

Moose Podcast #436

Moose Peterson Howdy folks and welcome to Moose Podcast number 436, Songsters of the Wilderness. How you folks doing this week? Hey, you're gonna be listening to this knowing that we've got new Super Bowl champions. I'm not gonna be a spoiler in case you haven't heard the news yet, but wow. What a game. It's very cool. Well, it's a delightful minus twelve right now here at the old homestead. Birds are going through suet like crazy. Oh my gosh, going through the pounds of it. But uh, a lot of females including pileated woodpeckers I know, it's, it's uh, you know, February 10th, but uh, spring isn't that far away, so if you're thinking about doing nesting birds, now's the time to To start making preparations both finding where activity might be happening as well as your gear. So I hope all that's making for a really great time. Keep me warm and thinking inside. This podcast is coming through Adobe beta podcast using the AI voice at the fifty marker. I appreciate you, those of you who, who let me know how it sounds. Uh, it just, uh, makes life a whole lot simpler for me. Now part of this is the transcript. So we head to the blog post for the podcast. You'll find a transcript that's created by the Adobe beta. It's not as good as the one that's done by Castros that's posted at Spotify. So if you're looking for the better of the two transcripts, head to Spotify, which at the same time you can head there and you can leave comments. Now this past week had a couple presentations. One was for the Scouters at Philmont. And it was really nice to see some familiar faces and hear from them that They're starting to listen to the podcast. I did another presentation, really delightful group of people in Livermore. And, uh, some more podcast fans. So I'm grateful for all of you. And that's why I'm here doing it. And you know, you all tell me that there's always some nugget somewhere in all my dribble and drabble during this podcast that just makes it worth your while. That just makes me very happy. So thanks so much for that feedback. Hey, had you heard the news? There's some stuff that's come out. So Bedford's at Bedford's.com sponsors of the Moose Podcast is where you could go get the new Nikon P1100 Coolpix. It's a crazy camera that I see out used a lot by birders. Just a great digital camera with a huge long zoom lens. But probably a little bit more to our drool factor is the new Z35 1.2. Or I receive emails. Yes, it's on my list. I need to check it out. But I already have the Z51.2 and love, love, love that lens. If you look at the photographs that McNally put out of, with, well, If you check out the photographs that I only took with, there we go, the Z3512. God, they're luscious. Gorgeous. Gorgeous focus and light. Oh, how could you not want that lens? And of course, Bedford's is going to be the place for it. And answer a couple questions this week while I talk about my friends at Bedford. That's where I get my Benro gears at Bedford. They have all the The gear that the Benro Mammoth and Wildlife Head, the Tortoise and all those. Yeah, Bedfords. They're the ones, man. I call them up. You can call them up. You say... This is what I would like to accomplish. What do you suggest? And they're going to make suggestions for you. Doesn't make a difference. The brand doesn't mean the difference, the genre you photograph. Bedford's camera are just great people. They're pros of what they do, and they're there to help us, us being photographers, just be a little bit better and more successful at it. She'll check them out, call them up, go to one of their many stores, bedfords.com, and make sure, here's the key here, You tell them that I sent you. It's going to save you 5% after you check out. So that's Bedford's. Bedford's.com. So I have a book recommendation for you. A little bit of an older one, but it's probably proved itself more than a lot of books, especially one

