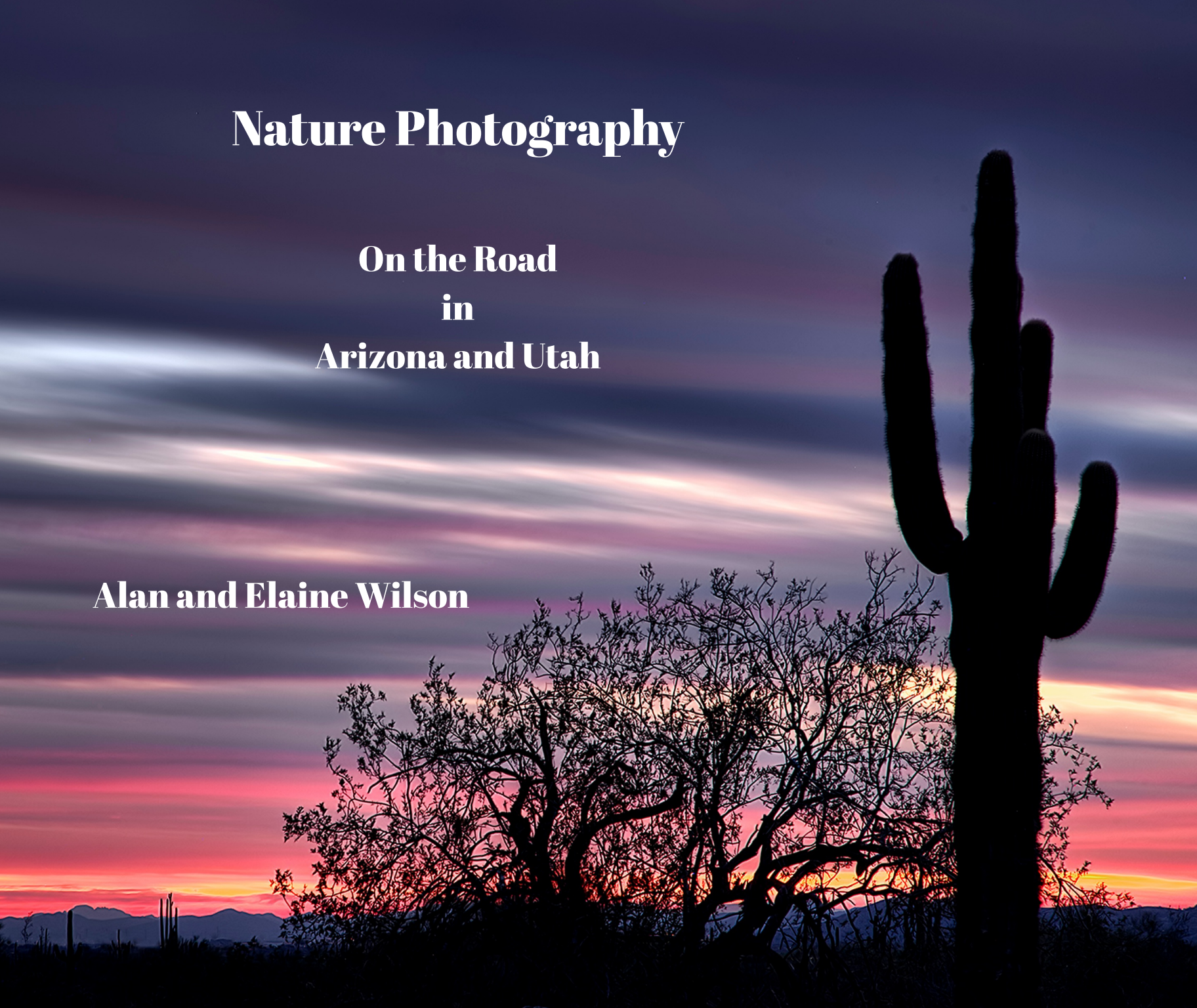


Nature Photography

**On the Road
in
Arizona and Utah**

Alan and Elaine Wilson



Preface

As with all photography planning, we were not surprised to discover that Arizona and Utah were vast areas that housed not only some of the most spectacular deserts and canyons on earth but also some key target species that we were intent on capturing. Prior to visiting, this left us facing a fair amount of distillation to hone in on the locations that would maximize the time we had allotted.

Arizona is a landlocked state situated in the southwestern United States that shares a border with Utah to the north. Although both states host incredibly immense and diverse bird and wildlife populations, our interest from a photography perspective was principally confined to the awesome canyon landscapes located in northern Arizona and southern Utah. This is not to say we didn't take advantage of visiting a host of locations that were well known for hard-to-get bird species that had been on our bucket list for some time, including the elusive Chukar Partridge in Utah and the many species of Orioles, Quail, Hummingbirds, Woodpeckers and Wrens that frequent Arizona's spine strewn deserts.

Our research indicated we were facing a diverse and incredibly harsh topography. Due to Arizona's large area and range of elevation, there is a wide variety of localized climate conditions. Overall, most of Arizona receives little precipitation, and is classified as having either an arid or semi-arid climate. The northern parts of the state and the mountainous areas tend to have cooler climates, while the south tends to be warm year-round. Nearly all of Arizona is drained by either the Colorado River or one of its tributaries. The Sonoran Desert covers the southwest and is one of the hottest deserts in the United States, maintaining warm temperatures year round. Despite the arid climate there are two distinct rainy seasons a year. As such, the desert is home to a diverse population of flora and fauna. Several plant populations thrive because of their specialized adaptations to the climate and various specialized species of cactus can be found. It is the only place in the world where the Saguaro cactus grows in the wild.

Arizona can be divided into two major physiographic regions: the Colorado Plateau and the Basin and Range Province separated by a transitioning zone. The Colorado Plateau is a semi-arid, mostly flat region located in the

northern part of the state and carries the moniker "Red Rock Country" because of its brightly colored sedimentary rock that is protected from deformation and left visible by dryness and erosion. The geology of the Colorado Plateau is exhibited by the canyons of the Colorado River and is best known for the majestic Grand Canyon that exposes one of the most unique rock sequences in the world. The area also hosts many other distinctive natural features unique to Arizona, including Antelope Canyon, Meteor Crater, Painted Desert and the Petrified Forest. The Basin and Range Province occupies the southern part of Arizona and is characterized by steep, linear mountain ranges alternating with lengthy deserts. The mountain ranges which poke through the desert plains surrounding them create biological islands inhabited by cool-climate plants and animals, most notably the Saguaro cactus and a host of lizards and snakes that have adapted to desert living.

Utah, on the other hand, is known for its natural diversity and is home to features ranging from arid deserts with sand dunes to thriving pine forests in mountain valleys. It is a rugged and geographically diverse state that is located at the convergence of three distinct geological regions: the Rocky Mountains, the Great Basin and the Colorado Plateau. Much of the scenic southern and southeastern landscape, which is the area we focused on, is comprised mainly of colorful Kayenta and Navajo sandstone. The Colorado River and its tributaries wind their way through the sandstone, creating some of the world's most striking terrain. This is the central feature of protected state and federal preserves such as Arches, Bryce Canyon, Canyonlands, Capitol Reef and Zion National Parks. This area also houses what we consider other "musts" from a photography perspective, including the Grand Staircase-Escalante and Natural Bridges National Monuments, the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Monument Valley, Dead Horse Point and Goblin Valley State Park.

The Great Salt Lake, located in the northern part of the Utah, is the largest salt water lake in the Western Hemisphere. Although it has been called "America's Dead Sea", the lake provides habitat for millions of native birds, shorebirds and water fowl, including the largest staging population of Wilson's Phalaropes in the world.

The centerpiece of the Great Salt Lake is Antelope Island State Park. Despite its name, the park is most famous for its herd of Bison, one of the oldest and largest in the United States. The inland grasslands on the island provide habitat for Chukar Partridge, Burrowing Owls, Long-Billed Curlews and several species of birds of prey.

The island also attracts migrating birds. The wetlands surrounding the Great Salt Lake account for nearly eighty percent of Utah's biodiversity and are home to over two hundred and fifty species of birds that stop over on the Pacific Flyway between South and North America. Between four and six million birds nest and feed on the lake every year. The world's largest populations of White-Faced Ibis and California Gulls make their homes near the lake. A large population of Black-Necked Stilts, American Avocets and American White Pelicans are also found on and near the Great Salt Lake. Many of the birds come to Antelope Island State Park near Salt Lake City to feed on the abundant quantities of brine flies and shrimp.

