

A Song for the Asking
The Electronic Newsletter of
EarthSong Photography
and

EarthSong Photography Workshops: Walking in Beauty

November 30, 2012

Volume X, Number 4

Hello to All:

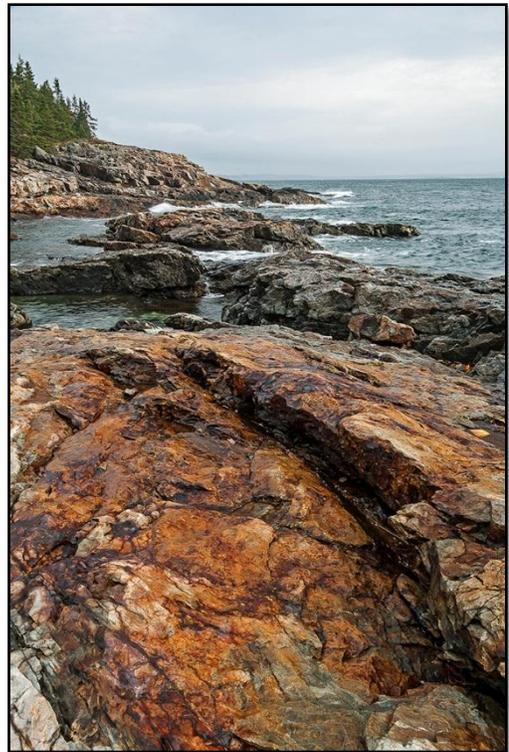
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I'll Fly Away

How does one become a butterfly.... You must want to fly so much that you are willing to give up being a caterpillar.

Trina Paulus
Hope for the Flowers

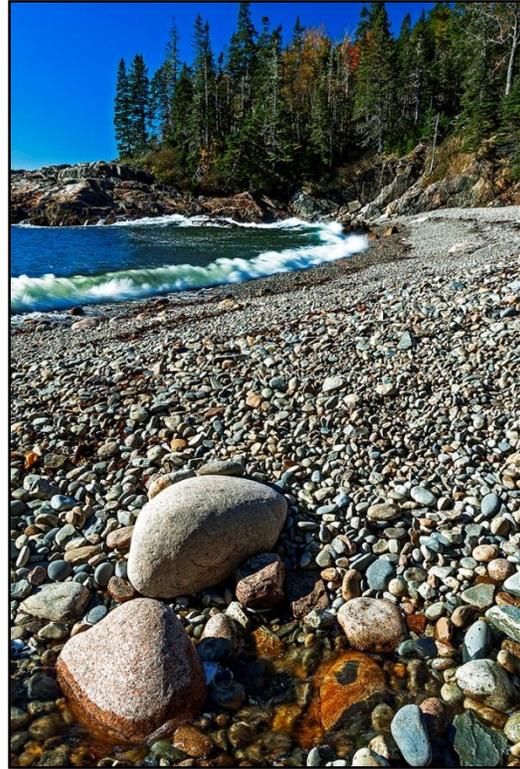
She lifted so quickly from the wabi-sabi stem on which she had been resting that in the haste of her departure I forgot to look to see exactly from where it was she had taken flight; and later I could not say for certain it was this plant or that. The meadow of her respite was thickly filled with the tall remnants of a variety late summer vascular species: asters and thistles, and at least one milkweed going to seed in the neighborhood, whose nutritional value was long depleted in the late-October chill of Sachuest Point. By the time I recognized her, she was far enough away from wherever she had been clinging that positive association wasn't possible. Perhaps she was merely resting anywhere she could as she contemplated the task before her. In her feet, since shoes were not part of her wardrobe, I might well have chosen to not contemplate the chore at all; but life gave her no choice in the matter: it was already far late in the season. Some of her brothers and sisters must already be in Texas; and here she was, looking out across the mouth of Narragansett Bay along the coast of Rhode Island, compelled by a force of genetics we can only imagine, pondering a place to which she had never been, which was a distant memory even to a grandmother, or maybe a great-grandmother, she had never known. I passed so close to her – on the



Rocks in Your Great Head

trail I was walking that skirted the ocean here as it circled around the peninsula on which Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge is located – that I startled her, and she had flown.

Now, as I watched, she looped several times above the rocky coast of the Ocean State, pointed her antennae southwest, and began that erratic trajectory that is so typical of her kind. I strained to see until she had become a dark speck half a mile away above the waters where Sachuest Bay looks out into the mighty Atlantic between Block Island and Martha’s Vineyard; and then she was gone. Into an uncertain future; she will likely never see the Southwest, much less those precious few hectares in Mexico’s Transverse Neovolcanic Mountains, where her species go, if they are fortunate – after the grueling, up to 3,000+ mile journey from the place of their birth in southern Canada, New England, or the northern Mid-West – to overwinter and await the coming of spring and the start of a new trip northward and a cycle many thousands of years in the offing. If she is over the open seas when the next storm strikes or an on-shore wind simply blows the coastline out from under her and she becomes too fatigued to fly, she will perish into the great waters. Her arrival in Mexico is mostly a dream made imperative by a fact of biology so habitual that it is encoded in her very existence. It is all-consuming and beyond any capacity she has to ignore it.



In-coming at Little Hunter

She touched me deeply, and for days afterward I was haunted by her appearance on that rocky promontory far to the north of where she should be at this point in the season. In my mind’s eye I saw her loping flight, so jaunty and almost frivolous in the face of the odds stacked against her; a silent, fierce and fragile determination moving through her wings as she headed south to meet her destiny.

She, of course, is **Danaus plexippus**, the **Monarch**, that beautiful, delicate bit of orange-and-black four-winged life that is the likely candidate for poster-child of what we think of when we think of “butterfly.” Her name goes back to the Father of Modern Taxonomy himself, **Carl Linnaeus**, who in 1758 penned the scientific nomenclature by which we know her: **Danaus** was the great-grandson of **Zeus**, and he was also the twin brother of **Aegyptus**. If Aegyptus has a familiar sound, it probably is with good reason. According to the Greek mythology that is so much a part of Western culture Danaus built the first big ships that ever existed so that he could escape with his fifty daughters to Argos to avoid their being married to the fifty sons of Aegyptus, their cousins. Of course, Aegyptus and his sons pursue them, and the story that is written of this episode is one of the great foundation stories in the history of Argos, one if the primary city-states in the annals of ancient Greece: Argos, as in Jason, Argonauts, and Golden Fleece. Her other (specific) name is **Plexippus**, he being one of those fifty sons of Aegyptus who was killed by his wife, **Amphicomone**; yep, you guessed it, one of those fifty

daughters of Danaus; but you should read the story. It's really good drama; but the only connection I can fathom between the name and a butterfly lies perhaps in the ship-building, which became, somehow, a symbol in the great taxonomist's mind for the migration/flight of this winged being, or the morphing that she experiences to become the beautiful creature she is. Perhaps it was the drama itself that had captured Linnaeus' attention, and he was reflecting on the drama of the monarch's life in comparison.

