

FOCAL POINTS

Vienna Photographic Society

MAY, 2017

INSIDE:

Trillium Fever

**Make Your
Smartphone
Smarter**

**Pennsylvania
Waterfalls**

**Surviving
Death Valley**

**Announcing
2017-2018
Themes**

Hold A Wild Bird



MAY, 2017

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VPS is a member of



<https://www.psa-photo.org>

VPS meets on the 1st, 3rd, & 4th Wednesdays, | September through June, at the Thoreau Middle School, Vienna, VA. Visitors are welcome. Please check VPS's calendar for details at <https://www.vpsva.org>

Millions of Trillium *Spring's Flower Fireworks Finale*

Carpe Florum! Seize the flowers! If you missed our explosion of cherry blossoms, slept through the bountiful bluebells, and failed to partake the terrific tulips, there's still time to capture one of the Mid-Atlantic's final and most wondrous spring spectacles: **millions of large-flowered trillium at Virginia's G. Thompson Wildlife Management Area**. This trillium spectacle is perhaps the "**largest population in North America**," says the Virginia Native Plant Society. And it's **peaking the first week in May**.

These showy white and pink three-petal wildflowers blanket Thompson's hills and flank its skinniest trails, including the legendary Appalachian Trail. Some start out pink while others morph from white into a blush- to fuchsia-pink as they age. Two wild orchids also shine there: lavender showy orchis and yellow lady slippers. Photographers can also catch glowing purple geraniums; purple, lavender, and yellow violets; and the white and yellow blossoms of umbrella-like mayapples, whose colonies can live more than a century. And if you look really hard, you might find a pricey morel mushroom near a tulip poplar tree.

Before you go, tap these websites: MidAtlanticHikes.com for its maps and photos: <http://www.midatlantichikes.com/grt.htm> and Thompson's official site, with details on the permit required to visit the hunting and fishing WMA on Freezeland Road off I-66 in Linden, VA: <https://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wma/thompson/> If you visit, please post your photos to [VPS's Flickr group](#). If you want to join an informal midweek group hike along 1 to 5 miles of its sometimes rocky trails, please email me. - **Barbara J. Saffir**

[Large-flowered Trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*) photos at G.Richard Thompson WMA by BJS]



Competition Results

April 19, Judge: John Hoover

Monthly Theme: Gardens/Trees/Bushes Digital Art (26 Entries)

1st Place	Joan H. Axilbund	From the Rose Garden
2nd Place	Gina Clautice	Spring Flowers
3rd Place	Loma M. Mier	White Lily with Dew Drops
HM	John Nye	Blue1paint
HM	Kathleen Furey	Petal Fireworks
HM	Kathrin Swoboda	Monet's Garden



Monthly Theme: Autumn (29 Entries)

1st Place	David R. Kepley	Last Leaf of Autumn
2nd Place	Ceasar Sharper	Ricketts Glen Stream
3rd Place	Paige Counts	Sunrise in the Smokies
HM	Carol Shoemaker	October on Red Top
HM	Sharon M. Connolly	Alluring Autumn
HM	Kathrin Swoboda	Autumn Radiance
HM	Kathleen Furey	Last September



Open Digital Novice (8 Entries)

1st Place	Mary Rabadan	Pink Beauty
2nd Place	Barbara Saffir	Ibis



Open Digital Advanced (29 Entries)

1st Place	Kathrin Swoboda	Hummingbird, Black and White
2nd Place	Ceasar Sharper	Riding the Falls - 2
3rd Place	Patricia Deege	Shoving Match
HM	Bill Mugg	Here Comes Dinner
HM	Morton H. Friedman	Library of Congress
HM	Lori Saunders	Red Room
HM	Lori Saunders	Red Mars



Open Prints: Combined Novice & Advanced (7 Entries)

1st Place	Gloria Spellman	Ballet in Blue
2nd Place	John Padbury	Old Fence in Fog



*Great photos everyone! Reminder:
Please don't put your name or initials on
your image in the competition or in the
title of the image when downloading it
for competition. - Janet Gelb, Competition Manager*



PSA Report

VPS in Third Place after Round 3 of PSA Interclub Open

Images by **Patricia Deege, David Heagy, Mary Rabadan, Ceasar Sharper** and **Kathrin Swoboda** scored 61 points in round 3 of the PSA Open (Projected Image Division) placing VPS in overall third place out of 30 participating clubs. Patricia Deege and Kathrin Swoboda received Honorable Mentions for "Blue Water Lily with Texture" and "Hummingbird Garden," respectively. Bill Mugg won an Award of Merit for "By the Window." Bill's image will be displayed on PSA's website in the near future. See the standings of the PSA Open here (VPS is in group E.):

<https://psa-photo.org/index.php?2016-17-pid-interclub-standings>

Images by the following VPS members were selected by a member vote and entered into Round 4 of the PSA Open: **Wayne Wolfersberger, Ceasar Sharper, Mary Rabadan, Bill Mugg, Kathleen Furey, and Mary Jane Fish**. The images may be viewed here:

<https://www.vpsva.org/g/fc8b39ce-5c5a-4292-8ed3-31f3c68f39c9>.

- Kathrin Swoboda, PSA Representative



"Blue Water Lily with Texture," Patricia Deege



"Hummingbird Garden," Kathrin Swoboda



"By the Window," Bill Mugg

May 3 Speaker: Patty Hankins

Secrets of Flower Photography

Patty Hankins of BeautifulFlowerPictures.com will be sharing tips for taking fabulous photographs of flowers in her "Secrets of Great Flower Photography" program. She'll be discussing photographing flowers in gardens and in the wild, focusing on things to think about before creating your photos, a bit on gear and how general rules of photography apply to flowers as a subject.

Patty is a flower and landscape photographer in the Washington, DC area. She is the author of *Wildflower Meditations: A Gift for the Spirit*, which features 90 of her photographs of wildflowers and 90 inspirational quotations. She leads several photography workshops and photo tours each year, including flower photography, landscape photography, and photo editing.

Patty was recently described as "one of the most professional fine art floral photographers" when she was ranked #1 on TopTenly's list of the Top 10 Best Macro Photographers in the World. You can see more of her work, learn about her workshops and buy her book at <http://beautifulflowerpictures.com/>



May 17 Judge: *Matthew G. Schmidt*



Matthew is a photography enthusiast with a strong attraction to abstract two-dimensional art. He has spent years developing techniques to express his vision through photography. Some techniques are in-camera, while others are in Photoshop, Lightroom and Nik filters. Matthew's vocation is a Systems Engineer providing subject matter expertise in computers and communications.

Matthew spends his free time on a variety of photography-related ventures. As the NVACC webmaster he handles submissions for the Annual Abstract Photography Exhibit. At SoFoBoMo, Matthew assists photographers who produce a photo book in one month. He judges competitions and presents on subjects from software use to visual design.

