

Moose Podcast #432

Moose Peterson Harry Fox. And welcome to Moos podcast number 432. Credit profiles, owls. I'm not sure how exactly to do the the greeting, the salutation this particular podcast because I've sadly heard from a couple of you who lost your homes in the fires in Southern California that have been raging this past week. So I can't say how you're doing because I can only imagine. Not really. Well. The ones I reached out have reached out to me. I mean, I know you've you know, I've just loss of words, right? You've I can't imagine losing your home and the speed and ferocity in what you did. So. Prayers are with you all and all those who have had the good fortune not to deal with that or any other. The natural kind of disasters going on right now. I thank you for tuning in and hopefully you're sending your prayers and good wishes and if not clothes and money to help those folks. It's it's a tragedy. So. Yeah. It's not the way to start the year. Hey, I'm using the Adobe Beta podcast with the I voice enhancement. Couple of you reached out to me, said it was, it didn't sound quite like me so I've dialed back to 50% this week was at 90% the recommended before. So let's see if that makes an improvement. I'm very grateful, though, that you folks have reached out and let me know. Now remember that you can find the podcast on the blog post each Monday and there will be there a photograph that that has to do with the podcast as well as other links. And the same time, you can stream the podcast at Spotify and Amazon in those places. They also have the translation for those who want to see the words, translations are getting better and better. Somehow they're managing to catch up with my unique style of verbalization. So, hey, that's all there for you. So this last week, CBS happened in Las Vegas. Wasn't really a big one for photography other than the cool thing was Nikon had in a case and I remember these events two items there space ized or moon ized z9 that they were doing for NASA and then the thermal blanket that will wrap around it when they're out there. The thermal blanket products, really cool. I mean, right now, it's it's a warm 26 degrees right now and spitting snow here in Montana. I'm going to be in later on today in Minnesota, where it was supposed to be -7 to -17. So that that thermal blanket, that would be really nice. So that's the only real interesting news. Bedford's my good friends at Bedford's camera. You know, it's the new year. Most people got a lot of blessings at Christmas, so they don't head to the camera store as much, but they're still there. I know. I got to use Coolpix a that I mentioned in the last podcast from Bedford's vast use selection. No matter the brand or the item from flashes, the camera, bodies, lenses, all that. They have new and used. The best part is they've got the folks to help you find what it is you need. So Bedford's you get go through Bedford's XCOM, you can call up one of their stores, you can head into one of their stores. The new one, they're in Kansas City. They've got just marvelous prices. And when you mentioned Moose, you're going to see that discount if you check out and that's cash getting put back into your pocket. So Bedford's the sponsor or Moose podcast. Great, folks, please tell them thank you for all they do is for us photographers and for sponsoring the podcast Bedford XCOM. Creator profiles. So this is something new to the podcast this year that I thought it would be. You know, I talk a lot about how you can improve your photography by just, you know, engaging a little bit more about the mind and the heart. But I thought I'd give you a little more hands on material kind of functionality, kind of information at least 12 times this year. And I thought I'd do it in these critter profiles. And I'm going to talk about owls today. Why am I talking about owls? Well, I love owls. At this point in

my career, I have photographed every single North American owl species multiple times, with the exceptions of the saw it. I've I've seen them. I've never gotten glass on them. That's the only one I have not photographed. All the others I have photographed pretty liberally. I love them. I've had the great experience of working with a researcher with the Southern Spotted Owl out of Big Bear Lake. He put a mouse on my head and the owl came down. Came down and grabbed the mouse from my head. That was that was a heck of an experience. When Brant was really young, we're up in the Blue Mountains in Oregon working with great gray owls. And he was the high to a grasshopper. And I guess the owl thought he looked yummy. So he had a great gray dove on Brant, which was for me was just hilarious. Not so much for Brant. We've had and a experiences with them and they're so enchanting now. My shirt off by. Should have been watching my script. Got what? Out of order here. So I have a book recommendation on the shirt off with. It's on this topic. Go figure. It's relatively new. It came out latter part of last year is by Jennifer Ackerman. She's