

Moose Podcast #445

Moose Peterson Howdy folks and welcome to Moose Podcast number 445, Hummers twenty-five Well, that was an interesting week. I'm kind of glad we, uh, have gone through that and we're on the other side at this point. I didn't hear from a single soul last week. I am not surprised. Uh, personally, I, I ducked behind my camera and uh, I didn't come out. And uh, it worked out pretty well. I hope you found solutions too to deal with all that is going on and just keep in mind that that passion for photography will get you through almost anything. So I am, I think, using Adobe podcast. I think the beta is gone. I, uh, logged in to record. And everything is kind of new, which includes everything that I had recorded is no longer there. It's all gone. You can find the archive for the podcast. They're on the website. Top banner, you'll see Moose Podcast Archive. I do keep copies of everything, but, uh, I'm assuming that Adobe podcast is, uh, gonna be even better and they've taken what they have learned and put it into this. So you have to tell me if you, uh, you hear anything better or change or the transcript you think is better. I love to hear your feedback. Well, this past week, um, Well, I'll wait a second to get into it because it kind of ties into what's going on with this episode of the Moose Podcast. I'm looking at my notes. Yeah, notes again. Um, so in that process, I'm going to skip and go over to, uh, yeah, well, kind of ties into everything too. It all ties in. Interesting, Moose Podcast, everything ties in. What are the odds? Well, my good friends at Bedford's, that's bedfords.com, the home of the Moose Taves Count. Ha ha. Home of the Moose discount. Boy, this is going to be a long one. Too early Monday morning. Anyway, have some projects coming up. Did some homework. Talking to, uh, our son Jake who owns one and seeing what my good friend Chuck did with it. Went out and got the Nikon Z180-600. It's been out for about a year now. I have one. I needed one. Called up my good friends at Bedford's. They told me they had ten in stock. Yeah, baby. I said, wrap that puppy up and there it was Mr. FedEx the next day with that lens. And that's what's so great about Bedford's. They have the inventory, they have the knowledge, they got the great service people, the great service, and of course the pricing. And does Moose get the Moose discount? Yeah, it's kind of nice. I like saving that money. So, you know, whether you're buying whatever brand or accessory or item, whatever your need is or what you think you need, right? Gotta admit it, we're photographers. We always get things that, uh, we don't always get things we need. We get things we want. Bedford's is the place. If you don't know, they've got seven stores. You can walk into them. You can call up, um, talk to them. You can go online. All of the above. They're gonna, they're gonna help you out. They're great. And when you do, at the end, if you check out, you're gonna see that, uh, you're gonna save some serious coin with that moose discount. That's why I gotta say, I want the moose discount. You're gonna get it. Whether it's on sale or not. So, those are my good friends at Bedford. Bedfords.com. Thanks, Bedfords, for getting that Z180-600 to me so quickly. Perfect timing. Well, so I have a book recommendation and it kind of ties in with what I'm going to talk about, Hummers twenty-five So Sharon and I were... In Missoula, going to my favorite bookstore. It's been my favorite bookstore. We started going there, I think, in eighty-nine I think it was eighty-nine And it's the book exchange there on Brook Street. And the book exchange... Back in the day, used to have this massive photography book section. Photography books, yeah, they don't make as many as they used to, sadly, and not enough go to stores, but um, that's what started to Attract me to the book exchange and they had an even bigger natural history

section, which they still do, which always gets me in. Then they have this great Montana historical section. But one of the great things about the book exchange, as the name implies, We can take books in, we can sell them our old used books, and we get a store credit that we can use to buy new books. Well, new to us, but they're used books, and in that process, You can find some real gems. So this last, I was just in there. What was it? Friday. Yeah. Friday morning. And there was this old book, F.J. Haynes Photographer, put out by the Montana Historical Society. Now, Haynes, if you don't know, was this photographer that was around... Late 1800s, early 1900s, uh, traveled, uh, extensively through, um, uh, Montana and photographed, documented, uh, A lot of the life, both natural history, uh, scenics, locations, and then the, the, uh, the trains, the, the planes, the, the sheep, the cows. It's