Matthew's favorite techniques are macro, panning, and multiple exposures. He gravitates toward cut glass, flowers, trees, architectural details, and motorsports. Regardless, he enjoys good photography in all forms.

<http://loreleistudios.com/>

May 17 Themes

Collections: Collection of things or objects, i.e., buttons, toys, hats, shoes, spoons, etc. A collection of special or unique objects would also come under this theme.

Spring: Anything that depicts spring to you. Examples include: flowers beginning to open, animals awakening, farmers, and gardeners planting.

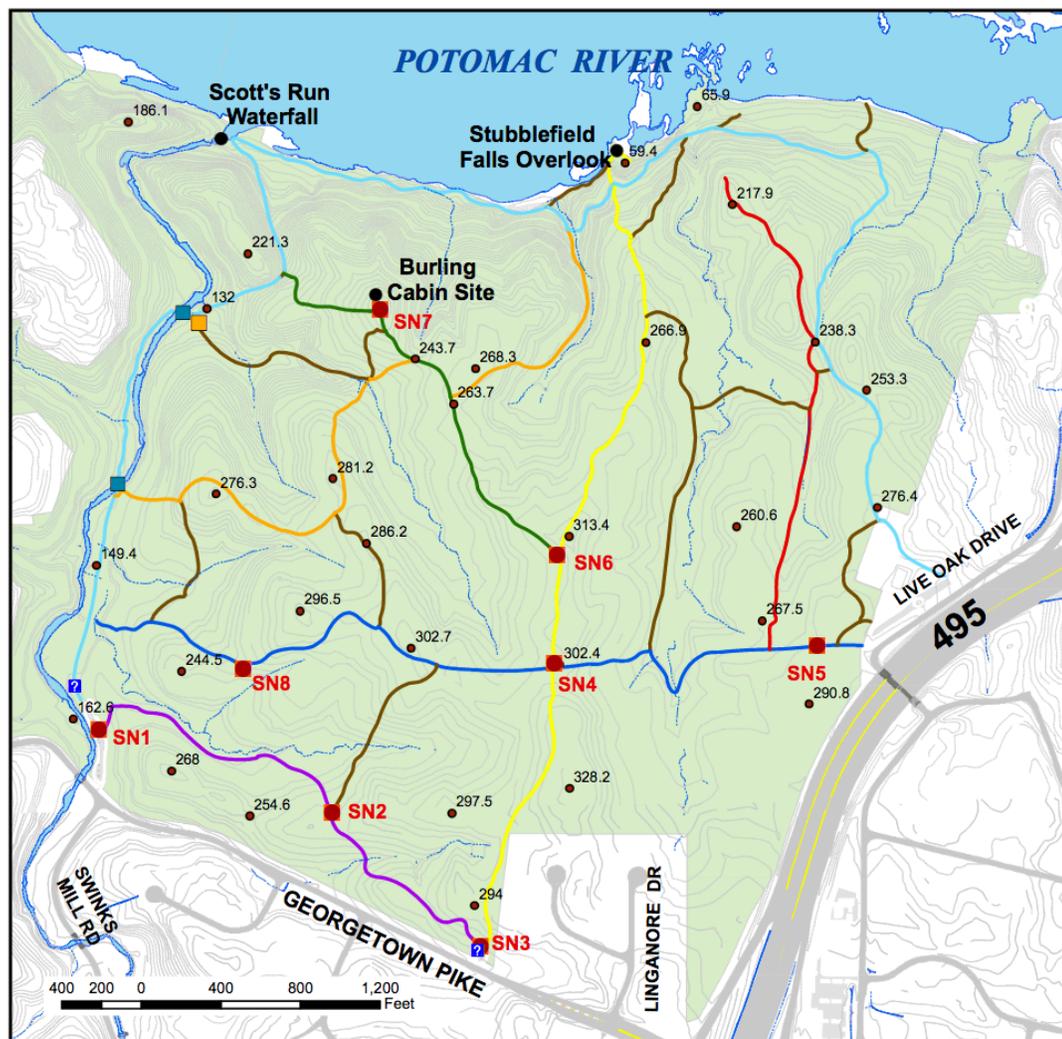
(NOTE: These are the final competition themes. June 21 is the End of Year Competition and we don't meet in July or August.)

May 13 Field Trip

Scott's Run Nature Preserve

Our next field trip is May 13 at Scott's Run Nature Preserve, 7400 Georgetown Pike, McLean. We will meet at 9 am in the parking lot. (<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/scottsrn/>) There are multiple hiking trails in the park, but we will do the most direct hike from the parking lot at the intersection of Swinks Mill Road and Georgetown Pike directly to the waterfall overlook area. (Potomac Heritage Trail: <http://www.funinfairfaxva.com/scotts-run-loop-hike-on-the-potomac-heritage-trail/>). It's a short, moderate level hike (about 2 miles out and back) with some elevation change and rocky trails; there are more difficult trails in the park for the more ambitious. This is a great opportunity to photograph spring flowers and the Scott's Run waterfall, so bring your polarizing or neutral density filter and tripod if you want to get those silky long exposure water shots.

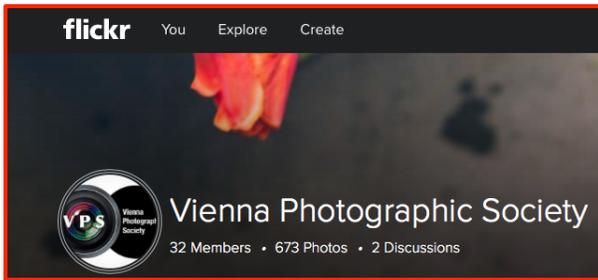
- Lori Saunders, VP, Field Trips



Trail Map: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/scottsrn/images/scotts-run-trail-map.pdf>

The Biggest Losers?

NONmembers of VPS's Flickr Group



LOSER! Someone -- *was it you?* -- lost a chance to potentially win thousands of dollars by not being the first person to join VPS's Flickr group last month and emailing me to win a lottery ticket. Want to win this month? If you are the first person to join in May *and* the first to email Barb22030 at Yahoo.com, you could win a bundle. Or not. But you can't win if you don't play!

A BIG THANKS to my fellow members who posted photos to the group this month to vie for a shot as the May *Focal Points* cover photo. Instead of being able to choose the best independent photo *per se* -- and there were many excellent pix worthy of a future cover -- in order to best illustrate my trillium cover story, I chose my own trillium photo. But since I'm not the best photographer, I hope you visit the Thompson WMA this week to photograph the flower fantasia and submit photos for a possible future cover or for a contest entry. Please let me know if it's okay for me to share one of your Flickr photos in the newsletter. Just email me with a caption or a short story about it so I can feature it in "My Fav Photo" in a future edition.