that is, God, I went and looked at the date. It scared me. 1981. 1981. The Wolf, simple title, The Wolf by L. David Mack. Now, I was shocked when I went to, uh, Looks up some things about, you know, and one of them was that my autographed copy is now worth over \$2,700. So you don't need to go buy an autographed copy, but you need to go out and get The Wolf by L. Devin Mack. He wrote the book literally, figuratively, on wolves and he did it long before the introduction of wolves in Yellowstone. They use his book in many ways, and he went there personally, um, to look at what was going on there, but this is the guy, he, he, um. He put in a lot of field time and if you haven't put in field time you don't understand the dedication it takes to sit and look When there ain't nothing to see, waiting for that one moment and then you make a whole lot of observations and notes. Well, he did that for a long time. Then he put it all together. And The Wolf is an amazing book. It will... It will grab your imagination and it will give you a lot of information you need as photographers. If you want to photograph any canine, especially wolves, So that's The Wolf by L. David Mack, 1981. Songsters of the Wilderness. I thought this would be a good month for me to do a critter story about wolves. Now, it was early eighteen boy, I am stuck on that, early 1980s, and Sharon and I were in the thick of seeing Witnessing and photographing California's wild heritage. A lot of it was vanishing. We have a distinct species in our slide files. It's a fact that I never take pride in. It always upsets me. Well, one of the species that we were way too late to see were the wolves. They got extirpated from California probably no later than 1910, somewhere in there. You know, they started... 1890s, they were hardly ever seen if they were at all. And after 1910, they weren't seen, period. And they're kind of a success story because they've come back to California and That just speaks to the, this incredible critter, this songster of the wilderness. Well, in my trying to see and put together all the tapestry that is California's wild heritage, Sarah and I headed up to Alaska because that's where some of the stuff still flourished. Back then, and this would have been 1985, we got what was called a pro pass. You submitted to the Park Service, had to literally show that you were a professional, send in tear sheets, And things like that. And state why you wanted to go up there and you should have access to the backcountry unfettered. No one was going to, you know, supervise you or anything. You're on your own. Well, 1985, we got our first one and we're in the back country. So we've gone past the last checkpoint and we've gone in and we're in the back country. And way off in the distance I saw a speck. It was on the road. The road is a, is a gravel road. And it's coming at us. And then all of a sudden it clicked in my head. Well, that's a wolf. We were out in the middle of nowhere. And here's a wolf. So we pull over. And I do my usual thing. Even way back then. And I got out the 7200 and stuck it on the camera. And then I leaned against the front tire, front left tire of the truck we had rented. And I waited. And here comes this wolf. And it's just loping down. I love watching their lope. It's just so beautiful. Calm and peaceful and it just kept coming. And then all of a sudden way off the horizon I saw one of the buses appear. And the buses I was like, oh, he's probably gonna make the wolf. Go off the road. So I waited. Now I always will, I still don't remember why I selected the 7200 Most of the time I, you know, I, I had a, they, oh, they entered him in the truck with me and that would have made sense case he pulled off sooner. I would have gotten something image size in the frame. Cause I, like I said, I'm shooting film. It is what it is in that, in a film world. But I had the 7200 and he just kept loping. And in a matter of seems like seconds now thinking about it, he was right there with me as in Right there with me, I could not even focus. Nope, he come right over to me, right there against the tire, and he sniffed me up