To say it simply, Danaus Plexippus is like no other butterfly in the world, and

somehow the formal name seems, well, much too formal. I think I'll call her **Athena**, and maybe it will serve her well. After all, among the winged-goddess' many attributes there can be cited her role as the patron of heroic endeavor, and my Athena is going to need all of the heroic endeavor she can amass if she is to have any hope of sipping nectar in Michoacán in December. One can only hope.

Heroic undertaking, however, is a trademark of this lovely insect. Her species alone of

all the butterflies in the world, undertakes an annual migration that can be spoken of in the same awed breath as terns and albatrosses. In fact, Athena and her kin are the only butterflies known to undertake two-way migrations in the way that any birds do; and the way they go about it is truly unique in the wide-world of migration.

For those of Athena's generation who do manage to reach the Transverse Neovolcanic range and

spend the winter hanging out there, they will come out of hibernation in February and March; they will mate and then begin the long journey back toward their summer residences. None of them will make it. Instead they will lay their eggs somewhere in Texas, and having lived perhaps two to six weeks, they will die. Meanwhile the eggs they have laid will hatch into baby caterpillars, which are, in truth, milkweed-eating machines in disguise, and for about two weeks they will do little else. Then, when fully gorged on milkweed juice, the grown caterpillar will find a place to attach itself to begin

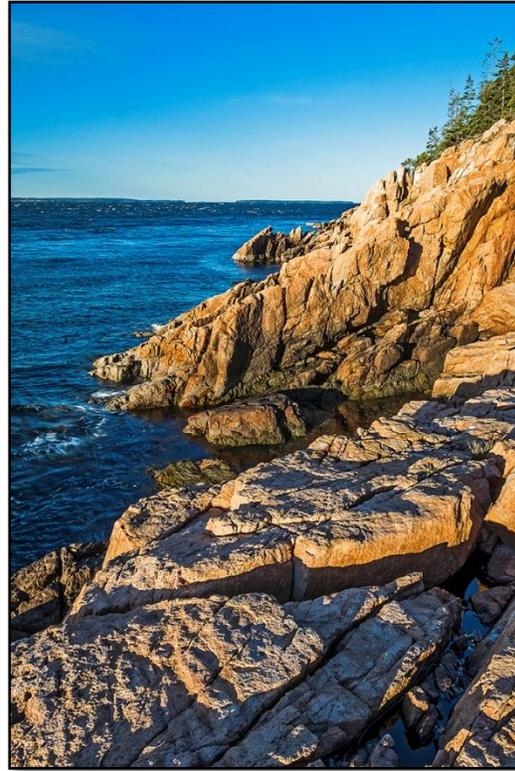


New Mills Meadow – A Duck's Brook



Duck's-Eye View of a Cadillac

that magical evolutionary adaptation trick called metamorphosis. First, it spins a house of silk, which is actually an exoskeleton called a chrysalis. Within this outer shell the caterpillar is undergoing an amazing transformation, and bodily parts that were once characteristic of a crawling creature are changed into bodily parts of flight. About ten days after beginning this process, the chrysalis opens and the butterfly emerges. Among the family of insects known as Lepidoptera, of which monarchs are a member, the chrysalis is also known as a pupa; and when the butterfly leaves it, she/he flies away to begin the same process again. And thus begins the life-cycle of generation two. It will repeat the dance of the first generation, only farther north and two to six weeks later in time. Its children, the third generation, will do much the same, but by this time the clans have reached their summering grounds somewhere between the 45th - 50th parallels, about halfway between the Equator and the North Pole: places like Minnesota and Wisconsin, Ontario and New York, Connecticut and Rhode Island. There the fourth generation will be born and undergo its feats of full-body legerdemain just as the others have done.



Rock Covers Land, Water Breaks Rock

Except this generation is special, the chosen ones as it were. This generation will not die in two to six weeks as did its predecessors. Instead, beginning in late-September and into October, this generation will begin a mass exodus southward focused on a place not only it, but neither its parents, nor its grandparents, has ever seen. It will do so with an accuracy so unerring that it may return to the very trees its ancestors found; there to await the coming of spring and the beginning of the cycle, as **Yogi Berra** said, “Déjà-vu all over again.”

Since today is October 24, Athena is behind schedule. By now even the stragglers in the family are mostly in Northern Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri. Even in a late-migration year, she is late. The leaving of the monarchs for warmer climes is a matter of both push and pull: In their bodies the essence of caterpillar is still present, especially in the abdomen. The tissue there is particularly soft and highly susceptible to temperature changes. If it stays too cold, especially near freezing, too long, monarchs can freeze, and basically be ripped apart from the inside as their bodily liquids expand. If it stays above about 95° F too long and they cannot find adequate shade, they dehydrate. There are even more finely drawn degree ranges that determine whether, and how well, they can fly in a given moment in time. So the advent of cooler temperatures in their summer places begins to push them southward toward relative warmth.

The other impulse to migrate comes from their diet. The species on which they largely depend for nutrition do not grow during the northern winters, so they are pulled south, as well, in order to find food to survive. Adult monarchs are nectar eaters, drawing the sweet liquid from a variety of sources including several milkweed species, thistles,

asters, goldenrod, and more exotic vasculars like tall ironweed, red clover, Indian hemp, and butterfly weed. The larval food-processors, by contrast, are almost exclusively consumers of milkweeds. Without them, nearly all hatchlings would die. To say it plainly, milkweed is the key to the survival of monarchs; the species of milkweed is not particularly relevant, there are quite a few that the larvae are happy to consume, but without milkweeds there are no monarchs.