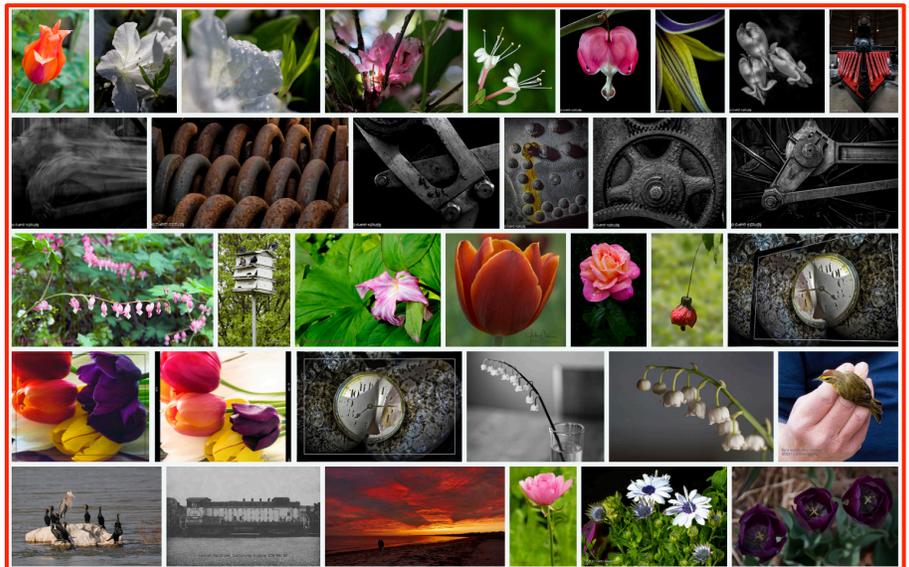
HOW TO JOIN: If you have *not* yet joined VPS's Flickr group, current VPS members can join by visiting <https://www.flickr.com/groups/vienna-photographic/> and clicking "Join Group" at the top. Then wait for approval from Michael Cassidy and/or Lori Saunders, which arrives by FlickrMail.

After you've joined, you can add photos several ways, such as clicking "Add photo" at the top and following the prompts when you're on the VPS site. Mark your photos "public" if you want everyone to see them or "friends" or "family" if you just want signed-in VPS group members to view them. If you aren't on Flickr, click here to join:

<https://www.flickr.com/>

If you're having trouble with the process, just email me or we can talk before or after a meeting. Hope to see you online!

- bjs



April 15 Field Trip Reports

Tulips at Burnside Farms

Carol Shoemaker, John Nye, and I attended the April VPS field trip to Haymarket's Burnside Farms. (<http://www.burnsidefarms.com/>) Carol Carroll, Julie Cochran, and Debbie Newell visited during the week when fewer small folks were running around. It was a beautiful day and there were many families photographing their kids. Nevertheless, it was not hard to get macros as well as shots of the full fields of flowers. The display was at a new location this year. As always, since there is never enough room to post all the great photos in the newsletter, more can be seen on the VPS Flickr site!

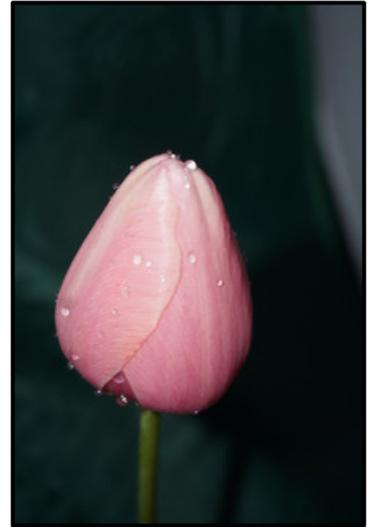
<https://www.flickr.com/groups/vienna-photographic/>

- *Lori Saunders, VP, Field Trips*



Photos by Lori Saunders

Julie Cochran: I visited the tulip farm with Debbie and Carol. We left our house at 8:45 a.m. and arrived when the farm opened. Debbie and I went to the tulip field, which was a real challenge due to the wind and sun. The fields were beautiful but we noticed the lack of rain and dry conditions. The tulips were okay. As you can see in the pictures, they were little bit shot and not as plentiful as the past. But all my pictures came out pretty well. I also brought some tulips home. Afterward, we ate lunch at Bob Evans in Oakton. It was a wonderful day.



Photos by Julie Cochran



John Nye: I found it hard to convey the wonderful feeling of seeing all those flowers glittering in the fields. This picture was one of the few I took which remind me of what I saw.



Photo by John Nye

Death Valley: *A Coyote, a Bobcat, and Spellbinding Vistas*

By Patricia Deege

In mid-February I had the good fortune to spend a couple of days visiting Death Valley. We arrived at the Los Angeles airport in late afternoon and drove the five hours it took to reach our first night stop. Crossing the 5,000-foot pass to reach the valley on a narrow winding road was a bit nerve racking in the dark, especially when rounding a corner, we almost ran down a bobcat in the middle of the road.

The next morning dawned cloudless and we departed early to explore. Death Valley is a dry bleak landscape but with a surprising palette of color and a wealth of spectacular vistas. The valley is bordered by high mountain peaks which, at this time of year, had a light covering of snow and the lower slopes created layers of rock of different hues and textures. Much of the valley floor is covered by salt pans, acres of mineral salts left by the fierce sun drying up the winter rains, leaving a fractured and eerie landscape.



Zabriskie Point

We took the road to Dante's View, one of the best overlooks in the area that provided an incredible vista of the valley, the salt pans and the distant mountains. We visited the old mining village of Rhyolite on the border of Nevada. There are ruins of the old mine buildings, the "station" where the ore was shipped out, and the abandoned hotel, a lonely construction on the edge of a windswept hill. Our wanderings next took us to Golden Canyon before the sun became too fierce to do a hike into the hills. The canyon is aptly named as it glows bright gold in early morning light. On the valley floor, the Devils Golf Course is a popular place to visit. The name is ironic as the area is a mass of football-size lumps of dried earth, which would be a nightmare to walk on let alone play golf. Our last stop of the day was at the popular Zabriskie Point, where layers of rock offer many interesting subjects for the camera and the famous peak glows in the late afternoon sun's rays.



Curious Coyote



Dante's View

Our next night was spent at the Furnace Creek Ranch, a pleasant watering hole with comfortable rooms, plenty of choice of restaurants and gift shops, and an interesting little open-air museum with artifacts from the time when gold and borax mining was a booming business. It is the only place to find food, gas and shelter so one has to be sure to take drinks and snacks for the day's explorations in the valley. There is another Inn at Furnace Creek but it appears to be for the wealthy. The obligatory valet parking made us decide to skip a visit there.