the marvelous writer of *The Genius of Birds*. Another great book. But this book by Jennifer is what an owl knows. What an owl knows. It's a great, great book. Undercover is a solid. It's the one bird off, not photograph, which is kind of interesting. But it's it's the science of the world's most dogmatic birds. And it's got unbelievable information with incredible up to date knowledge and science of these birds. I mean, rob the bat, the thing that if you're a photographer, why would you want to read an owl? What an owl knows. Right. Because it's about biology. Well, kind of gets into what I was going to start talking about, so I should read my script anyway. Owls have one of the most recognizable shapes and forms in nature around the globe. People know what an owl shape or form looks like. So as a photographer, that's a plus and a minus. We're going to get into that. But if it comes to finding these very reclusive and elusive critters. KING And other critters. Can make a big difference. So, for example, Jennifer points out pretty quickly in the book that chickadees and. Tit mice and crows slash ravens cover days. Jays like stellar jays Canada Jays. They also recognize the shape of the owl instantly. And and they will do what's called mobbing. So when you hear that ruckus in the forest early the morning or late in the evening. And you find those guys around, you know, that there's going to be an owl there. So that takes a lot of the the guesswork out of trying to find them, just doing that little bit of biology. So Jennifer's book, *What an Owl Knows*, is just a killer resource. And kind of brings me into what I won't talk about now for many years, Sharon, I actually rehab owls there in in Santa Barbara, California Then back in Mammoth we had. Well, mostly screech owls, western screech owls. We also had a couple pygmy owls in that process, and we did it for about seven years, which was quite a long time. Our last one, who we named Kenneth Cody, which is the part of the Latin name for Street Western Screech Owl, was actually an educational bird. We took it around to schools for three years so people could see this little bird. And little is a key word. Kenneth Cody was about the size of my hand opened up. Screech owls are small. We have very small owls. The smallest being the owl. There's little thing maybe as big as your thumb that most people know of from a Derek Canyon, Arizona, to the big guys, you've got physical size, big, great gray, weight wise, great horned owl. And we've got all of them from coast to coast, spotted a border all the way up to the Arctic and down. We have a lot of owls, but they're they're kind of hard to find. So in this process, the reason why I'm talking about owls right this moment, as in the second week of January, is for many locations throughout North America. Now is when they're trying to find a mate. To start the nesting season. I know it

seems early, but they they tend to. And you guys keep in mind, these are all generalities. Things are slowly changing, but they tend to start now. And we have our gray horned out here at the ranch in in the valley. He's been pretty active. So to back up a second, we have occasionally cottontail rabbits. They're not real common because we have fox and other predators, including owls. So they seeing them is kind of sporadic. In the last couple of weeks, Maggie first told me that they're around with her nose and then I was in the heid and I'd see him bopping around kind of before dusk. And then about four or five days ago, I guess five days ago, Sharon saw the greenhorn. Our first hunting are what we call the back nine. And then the next couple nights I saw it right at dusk gliding past. And I have no doubt it was looking for that rabbit or rabbits. And then last night when I was out with Maggie at 10:00, I heard him out there calling and he's calling because he's looking for a mate. So this time of year is a great time to be out. Don't have to spend lots of time. You can do it from your car if it's really cold, just turn off the engine and the music and just listen and you'll hear owls broadcasting and they're looking for that mate. And that's the first indication. You have owls in the area. You want to photograph them. That's really kind of an important part. Now, once you do that, you have to be a bit of a sleuth. And in the book, *What a Owl Nose*, there's a number of methodologies that are mentioned in there and describe in some detail how the biologists and researchers are actually finding these guys in the field. Things from whitewashed owl pellets. All these are indicating day routes and night routes and you guys are finding nests. Okay, so you're out there, you're looking for them. First thing I want to caution you about is that owls can be and have been known to be dangerous. Most the most famous case it's in a book is an English photographer named Eric Hosking. And this is back in the seventies and he was 28 years old at the time. He was a pretty accomplished bird photographer. He wasn't new to it. He