



JUDGE'S COMMENTS

THE MONTHLY JUDGE'S COMMENTS OF THE

MARLBOROUGH
Camera Club

March 2017 Natural History

Judges: Garry Speer FPSNZ MFIAP Digital, Errol Kelly Prints

Prints

C Grade:

Mountain Daisy. This is technically excellent. Crisp, with an exposure handled as well as it could be with such a range of contrast. The subject is somewhat of a "bull's eye", placed dead centre in the frame, but given the straight-on view point to the flower, necessary. But it does tend to be more pictorial than Natural History, in that we see nothing else of the plant, or of it's habitat. But to some extent, the problem here is that flowers are difficult subjects to make into great images.

Acceptance

Kingfisher. Well done. So typical a pose - the all so patient kingfisher, waiting. I do like the fact that you have the bird looking left, against the movement of the viewer's eye, and with a larger area on the left. However, you could still take off a little on the left, top, and right (about equal amounts for each) - this would make the picture just a little stronger. Honours

B Grade:

Boulder Beach, Ulva Island. Well done, with what could have been a fairly ordinary picture. Great leading curve from the bottom right corner, producing a pleasant lead around to the rock against the right frame, which is sufficiently unattractive not to hold our attention, and allow further exploration of the scene, before repeating the cycle. You could mask just a fraction off the top - it would eliminate that annoying piece of sky, and lift the far shore line just a little more above centre. Acceptance

South Island Robin. Ah - the photographer's friend. And you have done a great job. Light and focus just spot on, as too is the arrangement. And the looking right works OK here because the branch stops our eye going further right. Perhaps just a slight tan colour cast? Honours

A Grade:

Armillaria Species emerging from Black Beech. Normally, fungi produce better pictures than flowers. But such is not the case here. Although the fungi has a relatively unusual flecked surface, the white of it is too strong a contrast with the excessively dark background. There is good detail in the stem, but very poor information about the habitat. Not so keen on the landscape format, which tends to place the subject reasonably centrally, and leave a large amount of very uninteresting dark area. Not Accepted

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Ladybird on Fennel. My primary issue with this picture is that it's pictorialism (to coin a word) tends to swamp the Natural History - not helped by the ladybird being dead centre in the frame. Swinging the view to the left would have helped a bit (let's be honest - we do expect A Grade workers to be able to adjust the focus point!?!).

Not Accepted

Ourisia sp. Flowers tend to be difficult subjects to make into great pictures, as this image illustrates. Because there are a number of randomly placed flower heads, composition immediately becomes a problem. And then there is the problem of white flowers (as most NZ native are) - the white too easily over exposes, while the background goes too dark. Both these issues are reasonably well handled here - we can just make out some texture in the white while there is some detail in the background, and the arrangement is reasonably satisfactory. Acceptance

Koromiko. In this case, we have a much better composition (almost pictorial), and although there is not much detail in the background, we at least get the idea that it is bush or forest. The white is almost burnt out, but the large amount of detail in the flower heads tends to hide this. Acceptance

Olearia arborescens. This flower is just slightly stronger than the others - the contrast is a little better handled, and we have one flower head that stands out from the others, providing something of a focal point. We also have a better idea of the leaf structure, and a full range of the stages of flowering. Acceptance

Pterostylis foliata orchid flower. A strong point in favour of this orchid is that it is relatively rare, even though the basic type is fairly common. This, the close view point is well justified, and one is slightly less concerned with the background. It is a pity the light is from the left, striking the lighter features of the head. But overall, it is well done, but is still not quite up with the following images. Acceptance

White fronted terns at nest. I have to say, this picture is a heart breaker. Terns have to be one of our most picturesque birds, and to see an opportunity like this, then for me to not give this a higher award The back bird is an outstanding presentation, and would in fact have been a winner in itself. But it is the front bird that is the problem. That the black head disappears into the dark at the top is such a strong element in the picture, we fail to give sufficient attention to the great features. I do like the shadow of the bird's beak, and I think, had an eye been clearly visible, it might have worked. But as is, so sorry. Acceptance

