



New Nature Photography Rules

by [Chris Widdall](#)

The following bulleted paragraphs detail the new definition of nature photography, which has been adopted by the PSA (Photographic Society of America), the PAGB (Photographic Alliance of Great Britain), the RPS (Royal Photographic Society) and Le FIAP (Fédération Internationale de l'Art Photographique).

The effect of standardising the definition will enable a consistency across all types of competition. This year, the L&CPU (Lancashire and Cheshire Photographic Union) have also adopted the definition for their Individual and Club competitions. It is therefore very important that all OPS members are aware of what can and cannot be entered into nature competitions under these rules.

The new nature rules are shown as bullets. *The italic sections* are intended to interpret the rules and are my own interpretation in some cases plus some sections paraphrased from the PSA explanation by Daniel Charbonnet, FPSA, EPSA, Vice-President, PSA Exhibition Services. The article by Mr Charbonnet can be seen in the PSA Journal, September 2014, where a fuller explanation is given.

- **Nature photography is restricted to the use of the photographic process to depict all branches of natural history, except anthropology and archaeology, in such a fashion that a well-informed person will be able to identify the subject material and certify its honest presentation.**

The subject should be depicted in its entirety, and lit to show as much detail as possible. It should be sharp and well detailed e.g. should not be enlarged so much that fine detail is lost. Depth of field should be as great as possible given the limitations of the camera. For focus-stacking, see later.



This should be OK - it shows the whole insect...all six legs can be seen and the insect is shown from head to abdomen.

The story telling value of a photograph must be weighed more than the pictorial quality while maintaining high technical quality.

The PSA explanation says that "Technical quality includes primarily exposure and sharpness (and IMO, correct colour rendition, which is important in identifying a specimen). Pictorial quality includes composition, quality of lighting and impact."



This is strong pictorially with great impact but would not be eligible as it doesn't show all the bird.

- **Human elements shall not be present, except where those human elements are integral parts of the nature story such as nature subjects, like barn owls or storks, adapted to an environment modified by humans, or where those human elements are in situations depicting natural forces, like hurricanes or tidal waves.**

Some examples of human elements that should not be present, some of which are given in the PSA article are: "Roads, paths, vehicle tracks, fences and posts, signs, Electricity poles and pylons, wires, buildings (or parts of buildings), walls (or parts of walls), tree stumps cut by man, Jesses on birds..."



Has this log weathered sufficiently to be acceptable? - it was originally a cut log. However, the shot is slightly vignetted, so won't it do at all now? It will if it is lens vignetting, but not if it is added in post, apparently. Hmm.



This bullfinch is also on a cut log, but the ends don't show, so that's OK?

- **Scientific bands, scientific tags or radio collars on wild animals are permissible.**
- **Photographs of human created hybrid plants, cultivated plants, feral animals, domestic animals, or mounted specimens are ineligible, as is any form of manipulation that alters the truth of the photographic statement.**

So horses, cats, dogs, poultry, cattle and sheep, llamas and alpacas are not eligible. Even the white horses of the Camargue are not truly wild - they are herded like cattle. Neither are: cultivated and hybrid plants eligible. However, note from Chris: wild orchids are truly wild flowers and they do naturally hybridise so are presumable acceptable.

- **No techniques that add, relocate, replace, or remove pictorial elements except by cropping are permitted.**

You cannot remove anything (even a blade of grass or bright spots on leaves), unless it can be cropped out. You cannot add any elements in...so please don't touch the clone tool.

- **Techniques that enhance the presentation of the photograph without changing the nature story or the pictorial content, or without altering the content of the original scene, are permitted including HDR, focus stacking and dodging/burning.**



This damselfly has a rather uneven background...if you are skilled at burning and dodging or selective use of curves, levels etc, you can even up the tones this way. If you are not, you cannot artificially blur the background or clone over areas to make it better. So, better hone your dodging and burning skills then?

The PSA clarify this by saying: Adjustments that enhance your image without changing the content include exposure, color balance, contrast, sharpening, noise reduction, conversion to B&W, straightening, re-sizing and cropping.

However:

Deliberately blurring the background is not allowed.

Adding a vignette not originally produced by the camera is not allowed

- **Techniques that remove elements added by the camera, such as dust spots, digital noise and film scratches, are allowed.**
- **Stitched images are not permitted.**
- **All allowed adjustments must appear natural.**
- **Colour images can be converted to greyscale monochrome.**
- **Infrared images, either direct-captures or derivations, are not allowed.**
- **Further:**
- **Images used in Nature Photography competitions may be divided in two classes: Nature and Wildlife* (at the organiser's discretion)**
- **Images entered in Nature sections meeting the Nature Photography Definition above can have landscapes, geologic formations, weather phenomena, and extant organisms as the primary subject matter. This includes images taken with the subjects in controlled conditions, such as zoos, game farms, botanical gardens, aquariums and any enclosure where the subjects are totally dependent on man for food.**

*There is no Wildlife category in the Inter-Federation Competitions and Wildlife criteria do not apply there.

Personal Comment

Disclaimer: what follows is my own comment and is not endorsed by the society, the L&CPU or the PAGB. It is a personal view of what is happening in the world of competition photography.

Time will tell whether this set of rules will enhance or take away from good nature photography. For those who enter high level competition, for some it will be a godsend, a return to "purity" in photography. For many ordinary club photographers, it might be seen as a curse, something imposed from "on high" to spoil the enjoyment of their hobby and continually threaten them with disqualification.

Clearly, the rules are there for a purpose...I did judge a picture of an animal once and commented that only three legs were visible..when I saw it again on the wall of a photographic salon, it had four legs, but both hind legs were identical, thus it did not maintain the photographic truth of the matter.

Unacceptable.

We have all seen beautiful pictures of birds in flight that have had a completely new sky dropped in...this is just not on for nature - if you do it, put it in the pictorial/general/open section!

But as I judge, should I really care if you have spotted out a minor distraction in the background? Do I care if a beautifully photographed bird is sitting on a cut log - not at all, if the log looks pretty! Definitely I should care if you have added ear tufts to a squirrel that weren't there, or an extra leg on a spider - but, in my opinion, what we should be looking for is photographic truth of the subject - that it was actually there, with that background, which is natural and that the photograph is technically good with a bit of pictorial impact too.

But a word of warning...we are all at the mercy of the "rule police", who are determined to wipe out of existence all competitors who infringe their strictly drafted and occasionally totally illogical rules...to the extent that some bodies are writing into their rules that they reserve the right to demand to see the original RAW file. As a digital photographer of almost 20 years now, I would automatically spot out intrusions in the background of my shots, even nature shots - for goodness sake, I did it in the wet process with spotting inks! I will now have forgotten what I did to the image in the first place if I edited it more than a week ago...so the best and safest way is to always go back and look at the RAW file before submitting the edited version...just to make sure you are within the rules.

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Jan 2015