ask.