The images in this book cannot do justice to the incredible diversity that Arizona and Utah have to offer. They are simply birds, wildlife and natural landscapes that we were lucky to encounter and photograph on our travels. Although the awesome natural landscapes were the prime focus of both areas, our forte – birds and whatever wildlife happen to punctuate our visits – were always uppermost in our thoughts when selecting prime locations.

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Vernon, British Columbia

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Arizona Birds and Wildlife

Desert and canyon photography can pose some definite challenges. Intense light, sudden wind and a parched habitat laden with cactus and other plants with spines often make positioning and dealing with reflective light a difficult and at times hazardous process. Some species, such as Gambel's Quail, move continuously and are extremely wary. Lizards, on the other hand, display a wide range of colours from drab to spectacular and either sit like slugs or bolt for cover at the slightest movement. Notwithstanding, both Arizona and Utah are great areas for locations that provide decent public access to varying desert habitat that house an abundance of birds, animals and reptiles.

Our first visit to this area began in Phoenix where we found standard desert fare mixed with a little excitement. In other words, birds were plentiful, quite compliant but common, most notably House Finch, Cactus Wren, Mourning Dove and Curve-Billed Thrasher. The real excitement was down on the desert floor where an assortment of colourful lizards proved to be immensely photogenic.

We started at Lost Dutchman State Park just north of Apache Junction. It is a picturesque location in the lee of the magnificent Superstition Mountains. Here, next to the Ranger's station, the bird's "stage" on the cholla, producing excellent perch opportunities before jumping to the feed platforms provided. We also enjoyed the "Saguaro Mound" at the entrance to the Riparian Preserve at The Water Ranch in Gilbert. The primary attraction was Gila Woodpecker that nest by hollowing out cavities in the tall saguaro cactus. Our favourite site, however, was the Boyce Thompson Arboretum State Park roughly an hour east of Phoenix near Superior. Although our quest was avian opportunities, we were soon dazzled by the number of lizards lazily basking in the afternoon sun. We concentrated on the more colourful species including Spiny, Collared and Earless but avoided the Whiptail and Tree varieties as they are predominantly dark and meld into the backdrops, producing extremely bland and uninteresting photographs. Lastly, we had a great time at

DESERT SPINY LIZARD

Rudasill Road near Tucson, Arizona

the Desert Botanical Gardens in Phoenix. Our research indicated this was a haven for the Round-Tailed Ground Squirrel and Ladder-Backed Woodpecker. We weren't disappointed and found the inhabitants so conditioned to human traffic that positioning for light and background was much easier than the locations we previously visited.

The highlight of our first venture into Arizona was a fascinating area near Green Valley. The Santa Rita Mountains are a major resting place for migrating species and provide a respite from the heat for indigenous desert dwellers. Madera Canyon is a great location to create a simple high-speed flash set up to photograph hummingbirds as several species are prevalent, notably Broad-Billed, Black-Chinned and the large and colourful Magnificent. It's also a great location to photograph Acorn and Arizona Woodpeckers.

While in this area, we also scheduled some time at the Pond at Elephant Head and Drip at Madera Canyon, two private facilities that cater to photographers wanting to create set-pieces in controlled conditions where birds and other wildlife are attracted to abundant feed and water. Here we had the opportunity to concentrate on the hard-to-get species such as Pyrrhuloxia, Hooded and Bullock's Orioles in great settings. We certainly advanced the artistic component of our controlled perch experience and managed to capture twenty-eight avian species in the brief time we had allotted for this activity.

We found the Tucson area to be much like Phoenix in that the photography opportunities were restricted to common desert birds. We did visit several good locations where the bird life was accustomed to human activity including Catalina State Park, Sabino Canyon Recreation Area and the Sweetwater Wetlands.

However, birds are not the major attraction in southwestern Arizona. Here the giant saguaro cactus is unique to the Sonoran Desert and best known as the supreme symbol of the American southwest. These magnificent plants are protected in the mountains of Saguaro National Park, located to the east and west of Tucson. It's an immense and infinitely variable landscape where the harsh environment may appear lifeless but, in fact, supports an enormous variety of plants and wildlife that have adapted to the severe desert climate. It's also an endless source of photography opportunities. The lower Sonoran Desert near the Mexican border can be a "hotbed" for both reptiles and landscapes in August. It's monsoon season and the intermittent deluge of wet weather creates not only a lush green vibrance on the desert floor but also stunning sunsets and thunder storms with incredible lightning displays.

We visited Saguaro National Park (West) south of Tucson in late August with the primary objective of photographing reptiles during the day and sunsets in the evening. At this time of year, working in the intense heat requires a wide brim hat and lots of water to keep your body hydrated. This is on your knees and belly photography where cactus spines and rocky dirt are constant hazards. Lizards are relatively easy to find, best caught in early morning light as they emerge from the cooler night temperatures to warm their bodies. We drove the Bajada Loop Drive and photographed many species roadside from the car window. Snakes are another matter. They tend to be nocturnal and hunker down during the heat of the day in rocky crevices or under low-lying plants that provide shade and a good place to hide. For the inexperienced, this makes them very difficult to find. Moreover, disturbing them in-habit in a National Park is verboten. As such, finding a snake sunning on a rock while digesting a night's kill is not likely to happen. We decided to scour the desert in areas known for snake activity such as the Avra Valley road. We were joined by a local biologist/herpetologist who helped ferret out several species and place them in a quick "set-piece" on site using local habitat such as colored rocks, small ground cactus or a decayed cholla branch. It was great fun and fulfilled a dream of trying our hand at reptile photography in habitat.



MOJAVE RATTLESNAKE
Rudasill Road near Tucson, Arizona



TARANTULA SPIDER
Rudasill Road near Tucson, Arizona



CURVE-BILLED THRASHER
Pond at Elephant Head near Amado,
Arizona

CACTUS WREN
Pond at Elephant Head near Amado,
Arizona



WHITE-WINGED DOVE
Pond at Elephant Head near Amado,
Arizona



BREWER'S SPARROW
Pond at Elephant Head near Amado,
Arizona



ACORN WOODPECKER

Drip at Madera Canyon near Green Valley, Arizona



MEXICAN JAY
Santa Rita Lodge,
Madera Canyon near Green Valley,
Arizona



GREATER ROADRUNNER
Pond at Elephant Head near Amado,
Arizona



HARRIS'S ANTELOPE GROUND SQUIRREL
Pond at Elephant Head near Amado, Arizona

GREAT-HORNED OWL NEST
Catalina State Park near Tucson, Arizona





RETICULATE GILA MONSTER
Rudasill Road near Tucson, Arizona

HORNED "SIDEWINDER"