Pukeko Feeding. Was initially a little unhappy with this picture because of the strong green vegetation, although it has allowed the colour of the bird to be well displayed. But most significant in this picture is the way the foot has been presented, showing how it is used to pick out food - very well caught. Merit

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Greenfinch. Well arranged, well caught, good arrangement, and overall, a delightful picture. Maybe a little better light on the back would have been better, but you have enough for the award. Merit

Red-billed Gull Feeding. Such a common bird, but oh so well caught. Dynamic, and living. Even with the food in its mouth. Like the way that the background fills the rest of the frame, without being distracting. Honours

Whistling Frog OK, just to have a picture of the creature should be enough. But this is so well presented. The habitat is very well displayed, and I particularly like the way that the reflecting water surrounds the animal, and makes it so visible to us. Honours

Pied Stilt. Love the simplicity of this. Suspect it might be better reversed, with the flight against the eye viewing, but that's incidental. The strength of this is it's crispness, and sense of motion. How often one sees this action from a distance - it is fantastic to see it this close up. Honours

Gurnard. What a fantastic image. It's only when you look carefully that you see that the upper body is actually out of the water, and it is the submergence that gives the rest a softness. Nicely arranged, and the edge to edge presentation works wonders. Honours

Nesting Grey Spotted Shags. We will overlook the "grey" in the title, and if this picture has not been returned, it is still on my wall. A truly fantastic picture. Outstanding colour and subject presentation, where again the edge to edge mount really works. Honours

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Digital Images

C Grade

Amanita muscaria (Scarlet Flycap) – Slightly over-exposed resulting in the stalk detail being lost. The light coloured twig at top left is distracting but overall an Acceptance.

Humpback whale and calf – A very difficult image to record successfully. This image is suffering from a lot of digital “noise”. Not Accepted

Metrosideros excelsa (Pohutukawa) – Good exposure and detail. Remove the white blob from the top centre to improve the overall effect. Accepted.

Monarch Butterfly - *Danaus plexippus* – Lacks sharpness and this has weakened an otherwise well exposed and framed subject. Not Accepted.

Monarch Butterfly in Profile - *Danaus plexippus* – A well-handled image with correct exposure and good sharpness deserving of a Merit.

Phaulacridium marginale (New Zealand Cricket) – This image was very close to achieving an Honours. It is very sharp and well composed but the background blobs of yellow and the brightly lit stalks are distracting. Merit.

Poaka, Pied Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus leucocephalus*) – Good composition but there is no detail in the feathers or a light in the eye – two of the ‘must haves’ in bird photography. Not Accepted.

Wewia, New Zealand Dabchick Family (*Poliiocephalus rufopectus*) – Just sharp enough to show some feather detail. There is a bit of ‘noise’ in the background but overall worthy of an Acceptance.

White Heron – Kotuku – A strong composition resulting in a pleasing image. The feather detail has been well recorded. Merit.

White-fronted tern (*Sterna striata*) Adult with Fledgling – A successful action image with well-handled exposure of the white plumage. The slight blur at the wing tips adds to the action. Accepted.

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B Grade

Bell Bird (*Anthornis melanura*) – There is some nice detail here and the complementary colours help to add impact. The soft background adds extra contrast. Merit

Buller's Mollusc – The plane of focus seems to be slightly in front of the bird. This together with the flat light has resulted in very little feather detail being recorded. Try to capture the moment when the head is side on so that much more detail of the beak and eye is shown. Not Accepted

Cicada – This image would be improved by being taken from a 45 degree angle at the 2 o'clock position. This would provide much more detail of the face, legs and body. Not Accepted.

Cyathodes fraseri – A successful portrait of an alpine plant showing plenty of detail of the plant and the environment it is growing in. Merit.

Gold finch (*Carduelis carduelis* Britanica) – I like the composition and the feather detail. The soft background adds to the overall effect. Merit.

Green Bird Orchid [*Chiloglottis cornuta*] - There is not enough detail of the flowers from the angle that this image has been taken from. Use a diffuser to reduce the harsh light and this also softens the shadow lines. Not Accepted.