a great book. And it's a, it's a, it's a. Big book. It's in great shape. Twelve bucks. And it's, it's, I'm just absolutely loving it. That's F.J. Haynes, photographer by the Montana Historical Society. It came out in the, published in the 1970s. Kept on looking, and I don't know if you know the author, Malcolm Brooks, a really good author, picked up a novel, which I normally don't have time, but this one, it's a Excellent one. It's called Cloudmaker and it just came out last year. It's just, uh, it's just a really, really good read. That's Malcolm Brooks, Cloudmaker. But the thing that was really the best set off for me, um, which I thought, wow, it was meant to be, is, uh, There is a book from 2001, by Michael and Patricia Fogden. Hummingbrew is of Costa Rica. I mean, yeah, it was used. I picked it up for, uh, seven bucks, originally \$49.95. Great condition. Now, 2001, it's an older book with older photographs, but it has all the Costa Rica hummingbirds photographed in there except for one species. So, that was a lot of work they put in, and you think about it. 2001, that means that they were probably in layout and all that kind of stuff in 2,000, So all the photographs are all done shooting film, not digital. So that's one, that's a lot of work to photograph them, especially when you see, um, all the lighting they did. Cause you know, back then, wow, that was a lot of work. And then of course it's, since it's all film, what you see is, you know, what they shot, uh, Today with AI and stuff, you never know, right? I really hate that part. You have to really, there's no one's teaching the craft of seeing to, to, to, to, to know, but I thought, wow, this is a really cool book. It's 2001, Hummingbirds of Costa Rica, Michael and Patricia Fogden. I've already gone through it, read it, yeah, just a couple days. It, um, it has some great information. Great inspiration. They actually, uh, Had a really cool bit of it done at Rancho Naturalista. Yeah, it's been around that long. If you didn't check it out this, I think it dropped Friday, my moose shooter report about Rancho Naturalista, but it had that and some other locations in there, two of them that are no longer existent, but it's just, uh, it just ties in with this week's talk, uh, Hummers of twenty-five So like I keep mentioning the beginning of the year, the second week of the month, I was going to do a talk, a podcast on critters and I'm going to do this week on hummers because basically that's what all I've been really kind of Living for the last three weeks have been going down. We've been going down to the Lee McCaff National Water Refuge. And, um, uh, last, uh, weekend, it's pretty quiet. Um, Then on Wednesday, um. Tuesday, Sand Hill cranes appeared. Wednesday, the ospreys. So it's starting to, the birds are moving back into Montana. And I'm really looking forward to it. We got to get that little lulls right here. And right now, we have no hummers here. And I really, after spending all that time in Costa Rica, really would love to spend some time with those hummers. So, hummingbirds. They are a very unique group of birds, only in the New World, which means basically North America, South America, Central

America. And in all reality, they really kind of concentrate in Central America and South America. Here in North America, we're kind of on the northern edge of their range. Uh, and because of that, we only have a few species compared to what you might find, you know, uh, Costa Rica and South. And that, uh, kind of makes hummingbird photography, especially in some regions of the north of the US, uh, kind of a challenge. For example, if you, if you go, um, to, uh, East of the Mississippi, right, you basically only have the ruby-throated. Now there are, of course, birds have wings and others show up, but the vast majority of species, okay, show up kind of Costa Rica and further down. How many? Well, you know, you, you, you've got, it depends on who you talk to. Um, there are probably, you could, you know, let's just make it easy. Number ten ten species of hummingbirds. Um, in the U.S. That's, that's it. Most, a lot of those are migratory. And you might say, well, that seems like a lot until you realize that and depends who you talk to, there are between 336 and 365, species of hummingbirds in the world. So of, you know, and some people say there's as many as fifteen species in North America. So let's say we go with that, that high number, but that fifteen is in no comparison to perhaps the 365, we can go both extremes, okay, that are, that are, you know, in the world. And amazingly, twenty-one species of hummingbirds are endangered. Now, not all hummingbirds are called hummingbirds. Um, there's 112 genera in, in the family of, uh, hummingbirds and hummingbirds. The actually get the name hummingbird in