RATTLESNAKE

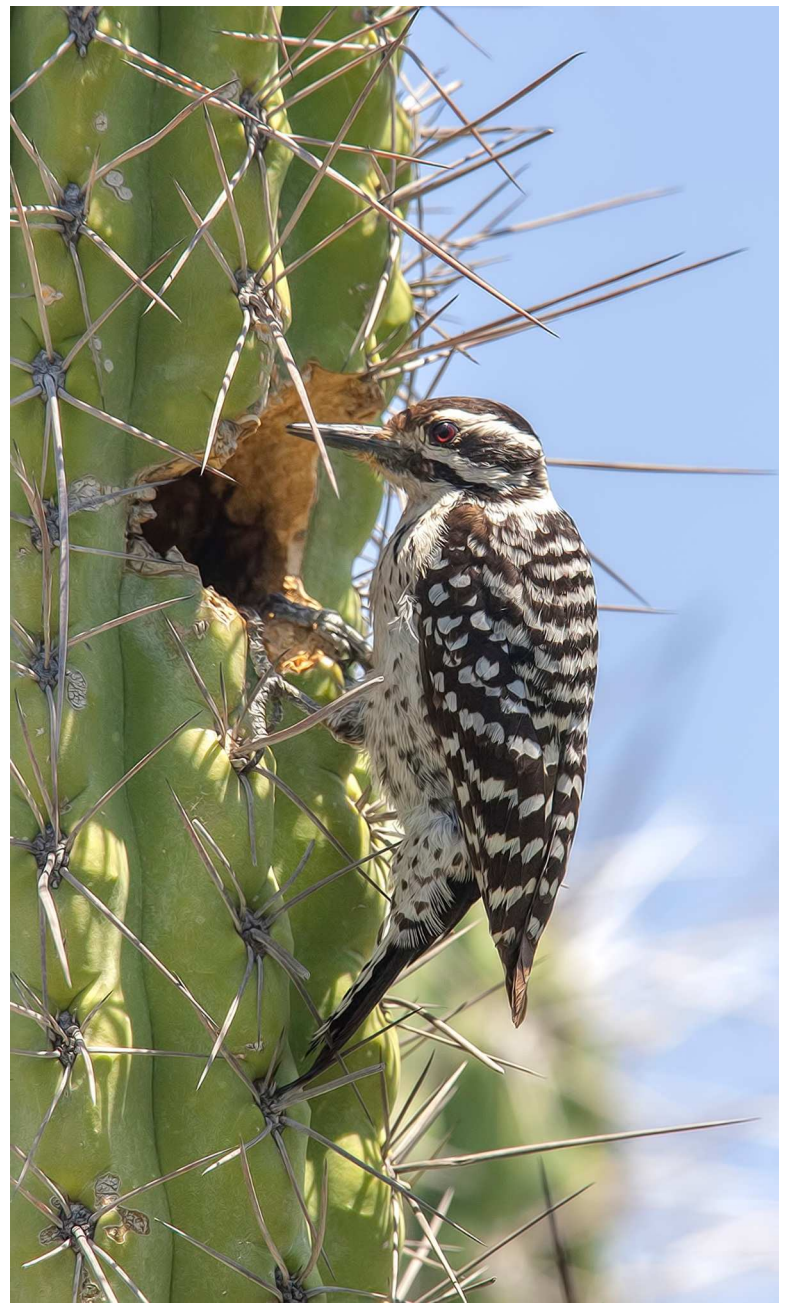
Rudasill Road near Tucson, Arizona



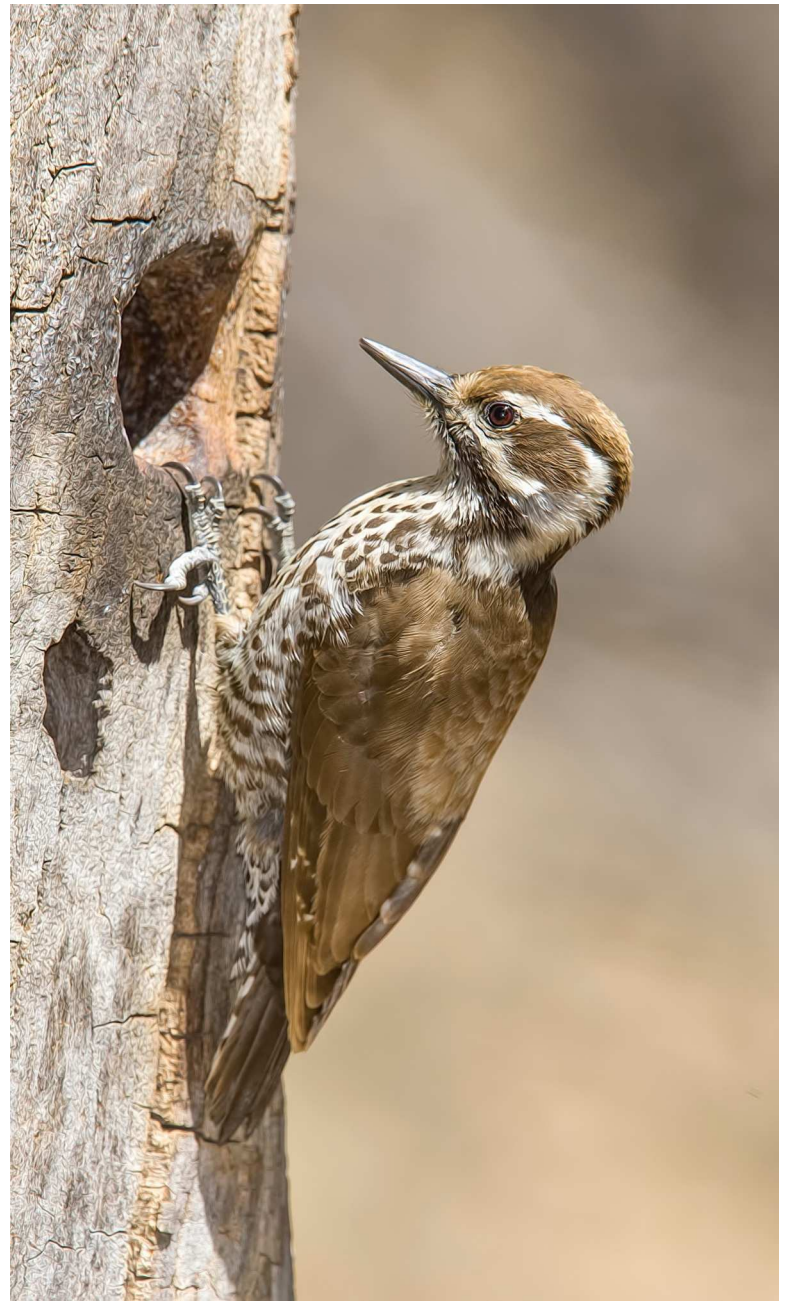
WESTERN DIAMONDBACK

RATTLESNAKE

Rudasill Road near Tucson, Arizona



MALE AND FEMALE LADDER-BACK WOODPECKERS
Desert Botanical Gardens, Phoenix, Arizona



MALE AND FEMALE ARIZONA WOODPECKERS
Drip at Madera Canyon near Green Valley, Arizona