Paper Wasp Nest – Good detail of the main features of the insect and its nest. The bright yellow leaf edge is a distractor and leads the eye out of the frame. Not Accepted.

Tui – This image is well composed but suffers from a great deal of 'noise'. A lower ISO setting would help to improve this. The brightly lit branches in the background are very distracting. Not Accepted.

A Grade

Armillaria sp – Excellent recording of caps, gills and stalks, together with a strong composition give this image an Honours.

Caladenia sp – A challenging orchid to photograph well. Exposure has been handled well and the soft background helps to give impact. A slightly higher angle of view would have captured more detail of the beauty of the markings in the throat of this orchid. Accepted.

Chiloglottis cornuta orchid – The detail of the flower has been well captured. Unfortunately this image is let down by over-saturation and the tips of the leaves being cropped. Not Accepted.

Clematis paniculata – A pleasing composition. The exposure has been handled well to capture the texture of the petals and the small spider adds extra interest. A good Acceptance.

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Cook Island blue tailed skink – Why did you chop the end of the tail off? The bright green leaf is a real distraction. The skinks skin detail has been recorded well. Not Accepted.

Hookers sealion female (*Phocarctus hookeri*) with newborn pup – I would have liked to have seen the whole of the pup but it is still a successful image. Accepted.

Kunzea ericoides (Kanuka) – The flowers are sharp but the buds are not quite in focus to enable the complete story to be told successfully. Not Accepted

New Zealand Dotterel (*Charadrius obscurus*) – The low angle light has given this image real impact. The crab being held in the beak adds extra impact. The detail is excellent. Honours.

New Zealand Tui (*Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*) – The iridescence of the feathers has been very successfully captured but the background has a number of bright distracting highlights. Despite this the image is worthy of an Acceptance.

Pied shag – Excellent feather detail but the moment hasn't been captured when the head is in profile so that the details of the face and eye can be clearly seen. Not Accepted.

Queen Anne's Lace bud – Simple and sharp with a strong composition. The soft background adds to the overall impact. Merit.

Red billed Gull – The exposure has been handled well to record the detail in the white plumage. A good Acceptance.

Roadside Borage – This is an example of a very simple image with impact. The complementary colours of the borage against the dry grass provides that impact. Merit.

Salvins Albatross -*Thalassarche salvini* – Another successful action image where the depth of field has been handled well to produce sharp detail. Accepted.

Salvins mollymawk (*Thalassarche salvini*) – Excellent feather detail. The bubbles add a sense of movement to the image. Honours.

Southern Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*) – Very sharp feather and beak detail. The wing acts as a lead-in to the main features of the two heads. Accepted.

Southern royal albatross (*Diomedea epomophora*) – The action is well caught with water droplets flying everywhere. A sharp beak and a light in the eye helps with the impact. Merit.

Terns and oystercatchers – The composition is good but the fact that nearly all the birds are facing away from the viewer reduces the overall impact. Not Accepted

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Thrush – This image has a very pleasant simplicity about it. The feather detail is excellent. Honours.

Wandering Albatross Landing - *Diomedea exulans* – A very successful image capturing the action. The added features of the wing tip carving the water and the reflections under the wings both add to the impact. Honours.

Welcome Swallows – This image is quite stunning but seems to be suffering from over-processing. There is a lot of 'noise' present and the feather colouration is too intense. It certainly deserves a Merit but re-processing correctly would achieve an honours.

Whio family [*Hymenolaimus malacorhynchos*] – A complete story showing this rare duck in its environment. Sharply focussed. Merit.

Zebra Snail (*Flammulina zebra*) on *Laccaria ohiensis* fungus cap – Strong composition with contrasting colours. The snail is sharply focussed. Accepted.

I have been very impressed with the high standard of photography being shown by your members. Congratulations to all of you who were successful with your entries and for those whose images were not accepted this time, I hope my comments give you an idea of some issues to be aware of and to work on in future.

Thank you for allowing me to judge your salon.

Regards and best wishes,

Gary Speer

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