their name, their common name, uh, tends to be because you can actually hear their hum when they're flying. Some of them do not make that. And what's that hum come from? Well, it's a, it's a it's kind of biologically technical, but in simple terms, they're nectar feeders and they all kind of specialize on certain flowers and And you think about it, Central and South America have a gazillion native flowers compared to, say, you know, the U.S. So because of that, And their strategy, they have a different set of wings and wing beats as well as a different bill or mandible. They all have in common a tongue that wraps around their skull and comes out. It's very retractable. You've seen that. But, um, you know, you talk about diversification, you've got some hummingbirds that, like the bee hummingbird in Cuba or the snowcap that I was having fun with down in Costa Rica. They are, you know, half the size of your pinky, if not smaller. They're really small. Then you have some that are almost the size of, uh, Oh, I guess you could say a house finch, a purple finch. They're really big and they have really long bills. There's one so big that there's a spider called a hummingbird spider. That weaves a web just to catch the hummingbird to eat it. Yikes! Anyway, they are a very diverse group of birds. Taking that a tad further, You have some of them that wing beats are as slow as fifty beats per second, per second, per second. Some that are as fast as eighty beats per second. That's nothing compared to their hearts. Some, their heartbeats are, you know, a little normal. I wouldn't want to have this when I went to my doctor, but the slow ones are twenty heartbeats per second. Where the other ones are cranking out 200 heartbeats per second. It's just amazing diversification. And you might say, well, that's just, that's just crazy. Especially when you realize that the energy, uh, take calories in the How much nectar does a hummingbird have to take in each day in order to keep that kind of, uh, uh, crazy heartbeat going, right? Cause you, you know, they, you're talking about a bird that might live in the perfect, perfect, perfect world. Maybe, maybe five years. There was a banded, ruby-throated hummingbird that was known to be alive for six years and eleven months. But, uh, that's really, really abnormal. We're talking about, I mean, these itty little birds that weigh .14 of an ounce. I mean, and some of them go

as fast as sixty seventy miles an hour. Mind-boggling stuff. But how does this all come down to you as the photographer? Well, if you're like me, they are amazing. Just a blast to photograph. So, how do we go about that? Because we need to know some of this basic biology to make that kind of thing happen. You gotta have the birds come to you. Now, I have friends down in Phoenix whose hummingbirds that they have in their yard have nested and have fledged two months ago. We're here in Montana. We're still waiting for the first one to show up at our feeders. Now, we woke up yesterday to snow on the ground again. So flowering plants, there are some, but are there enough to attract hummers? Not in our little yard. And that's the first thing we need to think about if we're going to photograph them is bring them to us. There's no, I mean, you can't chase them. That's just not even... Not even practical. I mean, it's not, it's, nobody's got that much time. Nobody. So you need to bring them in. It's somewhat a controlled situation, which is why I like to go to like the Madera Canyon in Arizona or Rancho Naturalista down in Costa Rica. Where they've established for decades food and food plants for these guys. So you can go online and you can look up plants that attract hummingbirds. There's quite a few. You gotta look at the region and realize that those flowering plants are great, but the blossoms don't last all summer. So that just naturally leads you to putting out hummingbird feeders. Now the first thing about hummingbird feeders I gotta tell you about and really assist about is don't use that damn red food coloring. It doesn't do anything but harm. It hurts the hummingbirds, okay? Studies have shown how it can actually cause this little growth on their bill, kind of looks like a cancerous thing, and they die from it. So no red food coloring. That leads you to the two options, the sugar and water, which is the most common way and definitely the least expensive, which we did for many, many years, until I learned about and saw what hummingbird nectar does for hummingbirds. Now, hummingbird nectar is a powder. You don't have to boil water, all that kind of stuff. You just need warm water, stir it in. It's the same basic ratios, one to four. And it comes from hummingbirdmarket.com. It's the hummingbird food they use at Madera Canyon. Uh, it's gonna cost you, uh, probably 300% more