MOJAVE RATTLESNAKE
Rudasill Road near Tucson, Arizona

QUEEN BUTTERFLY

Desert Botanical Gardens, Phoenix,
Arizona



WHITE-LINED SPHINX MOTH

CATERPILLAR

Kinney Road, Saguaro National
Park (West) near Tucson,
Arizona





SONORAN DESERT TOAD
Pond on West Picture Rocks Road,
Tucson, Arizona



COUCH'S SPADEFOOT TOAD
Pond on West Picture Rocks Road,
Tucson, Arizona



SONORAN DESERT TORTOISE

Bajada Loop Drive, Saguaro National Park (West) near Tucson, Arizona



**FEMALE BROAD-BILLED
HUMMINGBIRD**
Santa Rita Lodge,
Madera Canyon near Green Valley,
Arizona

**BLACK-CHINNED
HUMMINGBIRD**
Santa Rita Lodge,
Madera Canyon near Green Valley,
Arizona



**MALE BROAD-BILLED
HUMMINGBIRD**

Santa Rita Lodge,
Madera Canyon near Green Valley,
Arizona



**MAGNIFICENT
HUMMINGBIRD**

Santa Rita Lodge,
Madera Canyon near Green Valley,
Arizona



WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH

Drip at Maderia Canyon near Green Valley, Arizona



BRIDLED TITMOUSE

Drip at Maderia Canyon near Green Valley, Arizona



GIANT HAIRY SCORPION
Rudasill Road near Tucson, Arizona

DESERT IGUANA
Rudasill Road near Tucson,
Arizona



CALIFORNIA KING SNAKE
Rudasill Road near Tucson,
Arizona



MALE GILA WOODPECKER
Pond at Elephant Head near Amado, Arizona



CACTUS WREN

Lost Dutchman State Park
near Apache Junction, Arizona



**MALE BLACK-HEADED
GROSBEAK**

Drip at Madera Canyon
near Green Valley, Arizona



WESTERN GREY SQUIRREL
Santa Rita Lodge, Madera Canyon
near Green Valley, Arizona



**ROUND-TAILED GROUND
SQUIRREL**
Desert Botanical Gardens, Phoenix,
Arizona



DESERT COTTONTAIL
Pond at Elephant Head near Amado, Arizona



BULLFROG

Desert Botanical Gardens, Phoenix, Arizona



DESERT IGUANA
Rudasill Road near Tucson, Arizona

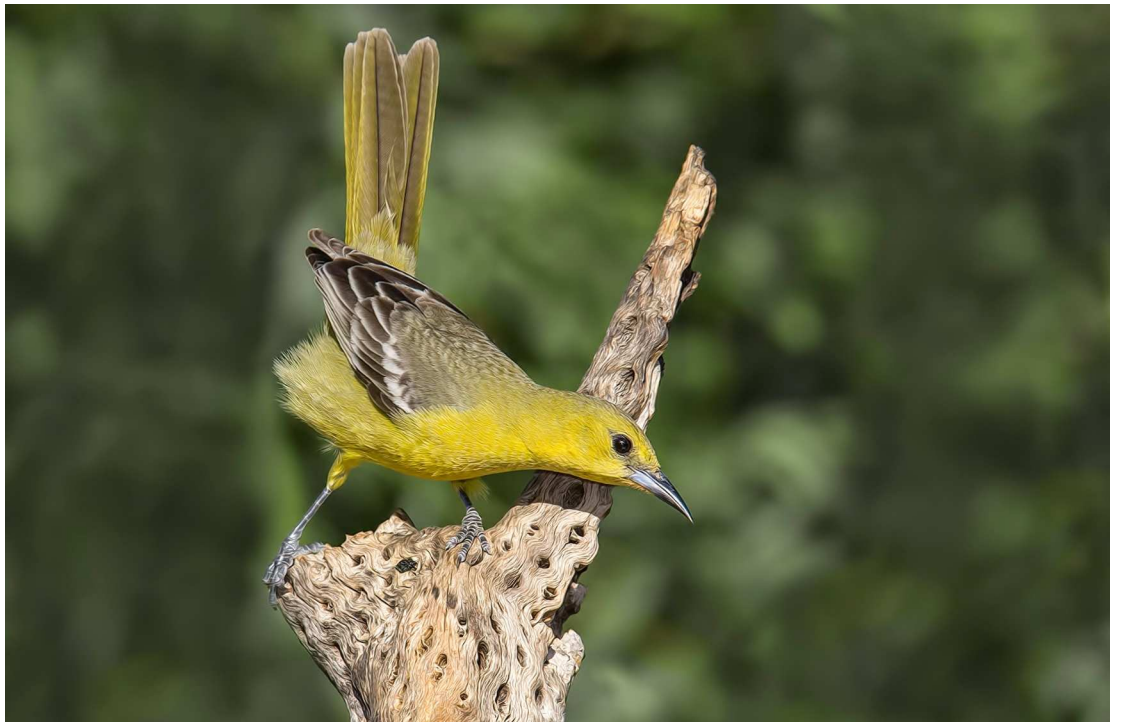
MALE HOODED ORIOLE

Pond at Elephant Head near Amado,
Arizona



FEMALE HOODED ORIOLE

Pond at Elephant Head near Amado,
Arizona





MALE BULLOCK'S ORIOLE
Pond at Elephant Head near Amado,
Arizona



MALE HEPATIC TANAGER
Drip at Madera Canyon near Green Valley,
Arizona



FEMALE GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE

Riparian Preserve at the Water Ranch, Gilbert, Arizona



MALE PHAINOPEPLA

Boyce Thompson Arboretum State Park near Superior, Arizona



MALE HOUSE FINCH
Lost Dutchman State Park
near Apache Junction, Arizona



FEMALE HOUSE FINCH
Lost Dutchman State Park
near Apache Junction, Arizona



GREATER EARLESS LIZARD

Boyce Thompson Arboretum State Park near Superior, Arizona



MALE LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER
Pond at Elephant Head near Amado, Arizona



MALE GAMBEL'S QUAIL
Pond at Elephant Head near Amado, Arizona



MALE PYRRHULOXIA
Pond at Elephant Head near Amado, Arizona

MALE NORTHERN CARDINAL
Pond at Elephant Head near Amado,
Arizona



FEMALE NORTHERN CARDINAL
Pond at Elephant Head near Amado,
Arizona





TARANTULA SPIDER
Rudasill Road near Tucson, Arizona



WESTERN SCREECH OWL

Pond at Elephant Head near Amado, Arizona



WESTERN BANDED GECKO
Rudasill Road near Tucson, Arizona

DESERT SPINY LIZARD

Desert Botanical Gardens, Phoenix,
Arizona



DESERT SPINY LIZARD

Bajada Loop Drive, Saguaro National
Park (West) near Tucson, Arizona



BROAD-BILLED HUMMINGBIRD

Santa Rita Lodge, Madera Canyon near Green Valley, Arizona



MAGNIFICENT HUMMINGBIRD

Santa Rita Lodge, Madera Canyon near Green Valley, Arizona

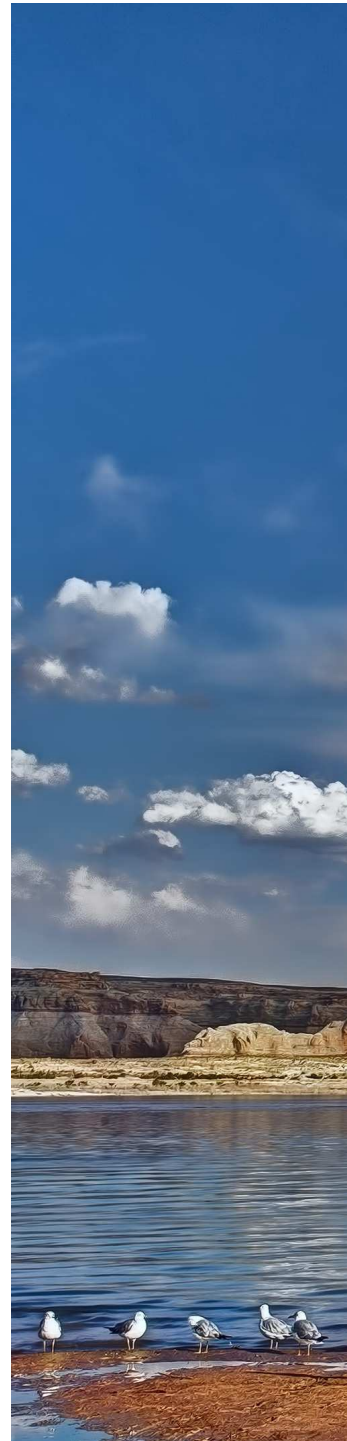
Arizona Landscapes

As we began our trip planning, we were excited about one stop as the published images of the underground slot canyons near Page were arguably the best surreal abstracts we had ever seen. We took the guided photo tour of the Upper Antelope location and found, to our dismay, it was a nightmare to time and position compositions around the crowds being funnelled through the narrow enclosure. We did however, come away with some relatively decent images that we felt were at least representative of the eroded sandstone that makes the slot canyons so popular. As a side note, we revisited this area several years later and opted to try the Lower Antelope Canyon location. Incredibly, we were once again disappointed. The caverns had certainly deteriorated from their former pristine condition. Many rock edges were broken, and the vertical surfaces streaked with water marks and bird guano. The ledges were also littered with dirt and small twigs, forcing us to “work” the cave walls with a zoom lens to eliminate distractions that would be difficult to clone out during post-processing. In our opinion, both the Upper and Lower Antelope Canyons are well beyond their prime as time and the incredible volume of tourists crammed through their narrow paths has taken its toll.

No visit to the Page area is complete without experiencing Horseshoe Bend. This iconic location also proved to have some photographic challenges as it’s primarily a late evening event that requires not only a decent sunset but also a tilt-shift lens that can capture the vertical valley to sky while positioning on the cliff edge. Capturing this image is not for the faint of heart. We did encounter some notable gems nearby that photographers seldom visit, especially the evening vistas at Powell Lake and Glen Canyon from the various roadside viewpoints, notably at Big Water and Lone Rock.

LONE ROCK

Wahweap Bay, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area
near Page, Arizona





We devoted part of our trip to exploring the desert along Stone House Valley Road. Not many photographers take this latter route, but it can cough up some spectacular panorama images. We also had great fun along the Arizona-Utah border framing architectural images of the Navajo Bridge and Cliff Dwellers using the Vermillion Cliffs as a backdrop.

During later trips, we scouted good sunrise and sunset locations in the Phoenix area using Saguaro cactus as foreground objects, most notably in McDowell Mountain Regional Park near Fountain Hills. However, the best locations for Saguaro photography, especially in the summer “monsoon” season, is Saguaro National Park in southern Arizona. Again, our preference, especially during a sunset, was to isolate a single Saguaro cactus as a foreground object that would act as a dark silhouette against the red and yellow night sky. Although we weren’t blessed with a lot of thunder storms, one of the best locations to photograph lightning is the Kitt Peak Observatory roughly an hour west of Tucson. We also traveled west to Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument near the small burg of Why where the Ajo Mountain Loop Drive is known for not only some of the most stunning desert vistas but also many opportunities to hike and capture the intimacy of this parched and desolate landscape.



SUNSET

Avra Valley Road near Tucson, Arizona



LOWER ANTELOPE "SLOT" CANYON
Page, Arizona



UPPER ANTELOPE "SLOT" CANYON
Page, Arizona



SAGUARO CACTUS

McDowell Mountain Regional Park near Fountain Hills, Arizona



ORGAN PIPE CACTUS

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument near Why, Arizona



SAGUARO "CRISTATES" CACTUS
Desert Botanical Gardens, Phoenix, Arizona



OCOTILLO CACTUS

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument near Why, Arizona



EVENING LIGHT

Bajada Loop Drive, Saguaro National Park (West) near Tucson, Arizona



MONSOON CLOUDS

Bajada Loop Drive, Saguaro National Park (West) near Tucson, Arizona



DESERT ROCK EROSION
Highway 89 Loop near Page, Arizona



HORSESHOE BEND
Page, Arizona



SAGUARO SUNSET
Cave Creek near Phoenix, Arizona



SUNSET STORM
Avra Valley Road near Tucson, Arizona





Utah Birds and Wildlife

Utah, however, was a much different story. Our research identified very few good locations for bird photography. The exception turned out to be Antelope Island State Park just outside Ogden, an unbelievably scenic location on the Great Salt Lake. Our target species was the Chukar, a small partridge that in our experience is extremely difficult to find and photograph in the wild. Here they roost on colourful volcanic rocks in late afternoon next to the Visitor Center. With patience, they are an easy target and the perch and lake backdrops make for stunning images. We “worked” the area and found Rock Wren, Sage Thrasher and Barn Swallows also made excellent fare.