knew his basic biology and he was photographing a tiny owl that ended up and tawny owls, a big owl. It's not a little guy. It's a big owl. The tiniest swoop down and and hit him in the face. And he actually lost an eye to that owl. It hit the eye and that was that. So you've got to remember that they have a lot of power. You read about some of the owls that aren't in North America and the power they have and their talons. It's formidable. So keep that in mind. Next, they're they are secretive for a reason. So when you find one, the first thing you have to do is go into motion. Really slow down. Really? Really. I had a group with me a couple of years ago on Great Horned Owl, and it took us about an hour to walk 50 yards, 60 yards around a position to photograph that owl. Why so slow when you go slow like that? The owls, in my personal opinion, to say, oh, well, one, they respect my space. Two, if they're that stupid, how dangerous can they be? So you going really slow. Small steps. Now owls have incredible eyesight, but even better hearing now that most species, their ears are not perpendicular on their head like ours. They're there, you could say, at nine and at 4:00 or ten at 4:00, I should say. And that big facial disc they have up brings those sounds they hear into those ears to which they can triangulate. I mean, you've got the spotted owl, which is such a great hunter. You can it's hearing is so good that when a flying squirrel hits a tree trunk at night, it hears that sound and is able to actually know the distance and place and launch and pick that owl off that trunk. Let that and that's that's amazing hearing so as as photographers as you're slowly walking. You don't want to be making a ton of noise. If that's a de roost, you're going to wake up the owl and it's going to think it's a predator, because if you move fast, that's how you know, they tend to do when they're about ready to rush the prey, not when they're stalking it. If it's at

nighttime, more likely the owl is going to be hunting and you're going to interrupt its hunting. It's going to go somewhere where it can hear easily. So slow motion. Really slow. Okay, now. Let's say you've got eyes on the owl and you're making progress towards it. Now we got to deal with the photographic part of it. Hers can be complicated. So most of the time. And when that's not the case, you know, knock on wood, count your blessings. It's low light level. So you're probably got to raise your iso right about. That's just going to be a given. It's dark and they're moving. They're not they're not just a statue. So you've got to raise it. 1600 or 30, 200. There's the first start. If it's really dark, you might need to bring in flash, which is doable. Here's the caveat. You've got a now both those eyes or forward on their head just like ours, where most birds and a lot of mammals have them on the side of their head. Both the owls eyes are in the front in Agile. You'll read in what an owl knows all those cones they are to reflect and bounce and amplify light. If you just put a flash in a hot shoe, you're going to have you're going to have purple eye for a red eye that even Photoshop can't deal with. It's unbelievable. If you just put it up your standard bracket, you're going to have that same purple red eye. Does it go away? The minimum distance above the lens axis. The flash has to be to remove that red eye. A purple eye is 18 inches. I have an extensive bar that's 21 inches, so I have my normal flash arm on the Z 600 F4 Tse lens. And then on to that I've extended I have a 21 inch extension bar, so the flash is going to be there high above and that way you can light up the bird. Don't make it look like you're a Hollywood, you know, opening. And it's just like this headlights. You want to have just enough to kiss the bird, but at 21 inches, you won't have any of that red eye. Purple eye, because that could be the death of a photograph. But I try, try, try, try not to have to use flash one because carrying a flash around one is extended that high. You have to watch for four boughs of trees because you can hit them and you have to have the alignment. So it hits just perfectly at the distance that you're focusing or else it won't kiss that bird. So there's a lot of challenges and you're already trying to walk so slow and quietly. And so that flash just complicates. All right. So you've got either that or the other. Now you have those those two eyes. Here comes an important question you might not think of. Do I want my photograph smile to have one eye or two eyes? Now, if you're photographing a bird, a regular bird, like a pasturing. Right. One I trust that's. That's normal. Everything that's that's kind of like. Yeah, that's how we see birds. Just one eye. But that's not how we see or more importantly, perceive owls. So one I. Yeah. I try to avoid one. I now can one. I be a sliver, not the whole round. I of course, but boy, having both eyes really makes a difference in that owl photograph. So you try to have the owl's eyes forward and I