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*The Art of*  
**NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY**

CULTIVATING OBSERVATION SKILLS IN THE OUTDOORS



## READY TO START CAPTURING NATURE LIKE A TRUE OBSERVER?

Many of us are drawn to nature photography because we love the magic of the outdoors. We are passionate outdoorsmen and women that use photography as a means to communicate our love of the outdoors with others. Our images have the ability to evoke a great deal of emotion—whether that emotion is positive or negative, of course depends on the image.

In order to create the sort of imagery that evokes those emotions and ultimately creates change, we cannot forget to continue to constantly develop our craft. Unfortunately, many photographers get caught up in the gear and technical aspects of photography and lose sight of why they do what they do in the first place. Some end up getting burnt out and needing a break, while others keep pushing on confused as to why their photography isn't improving.

Nature photography is both an art and a science that constantly needs to be finessed. However, oftentimes the art component isn't cultivated as much as the technical side. Throughout each of our journey's in nature photography we may end up spending more time than we had anticipated behind the computer editing and sharing images. And, over time the very technology that allows us to document, edit and share with the world ultimately numbs our senses—the very same senses we so desperately need to sharpen and fine-tune as nature photographers!

I am a professional fine art, editorial, and commercial photographer and founder of A Wild Life ([awildlife.co](http://awildlife.co)). I'm excited to share some of my nature photography thoughts with you! Remember, there is a great deal of magic in the everyday, but we have to take the time to quiet our minds to find it.

# HI THERE, I'M JOANNA

THE OWNER AND FOUNDER OF A WILD LIFE

Like most kids who grew up in the 80's, I spent the better part of my childhood outside. Whether I was scaling the maple tree in my front yard, barefoot, and with limited supplies, or navigating my way through the adjacent tree-lined yards—I spent hours on end exploring.

Each day, as the sunlight waned and the lightning bugs emerged, a solemn feeling took hold as I was summoned inside.

I loved being outdoors.

With my family, I traveled across the States at a very impressionable age, and witnessed the grandness of our National Parks. It was in the those wild parts where my obsession with the natural world really took hold.

Years later I moved overseas and spent time exploring Southeast Asia and then Europe. Scuba diving became a passion of mine and along with that underwater photography. I've spent the last decade traveling the world over but now that I'm finally settled down in upstate New York I've made a concerted effort to explore my own backyard—which I've thoroughly enjoyed. And to be honest, there was more magic here than I had ever anticipated.

My writing and photography have been published and exhibited around the world. My images were awarded in the 52nd Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition and in the Siena International Photography Awards. My stories have been published in publications such as Sidetracked, Oceanographic, and Hakai Magazines, as well as many others.

When I am not out crafting stories and creating imagery, I can be found in a small lakeside town surrounded by woodlands and water, tending to my four Plymouth Rock chicks, Amelia, Doris, Lena, & Lucy, and my Polish wildcat, Cricket.



*joanna lentini*

If we aren't connected on Instagram please connect with me there!

@joannalentini and @joannalentiniart



# YOUR JOURNEY TO BETTER NATURE IMAGES

*Kicks off here!*

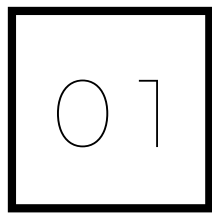
Creating better nature images begins with a deeper understanding of the flora and fauna you are documenting as well as their environments. I truly believe technical skills can only get you so far, and for that reason we won't be discussing that here. Rather, I'll provide you with a new set of nature photography skills and way of thinking that will make you better equipped to create images like a professional.

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*Nemophilist (n.)*

*one who is fond of forests or forest scenery; a haunter of the woods.*



# Observing YOUR SUBJECT

For some nature photographers the art of observation is unfortunately a foreign concept. However, it is one of the most important skill sets to cultivate. How often have you found yourself or a fellow photographer firing away as soon as something enters the frame—moving on moments later without having given the encounter much thought? We've all done it!

Sometimes, we become too dialed in to the desire for instant gratification to really be one with the experience and understand what it is that we aren't seeing. Sure, we may have created a technically sound image, but I'd imagine the reason you became a nature photographer goes a bit deeper than that?

Through the years I have learned that many of my best images have been a result of patience and observation. While the idea of sitting and observing a place can feel quite inefficient in a society where we are constantly bombarded with information, I've learned that when we aren't overly anxious to photograph a subject, we allow ourselves the space to connect with it. And, I don't know about you, but that connection is why I started shooting nature in the first place.





02

## THE ART OF *Blending In*

If you are going to practice the art of observation you'll need to blend into your environment as well as possible. Hunters know this best.

It might surprise you, but in many ways hunting and nature photography are very similar. While the intent is different the process is very much the same. Yet, rarely do I see nature photographers behaving like hunters. And I have to ask, why is that?

Whether you buy or make a blind, or wear camouflage, trying to blend into the environment will pay off handsomely.

And don't forget the other senses which impact our chances of encountering wildlife, such as scent and sound. Avoid wearing noisy materials and steer clear of any products that are scented. Really anything that the wind can pick up.