So Athena, the adult monarch butterfly, must find sufficient supplies of blooming flowers from which to syphon the drink of the gods that she requires; and, as I have surveyed the surrounding terrain over the past several days, I have seen



In Pioneer Valley the Milkweeds Grow

little indication of a network of nectar factories from which she might draw nutrition. She must do this while maintaining enough reserves of strength and fat to be able to fly quickly enough to stay far enough ahead of the chilling weather which can come now at any time. So, indeed, her prospects are shaky at the very best. In sunny weather she can fly readily if the temperature is above 50° F; below that it is questionable, and if she manages, she will need regular stops for rest and food to maintain her stamina. Indeed,



under fairly normal conditions of available food and decent weather, Athena might travel 100-200 miles in a day. In fact the record, as measured by humans, is 265 miles for a single day's effort. With food levels being what they seem and weather being what it is, it is unlikely that she can anticipate breaking any flight records in her imperiled life. Maybe 50-100 miles in a day would be considered good for her at this point; but she seems game, if the weather holds.

Gone to Seed Every One

It is almost impossible that she would be carrying eggs at this moment because one of the incredible facts of monarch existence is that when the fourth – the migrating – generation is born, it immediately goes into a non-reproductive phase called “diapause”. It is in this phase that the migrating monarchs can live for up to seven or eight months: in time to reach their wintering grounds, hibernate, wake up, mate, and start the journey north. If Athena were one of the summer generations, she would have mated in

three or four days of her birth and likely be carrying the precious seeds of a new generation even now. The biggest obvious benefit of diapause is that no eggs will be laid



– and no new caterpillars hatched – in a realm where there are no growing milkweeds for them to feed on, and the prospects of below-freezing temperatures day upon day for several months are reasonably high. The calculus of Nature is amazing beyond anything we can imagine. Birds that migrate typically do so in a single generation. They fly from wintering grounds, where the weather is usually more hospitable, to their summer residences, where

A Forest in the Light

they mate and raise their young. When the weather begins to turn foul with the onset of seasonal change, the adults and their juvenile children return to their winter palaces in a migratory stream; old and young, so that at least part of them have been to where they are heading. Imagine a creature that undertakes a similar transition but requires four generations of itself to complete the task, and no single generation ever sees both ends of the journey. Imagine a biological constitution that provides for such a state of being. Imagine....

It seems to be the general opinion of the scientists who study them that monarchs evolved in the Americas, but it is now known that they have dispersed to quite a few other parts of the world, as well, where they are presently found as sub-species. Of all these other, smaller, populations of Athena's kin, only those in Australia are known to undertake any sort of true migration; and those only of a much more restricted nature than Athena's tribe. What Athena and her ancestors have done for many millennia is truly unique.



At the Marsh's Edge

Unique as she may be and beautiful as she is, Athena can't escape the fact that she has a position on the web of life and is, thus, a part of the food chain. To say this is to say, in essence, that she has enemies. And being an herbivore means that her enemies fit the classification of predator. Against those predators that would make a quick meal of her, Athena's line has evolved an elaborate, but not absolutely foolproof, defense strategy.

Milkweeds, as it turns out, are making more than just a good-tasting monarch smoothie. In the juice they produce is a substance known as cardiac glycosides, a poison that can be fatal to most vertebrates, but not so to a number of invertebrates. And there's the



rub: most creatures with backbones have learned to avoid putting monarchs in their mouths for obvious reasons; although there are a several species of birds and a similar number of mice that have evolved to withstand the toxic effect, and would thus find Athena to be a tasty morsel. Just how toxic of a mouthful Athena would make depends on the type of milkweed she consumed as a caterpillar and the level of cardiac glycosides present in that particular species.

The Answer, My Friend...

Several of these poison-averse predators live in the mountains where Athena is bound, so even if she is lucky enough to arrive South of the Border, she still faces the uncertain chance of becoming mouse-, or bird-, food over the winter.

Athena's poison defense strategy comes as part of her amazing beauty. The vivid orange and black coloration by which we are so attracted to her is actually an early-warning system that tells those who would prey on her to think twice; and, generally, most would-be diners have learned to leave her well-enough alone for good reasons. For now, the weather and time are the worst



enemies she faces, though as a young caterpillar there were also spiders, stink bugs, wasps, and ambush bugs to avoid so that she could be here today.

In order to even arrive at being an adult monarch the odds against her have been daunting; so this blip on her timing screen is all the more regrettable. Unfortunately, it is what it is; she has been given this hand and must play it as best she can; and we have not made it any easier by our humanity – or, perhaps, lack of it.

Human beings, especially those in the more materially developed countries on the planet, harbor some interesting ideas about plants. There are those we like and those we don't; and, while some of the ones of which we are not fond have earned our disfavor by their character and traits – poison ivy comes quickly to mind – quite a few are disliked

Looking for Marsh-ians

simply because of some finicky ideas on our part about what constitutes “pretty,” or what smells “nice.” Milkweed has earned a low-rating on the botanical report card



A Way through the Blueberries

12,000'. In all, about 2% of the original range of oyamel firs remains. Why they picked such a tree for a winter roost is anyone's guess, but they did; and now.... Now Michoacán is the seventh most populated state in Mexico. Between 2005 and 2010 its population increased 9.7% to a little fewer than 4.5 million. Its citizens are like citizens the world over: they want newer and better things, like roads and houses and schools; and they are willing to cut down their forest heritage in order to have them, much like their neighbors to the north. And so even though the Mexican government has set aside twelve areas in the Transverse Neovolcanic Mountains as preserves for the monarchs, there is still so much illegal logging that the overwintering sites are threatened.

Actually, the oyamel forest is an ideal microclimate for monarchs. The temperature ranges between 32° -59° F. If it were colder, the relatives of Athena would be forced to utilize their fat reserves to survive, and even then if the temperature regularly dipped into the mid-20's, they would die. If it were warmer, their metabolism could not slow itself down enough to allow hibernation to occur. Moreover, the humidity in the oyamel forest at that elevation is sufficient to keep the butterflies from drying out and thus allowing for energy conservation. So, in fact, for somnolent monarchs it's the ideal place to spend some downtime months; and their decision to be here from November to March makes perfect sense, especially if the people of Michoacán can be convinced that having monarchs around makes more sense than cutting down the last oyamel fir tree. You know, it's sort of a “Do what I say, don't do what I do” approach.