On our second day in the valley, we drove south and visited the borax mine, famous for its Twenty Mule Train that was used

or transporting the minerals for processing. Gold was the initial attraction in Death Valley, and when that supply appeared to be dwindled the borax mining proved to be much more lucrative. The old wooden wagons were on display, with their huge rusty wheels and the water barrel hanging off the side of the wagon.

Our last stop was the abandoned Ashford Mill ruins, a desolate place in the shifting sands of the valley floor with the snow-covered mountain peaks in the background. On our way back north,

we stopped to hike up another canyon to a natural bridge formed in the rock, no doubt carved out over the years by rushing water after a heavy rain storm.

On arriving back at the Ranch we were informed that a heavy storm was approaching, bringing heavy rain and no

doubt snow on the pass. Without snow tires, we would have had difficulty negotiating that high winding road so decided to leave early. The skies were growing ever darker with the approaching weather, but at the head of the valley the sun broke through for some minutes which allowed us to get a few pictures of the iconic sand dunes, a favorite destination for any photographer. Crossing the mountain pass, the skies became somewhat ominous, providing some interesting scenes, and we encountered a lone coyote on the road. The animal stopped and watched us for a few minutes before trotting off into the sage brush. The sun was setting as we came off the pass and the cottonwoods on the roadside, just before joining the main road south, presented a picturesque scene for my final photograph.

We spent the night in Mojave and drove back to L.A. the next morning through the heaviest rain I have ever seen in California, apparently the worst storm for more than 100 years!! If we had not left when we did, we might have been stuck up there in a snow drift.



Old Stage Coach



Ashford Mill Ruins



Mesquite Dunes



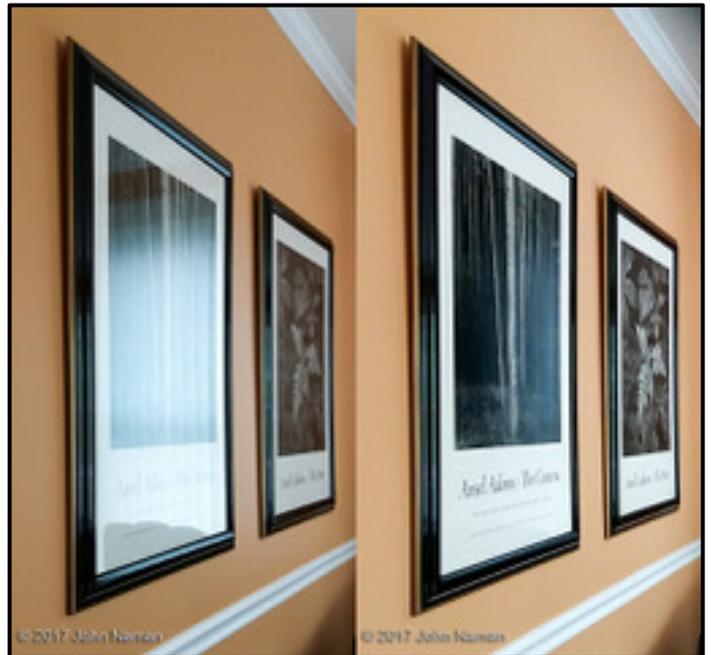
Sunset Over the Snow Peaks

A Smarter Smartphone: *Using a Polarizer*

By John Naman

I have a polarizer for my smartphone. Now washed-out glare is gone and my photos are better. The latest filters and lens clip on to smartphones, both Android and Apple iPhone.

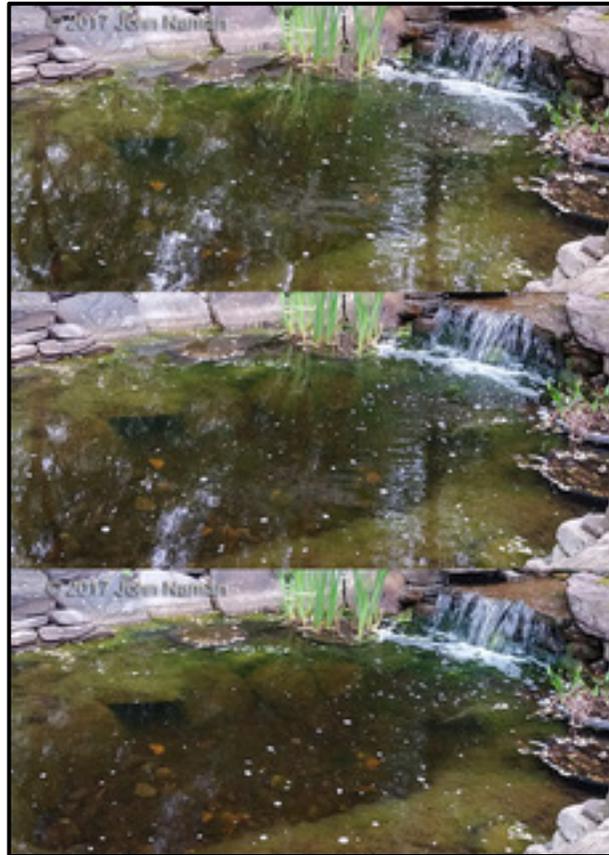
- 1) Glass reflects glare, a polarizer subtracts glare, revealing true colors. No Photoshop of images (except crop).



- 2) My roses haven't bloomed yet, but when they do I know that leaves reflect a lot of glare. Subtract the glare and the flowers "pop."



3) Water reflects sky glare big time, but often I like a little bit of reflection of sky and trees. So I only dialed in about 1/2 polarizer when I spun the filter. As you can see, full polarizer subtraction of glare on the bottom image is a little lifeless and shows yuck on the bottom of the pond.



So, take a "mobile lens polarizer" out for a spin. You can always unclip (clip to a shirt pocket) and go without. Polarizers never do much good when they are left at home.

4) Ah, price you ask? Mobile Lens Kits run from \$10 (cheap Chinese) to \$75 for the Promaster . (I bought it for \$60 on sale.) Most have three lenses: fisheye, wide, and macro. Just make sure the kit includes "Circular polarizing filter" or all you get is lens attachments. There is a \$17 polarizer only: AUKEY 37mm Circular Polarizer Clip-on Cell Phone Camera Lenses for Samsung, Android Smartphones, iPhone. Others for \$28. The SEHOO iPhone Lens, 22mm, \$13, has reviews that say "lots of vignetting" because it is small. (Vs. 37mm above.) I Googled "Mobile Lens Kit with Circular polarizing filter." By the way, if you get one with Macro, 10x maximum. 15x has almost no depth of field and you have to be closer than the diameter of your little finger, which is really close! I wish I had gotten an 8x instead of 10x, but it is still useable and fun.

