



4-5-2012

Captured: Lessons from Behind the Lens of a Legendary Wildlife Photographer *by Moose Peterson*

Howard O. Clark

HT Harvey and Associates, Fresno, CA, hclark@harveyecology.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/wnan>

 Part of the [Anatomy Commons](#), [Botany Commons](#), [Physiology Commons](#), and the [Zoology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Clark, Howard O. (2012) "Captured: Lessons from Behind the Lens of a Legendary Wildlife Photographer *by Moose Peterson*," *Western North American Naturalist*: Vol. 72 : No. 1 , Article 18.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/wnan/vol72/iss1/18>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Western North American Naturalist Publications at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Western North American Naturalist by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

BOOK REVIEW

Captured: Lessons from Behind the Lens of a Legendary Wildlife Photographer. 2010. Moose Peterson. New Riders, Pearson Education, Peachpit Press, Berkeley, CA. \$54.99; 396 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0-321-72059-7.

Moose Peterson, acclaimed wildlife photographer, has produced a hefty account of his experiences over the past 3 decades photographing wildlife as they occur on the landscape. His research and trial and error in the field has led to an amassed repertoire of photographic skill that is nearly unmatched anywhere else. In this volume, he shares his insights, advice, and thoughts on this growing form of photography. Here, he captures the essence of wildlife photography in 8 chapters and 4 appendixes, all covering a particular aspect of the craft. The book has a unique appearance because the cover looks like a leather-bound journal. The rustic feel continues within, as on almost every page is a photographic tip or piece of advice “taped” on the page, like “No shot is worth harming your subject.” The photos, which are certainly the highlight of the book, look like they have been placed on the page with corner clips. These features set up a mood for the reader to enjoy an “off the cuff” photographic presentation.

Moose started out rather humble but eager to learn. His mind was a sponge, and his never-ending barrage of questions only made him a better wildlife photographer and naturalist. Any object was a worthy subject—from the common species in his backyard to the stuffed toy animals he used to study lighting. When things didn’t work out, he would labor even harder to get the shot he wanted. He needed to understand how animals behaved, which is key in understanding wildlife in the field. When he first started wildlife photography, there were no Internet resources; he had to read scientific journals, such as *The Auk*, *The Condor*, and the *Wilson Report*. From the information in those journals, he was able to grasp basic wildlife ecology and behavioral processes. Research led to other helpful books;

2 guides are commonly mentioned throughout *Captured*: (1) *The Sibley Guide to Birds* (Sibley 2000) and (2) *A Guide to the Nest, Eggs, and Nestlings of North America* (Baicich and Harrison 1997).

Moose has photographed 127 threatened and endangered species during his career and has worked with 217 biologists. That’s very impressive because it shows that there is more to his work than these simple numbers: he has become a spokesperson for species in peril and the people who study them. His photos communicate to the world that wildlife species are in trouble and need help. His work is critical to the conservation effort and does more to sound the environmental crisis alarm than anything else. Many of his photos have become the rallying cry for endangered species such as the San Joaquin kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis mutica*) and the blunt-nosed leopard lizard (*Gambelia sila*). I would not be exaggerating if I were to say that the recovery of some endangered species may not have happened without Moose’s help.

The best parts of the book are the stories about his experiences in the field, not only with the focus species, but also his interactions with researchers and biologists. He brings a lot to the table—not just as a wildlife photographer donating his time, but as a fearless worker—from collecting insects for the Attwater’s Prairie Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido attwateri*) to helping capture Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis canadensis*). He’s quick to lend a hand, and in exchange he gains knowledge on the species and comes away with some outstanding photos. Some of his writings in *Captured* are extremely informative; I especially enjoyed his account of the American pika (*Ochotona princeps*), a flagship species in the new field of climate change research. His work with the pika is well worth a read (Chapter 7).

With experience comes connections. For example, Moose’s work with the bighorn sheep opened doors in Alaska. While there, Moose wanted to photograph a moose (*Alces alces*), but before he could, he needed to be interviewed

by the director of the Kenai Moose Research Center. The director had a bad experience with a photographer before, so things were not in Moose's favor from the outset. During the interview, the conversation about photography was going downhill fast, so they turned to biology instead. Moose was able to provide insight into an antler growth problem and copper deficiency. This piqued the interest of the director, who asked if Moose could provide a contact name. The contact was Vern, the biologist whom Moose helped on the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep capture project. The director then asked, "You're *that* photographer, aren't you?" Moose was wondering about the meaning behind the question when the director said, "Did Vern ever tell you about his Ph.D. defense?" Nope. Moose had done photographic work for Vern's research and those photos apparently were used in the defense. The director continued: "At the end of Vern's presentation, the oldest, wisest, crustiest member of the panel, who makes the room nervous just when he shifts his chair, paused and cleared his throat. 'I don't know much about your science, but those are the damn finest photographs I've ever seen!'" With the telling of that story, the director welcomed Moose to the research center (p. 241). Stories like these make *Captured* a unique volume.

I read *Captured* with the mindset of a biologist (my profession) and not as a photographer (I take hundreds of photos of wildlife in the field, but I use a high-end point-and-shoot camera). Most of the photographic jargon was lost to me, but I was able to learn many of the basics Moose was communicating. Lighting is key to a winning photograph, as well as back-

ground, focus, color, and action (what the animal is doing). You need all of these things to tell the story about your subject. Sometimes you need to get on your belly to get a good shot and sometimes you don't, but you have to decide within a few seconds. Photograph everything—it cannot hurt.

Sometimes Moose goes into lengthy detail about a shot he was trying to pull off. One time he spent 40 minutes approaching a nesting Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*), a photo later used by Nikon for a poster (p. 339). The photo was not included in the book—I would have liked to see a shot that took 40 minutes to get!

In conclusion, Moose's book is almost like a photographic autobiography. The 3 decades he has spent capturing wildlife species has led him to become their voice through images. The book contains only a glimpse into the mind of Moose Peterson—I am sure he could have expanded each chapter into its own book and photographic portfolio. But be that as it may, he has produced an interesting volume that will surely be a sought-after tool for both photographers and wildlife biologists alike.

LITERATURE CITED

- BAICICH, P.J., AND C.J.O. HARRISON. 1997. A guide to the nests, eggs and nestlings of North American birds. 2nd edition. Academic Press, San Diego, CA.
SIBLEY, D.A. 2000. The Sibley guide to birds. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, NY.

Howard O. Clark, Jr.
H.T. Harvey & Associates
7815 North Palm Avenue, Suite 310
Fresno, California 93711
E-mail: hclark@harveyecology.com