In all candor, there are actions and activities being taken and in place on both sides of the border which will help Athena's life remain possible for future generations, but these are only as effective as our willingness to sustain them for the long term. The

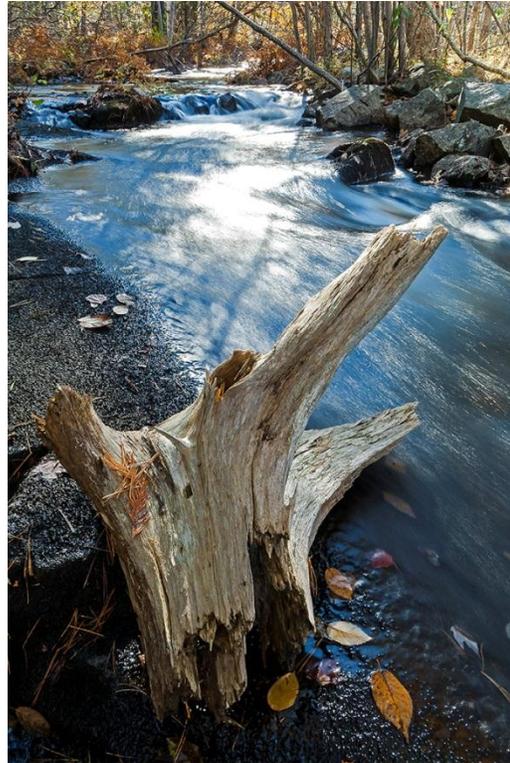
because to many people it “smells bad,” and to others it is just an inconvenient weed that gets in the way and cannot be eaten, or fed to anything that they will eat. In their rush to clear more and more natural land, milkweeds are an unfortunate casualty in the development war, and the children of Athena are becoming fewer and fewer because of it.

At the other end of the monarch life cycle, in the highlands of central Mexico, there is a comparable problem of a different sort. Over the long course of monarch evolution some very interesting relationships have developed between Athena's kin and their environment; monarchs and milkweeds is just the most well-known of these. During the overwintering months in Michoacán and its neighboring states, the eastern Monarchs have grown a fondness for oyamel fir trees as roosting sites. It's not so good for the monarchs that oyamel firs (*Abies religiosa*) are a relict forest type from a cooler and wetter Earth that is now found only in a restricted mountainous area and at elevations between 7,500' and

Monarch Joint Venture (MJV), www.MonarchJointVenture.org, is a partnership of federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and academic programs working together to support and coordinate efforts to protect the monarch migration across the lower 48 United States. Among the NGO members of this broad coalition are smaller groups such as Monarch Watch, www.MonarchWatch.org, and Journey North, www.Learner.org/jnorth/monarch, a site that showcases the Citizen Science monarch monitoring and education efforts.

In Mexico, the Mariposa Monarca Biosphere Reserve was created in 1986 and now protects, on paper, 217 square miles of monarch wintering sites. On the ground the reality is that much of the land within the reserve is communally owned “ejido” land. For the most part, the residents of the ejidos are poor farmers who, for generations, have looked to the oyamel forests for lumber, firewood, and other construction materials; and even though logging is prohibited within the reserve, it continues to be a problem and a threat to the monarchs’ ability to survive the winter.

Organizations such as the La Cruz Habitat Protection Project, the Michoacán Reforestation Fund, and Alternare are working in the ejidos to help find ways to create sustainable forestry practices, reforestation, and alternative forms of income generation. Perhaps the angels of our better nature are more numerous in the Transverse Neovolcanics than they have often been in the land of opportunity in the North. Of particular note is the Trilateral Monarch Butterfly Sister Protected Area Network, a partnership of wildlife refuges and national parks in the United States and Canada, and natural protected areas in Mexico, such as



Mariposa Monarca, working together on monarch conservation projects. Our hearts seem to usually be in the right place, even if our minds sometimes lag behind.

Athena had barely disappeared from my sight when I knew that I had to tell her story. In a scant two days I would be in the mid-autumn splendor of the Southern Appalachians, a mere 875 miles and 15 hours as my Jeep flies, away. How would she fare, this gaily-colored fluff of an organism; I could not say. In bestirring myself to leave the beauty of Narragansett the next day, I learned of a huge storm out in the Atlantic named Sandy, which was projected to make landfall along the New York-New Jersey coast sometime early in the coming week, four days hence. By then I would be in Western North Carolina; Athena would not.

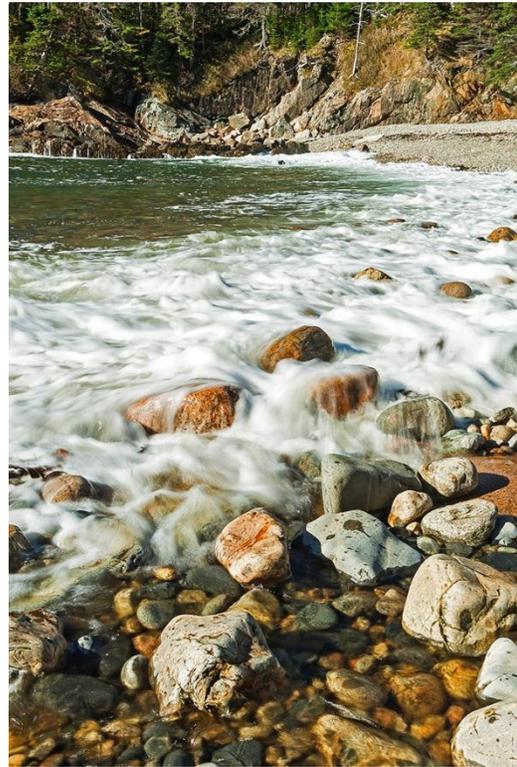
As I was preparing some initial research for Athena’s story, I came across an item of interest in the Albany, New York *Times-Union*. It was an account of another butterfly that had blossomed late in the season in the town of Shokan, in the middle of the wedge that is the foot of New York, about 60 miles south of the capital city. One week after Sandy roared ashore just south of Atlantic City, New Jersey carrying a horrific devastation, that we will never forget, in her path, **Maraleen Manos-Jones** debarked from a Southwest Airlines flight into San Antonio, Texas carrying a collapsible carry-on

Igloo cooler in which rested a carefully wrapped female monarch that had come-much-too-lately from her own garden. We're not talking about a vacant lot filled with whatever seeds the wind happens to bring along. Manos-Jones might well qualify as a Citizen Scientist butterfly expert. Her garden is an extensive butterfly grounds. She has raised and released thousands of them and is locally known as the "Butterfly Lady." She even worked for a decade in the seasonal butterfly conservatory at the American Museum of Natural History.

Manos-Jones knew in an empirical way that her butterfly had been born too late to migrate successfully, and yet this insect seemed too beautiful to just leave to fate and let die. She contacted Southwest Airlines, and it agreed to fly her butterfly – and her – at no charge to San Antonio so that it could catch up with its relatives and join the pilgrimage to Michoacán. Her monarch, who never received a name, was, indeed, alive and well; and, by now, may even be zeroing in on an oyamel fir tree somewhere deep in the cloud-mountains of the Transverse Neovolcanics. It is a delightful story with a very happy conclusion – as far as conclusions can be known in this beautiful dance we call life.