Next month, John shares telephoto and macro clip-on for smartphones. He says, "Macro is awesome and telephoto is great for zooming in on a presenter from the back of a large room."

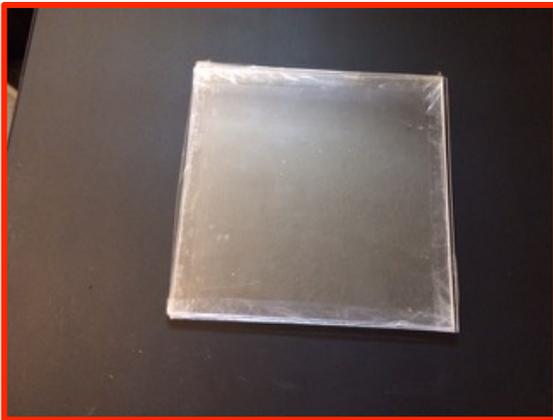
Wind Block

Making a "Windshield" to Improve Wildflower Macros

By David Kepley

Okay, it's spring and those beautiful little wildflowers are begging you to take their pictures. (Think bluebells!) But you carefully line up your shot and a little bit of breeze renders what would have been a terrific shot into a blur. Ugh! What to do? You could raise the shutter speed to reduce the amount of movement, which will mean you will probably need to raise the ISO, introducing noise. Hmmm!

When I was in a macro workshop with Mike Moats at Nature Visions last fall, Mike introduced us to his home-made windshield. So of course I went out and made one. This is meant to be a portable wind deflector that will allow you to take photos of small wildflowers in the field.



HOW TO MAKE A WINDSHIELD:

- Purchase four 15" X 15" pieces of Plexiglas. Make the pieces larger if you want to shoot larger plants.
- Use 3"- 4" clear tape.
- Affix the top to the back panel and the sides to the back panel.
- Put tape around all of the exposed edges, so you do not cut yourself.
- Fold it up and carry it to the site.
- Carefully surround the flower you want to shoot. We don't want to hurt the flowers that we love!



My Fav Photos



The blonde is my daughter Amy. (She is now 22.) She is with her good friend Tess. Tess' mom and I used to take the girls blueberry picking. I think this photo captures the essence of their continuing life-long friendship.

- Janet Gelb



This is Ben, who was 5 at the time, while whale watching at Virginia Beach on Oct. 13, 2016. The day was cold with 60-mile-an-hour winds on the water. This was taken on the beach playground equipment. The hat was hand made by his older brother and him. *- Julie Holtzer*

My Fav Photos



I'm not into photographing flowers. This was an unusual case. I was doing a shoot with a group in Dumbarton Oaks, and it was raining off and on. Various members of the group gave up and left, and eventually I headed for the exit, too. Walking along the terrace above one of the gardens, I saw this single beautiful rose "calling me" from a bed of deep green. A "Some Enchanted Evening" moment. So I walked down into the garden and tried to do it justice.

- Morton H. Friedman

Saw this Bald Eagle in a tree.
Shot with my point and shoot.

- Joe Morton



A Rose is a Rose is a Rose?

How I Used Photoshop To Create an Award Winner

By Joan Axilbund



The rose that won the Gardens/Trees/Bushes theme in April was a happy surprise for me. I tend to concentrate on animal portraits and to do minimal manipulation leaving the image somewhat close to the way it came from the camera. (Maybe that is why winners are few and far between!)

Last month Gloria Spellman and I were driving from the St. Augustine area down the east coast of Florida to meet up with Martin and Mary Jane Fish in Daytona Beach. On the way we stopped at Washington Oaks State Park where, among other things, is a small rose garden. It was 10:45 a.m. with the sun high in the sky and no clouds and absolutely no shade in the rose garden. Just the situation everyone says to avoid. But a yellow rose with red tips on the petals caught my eye. Next to it was a bud. I was there. It was there. So I took my “record shot.”

Once home I was enthralled by all my bird photos but there was no way I could enter all birds in April’s competition. So out came the flower. I use Photoshop Elements 11 and I have the Nik plug-ins. I usually start out all my processing by first cropping and then adjusting shadows and highlights and applying some saturation. I then started darkening the background (there were a lot of pink splotches in the background and, as the judge saw, I missed one). At that point, I saved the image in process because I wanted to start playing with filters and other things but I did not want to lose my work so far.

After playing with a lot of the filters, textures, etc., I applied the watercolor filter in Elements. Brush detail was set to 9 (very high), shadow detail was set to zero and texture was set to three (the highest). Since I do not use the filters much, I am lucky all the settings were still there days afterwards to know what I used. After that, the background was still not dark enough so I played some more with darkening the background for the final. (Still missing that one pink splotch on the right.) The judge liked it! Now I just need to do better on my bird and animal images! Maybe the filter tools need to be brought out more often.



Capturing Waterfalls

Pennsylvania's Ricketts Glen State Park

By David Kepley

Waterfalls, waterfalls, waterfalls! Ricketts Glen State Park boasts one of the largest collections of waterfalls in a relatively small space on the East Coast. It is located near Benton, PA, about a 4-5 hour ride from Northern Virginia. My wife and I went last fall and my goal as to get photos of waterfalls surrounded by amazing fall color. I was a little early for the kind of outstanding fall color I wanted, but I got some pretty good waterfall shots.

We parked at the top of the mountain at the Lake Rose Trailhead and hiked down the Highland Trail, and then went downhill to where another stream joined and hiked back up. The whole hike took 4-5 hours. I would rate it moderately difficult. We probably saw

15-20 waterfalls! The next day we parked at the Evergreen Trail parking lot off PA Rt 118 and took a short hike down to several other falls. Here is a link to the trail map:

http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr_003167.pdf

By the way, the trail itself is quite amazing. In its steepest sections, workers had to cut steps out of the rock. How did they get the equipment up there to do that anyway? Here is a link to the park website:

<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks/findapark/rickettsglen/>

Tips:

- Give yourself plenty of time and take lots of water.
- Make your reservations for accommodations early. There aren't a lot of options out there. The same is true of eating establishments.
- Go on an overcast day to reduce highlights on the water. On a bright sunny day, the white water and dark shadows will be too much for your camera to handle.
- Take a tripod, so you can get that silky smooth water effect.
- I shot at 100 ISO, f16-22, and my shutter speed was between 1/3-1/2 sec. Experiment with the shutter speed to get the effect that looks best to you.

Please share your photos with the rest of us!



