

PANAMA TRIP REPORT

Extract from Arthur Morris Bulletin #296

Ten happy photographers joined Linda Robbins, our assistant Rich Garrett, and me for a great trip to Panama. We spent our first three nights at Canopy Tower (<http://www.canopytower.com/index.php/Newsflashes/Newsflash/NEW-Canopy-Tower-s-Stimulus-Plan-for-you.html>) and our last four at Canopy Lodge (<http://www.canopylodge.com/itinerary.php>). We spent a good deal of time working at Linda's killer hummingbird set-ups and a good deal more working with a local reptile and amphibian wrangler do macro at set-ups. In addition, we did have some success photographing perched tropical bird species (though that action was nowhere as good as it was when Linda and I visited in December 2008).

Included in the group were IPT veterans Joe Barranco, Jane Ellison, Geri George, Alejandro (who flew up from Chile), Patti Corapi, Eleanor Briccetti, and Bob Wilmschen (and wife Betty who served as our administrative assistant during the hummingbird sessions; her job was to keep track of the times and rotations. Hers was such an important task that she was offered several bribes.) Joining the veterans were Bob Lewis and wife Hanno and Peter Hawrylyshyn (whom Linda and I met on BPN). Peter (say hah-ver-LISH-un) like Linda is addicted to hummingbird photography.

You can get a pretty good idea of the fun that was had by reading the e-mails below.

Artie & Linda - A quick thank-you to say how much I enjoyed the Panama IPT. The lodges were great and the photography was amazing. The hummingbird action at the RFDC rivaled the best sites I've visited in Costa Rica and Ecuador. Looking down at the sloths, toucans, and cotingas from atop the Canopy Tower offered unique photographic perspectives. The macro sessions (frogs and bugs) added another new dimension to our rain forest experience. It was, however, the nonstop instruction from both of you on technical details, set-ups, Photoshop tips and techniques that was most valuable. I couldn't have asked for more. Thanks again and take care. Peter Hawrylyshyn

Artie, First of all, I loved the trip. It was the best hummingbird workshop I have ever been on. The reason of course was the photography of the hummingbirds and the great setups by Linda and Rich. There were a lot of subjects and I was always pissed when my hour was up! Linda's system is awesome. I have attended two other hummingbird workshops but using the long lens with the optical triggering of the flashes made this one great. I can't say enough about Linda! She is a very hard worker and will do anything to help you and to make it right. I was also very surprised and pleased that you both agreed with Mikie G's idea of suggestion to have an extra day of hummingbird photography even though it meant lots of time on the bus. It meant a lot of extra work for Linda and Rich and they both jumped on it. I would do this workshop again and I will only do a hummingbird workshop with Linda! The other reason I loved the workshop was the participants. I am not a "birder" but everyone never hesitated to help me find a bird or identify a bird. Plus everyone was fun to be around. I made some great friends on this trip. All in all it was an awesome trip. Linda is outstanding and her methods are the best. Rich knows his stuff and helped every time anyone needed it. The participants were great. I had a lot of fun. What more could you ask for? Joe Barranco

Hi Arthur: *I hope you are home by now and have had the chance to get a well deserved rest after 2 back to back trips. For me Panama completely surpassed my expectations. After 10 continuous hours of editing together with Linda on the last day, I was left with a large number of pictures that have really pleased me as well as people that have had a chance to review them. Many thanks for a great trip, and if you have a chance, please convey my thanks to Linda and Rich for all of their efforts and positive energy. At this time I would like to remind you to write down my name for the Galapagos 2011 trip. Best regards, Alejandro Furman*

Lastly, here is an e-mail exchange that I had with Robert Lewis:

AM: Howdy Bob. Well, I got home yesterday after a great visit with my Mom and some good NY photo opps mostly with skimmers.

RL: Artie, many thanks for a very educational experience in Panama.

AM: You are most welcome and thanks a ton for your kind words.

RL: Both Hanno and I enjoyed our time, and I learned a lot. The hummingbird photography was a totally new experience and tremendous fun (with some really nice images as a bonus!)and the instruction on flash as main light made a lot of sense and I'm pretty sure I'll be able to apply it down the road.

AM: <smile>

RL: As a rank amateur in Photoshop, I've a long way to go, but I'm out of the starting blocks now, removing dust specks and extra eye highlights with great finesse, and even cleaning up dirty bills. I've lots of images on which to practice, so perfection must be close at hand! I haven't posted anything on the forums yet, but did at least open it up, so maybe soon. I've sent Linda 4 favorite hummer images as she requested... and posted a few on my flickr site so friends can see the results.

AM: Super. I enjoy working with talented serious students who are anxious to improve their skills and willing to work hard to do just that.

RL: So, you gave me a week of fun, a lot to think about and work on, and a bunch of nice images – thanks for all. And it was a pleasure to finally meet the person that goes with the name I've heard for so long.

AM: <big smile>

RL: Hope your New York adventure was great, and you got down and dirty.

AM: That I did. Later and love to you both and hope to see you again somewhere down the road. Artie



Green Honeycreeper, male near Canopy Tower, Panama

Image Copyright 2009: Arthur Morris/BIRDS AS ART

Canon 800mm f/5.6L IS lens with a 25mm Extension tube and the EOS-1D MIII. ISO 800. Evaluative metering at zero: 1/60 sec. at f/5.6. Fill flash at -3 stops.

Though there were more feeder birds on my DEC 2008 visit I struck out on this attractive species so getting a nice male was a plus. With the dark green background and a super-saturated subject I knew that I did not need to add any light to my exposure here.