And it leads me to reflect on Athena. I do not know, I will never know, if she lived or died. I will never even know if she made it to the other side of Narragansett Bay; but I do know that in the instant she disappeared from my view, she was giving it one heck of a try. Her four little wings were flapping for all they were worth, and she was headed in the right direction home. I should have told her to fly low and wide and fast because a storm the size of Alaska-on-steroids is no place for a little butterfly.

It wasn't within my power to wrap her in a glassine bag and place it in a protected space as she was air-lifted to Texas to join her family so that she could rest those wings from the storm toward which she was heading, and perhaps make it on to Mexico to spend the winter, and in the spring head back north carrying a new generation of her kind within her so that the wonderful journey she represents could be repeated for another cycle, another year, another generation, another millennia....If I could have done so, I would have in a heartbeat. All I could do was wrap her in my heart and wish her well. What is within my power is to say as often as I can, as forcefully as I can, that Athena's journey has value to all of us. And if that is so, then I believe we share some obligation to help her do what she cannot do for herself: protect herself from us. What she does is a miracle made visible. The determination to live that is manifest in her half-gram of body weight is great enough to fill a dozen "Sandys". She is a lesson in the power of determination to break free of the limits of time and space. It was not necessary for the universe to create Athena, but it did; and perhaps the lesson in it for me is this: We can make of our lives whatever we choose, a stumbling block or a steppingstone. In our determination, we can destroy, or we can create. In so much as we do it unto one of the least of these, our brothers...we do it to ourselves.



The Edge of Tide

What's Now?:

In the Time of the Big Sleep

We should honor our American public lands, celebrate them, study them, teach our children about them, find hope and solace in them, restore and enrich them, and enlarge them at every opportunity. We should remember their names as places worthy of special allegiance...

Richard Nelson

in Patriotism and the American Land

In the cold, dim light of a 23° dawn I slipped into Greenbrier. Both the hour and the temperature conspired to help me avoid the post-Thanksgiving celebrants who would soon be fanning out in

untold directions to return to from wherever they had come, having enjoyed once again, or maybe for the first time, the awesome beauty of this magical place. I often lapse into wondering what they see here, these nine million visitors who arrive annually to be uplifted, inspired, solaced, soothed, or maybe only revealed and momentarily rejuvenated in these peaks and valleys that are so old they can look back at themselves and see the birth of the continent. Do they feel the rhythms of the



...Water Breaks Rock...

Do they feel the rhythms of the

rocks, the energies of the trees, the oneness of the waters? Do they listen to the birds, or hear the grass sing? Does this place seep into their pores so that they carry it wherever they go?

As I went wandering in search of the Smokies *now*, I wondered about this.

The leaves are on the ground, the season of color has come and gone, the branches are bare. Through the visibility that is now offered, the contours of the land and the rocks that are



In the Days Before Color

the skeleton of the land are easily seen. This bareness is beauty waiting to be made into

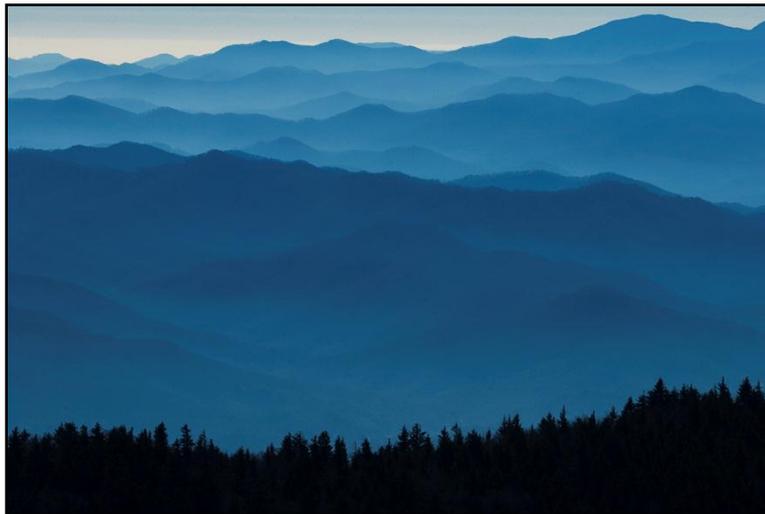
art, especially black and white art; for it is now in the absence of color that the shapes and forms, the patterns and textures seem to say here we are, imagine us, picture us thus. The ridges, the great old gnarled trees, the waterfalls, the boulder fields, the memory of human presence in the cabins and barns and mills and churches: all of these and more are awaiting grayscale discovery.

Yet do not discount color entirely, for there are still many ways it can be used – in reflections, in the receding blue ridges, in the gold of winter grasses in places like Cataloochee and Cades Cove.

And, of course, there is always the light, whether directly or in reflection.

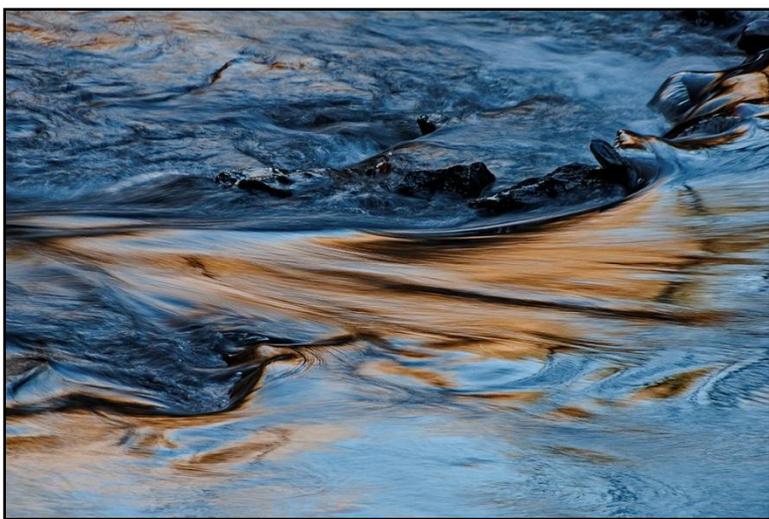
For the winter light in the Smokies is more than exquisite; it is truly sublime, and though it can often be subtle, it sparks life into any scene.