than just plain old white sugar. Uh, well, the way sugar's going, maybe even less. But the thing about hummingbird nectar is it has other things in it just other than sweetness. It has proteins and other things that the hummingbirds would get from flowers. Because when they go in for nectar, they're getting little bugs and stuff too. Itty bitty microscopic ones. One thing about the hummingbirds of Costa Rica book, they got a great shot where the mites are on the bill of the, of the hummingbird. It just had picked up while it was feeding. I mean, that's my, and hummingbirds themselves have feather mites, but these are ones that are getting from the, they're eating that microscopic protein, which the hummingbird nectar has. And by, when we started using it, which has been, Four years now. I must say it's four years. We instantly found that the hummingbirds, we got more hummingbirds. They fed more often and they stayed at the feeder longer. So if you want to photograph hummingbirds, Having more that stay longer and there's, and I mean, it's just like a win-win. And when you think about the cost of camera gear, you know, spending a couple of dollars more for that, it's like a no-brainer. So that's Hummingbird Nectar from hummingbirdmarket.com. Now, in photographing these little dudes, first, before I go any further, you can go to the video that I just posted on On my moose shooting report for Rancho Naturalista, and there is the exploded view of what I call the Hummer Rig. Talk about that in a second. So it's all there. It's all exploded. You can see every piece. It's all labeled. And then you can go to YouTube, and I believe it's 2023. There's a two-

part series of photographing hummingbirds at Madera Canyon. So those videos, which right there, you've got almost an hour of video information on how to, I go about photographing them. So I'm not going to go through all that now in the podcast because I'm not going to take an hour to do it and you don't see any pictures. But getting to the heart of the matter, you don't want... To do all your photographs of them just sitting on your feeder. That just, you get bored real quick. And that is the shot that most people go for. You want to get the shot of them coming to and from that feeder. And That brings up how many feeders should you have? It depends on how Much of a shooting gallery you have in your backyard, you have to look at that background, you have to think about the light, time of day you're gonna shoot. You gotta realize that you put up one feeder, there's probably one that's gonna, a Hummer that's gonna like Think it belongs to him and but that's okay that all works out in in the photographic process as long as you just You think it through. Because you want to have it such as that you get most of the shots of them kind of flying towards you, not flying laterally to you. In other words, not coming into the scene constantly right and left. But more kind of diagonally straight towards you. That's the more interesting shot. So you want to set up your feeder or feeders because you can photograph different feeders during the day, right? Based on light and background. And you can, you can shoot As long as you have hummingbirds. So like I mentioned, uh, friends in Phoenix, they have hummingbirds twenty 365, twenty-four seven here in Montana. Um, I actually have a hummingbird feeder. That's got a camera in it. So I know when the first Hummer shows up, and then with that, there's a blog post on this, this whole feeder. I can see when they show up, who's showing up, how often they're staying, I can figure out what time of the day they're here the most. So then I can maximize my shooting time, which is the whole goal. Then comes the photographic setup, the Hummerbrick. It's important to understand that birds, all birds, their feathers are meant to reflect light. And through the miracle of evolution, They all have evolved with different colors to attract the opposite sex. And I got, I really would love to know. What Hummer decided, oh, I'm going to make myself blue and green and purple because that's going to turn her on. And the next one goes, I want green and red and white. How does that work? Anyway. You need to have light that will reflect off those feathers and bring the light through the lens to the film plane. If you have just one light and knowing that the angle of incident equals the angle of reflection, And you've got something round you're photographing that you're probably going to miss 80% of the color because only 20% is going to see the light and be reflected back through the lens to the film plane. So that's the heart of the Hummer rig. I have the two Profoto A10s. They're on a bracket. The bracket is really kind of the Achilles heels whole thing. I've tried to get different manufacturers to make