THE BIRDS AS ART BLOG PANAMA POSTS

Photoshop Magic/Panama

August 26th, 2009

On the recent Panama trip that I co-led with Linda Robbins, the Hummingbird Queen, some of the participants created well more than 4,000 images on a single day. Many of the best of those images featured either the feeder that we used to attract the birds, another hummingbird, or, as in the image below, both.



This image of a Long-tailed Hermit was created with the Canon 400mm f/4L IS lens and the EOS-1D MIII. ISO 400. Eight flash set-up. 1/250 sec. at f/22.

As detailed in Digital Basics, I first expanded the canvas and then used the Clone Stamp, the Patch Tool, and a series of Quick Masks to create the optimized image below. Many folks would consider this cheating; I consider it using the latest technology to create pleasing and saleable images. (I would never enter such images in a contest in which such practices were forbidden by the rules.)



I was quite pleased with the results of my Photoshop handiwork. Be sure to click on each image to see a larger version.

Chestnut-mandibled Toucan is a tree-top loving species that is rarely photographed in the wild. Getting a somewhat clear view of the bird was somewhat miraculous but the background in the original image (see same immediately below) was just too, too busy for me with many of the branches and seed pods merging with the bird's head and bill. I worked on the image for about an hour using the tools mentioned above and in addition employed both the "Divide and Conquer" and the "Protect and Defend" techniques that are also detailed in the latest update of Digital Basics.



Canon 800mm f/5.6L IS lens with the EOS-1D MIII. ISO 800. Evaluative metering +1 1/3 stops: 1/320 sec. at f/7.1. Fill flash with Better Beamer at -2 stops.

I look back with a wry smile on my face remembering that the words "digital" and "Photoshop" filled me with fear and trepidation just seven years ago. It is quite satisfying to have mastered so many techniques that allow me to create images that put a smile on my face.



Again, I was quite happy with the final optimized image.

Be sure to check out the interesting BPN thread on this image here:
<http://www.birdphotographers.net/forums/showthread.php?t=44267>

You can learn more about Digital Basics, APTATS (Advanced Photoshop Tips and Techniques), and Linda Robbin's Guide to High Speed Flash Hummingbird Photography by visiting the BAA On-Line Store via the link on the home page or checking out our product pages. I'll be back soon.

[Panama: Back to the Basics and More #4 Composition](#)

August 23rd, 2009



This perched female Blue-chested Hummingbird was photographed near Canopy Tower with the Canon 800mm f/5.6L IS lens, a 25mm Extension tube for close focusing, and the EOS-1D Mark III. ISO 400. Evaluative metering +2/3 stop: 1/50 sec. at f/6.3. Fill flash at -3 stops.

The Basics

When working in horizontal format with small-in-the-frame subjects, be sure—as I did above—to place the subject well back in the frame with the subject looking into the open area of the image.

You can click on each image to see a larger version.



This male Green Honeycreeper was photographed near Canopy Tower with the Canon 800mm f/5.6 L lens, a 25 mm Extension tube for close focus, and the EOS-1D MIII. ISO 800. Evaluative metering at zero: 1/60 sec. at f/5.6. Fill flash at -1 stop.

When working in horizontal format with large-in-the-frame subjects, be sure—as I did above—to leave at least twice as much room in front of the bird as behind it.



This free and wild Leaf Frog was photographed near Canopy Tower with the Canon 180mm Macro lens and the EOS-1D MIII. ISO 800. Evaluative metering +2/3 stop: 1/30 sec. at f/6.3. Fill flash at -2 stops with the Canon Macro Twin Light.

When working in horizontal format with large-in-the-frame subjects like the Leaf Frog above that are looking (or with birds, flying) right at at you, placing them dead center is the way to go.



This fledgling Black-breasted-Puffbird was photographed with the Canon 800mm f/5.6L lens, the 1.4X II TC, and the EOS-1D Mark III. ISO 800. Evaluative metering +2/3 stop: 1/50 sec. at f/8. Fill flash at -2 stops.

When working in vertical format with relatively large-in-the-frame forward-facing subjects it is fine to place them in the middle of the frame as I did with the young puffbird above. (With small-in-the-frame subjects you will need to place them in one of the corners....)

To learn the basics of image composition, be sure to see the chapter on composition in the original "The Art of Bird Photography" (soft cover). To learn about Advanced Composition and Image Design, see the chapter of the same name in "The Art of Bird Photography II" (916 pages on CD only). You can learn more about both books by following this link:

<https://store.birdsasart.com/shop/category.aspx?catid=32>

Buy both and receive a \$10 discount.



This Broad-billed Motmot was photographed with the Canon 800mm f/5.6L IS lens and the EOS-1D MIII. ISO 800. Evaluative metering +2/3 stop: 1/40 sec. at f/5.6. Fill flash at -3 stops.

And More

As in the image above, when you are working in vertical format with relatively large-in-the-frame subjects that are looking to one side or the other, place them back in frame so that they have a bit more room to see into their world.



This captive Lemur Frog was photographed at Canopy Lodge with the Canon 180mm Macro lens and the EOS-1D MIII. ISO 400. Evaluative metering +2/3 stop: 1/4 sec. at f/11.

In the image above I chose to move the frog right of center so that the green bark of the eucalyptus tree on our left could balance the strip of green background on our right. The principles that I teach are only guidelines; feel free to break them whenever you have a good reason to do so.

Final Notes

By studying the technical details above you can see that slow shutter speeds are the rule in the rain forest. While the improved 4-stop Image Stabilization of the Canon 800mm lens was a huge help, using my very best sharpness techniques (as described in ABP II) was equally important. When working with the macro lens and static subjects I used mirror lock-up and the 2-second self timer to ensure sharp images. With the macro lens I find that focusing manually is the best way to go. (I do however rely on the focus confirmation beep.)

I hope that everyone will benefit from this post. See y'all soon.