As the Smokies enter into the time of the Big Sleep there are practical changes that occur and for which due note should be taken. On **December 1**, Clingman’s Dome Road will close for the season. Already closed are Parsons Branch Road and Rich Mountain Road out of Cades Cove and Heintooga Ridge Road and Round Bottom-Straight Fork Road off of the Blue Ridge Parkway. On **December 1** Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail out of Gatlinburg will close for the season; and on **December 31**, Little Greenbrier Road into Little Greenbrier Schoolhouse out of Metcalf Bottoms-Wear Gap Road will close. During the winter months every effort is made to keep Newfound Gap Road (US 441), Little



Shaconage

River Road, Cades Cove Loop Road, Tremont Road, Cataloochee Road (from Cove Creek), and Greenbrier Road open. If there is any question about a particular road’s status, a quick call to **(865) 436-1200, Option 2, Option 2** will get you an answer regarding access. With the closing of Clingman’s Dome Road, easy access to a great sunrise-sunset location is foreclosed until March. And with the unfavorable position of the setting sun



Little River in Liquid Gold

with respect to Morton Overlook during the upcoming months, there is effectively no readily accessible location in the park where a sunset shot can be found.

On the other hand, Luftee Overlook is now a perfect location for a sunrise opportunity,

at least in terms of the position of the sun as it rises: straight down the valley of Beech Flats Prong. Of course the drawback is that there is no foliage on the near trees to enhance their presence as foreground elements; but using them with the bare shapes of their trunks and branches – along with the evergreen firs that are there – can still provide a great interest in the scene. And the valley of Beech Flats Prong as it recedes to join and become the valley of the Oconaluftee River it truly one of the quintessential Smokies scenes.

In scouting for this writing I decided to visit an old friend, White Oak Flats Branch. This lovely creek flows into Little River not far upstream from where the three branches of the river all come together at the Townsend “Y”. In the storms of early-July, which damaged so many parts of the eastern seaboard, a funnel or intense microburst ripped through the western part of the Park leaving a line of destruction as it came along Little River Gorge and up the Laurel Creek watershed into Cades Cove. I knew the White Oak Flats drainage had suffered, but I wanted to get a closer look. This



charming **Does the Land Feel Pain?**

stream is the place where my wide-angle eyes were opened so many years ago. It was sad to see the big trees blown over like matchsticks with all of their trunks and debris cluttering the beautiful streambed. It will likely be quite a few years before the deadfall has decayed or been swept away so that it resembles the way I have known it for many years.

Nature does not choose sides and change is inevitable, but it is still hard to see it and not believe that the land feels the pain.

The time of the Big Sleep in the Smokies is also the wet season of the year. More precipitation falls here, either as rain or snow, between December and March than during any other period, and November is usually fairly wet as well. I know that on the North Carolina side of the Park it has been an unusually dry fall, yet I was somewhat surprised to see the water levels in the streams, generally, being as low as it is. There still are innumerable opportunities for great stream images throughout the Smokies, both



The Way We Were

in reflection and straight flow scenes. Little River Gorge is always an awesome place, as

is Greenbrier, Big Creek, Tremont, and the Oconaluftee drainage. The 900 miles of streams that are found in Great Smoky Mountains National Park offer a plethora of beauty in every season.

A selection of sunrise-sunset times for the winter season in the Smokies is listed below. Eastern Standard Winter Time is applicable throughout the period. On December 21 the winter solstice will herald the shortest period of daylight of the year and usher in the lengthening of days that will eventually lead us into the warming of spring. Actually the 9-hour and 45-minute day length will persist from December 19-24, but the Winter Solstice remains intact. The times shown are specific to the **Oconaluftee Visitors Center**, but will not vary widely for other Park locations.

	December 1	December 21	January 1	January 31	February 28
Sunrise:	7:24a.m.	7:39a.m.	7:43a.m.	7:34a.m.	7:05a.m.
Sunset:	5:20p.m.	5:24p.m.	5:31p.m.	5:59p.m.	6:27p.m.

While the trees and other plants are dormant in the Big Sleep, many of the animals are



likewise living in downtime. It's not impossible, but you are not likely to see a black bear (*Ursus americanus*) in winter. The whitetail deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) and elk (*Cervus elaphus*) are much less active, but are usually visible. Finding them in a background of snow or in the golden grass of a winter field can make for some unforgettable imagery. While you're out with the critters, take a hike. There are trails too numerous to mention that trek out of and

How Do You Do, Is Your Name Sue? through Cataloochee and Cades Cove that make for some wonderful walking experiences in the time of the Big Sleep. Anthony Creek, Abrams Falls, Crooked Arm Ridge, Rich Mountain Loop, Caldwell Fork, Palmer Creek, Boogerman, Rough Fork, and Big Fork Ridge Trails are all great ways to see the land and to get to know it up close and personal.

Nature may be resting, but she is very much alive even in winter. To know her is to love her; and to love her is to care for her. In that caring, our vision is clarified and our creativity magnified.

A Tip is Worth...?

Seeing in the Round

It all begins with a very simple idea – that real photographic “seeing” is an amazingly

rich and rewarding experience that opens our eyes to the incredible beauty of the natural world, and allows our images to undergo a transformation from ordinary to extraordinary. But learning to see often seems to be a complicated affair, and the language of “seeing” often obtuse and esoteric in its descriptions – indirect and arcane sort of like **Justice Potter Stewart’s** definition of obscenity, “I shall not...attempt further to define (it) and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it...” Maybe it’s because for most of us “seeing” is so inextricably bound up in our eyes that we have come to consider that it is located in those organs and nowhere else; and that it involves only two components: the use of those organs as receptors, on the one hand, and objects from the material world on which those receptors act, on the other. Yet artists and mystics throughout human history have continuously assured us that it is otherwise and that by broadening the receptor – object limitation, our capacity to experience the world visually, and to connect with that world, is enhanced immeasurably; and our ability to enter into a heightened level of creativity is magnified.



Leaves on Blue

Edward Weston, for example, one of this country’s great photographic masters, described his own process as, “seeing through one’s eyes, not with them.” That incomparable French storyteller-aviator, **Antoine de Saint-Exupéry**, wrote these words in his timeless tale, *Le Petit Prince* (The Little Prince), “...It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye.” In a somewhat more abstract vein Uncle **Walt Whitman** opined, “I believe a blade of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars.” And of much more recent genesis is **Galen Rowell’s** sage observation, “Creative photographs don’t originate in the human organ that pumps blood any more than small, wild canines tell space aliens the meaning of life. Yet we can’t deny that the metaphysical heart that we associate with love and compassion must be intrinsically connected to original photographic seeing.”