Remember the goal is to be one with the environment!





Face down  
on the sand I waited  
motionless for crabs  
to emerge from their  
homes



For a long time I made the mistake of thinking that because I photographed my encounters, that such visual documentation was sufficient. However, if we are to be mindful observers, recording images isn't enough. We have four other senses that we neglect when we don't keep a nature journal and it limits the possibilities of our image-making.

Nature journaling gets us to slow down, take notes, and ask questions about what is happening around us. By doing so, we can really plug into the rhythm of the earth and discover things we might never have. It's a different, and perhaps even more meaningful way of exploring the world around us that I highly recommend.

*But, don't take it from me, just ask Charles Darwin!*



# Tools to Get Started

Journal

Graphite pencils


Graphite eraser

Plastic eraser

Graphite stick

We don't have to be amazing artists to get started. In fact, a journal should consist of much more than just sketches. It involves recording the very basics such as the date, location, and weather conditions, all the way to how we feel in a certain place.

It should involve recording and questioning any patterns we find in our surroundings, which tends to lead to more questions and ultimately some fascinating discoveries.





04

## Anticipating EVENTS


As we develop better observation skills, learn to blend into our surroundings, and keep a nature journal we become more prepared to anticipate different natural events. Whether that means understanding when a few thousand snow geese are about to take flight or when a flower is ready to bloom, time spent cultivating your observation skills allows you to be ready to capture "peak of the action" images..

And creating images with this element is what sets amateur and professional photographers apart.

Anticipating events is something that takes time to fully develop. I like to think of it as reading the book of nature. Yes, a lot of it is instinctual; however a large component comes from observing, asking yourself questions, and taking notes.

The goal is to understand your subject well enough to anticipate its next move and capture that behavior.





05

## *The Magic* COMPONENT

As a photographer, I am always chasing light, and you should be too! The right light can make an otherwise ordinary subject extraordinary, and an extraordinary subject, magical.

Think about some of your favorite images. What is it about them that inspires you? Is it possibly the light?


When captured properly, light elevates images, and can sometimes even be the subject itself (as in the image to the left).

If you aren't already, get acquainted with light. Study it closely. Once you master it, your images will stand apart from others.



“In the right light, at the  
right time, everything is  
extraordinary.”

– Aaron Rose



Photophile (n.)  
a person who loves light.





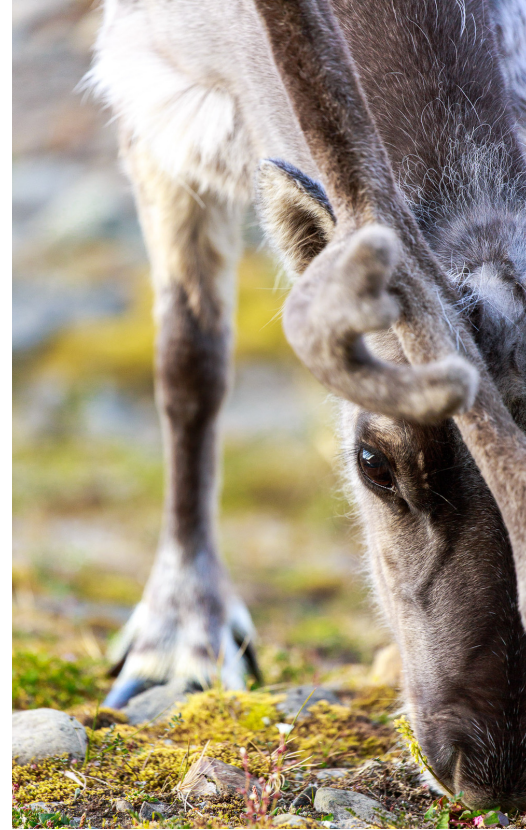
06

*A Word On*  
TECHNIQUE



Once you've learned how to blend in, be a better observer, and lasso the light, you'll want to work on implementing certain techniques to make your images stand out. Now, I realize I promised not to get too technical, but here are a few tips to continue to elevate your nature images:

- Photograph your subject at eye level
- Try to capture a catch-light in your subject's eye
- Use a long lens to capture intimate moments
- Go wide to document the habitat
- Use slow shutter speeds to create abstract images, like above, and use fast shutter speeds to create sharp action images
- Use a wide aperture (low f-number) to blur a bit of the foreground & background



Whether you shoot with a wide angle or long lens, try to do so as close as possible to eye level. This creates an intimate look at your subject and adds drama to your images.



*Blur the  
foreground +  
background*

# Are you keen to *Explore More?*



If you would like to put into practice what you've learned here, I will help you implement everything discussed in this book and more. Or perhaps you simply want to immerse yourself in nature with like-minded people. Either way, I look forward to connecting with you in the field...



I HOPE TO SEE YOU AT  
ONE OF MY WORKSHOPS!



Image by Federico Perazzi

*The mountains  
are calling,  
I must go...*

MANY  
THANKS  
FOR  
READING  
ALONG  
AND  
PLEASE  
KEEP IN  
TOUCH!

-J.L.

*A Wild Life*