SPPC Perspective

The Seven Ponds Photography Club, formed in 2009, it was created to promote the advancement of photography as an art. The purpose of the club is to bring together persons of like mind who are dedicated to the advancement of their skills by association with other members, through the study of the work of others and through spirited and friendly competition. The club exists to offer opportunities for all to share knowledge within the club and in the community, through exhibitions and programs that excite interest in the knowledge and practice of all branches of photography.

SPPC Members,

Due to the growing concerns over the COVID-19/Coronavirus, and the decision of Seven Ponds Nature Center to close for group meetings for everyone's well being, the Seven Ponds Photo Club Board of Directors has decided it is in the best interest of our club members and any visitors to cancel our upcoming in-person meetings:

We are sorry for any inconvenience and hope that you and your family stay healthy and safe.
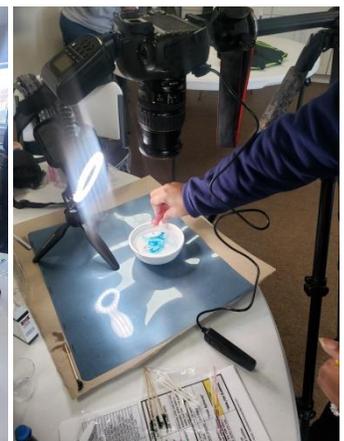
Jim Lewis

SPPC President

Explore Macro Photography with Color and Oils Workshop 3/20/2021

In March, the club hosted a workshop split into 2 sessions to control the number of people and ensure the safety of the group members due to Covid-19. We met in a large room with everyone at their own table and lots of fresh air from open windows. Instructions and a workshop kit was provided for each participant with all the needed materials. Thanks to Jim and Bobbie Lewis and LeeAnn McLaneGoetz for getting all the materials together and being our instructors. It was a lot of fun playing with the color and oils and capturing the bubbles and shapes. Help was just a hand raise away for any question. Below are some sample photos from the workshop and members are still playing with creative interpretations of their images.

SPPC Mike Mercier   SPPC Tina Daniels

The setup. Add your Milk, blow bubbles, add color & oil, shoot!

The amazing part of the class was that no two set ups were the same and everyone was able to create unique images using their own equipment.

SPPC Tim Toland

Guest John Martin

SPPC Cris Young

SPPC Karen Page

SPPC Cindy Bilinsky

SPPC Heather Bilinsky

SPPC Kristin Grudzien

SPPC Debra Ridsdale

SPPC Germaine Finley

Guest Sharon Evanko

Photo - Debra Ridsdale

Photo - Tina Daniels

Masked participants -LeeAnn, Kristin, Bobbie and Tina (really, they are smiling)

It was a lot of fun and great to be able to do a workshop together after being cooped up all winter.
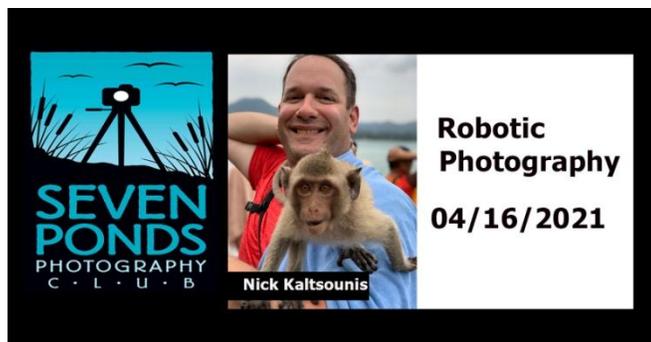
Kensington Metro Park April Outing
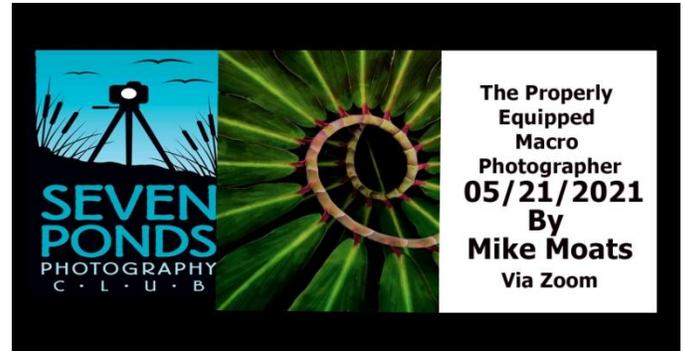
Photos by Roman Tornopilsky

There was a fun group meet-up at Kensington Metro park on April 10, 2021. The group was eager to be out enjoying the Spring weather, birds and flowers. First photo is of club members enjoying the day and the rest are selected photos taken that day compliments of Roman.