So as we stand in front of that intimate landscape, or lie on the ground observing the intricacies of that lovely mushroom, what happens that seems to result in one person’s image being unforgettable and another’s being unremarkable? Maybe a straightforward way of thinking about it is to consider the difference between looking and seeing.

Alex Grey, the renowned spiritual, visionary, postmodern artist, in his excellent treatise on his own journey of discovery, *The Mission of Art*, writes, “When deeply seeing, the object of our contemplation enters our heart and mind directly. In the act of deeply seeing, we transcend the egoic boundaries between the self and the otherness of the world, momentarily merging with the thing seen.” It has been suggested that what is meant by this is that, in that moment, we are not aware of looking at a tangible object, but rather we are seeing that object for what it symbolizes in our eyes, which is why we

see it as art. So there may be symbolism for someone in **Eliot Porter's** *Bunchberry Flowers, Silver Lake, New Hampshire, June 5, 1953*; while someone else might merely flip the page and keep going to the next plate.

But as Alex Grey puts it, "Seeing determines every aesthetic decision...seeing is also the recognition of meaning." According to Grey, artists *see* their subject, and in this act they



Lake of the Clouds

is for the *see-er* then to translate this in such a way that they *see* the work, not merely in an objective way, but in its symbolic presence, which creates an emotional response from the *see-er*.

This is an interesting progression of cause and effect, and one that seems to describe the process accurately as I experience it. So let's go back to the beginning, where the artist *sees* the subject. Two scenarios come quickly to my mind. The first is a scene from National Lampoon's classic movie *Vacation* in which Chevy Chase has carted his family off on a vacation to the Grand Canyon. After a laborious journey they arrive at the canyon's rim, get out of the car and look over the edge for fewer than ten seconds, then get back in the car, and they are gone. The second is a scene that I have experienced any number of times somewhere in Great Smoky Mountains National Park when I am working in some beautiful location, usually a high vista overlook; and a vehicle drives up, a photographer debarks, either with or without tripod, looks through the viewfinder of his or her camera, quickly snaps a few shots, turns and leaves – often with a surreptitious remark to the effect, "Well, got that one."

In both instances no one has *seen* the subject, at least not in the sense Alex Grey is talking about. They may have looked, but they have not seen. But, of course, there are plenty of photographers who do bother to spend some time in a location before moving on and who still manage not to *see* the place. Why is this? What have they missed? They have missed the "seeing deeply", the moment of transcendence when "the object of contemplation enters the heart and mind directly", when the egoic boundaries give way and, as between self and other, there is no distinction. And the failure is that there is no symbolism in the act; there is observation but not merger. I would suggest that it is the realization of some symbolic significance on the part of the observer in the thing observed that makes of the observed something for which an emotional response is unavoidable, or even inevitable. In other words, there is something in the observed for which the observer feels – in an emotional way – a connection.

are inspired to create. In other words they sense a connection with their subject at a level beyond mere tangibility. Once this awareness is fixed there occurs an analysis of the actual relationships the artist wishes to express in the subject. Next there takes place a translation of the subject by the artist that is directed ultimately toward the awareness of the *see-er*. It is not inaccurate to say that the artist speaks to the *see-ing* mind of the *see-er*. It

Can this awareness be taught, or infinitely more important, can it be learned? I certainly believe so, because even if there is no one to teach me of this capacity for connection, I can always strive to learn it on my own.

One of the ways I can go about self-education is with a wee game of language called “This and That.” Take the words “looking” and “seeing.” Looking is a “that” word; it implies a separation and a distance between the observer and the observed. “Seeing” is a “this” word. It implies something in relationship to me and something nearer at hand, toward which I feel a connection, however tenuous. Try this little exercise and see what happens. What you are looking for, in doing it, is a difference in your feeling for an object when you use “this” in describing it, as opposed to “that.” This flower, that flower; this forest, that forest; this river, that river; these ridgelines, those ridgelines. And the more you come to sense a relationship between yourself and the things you observe, the more likely you are to begin to feel connected to these things. As your awareness of relationship increases, you begin to consciously realize the symbolism in your observation of these things. They are comfort, solace, peace, rejuvenation, home, natural beauty, wonder, awe, and on; and when they are seen/experienced in that way, then the deep seeing of creative imagery, the photography of connection is possible.



A Tree Grew in Michigan

One more thought thread: **David Ulrich**, a master photographer and the author of one of my favorite books on creativity, *The Widening Stream, the Seven Stages of Creativity*, makes this observation. “...we see through our entire body. To focus only on the seeing of our eyes is misguided, and represents a common fallacy. Every cell, every part of our body is a sensitive receiving apparatus, and all are connected to the eyes.” Ulrich is in a unique position to offer this perspective. Nearly thirty years ago he lost an eye – his dominant right eye – in an accident and was forced to relearn to see if he wanted to continue to work. “Seeing,” he says, “is an exchange of energy that takes place between ourselves and the perceived objects of our attention... Seeing can be cultivated, indeed, must be... Moments of real seeing are beyond the labeling propensity of the mind, beyond what we think we know. Seeing is a step into the unknown and requires some degree of intention and awakening. Real seeing – of ourselves, of others, and of the world – contains three defining characteristics: **simultaneity**, a direct perception of the present moment; **objectivity**, seeing things as they are, as best we can; and **impartiality**, freedom from judgment.”

Seeing, deep seeing, is not something we accomplish in a classroom, or in random moments snatched from the day. Deep seeing is a commitment to being, to openness, to relationship, and to possibility. Deep seeing arises within us, involves every part of us, is sent beyond us into the world, and returns to us with the treasures of perception.

As for EarthSong/Walking in Beauty...

Walking in Beauty

As I walk with Beauty
As I walk, as I walk
The universe is walking with me
In beauty it walks before me
In beauty it walks behind me
In beauty it walks below me
In beauty it walks above me
Beauty is on every side
As I walk, I walk with beauty

Traditional Diné Prayer

You ride on feathers at 90 miles an hour and the earth just slips away from under you. If you went in a plane it would be 200 miles an hour and the slipping away would be just that much worse. I got thinking about America on the way out – how can anyone feel defensive about earth that slips away from under you so easily. I live in mountains and I know the solid earth doesn't slip away from you there. But for millions of people the earth is just something to evade. Perhaps, in order to make people feel really conscious about their land, we should make everyone cross the continent on foot or in a wagon....