Hold a Wild Bird

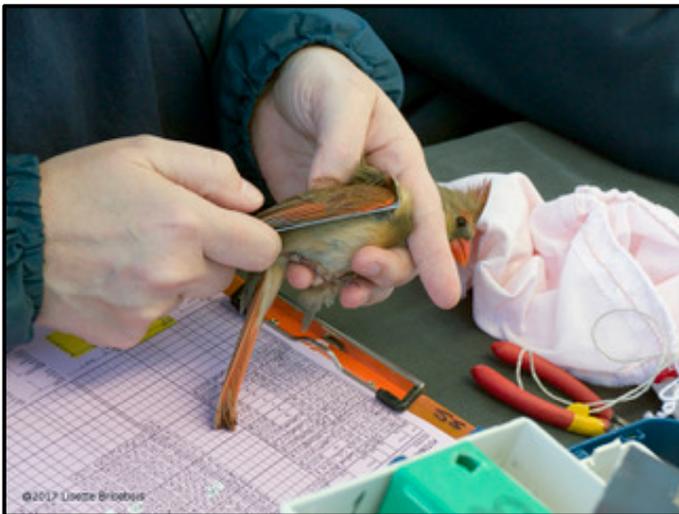
Public Bird-Banding Bonanza

By Lisette Brisebois



Arriving at Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge is no easy feat. It is not Occoquan, the charmer of a little town on the river, nor is it Occoquan Regional Park. I was so very lucky to have Barbara Saffir as my guide not only to the refuge, but also to the bird-banding station. According to the web page, **this public bird banding takes place through May 28, 2017 on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from 7 a.m. until noon.**

[\(https://www.fws.gov/refuge/occoquan_bay/\)](https://www.fws.gov/refuge/occoquan_bay/)



We were warmly greeted, *literally* on that cold morning, as the banders had a heater for themselves and the birds in their tent where tables, benches, and all sorts of measuring items were located. It's a glorious site with an Osprey nest just to the right and Occoquan Bay in front. When we were permitted to stand in front of the nets, they were magically invisible to us and to the birds. Every half hour the banders went out with odd equipment to check the nets for birds. When a bird was caught in the net next to the tent we could see the banders carefully extract the bird from the fine netting and place it in a bag. Once a bird was bagged and returned to the tent, it was measured, judged for condition and age and all information was carefully noted. Finally, a band was placed on the bird. In our case a female Northern Cardinal, a White-throated Sparrow, a Palm Warbler, and another sparrow were caught. There was huge excitement when the first American Crow in 18 years was netted. We clearly brought them luck or -





perhaps one of the children who were also with their mother. The banders were generous in explaining the procedures to us.

Reluctantly, after several series of net checking, Barbara and I went for a walk on the easily traveled path beside the bay. The day was glorious and clear and we saw many wonders including a baby snapping turtle (perhaps the child of the two we saw having a long loving moment) and a muskrat.



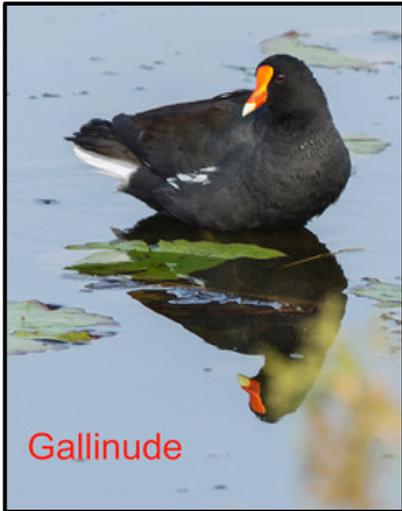
The most moving, emotional, and visual part of the bird banding was the bird release. The banders showed visitors how to gently hold a bird and then release it. There was a particularly feisty female Northern Cardinal that we all worried would give vicious pecks. Only Barbara was brave enough to hold her and give the cardinal her freedom. It was magic to see the beautiful red and tan bird fly off, free again. It was quite an amazing experience and I would return in a heartbeat.



In Search of Birds

Florida Hot Spots

Photos and Text By Joan Axilbund, Gloria Spellman, Martin Fish, and Mary Jane Fish



Gallinule

The plans were made, the airline tickets bought, the lodging arranged. Joan Axilbund and Gloria Spellman were flying to Florida to meet up with Martin and Mary Jane in Saint Augustine. Martin and MJ were driving down from Chattanooga. All arrived at the hotel in St. Augustine within an hour of each other. Because it was too late to go to the Alligator Farm that day, we explored Saint Augustine, walked the streets of the old town, had dinner, then excitedly finalized plans for the rest of the trip.

Day Two: Arrived at the Alligator Farm by 7:45 am for early entry. Found an abundance of egrets, both great and snowy; Roseate Spoonbills; Wood Storks and several types of heron and many other photographers! Spent the day trying to capture birds in flight, building nests, mating, doing mating rituals, and fighting off competitors. Some of us even took pictures of the alligators. When we finally reviewed what we had done that day, we found that each of us had taken over 1,000 pictures.



Day Three: Early morning and late evening was a repeat of day two. Mid-day Martin, Mary Jane and Gloria went on a historic guided tour of Flagler College which highlights the architectural heritage of the former Hotel Ponce de Leon, listed as a National Historic Landmark. Built by railroad magnate, Henry M. Flagler, in 1888, the Ponce is considered one of the finest examples of Spanish Renaissance architecture and was one of the most exclusive resorts of its day. The guests are able to visit the dining room where 79 Louis Comfort Tiffany stained glass windows stream light onto the beautifully hand painted murals on the walls and ceiling. This is truly a beautiful building. Meanwhile Joan visited the famous St. Augustine fort, Castillo de San Marcos, built in the 1600's.

Day Four: Left Saint Augustine heading South on Rt A1A. Joan and Gloria visited the Washington Oaks Gardens State Park, known for its formal gardens. (See associated article on Joan's winning photo taken here.) Meanwhile Martin and MJ visited the Ponce de Leon Inlet Lighthouse. We then met up for lunch near Smyrna Beach and found out we could drive on the beach for several miles in either direction. We



Lesser Yellowlegs



Great Blue Heron



drove in one car along the beach stopping to take photos of some sanderlings, a pelican, a willet, a ruddy turnstone and a Caspian Tern. It was a beautiful day for the beach. Left the beach and headed to our rental house in Kissimmee.

Day Five: The bird watching at the 20,000-acre Lake Apopka North Shore property near Orlando is ranked as one of the top three winter birding areas in Florida after Everglades National Park and the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. It also is Florida's best inland birding hotspot. The Wildlife Drive bordering Lake Apopka is open between sunrise and sunset only on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and federal holidays. The first pass on the one-way, 11-mile Wildlife Drive was a little disappointing for



wildlife. But, contrary to all popular theory, after a good lunch at a local hangout, mid-afternoon brought success. We saw ibis, both white and glossy, anhingas, several different types of ducks (some with babies), coots, gallinules, cattle egrets, osprey and others birds, as well as several alligators.