Our first visit to both states was great fun and the locations we managed to find were prolific in terms of species variety and settings. Although it was an incredible experience, it was really the awe-inspiring canyon and desert landscapes that provided the impetus for the many return visits we made over the following years.

CHUKAR PARTRIDGE

Antelope Island State Park near Ogden, Utah



SAGE THRASHER
Antelope Island State Park
near Ogden, Utah



SCRUB JAY
Cottonwood Canyon Road
near Cannonville, Utah



CHUKAR PARTRIDGE

Antelope Island State Park near Ogden, Utah





Utah Landscapes

The deserts and canyons of southern Utah house an incredible number of landscape locations. It's hard to know where to start when planning a trip. It's an easy area to research as the Web is riddled with narrative and photographs that document more locations than anyone could possibly visit in years of travel. In fact, the locations we visited were so visually stunning and housed so many attractions that it was difficult to winnow out a selection that would adequately portray the awesome scenery we experienced. The following is an abbreviated travelogue of what we encountered as we meandered from place to place.

We chose to get underway at Arches National Park on the outskirts of Moab. There is an excellent auto route and many well-planned hiking trails through a host of popular sunrise and sunset locations that had the potential to generate some early excitement in our trip. We usually tackle new areas by driving the auto routes to become familiar with the terrain, choose several morning and evening locations that look productive and settle into stopping during the day at sites that take our fancy. Light, cloud structure and traffic dictate our choice of locations. This area lies atop an underground salt bed that provides the foundation that creates the arches, pinnacles, balanced rocks, sandstone fins and eroded monoliths that make for an intimate photography experience. Arches has a preponderance of colourful foreground objects that can be used to balance the ubiquitous red sandstone, including yucca plants, sand dune ripples, wild flowers in season, gnarled pinyon pine, textured juniper and patches of low growth cactus. After driving the park loop we spent our first afternoon at the Cove of Caves, Double Arch and Turret Arch, ending the day with an evening at Balanced Rock to work the sunset light that paints the rock with a brilliant yellow glow.

Arches is near Dead Horse Point State Park and the north entrance to Canyonlands National Park. The landscapes here were breathtakingly majestic compared to the intimate sandstone structures of Arches. This is particularly true of Dead Horse Point where a vista of the Islands-In-The-Sky shelters a panorama of the

NATURAL BRIDGE

Bryce Canyon National Park near Ruby's Inn, Utah

north end of Canyonlands where the Colorado River meanders through the sculptured pinnacles and buttes two thousand feet below. We didn't drive the north end auto route, opting instead to experience the Shafter Trail Road. This is an extremely narrow, precipitous and very rough switchback that spirals through Shafter Canyon, terminating two thousand feet below at some spectacular azure blue potash ponds. The sheer drop is a breathtaking adrenaline rush that is not for the faint of heart.

Back in Arches, we topped our day off with a sunset visit to the Delicate Arch. The hike up is an unbelievable lung burner but worth the effort, especially at sunset as it's arguably the best arch in the park. If the stars align and the La Sal Mountains sport a good cloud structure, it's a moment not to be missed as the arch is bathed in the last golden drops of daylight. It's quite the sight and a definite trip highpoint.

Our last day in this area started early on the east side of the North Window where we attempted to frame Turret Arch at sunrise. It's a bit of a squeeze getting to the small rock where this shot is possible and not an easy climb in the dark. Although the image has been taken many times it's one we didn't want to miss, especially as the early morning light was forecast to create the shadow we were hoping to capture.

After Arches, our plan was to slowly work our way south through Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park on the Arizona-Utah border. This is a spectacular setting, hosting huge mesa and butte outcrops in open desert. However, to our dismay, we discovered it's not a photographer friendly location as desert access is restricted in most locations to walking within ten feet of the road. This makes framing a blooming desert yucca as a counterpoint to a distant mesa very challenging. Moreover, the seventeen-mile dirt auto route is a poorly maintained, rut infested nightmare that kicks up dust that gets worse as the wind gusts. As the traffic is usually heavy, especially with local tours, it was impossible to stop and experiment with any meaningful composition and avoid the granular dust beating that plagued us throughout the day. If this sounds negative, we nonetheless enjoyed our visit and stayed well into the evening as the weather promised a spectacular sunset.

While in the Page area we decided to tackle a tough off-road area and search for the Wahweap Toadstools near Kanab, Utah. At the time we visited, the only access was just north of Church Wells at Milepost 18 along the Cottonwood Canyon Road. This is a long haul over rough desert terrain that terminates at a snag strewn wash. The site is roughly a mile walk downstream and an exhausting hike in the burning heat. There are three "coves" housing

the hoodoos or toadstools. Although it was remote and difficult to access, we certainly were blessed to see and photograph the delicate spires as it's one of those desert spectacles that won't last as erosion continues to take its toll.

Next day we drove the north end of Cottonwood Canyon Road from just outside Cannonville, Utah and worked our way slowly to Grosvenor Arch. This is a wonderful location and best caught in afternoon light. We were accosted by a very impudent Scrub Jay who posed on the sagebrush in the parking lot, obviously mooching for scraps. We then back tracked and scouted Kodachrome Basin State Park. We decided to return the next day and walk the Angel's Palace Trail, a hike that promises photographer friendly vistas in the early morning. From here we began to wend our way through Zion National Park in southwest Utah where we focused on roadside "grabs" of rock formations along the Mount Carmel Highway and vistas of the East Temple as we neared Canyon Junction. Access is tight along this stretch of highway and requires a quick drive through to ferret out the locations that exhibit potential. We didn't have time to take the shuttle along the Canyon Scenic Drive but opted instead for a hike up the Overlook Trail, again hoping for a sunset opportunity.

In our opinion, the real gem of this area is Bryce Canyon National Park where opportunities from grand vistas to intimate scenes abound. It is a north-south area where the sun traverses the major overlooks and trail viewpoints, forcing photographers to choose their vantage points, not only seasonally but also by time of day. The Amphitheatre Region, except for Sunrise Point, houses four exceptional locations: Sunset Point (including Thors Hammer); Inspiration Point (including Wall Street and the Navajo Loop); Bryce Point (including the Grottos and Arch); and, the Paria View. The south end houses the spectacular Natural Bridge, a structure where someone rode a horse along the arch to the canyon edge in the days when tourism and park rules were loosely managed. We enjoyed frequent stops from Swamp Canyon to Yovimpa Point, especially at the controlled burn sites, where seasonal flowers made a striking contrast to the charred forest remains. Later in the day we found a great waterfall on a hike to Mossy Caves.

From here we entered the final two parks at the tip of the San Rafael Swell. The first is Capitol Reef National Park, a roughly ninety-mile moncline or wrinkle in the earth's crust that preserves an eroded tangle of cliffs, monoliths, arches and canyons in what is known as the Waterpocket Fold. This is "red rock" country, stunning and vibrant. During the morning, the locations we visited were readily accessible but remote, Factory Butte at sunrise then on to

the Hickman Natural Bridge. As the day progressed, we worked some colourful and abstract bentonite mounds in the late afternoon and evening light. These are bypassed by most photographers but make for excellent fare as the striped grays and reds are stacked in a striking contrast to the deep blue sky. The next morning, we decided to frame the antique farm machinery that sits roadside near the Visitors Center. The golden glow of sunrise on the cliffs made an excellent backdrop and we found many old wagons and plows hidden along Sulphur Creek. As the morning progressed, we let the light lead us through Twin Rocks, Chimney Rock and the Fluted Wall. Our evening ended at Sunset Point where we worked the glow using trees and rocks as anchors to our images. It's a great location and an easy hike. Our last morning here was devoted to the ten-mile scenic loop that starts just east of the Visitors Center photographing the abstract formations along the Capitol Gorge Road.

Our final destination was Goblin Valley State Park in Utah. For the most part it's a morning location, with the exception being the evening and sunset glow that lights up the Three Sisters. At sunrise we captured the majesty of Wild Horse Butte using sage and blooming desert flowers as foreground objects. The fun, however, is really traversing the desert floor and photographing the many "mushroom" like forms that give the park its name. We spent a few hours in Valley One walking amongst the "goblins" looking for intimate ways to interpret and frame either individuals or groups that comprise the intimate structures and striations that nature has carved over centuries of intense erosion.