Ansel Adams

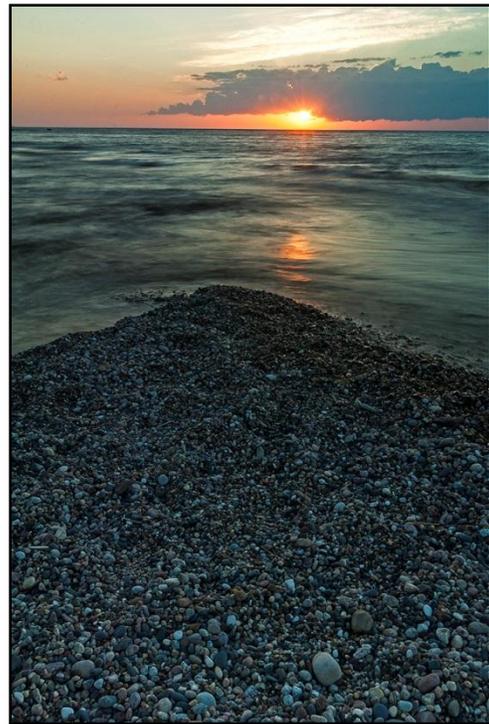
Letter to Alfred Stieglitz, June 8, 1941

I think I know how Ansel felt; I also know that it didn't keep him from crossing the country whenever it became necessary to share/further his work or promote the causes of conservation about which he felt so passionately, but that's a story for another time.

What a year it has been! I really want to thank everyone who is part of the EarthSong family. Your support of my work and your passion for photography are heart-warming. And there's plenty of room for many more.

There are several highlights from the year almost ended that are worth mentioning. In July, I was asked to present at the largest camera club annual gathering in the country, the New England Camera Club Council (NECCC) in Amherst, Massachusetts. More than 160 new people were added to the "Song" List, and **Bonnie** and I had a wonderful experience for which we are grateful. **Antoinette**

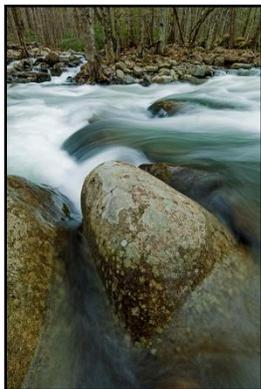
Gombeda and **Susan Mosser** crafted an amazing weekend of learning and fun. **For Another Day**



As usual I taught twice at the **John C. Campbell Folk School** and had wonderful classes on both occasions, and I look forward to the coming year and being there again. **Dr. Jan Davidson** and the Folk School staff have always been more gracious and helpful than can be imagined, and my time there is always a highlight for me. As intense as the time is with a class, being in Brasstown is like a wonderful vacation in the country.



In 2012 I also returned to teach at the **Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts** for the first time in several



years. I know I sometimes say disparaging things about Gatlinburg, but **Bill May** and **Bill Griffith** have put together incredible opportunities for learning through art that make being in Gatlinburg like being cloistered in a deeply spiritual place in New York City. I appreciate the invitation they extended and especially the opportunity to return in 2013. I'm looking forward to being there again. Having such immediate access to the Smokies makes it truly like being cloistered in a very spiritual place.

The conclusion of the workshop year for 2012 saw us in two of our very favorite places, Michigan's Upper Peninsula and Maine's Mount Desert Island/Acadia National Park.

In both locations we were with a wonderful group of participants/friends, who were treated to some of the most amazing photographic conditions I have experienced in either of those



places. It was a pleasure sharing each of these treasures with



such passionate, dedicated, and willing folks. I very much appreciate the assistance of the great staffs at Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, Hiawatha National Forest, and Acadia National Park. We look forward to being with you again. It's not possible to talk about being in Acadia without mentioning **Dave** and **Vickie Lloyd** and all that they do to make our time at **Seawall Motel** such a wonderful experience. When we're with them, we feel like we're home.



And it's not completely impossible to talk about being anywhere without saying something about **Bonnie Cooper**. Her warm smile and easy grace make the logistics of any workshop an adventure in fun. She brightens my life like a thousand million fireflies on a summer night, and I cannot even begin to imagine doing what I do without her.

As wonderful as 2012 has been, I believe that 2013 is going to be even wonderfuller.

If you haven't had a chance to visit www.EarthSongPhotography.com, I invite you to take a look at where we're headed in the coming year and plan to join us.

The schedule begins with being home. Our first workshop is the annual **Smokies** rite of spring, **April 6-10, 2013**. Please note that this is a four-day workshop that begins on



Saturday and concludes on Wednesday. We'll be located on the North Carolina side of the Park in beautiful Waynesville, North Carolina. Spring is the season of magic in the Smokies and we'll be set to capture it. The wildflowers for which this region is justly famous will have begun to appear in masse, and the spring foliage will have shown its new green. The streams will be ripe, the mountains will be gorgeous, and the light will be incredible.

Our next stop is our annual return to the amazing beauty of the Maine coast and the spring workshop in Mount Desert Island/Acadia National Park, **June 8-14, 2013**. The



lupine will be blooming and the bunchberries will be peeking up from everywhere. The great rocks and ancient forests will be bathed in a light that makes them seem to glow from within. In 2012 we discovered many new locations on an island I thought I already knew fairly well, and I'm eager to return to share them with anyone whose affinity for, or curiosity about, the wonders of Down East encourages them to want to know why Eliot Porter was so attracted to this land.

The remainder of the schedule is concentrated in the remaining half of the year, so I'll tell you more about them later. Of course you can always see what I've written on the website.

For now let me tell you that they include new locations that I am very excited about. In September we'll be heading to where Massachusetts and the Atlantic Ocean come together to form **Cape Cod** and its awesome National Seashore. This is a really special land where sand and water conspire to create spectacular scenery, and some of our earliest history is no more than a few steps away. **September 21-27, 2013** are the dates for this adventure that you will not want to miss.



The other new workshop location is just down the coast from the Cape, but in a place that is altogether unique. **October 19-25, 2013**, we'll be in **Narragansett, Rhode Island** for an amazing week in the Ocean State along the Rhode Island Coast. It's a land rich in culture, history, and wonderful natural beauty. Harbors, lighthouses, wildlife refuges and rocky beaches are just some of the things that will create a memorable photographic experience in a place you'll never forget.



Until next time, may the Spirit of Light guide your shutter release.

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Early Light, Foothills Parkway West, Walland, Tennessee