them, but they say it's not a big enough market. So the bracket to hold these flashes in general is forty-five from the lens axis and forty-five from, um, um, out and up. And hold it there. So as you. Pan with the hummingbirds, the lights are in the same position relative to the film acts the whole time. That bracket, that's the biggest challenge. Like I said in that video I posted this week, last week on Costa Rica, you can see the exploded view and what I, the current bracket that I'm using, um, with those new, uh, smart rig hawk locks that work really well for the flashes. Now, the light itself, I'm not using the flash to stop the motion of the hummingbirds. I don't want to freeze them. I want to see those shots. In fact, I actually got closer this time to the shot I want because the hummingbird wing pattern when they are Kind of stationary is this somewhat of a figure eight. And they're both wings are doing this figure eight. And I got one

shot that's kind of close to actually showing that figure eight. In a still image, there's lots of it in time-lapse, but I wanted a still. So it's a combination of that flash bringing out the color and then using some shutter speed Fast enough so the body is sharp. Slow enough that the wings blur. It's quite the combination. So what are the numbers? In general, This is strictly in general. ISO is going to be 1600 Yep, you probably just felt the earth kind of shiver again. Yep, I'm using a high ISO. 1600 ISO. The flashes power basically around five They're not even. I have ratios because we only have one sun. I don't want to make it look like I have two suns. I don't want even lighting. I want you to see the curvature of that body, that little plumpness. So 1600 ISO. About five on the, on the flashes starting point. I'm typically shooting with that Z400-45 with a 1.4, which would give you 5.6.3. I open it to close it down to f8. And then typically I dial in minus one exposure count because I'm using aperture priority, which gives me the average shutter speed of about one 250th, one 400. Those are the basic numbers. If you go and carve those numbers I just said in stone, you'll never succeed. Those are just starting points. Just starting points. Everything will be constantly fluid as you change backgrounds, the sun moves, Those are basic numbers. And with that, I shoot. And I shoot and I shoot. Now a typical session for me to spend with hummingbirds is probably I'm gonna say between two and a half and three hours, at which point I take a break. I am, I am, uh, there are times where there can be so much, so much activity, I can't make it an hour. And I, I shot, People don't know how many pictures you shoot. There are times I have, I've shot, oh, in a, in a one hour session of hummingbirds, I bet I've shot 2,000, 2,500 images. Now in that process, you're going to get a lot of things. You're going to get a lot of tips and tales. And one thing you get a lot of are blank frames. And you're going to say, I know there was a hummingbird when I hit the button. They're just lightning fast. They're gone. And that's part of the fun. And, and you just keep on shooting. In this whole process, you have to take the time and go back and look at your images and see what you did right and what you did wrong So you can move forward. I mean, that is just, that is essential. Uh, there is so many, uh, variables in this whole things, uh, as far as exposure. Focaling, size in the frame. Did you shoot the right alley or left alley? Uh, there's this, you know, where is the best shot this time of day? And you start going, oh, well that Hummingbird is a female. I don't want so much time with her because she doesn't have much color. That's a young male just came out of the nest. He doesn't have all of his color. You start getting more particular and you only do that when you actually take the time to look at your photographs and look what's what's right and what's wrong. And then I think, I think the best part of this whole process. And this could be just me, I know. The best part of the process is when the camera is put away and then I go back out and I just enjoy the hummers at the lambs here eating the nectar and at the feeders going back and forth and Watching the different characters, there's definitely, you know, the Rufus shows up and they always think they're boss and then the Costas show up and they don't care what the Rufus thinks. They're going to do their thing anyway. Then I got the black chin that's kind of almost scared of its own shadow. And you watch it, and that's probably even, to me, even better than the photography. But it all comes together. It's just, uh. The beauty of Hummer's twenty-five You folks have a marvelous week. Get out there and shoot. Share those photographs. Say hello. And remember to make every click your story.