Overall this trip proved to be an exciting and fulfilling experience that left us in awe of the spectacular canyon and desert scenery we managed to witness in the short time we had allotted. It's an area that changes not only seasonally but over time, creating endless vistas that can never really be fully appreciated when viewing photographs.



GROSVENOR ARCH
Cottonwood Canyon Road near Cannonville, Utah



SUMMER STORM

COVE OF CAVES

Arches National Park near Moab, Utah



STORM CLOUDS

NORTH WINDOW

Arches National Park near Moab, Utah



EVENING SUNLIGHT
DELICATE ARCH
Arches National Park near Moab, Utah



SUNRISE
TURRET ARCH THROUGH THE NORTH WINDOW
Arches National Park near Moab, Utah



COTTONWOOD CANYON ROAD near Churchwells, Utah



WAHWEAP TOADSTOOLS

Cove One, Grand-Staircase Escalante National Monument near Kanab, Utah



WILD HORSE BUTTE
Goblin Valley State Park near Hanksville, Utah



VALLEY ONE
Goblin Valley State Park near Hanksville, Utah



SUNSET POINT

Bryce Canyon National Park near Ruby's Inn, Utah



FAIRYLAND POINT

Bryce Canyon National Park near Ruby's Inn, Utah



ANTIQUE FARM MACHINERY
Capital Reef National Park near Torrey, Utah



BENTONITE HILLS
Capital Reef National Park near Torrey, Utah



SUNSET POINT
Capitol Reef National Park near Torrey, Utah



SUNSET

WEST MITTEN BUTTE

West Mitten Butte, Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park near Kayenta, Utah



SUNSET
HAM ROCK

Arches National Park near Moab, Utah



SUNSET

THE THREE SISTERS

Goblin Valley State Park near Hanksville, Utah



DOUBLE ARCH

Arches National Park near Moab, Utah



BROKEN ARCH
Arches National Park near Moab, Utah



SHAFTER CANYON OVERLOOK
Dead Horse Point State Park near Moab, Utah



MOSSY CAVE WATERFALL
Bryce Canyon National Park near Ruby's Inn, Utah



WOLFE RANCH ROCK ART PANEL
Arches National Park near Moab, Utah



HICKMAN NATURAL BRIDGE
Capitol Reef National Park near Torrey, Utah





NIPPLE BENCH

Glen Canyon National Recreation Area near Big Water, Utah

THE GRAND CANYON

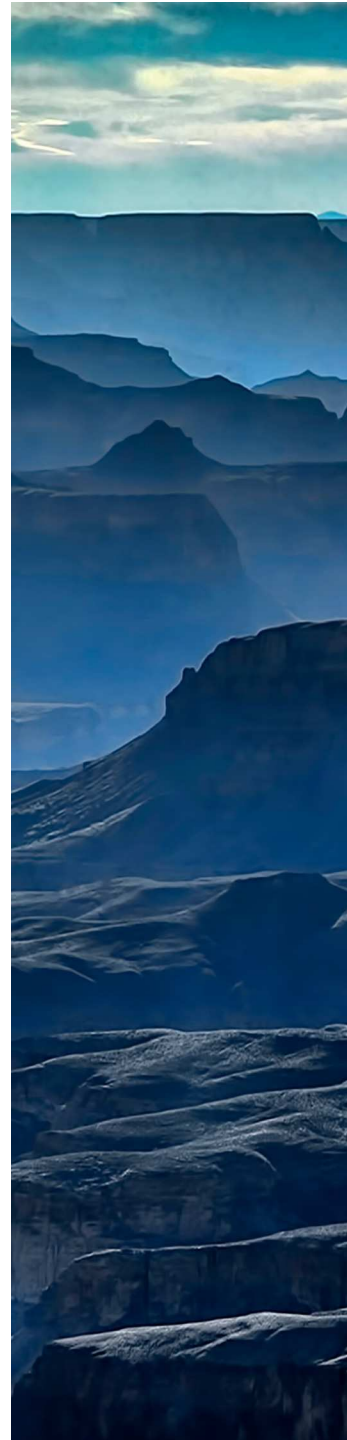
We've left this iconic location to last as it's the centerpiece of northern Arizona tourism and of such world class prominence that it deserves to be treated separately. You could literally spend a life time photographing this area. The depth of the gorge, layered geology and ever-changing weather patterns simply overwhelm your senses. Dedicated landscape photographers are continually challenged with "timing" this location to capture the images they envision. We decided to focus on the south rim in late January of 2017 with the hope that a fresh snowfall would add an element of character to the locations we planned to visit. We returned in August during the "monsoon" season when summer storms bring lightening to the canyon, creating new and exciting opportunities.

In January, our objective was to take advantage of early morning and late evening light and deal with whatever the weather threw at us midday. Fortunately, our arrival coincided with the tail-end of one of the worst winter storms the area had experienced in years. This made driving conditions and foot access to the viewpoints somewhat hazardous as the snow was deep and the temperatures well below zero. Most viewpoints required crampons as the foot paths were well packed with hidden patches of solid ice. However, the pristine snow coating the south rim created a dramatic winter atmosphere that left us breathless. The early morning and late evening light created a glow on the rim with the opportunity to capture the blues and reds cast by the "earth's shadow." Our favorite morning and evening locations were Mojave and Lipan Points respectively. On several days the clear skies made photography difficult without clouds to add some character and depth to compositions. However, other opportunities abound with panoramas, icicle formations and telephoto close-ups of canyon geology where shadows help define the curves and diagonals above the Colorado River.

SUNDOWN

LIPAN POINT

South Rim, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona





After our winter experience in January photographing the South Rim, we were looking forward to visiting again during the middle of August when the annual monsoon season brings intermittent but intense summer storms that carry with them the potential for thunder and lightning. This is also peak tourist season and much of the west rim drive can only be accessed by the park transit system. As the east rim auto-route was open, we decided to concentrate on the morning and evening locations that predictably cough up great sunrise and sunset landscapes. We weren't disappointed as fluffy cumulonimbus clouds created incredible red skies. However, other than a single afternoon downpour, the expected monsoon weather had taken an hiatus leaving us mildly disappointed but enjoying familiar locations such as Lipan, Moran and Navajo Points. The highlight was sunrise at Yaki Point, a location we hadn't previously visited.

Although the South Rim vistas are stunning and easily accessible, in our opinion the North Rim locations are much more intimate, bringing you closer to canyon icons such as the Vishnu Temple and Wotan's Throne which can only be placed as distant but visible objects in photographs captured in locations such as Duck on a Rock. At this time of year there are predictable sunrise and sunset locations that won't disappoint. Although the roads to Cape Royal and Imperial Point are a narrow and winding nightmare to drive, the vistas can produce great compositions bathed in sweet morning and evening light. An incredible morning location is Imperial Point where the sun lights up Mount Hayden and casts shadows throughout the surrounding landscape. Eliminating the sky from compositions creates a "layered" effect as the hills cascade into the distance. The Angel's Window on the Cape Royal route is another good morning site as the sun can produce a visible beam through the rock opening. There are two good spots to capture this effect. The upper location, however, is dangerous as there is no railing. It's a site that should be scouted in daylight and requires a headlamp for predawn setup. We did make an afternoon visit to Greenland Lake where the historic Bar Z Ranch salt cabin is still standing. In our opinion, it's not photogenic as positioning for compositions is difficult given the trees that have been removed as a precaution against fire destroying the structure. In our opinion, it's a definite miss.

We plan to return to the canyon as "monsoon" photography is an attraction we want to experience again. There are also birds and wildlife in the area that we'd love to photograph, especially the tassel-eared Abert's and Kaibab Squirrels that are prevalent on the South and North Rim's respectively.



