

OUTDOOR & TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY

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SEA HUNT

A Step-by-Step Guide to
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INDIA

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RISKY BUSINESS

A Wildlife Photographer's
Guide To Staying Alive

- AERIAL PHOTOS YOU CAN TAKE
- SPOTMETERS FOR DIFFICULT EXPOSURES
- THE RIGHT ZOOM LENSES FOR WILDLIFE



Our Readers Write

Stop the Oil Spills

Recently, I have been doing a great deal of research into oil spills and their effect on marine life. Your article, 'West Coast Oil Spill Underscores Environmental Risks,' is a very awakening and factual account of the recent oil spill off our coast.

Since I became a diver, environmental issues concerning marine life have sparked my interest. My research on oil spills has left me very concerned about the great coast of British Columbia. If the government and citizens of BC, alike, do not get more involved in protecting the marine environment, the vast regions of beautiful coastline are in grave danger. We must ensure protection of our final frontier.

*Brian Pedersen
British Columbia*

Editors Reply:

Yes—and now we have the Alaskan spill. See Fathoms this issue.



Enlightenment

As a 25-year resident of Hawaii with a special concern for sea turtles, your article 'Diving with Turtles in Hawaii' (Jan/Feb '89) left me with mixed emotions. On the one hand, photography can certainly play an important role in enhancing the public's awareness and appreciation for marine life, as in the case of our sea turtles protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. To my knowledge, no turtles here, or elsewhere, have ever died from being 'shot' with a camera. On the other hand, great numbers of scuba divers with cameras repeatedly intruding into sensitive underwater habitats, such as places where turtles rest on the bottom, could easily constitute a harmful activity. Sea turtles breathe air, just like we do. When disturbed or provoked to swim when they don't want to, turtles are forced to rise to the surface to breathe more often. Unlike the camera-carrying diver out to get a picture, the turtle has no scuba bottle on its back.

What is the solution? The best guidelines, in my opinion, are common sense, self-restraint and regular reminders to dive tour operators that Hawaiian sea turtles are threatened and endangered species stringently protected by law. Take pictures, but

from a distance and in such a manner to not disturb, harass or alter the turtles' normal behaviour. Going home with good photos is a rewarding part of any vacation. But doing so at the expense of a gentle sea turtle would surely only result in an ugly reminder of poor ecological responsibility. As a diver myself, I know that most of us are included in this category if we have accurate information on

how to properly conduct ourselves while underwater. The recommendation in your article of getting 'close, really close' to a turtle is misguided advice. I hope that by publishing this letter a more enlightened attitude will be realized.

*George H. Balazs
Honolulu, Hawaii*



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Of Special Concern to Our Readers

It has recently been brought to our attention by several readers that our Spring 1989 cover depicted an improper scene—a model swimming with a green sea turtle. The sea turtle is a species protected by the U.S. Endangered Species Act, and should not be disturbed or harassed in any fashion that alters the animal's normal behavior. Clearly, hitching a ride on the back of a sea turtle for photographic purposes falls under these restrictions.

It was an unfortunate mistake that we chose a cover which depicts this activity. We are a magazine that constantly stresses the importance of respecting and conserving the wilderness and wildlife. The image was chosen for its technical photographic excellence, without realizing its impropriety. It was photographed quite some time ago, apparently before awareness had been raised on the dangers of handling sea turtles.

We greatly appreciate those individuals who brought this to our attention, and we assure our readers we will exercise greater editorial discretion in presenting images resulting from the interplay of photographers with endangered species and other animals.

Once again, we must stress that sea turtles and endangered species must be viewed and photographed in a fashion that does not put stress on the animal or disturb its natural behavior. To do so may result in stiff fines and other legal action. The same respect should be given to animals that are not endangered. In many articles, we have made statements that suggest trained animals be used in any photographic situation involving handling, close approach or other activities that could stress a wild animal. We hope you will take this advice to heart.

Jenni Bidner
Editor-in-Chief

Finding out the Facts

I enjoyed your Summer 1989 issue. I enjoy your magazine a lot; it is one of the finest of its kind. One of the things I like about it is the Photo Facts section following the feature articles.

This issue was of special interest to me as I have just returned from a trip to Utah, including Cedar Breaks National Monument, Bryce Canyon, Zion, Arches and Canyonlands National Parks. I was very impressed with all of these areas, and with the photographs in this issue. Keep up the good work.

Irwin D. Foy

Advice from the Cockpit

The Summer 1989 article on aerial photography, "Above it All" by Tom Till, hit all the right points from the photo technical angle. However, as a long-time pilot, permit me to add a few caveats.

First, there is a legal "nicety" that should be understood before it is ignored. If you pay someone to take you up for any purpose, that pilot must possess a Commercial license. So, if money changes hands, a pilot without a current Commercial license is in violation of

FAA regulations. Some interpret the rule to permit payment of "gas money," but if it's any more than that or if you are doing a commercial job for which you will be paid, don't put your pilot friend in jeopardy with the Feds. While this may sound like a technicality, you will find that most pilots who might think nothing of putting on an extra 10 over 55mph while driving a car on the Thruway, will be scrupulous when it comes to their flying practices. The stakes are a lot higher.

Next, the era of free skies is pretty much over in many areas, especially so in the Northeast. Asking a pilot to "go higher or lower" is okay over the countryside, but near major cities increased restrictions will often severely limit freedom to change altitude or direction at will.

Most importantly, you should exercise prudence in climbing aboard an unknown aircraft with an unknown pilot or a pilot friend with limited experience. Flying is fun and safe when you put yourself in the hands of a conservative, reasonably experienced pilot flying a well-maintained aircraft. Aerial photography, however, is generally conducted "low and slow," which is the least forgiving flight regimen. If you fly with someone whose experience you know of first hand, or if the pilot has a Commercial license and/or Instrument or instructors' ratings, you can be comfortable with your choice. The airplane's age is not a factor. Many superb airplanes are twenty or more years old; but if it looks ratty, it probably is, and you would be smart to avoid it.

Although Tom reviewed the choice of aircraft types, the fact is that a high-wing type such as Cessna, Cub or Pacer series Pipers, etc. are far and away the best choice. Low wing planes such as Cherokees have poor downward visibility and fixed windows. The only "window" that can be opened on most low wingers is a tiny pilot-side vent window just big enough to stick a lens through. Moreover, this requires you to sit on the left or pilot side of the aircraft and the pilot must fly from the right side. This is no problem for experienced flight instructors who sit there all the time, but a definite no-no for first timers.

Keep in mind that your pilot's first responsibility is safety. He has limitations as to minimum altitude; distance from and below any cloud cover; speed; angle of bank; and so on. He must at all times keep a sharp eye out for other aircraft ("traffic"), especially when engaged in the kind of maneuvering associated with aerial photography. Four eyes are better than two, and any help you can give him on this is always appreciated. No need to point out jet contrails five miles up, but a quiet tap on the shoulder or pointing a finger in the direction of a spotted aircraft is helpful.

Normal conversation in nearly all small single engine aircraft is poor at best. They're noisy. The well-equipped pilot will have one of the many headset intercom systems available today. It will make things much much easier.

Steven Hess, President
The Saunders Group
Rochester, New York