Day Six: Gatorland. We bought the photographers pass for early opening and late closing available on Saturdays only. Here the birds were several weeks ahead in the life cycle than in St. Augustine. Spent the morning shooting the egrets, great, snowy and cattle; herons, great blue and tri-color; and ibis. The most fun was trying to get a shot of the baby egrets. Some of them were almost as tall as their mom but they still squawked for food and were trying to fly.



Day Seven: Decided to visit Merritt Island NWR and on the way stopped at Viera Wetlands, which are on the mainland south of Merritt Island. At the wetlands, we saw little blue herons, glossy and white ibis, great egrets, anhingas, tricolor herons, great blue herons, green herons, black-necked stilts, blue-winged teals, coots, and several other birds. Because that part of coastal Florida had had a drought, the ponds were smaller than normal. That not only concentrated the birds, but it also made it easier for them to catch fish. We all got many shots of egrets and herons with large fish in their beaks and then photographed them as they tried to get the fish in the right orientation before swallowing them. Some herons would repeatedly drop their fish into the water and pick them up again. I guess their moms never told them not to play with their food! Martin was delighted to get photos similar to some Nature Visions images that he has always admired.

Then we went on to Merritt Island NWR. A hurricane had broken several of the barriers, so half of the NWR was just sunbaked, cracked earth. But some water remained and we all got to see our first encounter with a flock of American Avocets with their cinnamon-colored heads and necks. Some were wading and some were resting in the mud. We also enjoyed watching a flock of roseate spoonbills wade in

a group through the water, heads down and sweeping back and forth to find food at the bottom of the pond. It looks funny, but it's the practical way to feed. Gloria and Joan decided to investigate the Orlando Wetlands. On the way they stopped at Fort Christmas and were delighted with a sandhill crane mating dance. Walking along

the paths of the wetlands approaching sunset, even Joan, who thinks Florida has an ugly landscape, found the area to be peaceful and attractive.

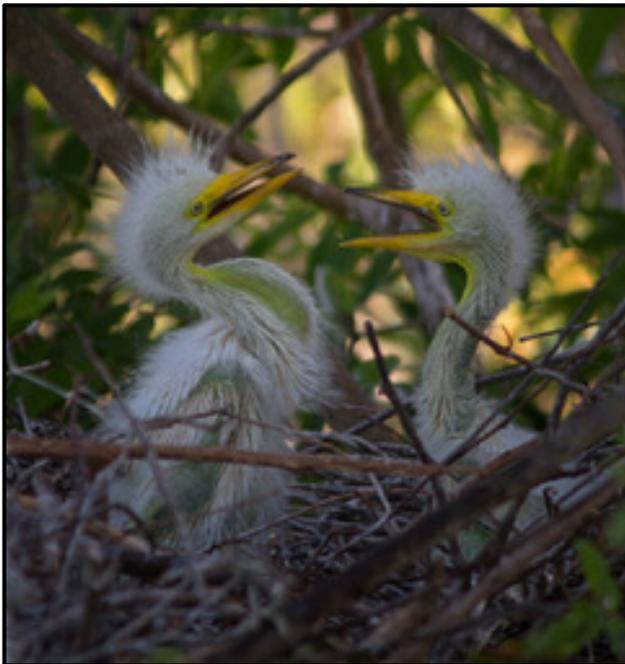
Day Eight: Today we went to the Lakeland area. Our first stop was at the Circle B Bar Ranch, which used to be a ranch, but is now protected wetland. When MJ found that it was not a driving tour, and that the tram was not running that day, she went off in the car to find other things to photograph. So the others started exploring. We wanted to take the Lost Bridge Trail to Lake Hancock, but we went the wrong way. We wound up passing a pond that had glossy ibis and a flock of lesser yellowlegs. Martin was able to practice shooting birds in flight on turkey vultures, a few of which were in the tall grass surrounding the pond. When we discovered our error, we reversed course and took the right trail with Joan encouraging the other two that it was not that hot and the next great picture was just around the corner. (It wasn't!) Along the way we saw an immature heron, some white ibis in flight, egrets, and a red-tailed hawk. Visiting the lake was nice because it was very hot that day, so we sat and enjoyed the cool breeze.

Day Nine: For our final day, we went to Winter Park to take a boat ride to see the historic homes built on the shores of five lakes. Human labor made canals to link all five lakes together, and the boat went through two of

them to show us three lakes. Our guide told us many interesting stories about the homes and the people. Fred Rogers (of Mr. Roger's Neighborhood) went to Rollins University, which is on one of the lakes. There was a wealthy couple whose wife missed her other home so much, the husband built an identical home on the lake. And there is the story of the mansion that was floated across the lake to another location. (Even getting barges onto the lake was impressive.) If you are interested, there are homes near/on the lake for sale for \$2.5M - \$8.5M. After the boat tour, we visited the Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art, which has the largest collection of Tiffany art in existence. Photography is allowed.

Day Ten: Joan and Gloria went off in the morning to the Orlando airport. Mary Jane and Martin started the drive home. There was a storm front coming through western Georgia, so they decided to try to make it home in one day, a seven-hour drive. About 1 hour and 30 minutes of the drive was through the storm, with very low visibility, but they made it home safely.

Now we all have to process our thousands of images! Fortunately (or unfortunately) many of the in-flight photos have birds missing heads, parts of wings, are feet only, or just pictures of blue sky or empty branches. Be prepared, however, you will see many Florida birds over the next 12 months!



Lotus Palooza

Julie Cochran at Vienna Arts Gallery

Vienna Arts Society gallery at Village Green shopping center, 513 Maple Ave. W., Vienna, 703-319-3971, <http://viennaartsociety.org/about/> June 6 - July 29 (except Sundays, Mondays, and holidays)



Julie Cochran: I was working at Pet Smart when I got the call from Janice asking me to be the featured artist. Of course I said yes I'd be honored to be the featured artist. My show will be will be about lotuses and possibly a water lily or two just to give it a little bit of variety. I hope VPS members will take a look at my show. I am very excited about it.

I put this show together to show how many colors that lotuses come in and different ways they grow. The images here were taken over the course of many, many years.

In 1993 I took a class at Northern Virginia Community College, borrowed my now husband's Pentax K1000 camera and fell in love with photography. Since then I've taken many photography related classes, such as like developing, printing, and digital imaging. Like most photographers, I have migrated to digital.

I became a member of Vienna Photographic Society in September 1998. I have become an award-winning photographer with this club. I was juried into Nature Visions photo Expo in 2014 and again in 2016. I also got into the town of Vienna's photo show in 2015 and I won second place. Some of the pictures in the show are the award-winning pictures.



Photo Opportunities/Calendar

May: PLEASE HELP. Your volunteer-run photo club needs *YOUR* help operating its digital competitions. Please contact Joan Axilbund ([jaxilbund at verizon.net](mailto:jaxilbund@verizon.net)). There's a small time requirement outside VPS's monthly meeting and training is provided.