SUNSET SHADOWS

NAVAJO POINT

South Rim, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona



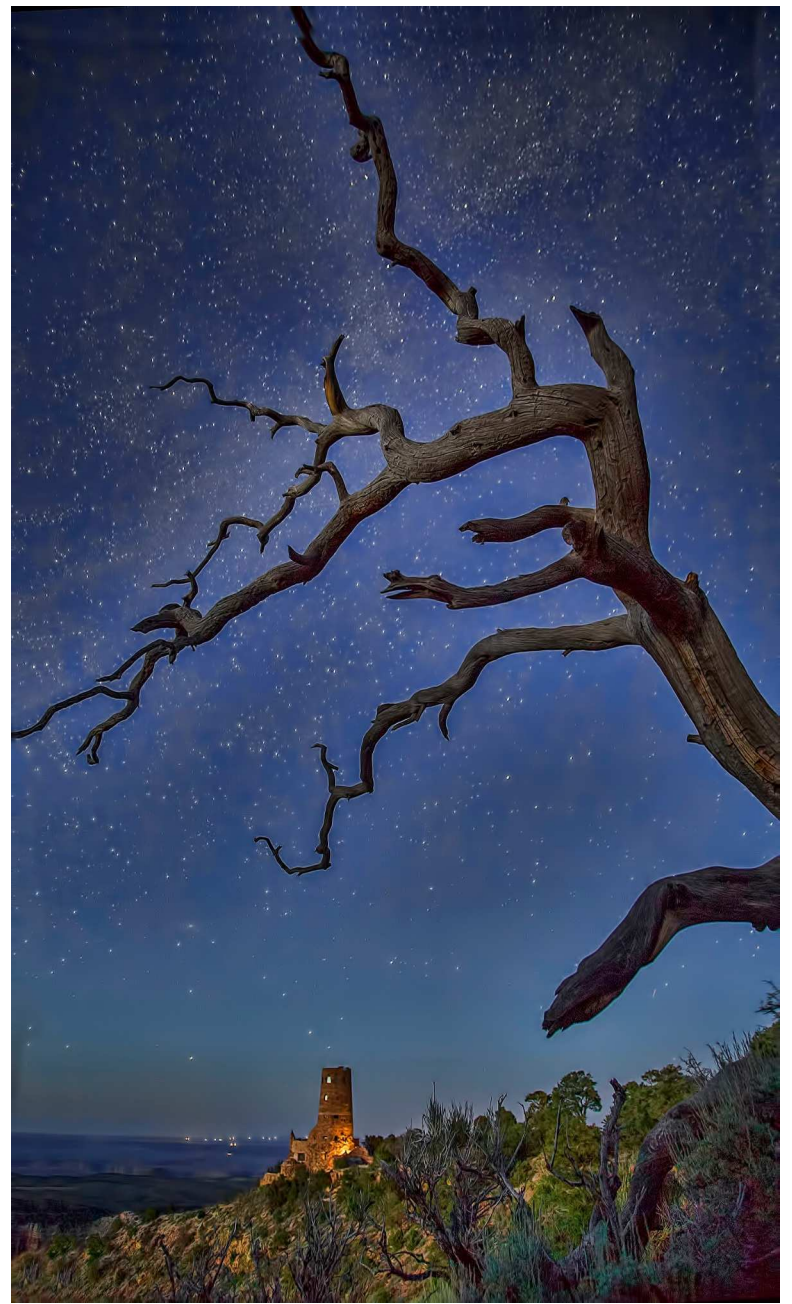
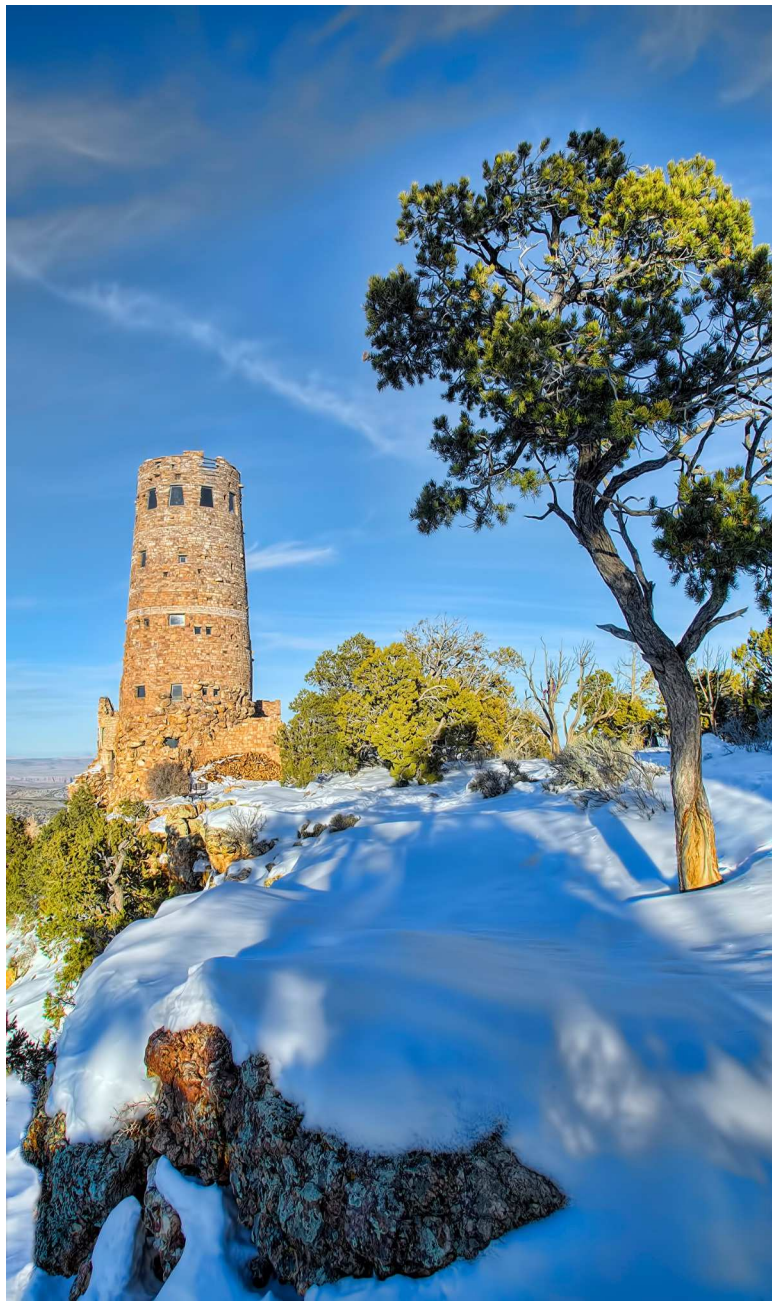
SUMMER STORM

NAVAJO POINT

South Rim, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona



MOUNT HAYDEN SUNRISE
POINT IMPERIAL
North Rim, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona



DESERT VIEW WATCHTOWER
South Rim, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona



AFTERNOON SHADOWS
DUCK ON A ROCK
South Rim, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona



SNOW SQUALL

HOPI POINT

South Rim, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona



STORM BREWING

YAVAPAI POINT

South Rim, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona



DESERT VIEW WATCHTOWER
South Rim, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona



ICICLE FORMATIONS

Back Country Information Center, Grand Canyon Village, Arizona



EARTH'S EVENING SHADOW

DUCK ON A ROCK

South Rim, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona



DUSK

CAPE ROYAL

North Rim, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona



WOTAN'S THRONE SUNSET
CAPE ROYAL
North Rim, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona



SUNRISE

YAKI POINT

South Rim, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona



AFTERNOON SHADOWS

WAHALLA OVERLOOK

North Rim, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona



SUNRISE RAYS
POINT IMPERIAL

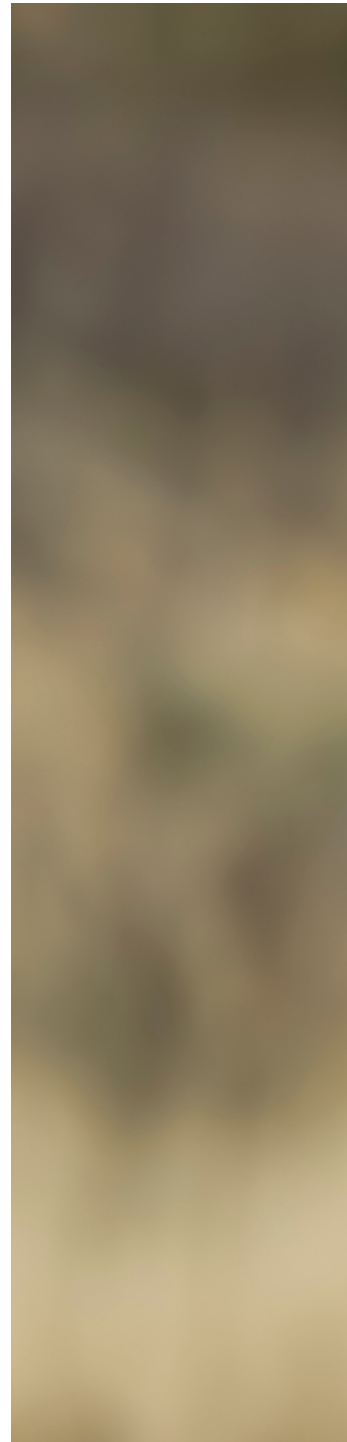
North Rim, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona

NEW MEXICO

Our first foray into New Mexico was really an afterthought from a rather disappointing experience trying to photograph Sandhill Cranes in Texas. Although we found many small flocks of foraging birds, even slow stalking proved fruitless as our quarry would not tolerate human presence. On a whim, we decided to deviate from our traditional route home through Arizona and try New Mexico on what we hoped would be a pleasant and scenic diversion. It was at the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge near San Antonio that we literally drove into thousands of Sandhill Cranes and Snow Geese feeding in acres of corn stubble. We were unaware that this was a traditional nesting area for southern migrants. The fields are cultivated to provide a ready food source and the surrounding landscape is littered with large ponds that provide overnight protection from predators. The incredible number of birds made isolating single subjects almost impossible. However, we found them compliant and tolerant of our presence. It was early February and both species were restless and soon small groups began leaving for the long migration to their traditional tundra nesting grounds. It was an unexpected and exciting spectacle and one we hope to see again on future trips to the southwestern United States.

