

Moose Podcast #438

Moose Peterson Howdy, folks, and welcome to Moose Podcast number 438, Working the Boardwalk. How you folks doing this week? I trust you're doing well. I am back from a real fabulous week of bird photography on the east coast of Florida. It was, uh, really quite rewarding. And it was interesting to see that spring has really kind of been full swing down there. Here in Montana, we still have snow on the ground, but it's been raining, so it's disappearing, and the birds... Well, their numbers have definitely increased in the last ten days. Starting to see some territorial behavior going on. It's kind of fun to watch our Pileated woodpeckers. It seems like we might have two pair. They're kind of like, um, starting to defend a little bit of the ranch as being theirs, which is really exciting. So now is a great time to get out with your binoculars. And if anybody's got the new Nikon, um, stabilized binoculars, if you would be so kind as to email me, tell me your thoughts, let me know. I'm thinking about checking out a pair. But if you've got them, let me know. I'd love to know how they work because now is a great time to be out with binoculars, watching birds, watching birds' behavior, and getting ready for some nesting bird photography. So it's that time of year. I can't believe already coming to the end of February. This podcast again will be, uh, is being recorded through the Adobe beta podcast using the AI voice cleanup. I need all the help I can get. Keep in mind that the blog post on the website for the podcast will have the photograph and the transcript from the text in the content. But you also go to your favorite, uh, spot to listen to the podcast. You go to Spotify. Remember that there's a place there you can actually, uh, write a comment and I will instantly get notification and we'll respond. So remember, Spotify is a great place to ask further questions on any topic, whether it's a podcast or not. I'm here to help. Speaking of helping, Bedford's Camera, Bedford's.com. Yes, the official sponsor of the Moose Podcast. They've got their winter used gear sale going 20% off. And then, of course, you've got the old Moose discount after you check out a 5% so you can save some serious money. And I know some of you I've already got your tax refunds and, uh, looking for a place to invest them. And this is a great time and place to head to Bedford's. See what you've got and, uh, what they've got, what you need and some savings. You know, they've got the great folks, they've got the great prices, they've got the great gear, they've got the great service, so you've got to get there because it's just great. That's my good friends at Bedford Camera, bedfords.com. I'm going to dive right into this week's topic because it might be just a little bit longer. So, work in the boardwalk. Many, many locations around the country. When it comes to wildlife photography, you access them via a boardwalk. You can go to Yellowstone or to Florida like I just happen to be or in Southern California or Oregon, Washington. The list goes on and on of all the locations where boardwalks have been erected so we can access these marvelous, typically wet areas without getting wet. Working the boardwalk. I hope you weren't like going, oh gosh, what's he going to do? Put on short shorts and do some sort of dance across the boardwalk. I'm not talking about that kind of work in the boardwalk here, folks. No, no, no. I'm talking about getting out there and using these great access routes into typically wetlands to photograph the birds and mammals that happen to be there. Now there's a number of aspects to this you've got, I want you to think about to maximize your shooting potential. So for example, Let's go with just the basics, east or west. Which way is your boardwalk gonna take you through those wetlands? So for example, if it's the boardwalk heads to the east, Might not

be the best time to go early morning because the sun is going to be rising in the east. You'll have things backlit. Or conversely, if you're on, you know, the boardwalk goes to the west. Most of the locations you head to, there is a map of the boardwalk. It will show you where they are in relation to the compass. So a little pre-planning can make a difference. Now keep in mind that boardwalks you have both sides of the boardwalk to shoot from. So even though the majority of the walk might be hitting Say, for example, towards the east. Um, but, uh, there might be some spots where it projects out from the shoreline so you can get a little distance from that shoreline to the west. Then early morning might be the great time to go. But some simple, easy planning can make a difference. Another one is that a lot of boardwalks are not necessarily state or national parks, but are actual County or city parks and they will have a definite time. They're open and closed, typically sunrise, sunset. It's good to check that out before you head out. So let's just think this through. We're gonna, we're gonna go, I'm gonna use for my example, Wakatahatchee wetlands there in Florida, because that's where I just happened to be. And, uh, let's just think about the process. So we, we arrive early in the morning. You've got a, a boardwalk that is kind of, uh, Two big squares connected by two singular kind of, um, boardwalks. So you go anytime you want, you can get front light or back light as per your desire. First thing to think about is the gear you're gonna take and your parking. So one thing that boardwalks attract or a lot of folks Kids with parents, wheelchair folks, handicapped folks, because they all could access that. Also, at the same time, keep in mind that your parking lot is not going to be where you're shooting. So the other aspect to think about is, yeah, those bad guys. So if you're going to the boardwalk, you shouldn't take your entire bag of camera gear. You should minimize it. What should you take? I'd first fall back on an old adage I've said many times. If you're gonna, for wildlife photography, for bird photography in particular, if you don't go out with your longest lens, you'll come back short. Doesn't mean you shouldn't go out with a short lens, but take your longest. So in my case, it's going to be the Z600F4TC. And I will often take and have it a little fanny pack, the 1.4 and 2XZ teleconverters. Now, am I going to go with the shorter lens, say like the 400-4.5, which would be a natural choice. It is an option. Some places like Wakanda Hatch, you go with an 8mm fisheye and fill the frame with wood storks. They're that close. But those are the exceptions. The majority of your shooting, especially if you want to make the most of it, it's going to be a little bit further away from the boardwalk, not closer. And I'm going to get into that. So that means that when you park, You're going to simply, if you've done it with a little forethought, have your body on your longest lens, perhaps teleconverters or maybe a simple little wide angle. I take the Z2628mm. Have them in a Fanta pack. And then I could just park, grab that lens and tripod and walk away from my vehicle. The purpose being that bad guys don't really have time enough to look at the car that you came from and they might not come check it out thinking you're gonna be gone for a while. Now way back when, a long time ago, field days, I wasn't quite so smart. Our car was broken into and a lot of gear was stolen. So, I'm telling you this out of, you know, the pain of coming back after the great day of shooting to see windows smashed and, you know, your gear all gone. So, Just something to think about. And it's, it's, it's not any more prolific now than it was then, but just got to be cautious. All right. So you're going to walk out with your longest lens on a tripod. Why am I recommending a tripod? A lot of scenarios on the boardwalk are ones where you're gonna probably have to stand for a little bit. You'll see something, and it's not gonna be perfect, but you can see where it's going to evolve