May 1: PSA. Registration for PSA'S 2017 national conference opens May 1. It takes place Oct. 8-14 in Pittsburgh, PA. There will be classes, workshops, photo tours, a print exhibition, social events, and vendors. For details, visit: <https://psa-photo.org/index.php?conference-overview>

May 1: VPS EXHIBIT. Members showcase their work at the Oakton Library until about June 17. 10304 Lynnhaven Place, Oakton, 703-242-4020, <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/branches/ok/>

May 5-7: ISLAND. Tangier Island, VA, Photo Workshop. in waterman community in the middle of the Chesapeake Bay with abundant wildlife, <http://www.ospreyphoto.com>

May 6: BIKES. 9 a.m. to noon, Vienna calendar photo op at the Bike Rodeo, Vienna Volunteer Fire Department, <http://www.viennava.gov/calendar.aspx>

May 6: ABSTRACT. Joseph Miller Abstract Photography Exhibit, May 6-29. Artists' reception is May 7. For details, visit: <http://nvacc.org/home/abstract-exhibit/>

May: WILDERNESSCAPES. Photography workshops with Johnathan Esper in May, July, October and other dates to the Adirondacks, Cuba, Greenland, Faroe Islands, and Iceland. For details, visit <http://www.WildernessPhotographs.com>

July 31: CONTEST. Deadline for the Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts Photo Contest For details, visit: <http://vaswcd.org/photocontest>

September: NATURE'S BEST. 21st Annual Nature's Best Photography Windland Smith Rice International Awards Exhibition at the National Museum of Natural History (<https://naturalhistory.si.edu/exhibits/natures-best-2016/>). Closes September 2017.

Ongoing: SMITHSONIAN. Classes related to composition, S. Dillon Ripley Center, Room 3113, 1100 Jefferson Dr. SW, Metro: Smithsonian Mall exit, <https://smithsonianassociates.org>

Ongoing: NAT GEO. National Geographic in Washington, DC stages wonderful evening programs, featuring entertaining and instructive stories and photography. Programs begin at 7:30 pm and usually last about 1 1/2 hours, with open seating and free parking in the underground garage entering from M and 16th streets. Tickets cost less than \$25, with a discount if you subscribe to "National Geographic" magazine. Purchase online at <http://www.nationalgeographic.org/dc> or call 202-857-7700 for information and tickets. The next series runs **from March through May 2017.**

Aug 31: DEADLINE. The deadline for submitting photos to the Town of Vienna for their 2018 Calendar. The scenes must be within the town limits. The dates for events in the town are at <https://www.viennava.gov/calendar.aspx>

VPS THEMES FOR 2017-2018



Sept. 20	Nature Summer
Oct. 18	Ducks/Birds Famous places/buildings/memorials
Nov. 15	Working (animals, people, machines) Street Photography
Jan. 17, 2018	Simplicity Abstracts in Nature Digital Art
Feb. 21, 2018	Black & White Winter Digital Art
Mar. 21, 2018	Night Photography Animals in Motion
Apr. 18, 2018	Things that Fly Photojournalism
May 16, 2018	Town of Vienna Flowers Digital Art

VPS Board Members



President	<i>(Vacant until 2017-2018)</i>
First VP	David Kepley
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PSA Rep	Kathrin Swoboda
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Dir Publicity	David Heagy
Membership	Paige Counts
Dir Website	Gloria Spellman
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VP Field Trips	Lori Saunders
VP Operations	Joseph Morton
Social Events	Carol Carroll
Exhibits	<i>Vacant</i>
Gift Cards	Julie Cochran
50/50 Raffle	Julie Cochran
NatureVis.Rep	Bill Mugg

(To contact the club, please email webmaster@vpsva.org)

FOCAL POINTS newsletter is published monthly except for a combined July/August issue. Please email member news, story ideas, stories, and low-res photos to Editor Barbara Saffir at Barb22030 at yahoo.com.

VPS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION: JULY 2016 through JUNE 2017

Mail this Application and your check (Payable to: "VPS") or cash to:

VPS, P.O. Box 1212, Vienna, VA 22183-1212

or attend a VPS meeting and give your payment and application form to:

Paige Counts, Membership Director, or Burgess Levin, Treasurer

I am a **New Member** OR **Renewing** I have been a VPS member since the year (____)

First Name* _____ Middle Initial ____ Last Name* _____

Street Address _____ City-State-Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____ Cell _____

Email (required) _____

NOTE: To receive the VPS Newsletter *FOCAL POINTS* and other membership messages, you must provide a unique and valid email address. *FOCAL POINTS* is distributed by email and on the club website as a PDF file. You will need an installed copy of Adobe Acrobat Reader on your computer to open it.

PRIVACY

Membership records are maintained by the Membership Director. Periodically, the records are distributed to members to manage VPS's business. Membership records may also be shared with the Nature Visions Photo Expo as part of VPS's participation in that event. Membership records are also available on the VPS website to club members only. VPS will not provide member information to persons or to organizations outside the club, other than specified above. Members may opt to restrict the display of their membership records to other members as follows. **Please check one of the two options below.** This will govern how your records may be displayed to other members on the VPS website:

INCLUDE ___ my name, phone number, home and email addresses. (This is the default option)

DO NOT INCLUDE ___ my phone number, home and email addresses. Please, include only my name.

DUES PAYMENT

I have enclosed my check or cash for:

\$40 for a **Single** Membership \$20 for non-renewing members joining after January 31.

\$60 for a **Family Membership** \$30 for non-renewing Family Members* joining after January 31

\$15 for a **Student** Membership (age 18 or under)

*Family members, please make **Separate Application** and use **Unique Email Address** for each member

VPS Liability & Publicity Release

In consideration of being given the opportunity to participate in a Vienna Photographic Society (VPS) field trip or other event, I acknowledge, agree and represent that I understand the nature of field trips and other VPS activities, and that I am qualified, in good health and in proper physical condition to participate in such field trips and activities. I fully understand that field trips and other VPS activities are conducted in different environments, and that, accordingly, my photography equipment and I may be exposed to dangers and hazards both natural and man-made. I fully accept and assume all risks and all responsibility for losses, costs, and damages I incur as a result of my participation in VPS field trips or other activities. I hereby release, discharge, and covenant not to sue VPS, its officers, directors, agents, independent contractors, volunteers, members and sponsors.

ADDITIONALLY, I authorize the use of any images submitted to VPS for use by VPS solely for publicity activities such as websites or brochures.

Acceptance of terms of VPS Liability Release (If under 18, parent or guardian must sign):

PRINTED NAME _____ Signature _____ Date _____

PARENT'S NAME _____ Signature _____ Date _____