and down, back and forth, left and right. He didn't make a sound. He never put his ears back. His ears were forward. He was just looking at me and sniffing at me. And that was that. He looked on past us. And I couldn't hear it. That was a funny thing. I couldn't hear him making footfalls on that gravel. That bugged me. Couldn't hear him coming towards me and couldn't hear him going away. So I counted to five. Turn around and look. He was gone. He wasn't on the road. I didn't see him anywhere. He disappeared. Later that day, Sharon and I, for the first time, heard The songsters of the wilderness calling off in the distance. I was hooked. I was hooked. Now wolf encounters, unfettered wolf encounters are nearly impossible. The one place we go to enjoy wolves is Yellowstone. Which is one place you're not going to have an unfettered encounter. No, no, no, not at all. Especially when you hear, you know, a couple weeks ago, it's being told about one photographer that now has a... A lifetime ban in Yellowstone because of their actions with wolves. Yeah, they were so, um, horrendous, for lack of better terms. They're no longer allowed in Yellowstone. Rest their life. So when you have that side of the photographer coin, they've got to manage for the worst, right? Because if something goes wrong, we get back in our vehicles and we drive back and have dinner and sleep in our rooms and we're, we're comfy. The wool's dead. Am I being overdramatic? It's probably been four years, no, five years. There was two cubs, uh, two pups, uh, And at this point it would have been late fall. It was November-ish. So they were kind of adult size and people were feeding them crap like corn chips and stuff. And wolves are in many ways just dogs that, you know, dogs eat all that stuff. Well, they kind of got habituated and a week after we saw them, they got hit by a car and killed. So it is a serious thing. So how do you see wolves unfettered? And then how do you photograph them? Well, just like I was mentioning, Mr. Meck, he showed us the way. You gotta put in the field time. You gotta put in the field time. As I mentioned in the last podcast, you know, I put in over thirty years in Yellowstone. And after thirty years, it wasn't, keep in mind, it wasn't 24-7, 365, you know, I was, I'd spend about five, six weeks a year in the park. But after all that time, finally got to witness a takedown and a kill of a bison. And time is the, is a big part of it. The other part of it is planned luck. Seriously. And plan luck means you can understand to the best of our knowledge where they're going, what they've done, and what they might do next. And each pack's got such character. It's hard to do. Now I rely on my friends like Bob and Rick and other people in the, in the park. And I start talking to them about ten days and they always know when I'm coming over because I'll start saying, what's happening? What are you seeing? And when I'm there, I do the same thing. I tell them where I've been and what I see and, and I, and I give them kind of, uh, Biological clock time kind of information. And then from there, you've, Kind of just plan your luck. Plan on being in the right place at the right time. And it sometimes worked like it did a couple weeks ago and we got to see the takedown of the kill. So the first thing you got to know in photographing these guys is they're really big German shepherds. So the more lens you have, two things are gonna happen. One, you can be physically further away, which means the National Park Service We'll let you enjoy your encounter because there are way too many people try to walk right up to them and that's just not necessary. As soon as you do that ruins it for everybody including the wolves. So the longer the lens you've got, the better it is. As soon as you get the long lens out, you have to worry about heat shimmer. Yeah, it could be minus twenty That sun still bounces off that snow. You still get heat shimmer. That can cause things just to be not in focus. And if that's the case, If you see that going on, you have to realize you

need to take a bigger burst than normal. So, let's just say, for example, you've got a wolf that's posed and you've got him, let's say, filling half the frame. And the AF kind of wavers a little bit. And you look through the viewfinder. You're not really sure it's tack sharp. You've got heat shimmer. When you have that scenario, you've got to rip off twenty or forty frames. Because somewhere... In that twenty to forty frames will be one shot where the heat shimmer will lay down enough you'll get sharp eyes. It takes a lot of time and patience. And that's probably the next most important tool you have after that long lens and knowing how to deal with heat shimmer is taking a deep breath. Being a panicked photographer, it just doesn't work. When you, for lack of better terms, camp out. You hold still. You don't move. You just wait it out. Things always happen. They always do. Wolves, I can't count the number of times where I've heard them. You've got to realize that I love listening to these songsters and their hows they've learned. They can tell individuals and distances and places and what's going on from their old hows. It's not just a song. It's, it's, it's amazing. And the number of times I've heard that and I've just stopped and I've parked, you don't see nothing, nowhere. And sometimes you can use ravens to find where those wolves are doing their things. But I'm here to tell you, if you just park, I'm talking about Yellowstone right now. Denali doesn't work as, as the same. But in Yellowstone, you just park and You'd be surprised what will happen in the next sixty minutes. You have to keep doing a 360. What's that mean? That means that probably every three to four minutes I'll do a complete 360. I turn and look slowly and I look at all the shapes continually. I keep doing it over and over again. The number of times I've seen just a pair of ears and eyes on a horizon line, I've lost track. And that might be my only Viewing of a wolf. But it's, it's, they are such an engaging critter that when you, you do it right. And you know in your gut. You know in your gut. And those of you who don't do it right, you know what I'm talking about because I've yelled at you out there. Because we are We are the guests in their homes. And they have a really hard life. And it's amazing what they do on a daily basis. But when you go out there and you do it right, There is nothing more rewarding than to be kneeling against a tire in the middle of Alaskan territory with nobody else around and a wolf comes up. Gives you one, two, three, sniff over and then just evaporates back into the wilderness. The songsters of the wilderness. What a critter. You folks have a marvelous week. You guys up in my neighborhood stay warm and remember to get out and shoot and make every click your story.