into a much better shot. It's easier if you have that tripod to hold that lens because after, you know, a morning of walking that boardwalk, especially the sun's out, it could beat you down. That tripod just keeps you fresh a little bit longer. So I'm gonna talk like I'm shooting on a tripod the whole time, which I did, I shot on a tripod the whole time. Now, most boardwalks are just wide enough for perhaps, you know, two people to go breast to breast and pass each other. If you happen to go out with your tripod and you have it, all the lathes fully open to the normal stance you would have somewhere out in the open. You're gonna run into the risk of people tripping into your tripod at the same time having someone come and comment that you're, you know, making it hard for them to get by. So first, I'm gonna typically not have my tripod legs fully extended. So they, if I Um, that is because I'm going to actually close up the tripod legs. So they're about, oh, maybe eighteen inches apart where they hit the ground. So it's not as perfectly stable as if the legs are fully out. But when you close them up like that, it will be a little bit taller. So when I extend the legs in the beginning, they're not as extended as normal because I know I'm going to close it up. To save space on the boardwalk. Then when I put my tripod down and we're using long lens technique the whole time, but that might not save you. So just bear with me. So when I put my tripod down to actually shoot, I'm going to do what I normally never do and I'm going to have a tripod leg typically between my legs and so then two legs are close to the edge of the boardwalk. That way I'm taking up as little room as possible. Now in this whole process, we don't have the most stable platform on the planet. We have the boardwalk itself and we have the tripod legs closed up. So a couple of things. I try to have all three legs on three different planks in the boardwalk. That way when somebody comes by and either, uh, A wheelchair or a, you know, something like that or a herd of kids go by. Not all the boards the tripod is resting on will get vibrated at the same time. Now, I will use long lens technique, but because I know that I'm not working on the most stable of platforms, even though you could raise your ISO to 800 or 1600 and, you know, get that shutter speed up to 1500, 2000s. Even so, if those boards are bouncing, that long lens is going to bounce. You won't get a sharp image. So if I'm looking through that camera and I go, oh, hey, here's the shot. And there's even the slightest doubt in the back of my head that there's vibration in the boardwalk. And some boardwalks kind of sway, not only vibrate, I ripped the camera so and normally if you have a question in mind if it's gonna be tack sharp or not you take five at least five frames because the middle ones will be the sharpest Yeah, when I think there's a really great shot out there, I'm gonna rip 20-25 frames. Now, in the worst case scenario, all twenty-five are sharp, and then when I go into photomechanic, I just save five of them, and the rest of them I delete. But if I have the shot that I really love and it's not sharp, then that's that, right? I'm, I'm, don't have a picture. Now with that in mind, excuse me. What, um, what should you be looking for? Well, light is very important. You want to look for the, you know, the common bird in an uncommon way. But working with that longest lens, you want a bird that is at a distance that will fill the frame, but the background behind it is a long ways off, which is one of the nice things boardwalks afford you. Why would you want the background way in the distance behind the subject? Because then it goes out of focus. So most boardwalks, at least the ones that come to my mind, are in a wetland scenario. Trees and branches, all that kind of stuff is in the background. And what you want to do is have the best possible background to make your subject pop. So the further away it is physically from the subject, The more it's gonna be out of focus and it's just a very easy way to manage all that busyness that can be in