believe don't quote me, read what an owl knows. But I've always under the assumption that an owl can rotate its head 304 degrees, 340 degrees. I think that's what it is. It's not a full 360. But anyway. That's a lot of rotation. So in the process of it, echo locating you, that's hunting, that head's going to rotate. So you want to think about that. The other thing is also that head is moving. Their head is moving and your shutter speed is it fast enough? The thing that needs to be sharp, the eyes will be out of focus. So a bunch of things to think about there. Now. This is one thing to think about that you might want to practice with a local tree, and that is you want to bring out the roundness in the owl right there. They're kind of chunky. They're round. They're not they're not your shape of a of a raptor or a woodpecker or pasturing. They have that very unique shape and they're round and they're so soft when you look at them. And if you ever have one in the hand, which since I did all those projects from the Foragers Pygmy out to Spotted Owl, I've had lots of owls and off and

rehabbing. And in my hand there are. The feathers are. Just thick, thick, thick. Their bodies is little thing, but inside they're, you know, so that cute round softness needs to come out in the photograph. That means our light has to be super, super, super spot on. Not necessarily mellow now. So you can't use harsh but you've got to think about you want to show that round shape that's why you find a tree trunk or I like to use stuffed animals and you look at those and you kind of rotate them in the light because you need a little bit of shading right on the sides to show that it's round. But you want to have enough light to show all that beautiful breast which has all those great patterns and colors to them. You want to do this normally with all birds, but with owls because they're so cylindrical on that branch, it's really important to show off all their endearing features. So lights are really important. This kind of brings us up to that one of like last things to really think about in it. You can shoot it vertically or horizontally. That's really got to be something that that's in your mind, because right off the bat, you most people tend to go and it's logical vertical that makes sense because it's more or less a vertical subject. The thing with that is when you go vertical, people tend to get really tight and owls need space in the frame. I mean, if you can get just a head shot with a facial disc and eyes, definitely go for it. But that's really the rare exception. That's not the generalized rule. So thinking about horizontal, right, placing it, a couple of things happen. First, you don't think it as close physically. When if you just do the math, you can see that since you go vertical, you have to get at least 40% closer to get the excuse me closer They get the same image size as if you were to shoot horizontal. So percentage of frame coverage. So horizontal. Also, if you're looking at. Editorially or prints on the wall. Horizontal works in a lot of homes more than vertical. If you want to talk about the space in which it's living because sometimes they will pick the most picturesque tree branch area to be in. You want to show as much as possible. Then horizontal plays to that. Lastly, if it's thinking about launching an it's hunting, you definitely want to be horizontal because try to shoot vertically. An owl which has such a big wingspan and so broad vertical, it'd be really small on the frame. So you want to be horizontal for when they launch. Now, if you don't have those conditions, it's not haunting, it's hunting. It's not going to be flying any time soon. The busyness around it needs to be somehow a lot of those branches eliminated. That naturally then brings in the vertical format, which if you want to make life easy, you would do it with telling converters rather than physically moving. As soon as you talk about moving with owls, what happens? You have to go slow. So getting close physically can be time consuming. And if the light is going down because you find them at the dusk, which is probably the most typical time we find owls active, the longer you take, the less light you're going to have So it's like juggling balls or wildlife photography. After that, then you get the shots. Focus on the eyes. If the tip of the mandible is not tack sharp, not a big deal, but the owl eyes and its breasts are almost always on the same plane. So you focus on the eyes. The breasts will be sharp. That's what you want to tell. That story of that owl. So there you have it kind of in a in a. Shoebox. Photographing those incredible critters we call owls. And that's the first in our critter profiles for the year. You folks have absolutely a great week. Again, my heart goes out to all those folks in southern California. Prayers are with you. Everybody else, get out there. Make the most of this new year. Enjoy this time of year. It's a great time. Get out and shoot. And remember to make every click. Your story.