SANDHILL CRANE

Entrance Pull-Off Pond, Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge
near San Antonio, New Mexico







SNOW GOOSE

Farm Loop, Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge near San Antonio, New Mexico

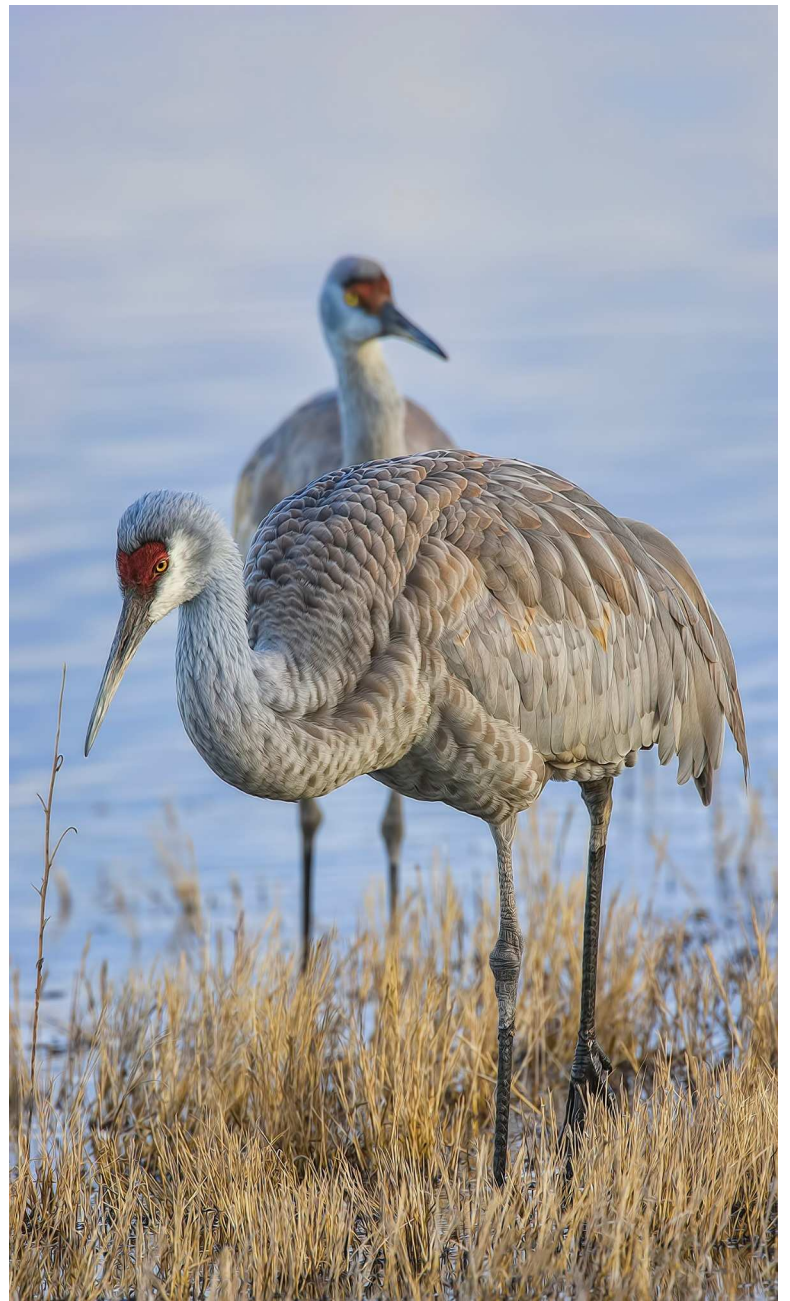
SNOW GOOSE

Farm Loop, Bosque del Apache
National Wildlife Refuge
near San Antonio, New Mexico



SNOW GOOSE (DARK MORPH)

Farm Loop, Bosque del Apache
National Wildlife Refuge
near San Antonio, New Mexico



SANDHILL CRANE

Entrance Pull-Off Pond, Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge
near San Antonio, New Mexico



SANDHILL CRANE

Entrance Pull-Off Pond, Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge
near San Antonio, New Mexico



SAGE THRASHER
 Visitor's Center,
 Bosque del Apache National Wildlife
 Refuge near San Antonio,
 New Mexico



CURVE-BILLED THRASHER
 Visitor's Center,
 Bosque del Apache National Wildlife
 Refuge near San Antonio,
 New Mexico

FEMALE GAMBEL'S QUAIL

Visitor's Center,
Bosque del Apache National Wildlife
Refuge near San Antonio,
New Mexico



ROCK WREN

Visitor's Center,
Bosque del Apache National Wildlife
Refuge near San Antonio,
New Mexico



SANDHILL CRANE

Entrance Pull-Off Pond, Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge near San Antonio,
New Mexico



SNOW GOOSE

Farm Loop, Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge near San Antonio,
New Mexico



**PIXEL BENDER OIL PAINTING
MOJAVE RATTLESNAKE “QUIET WARNING”**

Our Photography Journey...

The adventure began during the latter part of our careers when we started to ponder the question of what to do during our retirement. We had no objective in mind but finally settled on the combination of travel and nature photography as something that might be an interesting pastime. After months of agonizing research, we became early adopters of Canon's transition from film to digital camera bodies. What started as an overwhelming introduction to an emerging and complex technology soon mushroomed into somewhat of an obsession, especially as we progressed from wandering around local habitat searching for compliant subjects to attracting birds to sets we designed and photographed from a blind in our back yard. As we became more proficient behind the camera, we decided to focus our attention on travelling to locations in western North America, targeting sites known for outstanding bird, wildlife and natural landscape photography. Although our approach to stalking subjects "in the wild" produced some compelling images, we soon learned that most eye-catching exposures are the result of set-piece creations where subject behavior and ambient light are manipulated in a controlled setting. This is most readily achieved when photographing birds. The concept of "Birds as Art" was first introduced by Arthur Morris and subsequently taken to unprecedented heights as an artform by Alan Murphy. Both photographers raised the bar for what eventually became a photographic standard and one we passionately pursued as an adjunct to the traditional approach of simply searching for subjects in their natural habitat.

Not surprisingly, we were soon overcome with the urge to display and share our images. We began by producing web graphics and hosting an educational blog online for beginner photographers. As the sophistication of the digital darkroom evolved, a host of programs began to appear that elevated post-processing techniques to a new and exciting level. This led us to not only improve our web graphics but also to experiment in-house with the production of large prints on specialty media, including textured watercolor paper and canvas. During this time, we became overwhelmed by the emerging world of digital art, a niche genre designed to create stunning special effects from photographs. At the time of publication, our favorites were Pixel Bender, a Photoshop plug-in with an Oil Paint filter and LucisArt, a standalone program that creates incredible watercolor renditions. Both programs became mainstays in our Photoshop workflow.

This book is our self-published attempt to showcase, in print, a selection of photographs from our Arizona, Utah and New Mexico travels.

Nature Photography

Arizona and Utah

Bird, wildlife and natural landscape photography is an enjoyable and absorbing pastime. It's also an immense amount of fun! The advent of the digital camera and image enhancement software has had a significant impact on what was once the domain of professionals and serious amateurs. Today, it's an accessible and affordable hobby, no matter what your level of entry.

Like most photographers, we were soon overcome with the urge to display and share our images. We began with web graphics of photographs captured at outstanding locations throughout western North America, including: Alaska, Alberta Arizona, British Columbia, California, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Nunavut, Oregon, Saskatchewan, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, the Yukon and several sites we visited in eastern Canada.

This book contains selected images from our travels throughout Arizona and Utah with a side trip to an awesome location in New Mexico.