a wetlands. Another thing to look out for is, you know, like, let's say, um, Wakatahatchee or, or, um, Palo Alto Baylands, another favorite boardwalk, and that's in San Francisco Bay. Or Coyote Hills, it's also kind of it's across the bay. It's in the, it's, it's in the Pablo Bay complexes of, of NWR. Uh, but those places you have some spots, you've got some buildings off in the background. Man, nothing can hurt a photograph more than having a pink building in the background. Okay. You got to watch for that stuff. A lot of them have wires going through and telephone wires and power lines. You gotta watch those backgrounds and probably one of the biggest things you have to think about and look at are gray skies. A lot of wetlands, of course, are on the coast. You have that morning coastal overcast. And that grayness in the top of the frame is going to pull your eye right to it and away from the subject. So that long lens, man, it serves so many functions. It gets you the image size you want. Let's you control the background. And then when you actually put your camera down, And what happens a lot, birds are going to be in a tree or a bush. You can move left or right, up or down just a little bit, an inch here or there, and twigs between you and the subject can be avoided. It's a real simple way of dealing with the world that you've immersed yourself in on that boardwalk while coming back with the shot. Now one thing about boardwalks That I see a lot of times and, and I can understand it. You get out on the boardwalk and you are now surrounded by critters. That's the beauty of them, right? Uh, and that concentration is why we're there. At the same time, it's hard to stop. It's like, it's like you get to go into Baskin and Robbins and you have a coupon to eat all the ice cream you want. You start eating it, then you realize, oh, I'm getting full, but get all that ice cream, you keep eating it, and then finally, eh, you don't feel so good. Well, when you're on a boardwalk, the lights can be great for, especially if it's, you know, possibly a, a bald sky day, right? You're going to have some great light for the first ninety minutes. And after that, it's going to get harder and harder. And that hard light's gonna cause shadows and those shadows aren't your friend. But you've got all these birds and they're up close and you wanna shoot You gotta wean yourself from that. I'm telling you that boardwalks are this great, great shooting platform for us to work from. But we need to remember that we're there to photograph and capture the light and use the light and write with that light to tell the story. So it means a lot of times that you might leave some birds that you think are just super close and great. But that's okay. Have a great breakfast. Have some coffee. Go and look at your images. Because some of the best lessons you're going to learn about photography Photography come from your own lesson, your own images. And look at those lessons. Did you center your subject? Are you not looking at the background? Are there busyness in the background that you didn't see that are causing your problems? A great example is that in wetlands you have a lot of birds that are roosting. And not to be gross, but when they're roosting, they tend to, uh, clean out their, their bowels and there's all these whitewash things. And there's nothing more distracting in the background than a branch with whitewash. It's like this neon white that's flashing that pulls your eye away from the subject. It's easy to get absorbed by that great subject. So take that high noon time when the life's not great. Let your images teach you some lessons. So when you go back out, you're going to get better shots. What else about working at the board watch you think about? One thing that I think about and that is exposure to the sun. I can't emphasize enough to think about how that sun is affecting your skin. Uh, we have done a little bit of a number on our atmosphere. We don't have the same UV protection. So wear a hat, wear that long sleeve shirt. If it's a hot and humid place like Florida can be and some other

locations, have water with you. Minimize though what you take with you out there and think about it. Um, when you're out shooting, um, It's a natural place to start talking with folks. And I understand that it's a great social event, but keep in mind that, you know, if you have, for example, bald skies, the clock is ticking in the beginning of the morning. So if you want to talk, Arrange to have breakfast together perhaps after the light gets hard or meet at the cars after the light gets hard. Take advantage of the shooting while you can and then come back later. What else? Well, once you start feeling more comfortable, you might head out to the boardwalk with two bodies and two lenses. You got your biggest lens on a tripod and then perhaps, like in my case, I'd have the Z600F4 on the tripod. And then I might have the Z400F5 on the Z63 on my shoulder. Why? Flight shots. One of the things that's kind of a challenge, especially when the day goes on, you have more and more family and kids, your maneuverability gets a little bit constricted. So we've got birds flying and that's, you know, a great thing about wetlands. They fly and they're going to be oftentimes flying very close to you. Having that second body that you can just swing up from your shoulder and shoot Really cool thing to do. There's one little thing about that, though, that makes me nervous. I want to pass you along. Remember that tripod, it's closed up. It's not fully opened up. So it's not as stable as possible. So I tend to see who's around me before I think about doing any kind of flight photography because I like to keep my at least one hand on that tripod so it doesn't go over. Now I'm not talking about going over the railing and plunking into the water. I'm talking about just going down and in the process hitting that rail and putting possible damage to the gear. So a little common sense goes a long way. The other thing to think about, especially with coastal boardwalks, is the weather. There are times when you will encounter early morning overcast or perhaps rain. Birds that are in wetlands really love rain. It's like this fresh water shower and they're always, you know, dealing with salt water. So being able to deal with that rain yourself is a good strategy. There's a, I got a lot on the website and the podcast about dealing with weather and it's just something to think about. If you're going to go out and you see the rain, Prepare yourself to be able to actually shoot the rain because the birds, they kind of celebrate it. And that celebration, of course, comes across in your photographs. Other than that, all I can say is you've got boardwalks around. They're a great place to go shooting. Even if there's just one bird. You know the access to them out there. They're kind of habituated to people on the boardwalk. You can get shots that you're not going to get otherwise and you'll get them more frequently. So As spring goes forward and you look around, think about that. Because I'm here to tell you, we want some really great bird photography. Working the boardwalk is a great way of doing it. You folks have a marvelous week. Gonna be, uh, March next time we speak. In the meantime, you guys take care and remember to make every click your story.