Nick Kaltsounis – Robotic Photography 4-16-2021

- What is FIRST
- Challenges with photographing a robotics event
- Doing something different to be noticed, and how it can be applied in your photography

Mike Moats – The Properly Equipped Macro Photographer 5-21-2021

Being a properly equipped macro photographer is not just about the equipment, but also equipping yourself with the how-to knowledge of macro photography. Mike will cover the most important equipment for macro photography, how to control depth of field, a little about composition, and subject matter.

New Members Can Sign up & Pay Online

Thanks to Seven Ponds Nature Center we now have the ability for new Seven Ponds Photography Members to sign up and pay on line. Thank you Diane Rankin

Please consider sharing with any new potential member

SPPC dues are $15 for one member and $20 for a family or two or more members living at the same address.

Pay Seven Ponds Photo Club Membership

Note: 200+ Camaro Event Waterford / Brooklyn, Michigan   7-1 thru 7-2 -2021

Event was canceled due to Covid 19

Looking SPPC Member Volunteers for SPNC Party at the Ponds

On Saturday, August 7 Seven Ponds Nature Center will be hosting Party at the Ponds - a free celebration of the nature center, open to all members and non-members. There will be numerous activities throughout the day. We would love to have representatives (volunteers) from each of our clubs/groups on hand to distribute information, chat with visitors, or do demonstrations. The timing of the event is noon to 6:00 PM, but the length of time your group is present is up to you.

Helion Focus 7 (Stacking Software)

Contributor – Germaine Finley

This article is to review a product called Helicon Focus 7 and is based on an evaluation copy provided by Helicon for 7 for this article. I thank Helicon for being receptive to our inquiries on the capabilities of their software and wanting to promote an awareness of another option to using Photoshop. While many use Photoshop for focus stacking, Helicon Focus 7 is an alternative product that does not require a subscription and so was very interesting for me to evaluate. Let's start with – what is focus stacking. Focus stacking is a digital image processing technique which combines multiple images taken at different focus distances to give a resulting image with a greater depth of field (DOF) than any of the individual source images. Focus stacking is used heavily in both macro photography as well as landscape photography to give a front to back sharp picture. I did a small test of both the macro and landscape examples to see how easy Helicon was to learn and how well it performed.

*Note - Helicon Focus 7 also has a feature called micro panorama. The micro panorama function is only available in **Pro** version and will not be reviewed in this article and is designed to stitch images made through a microscope. It may fail to stitch images that were made by camera rotation on the tripod.*

Helicon is easy to install and provides a very descriptive online help and various videos that help illustrate installation, stacking, retouching, Lightroom integration, batch mode processing and their RAW in-DNG-out mode (this helps retain maximum information for further processing). There are 3 versions of Helicon Focus - Lite, Pro & Pro Premium. See this link to help choose what is right for you. https://www.heliconsoft.com/helicon-focus-versions-licensing/ Prices range for Lite = $30 annual/$110 lifetime or Pro version $55 annual/ $200 lifetime or Pro Premium $65/$240. *prices taken from Helicon website 2021)

Helicon has **3 main methods** for the stacking algorithm.

- **Method A** computes the weight for each pixel based on its contrast and then forms the weighted average of all pixels from all source images. This method works better for short stacks and preserves contrast and color.
- **Method B** selects the source image containing the sharpest pixel and uses this information to form the "depth map". This method imposes strict requirements on the order of images - it should always be consecutive. Perfectly renders textures on smooth surfaces.
- **Method C** uses pyramid approach to image processing dividing image signals into high and low frequencies. Gives good results in complex cases (intersecting objects, deep stacks), though increases contrast and glare.

If you are using Method B, the software NEEDS the stack in consecutive order or it produces some fuzzy results. There is a nice **Sort automatically** option which enables the program to analyze the stack and automatically reverse the order of images if needed, allowing to avoid banding artifacts along the image edges. Helicon also has a nice feature of **retouching** to help clean up photos where the subject might have moved a bit – minor movement (ie insect antennae). This feature allows you to select a source file and paint that in. You have a lot of features on how to paint as well with using a color tolerance – to replace a specific color, brush hardness – to select how sharp your brush edge is, cloning areas of your output image to another area on it, etc. Helicon also allows text to be added and/or a size scale to better understand the dimensions of the image.

Helicon says you can have a stack hundreds of photos deep. However, I did not test this and used fairly small stacks given I have an old PC with limited memory and CPU. None of the rendering processes took very long even with my limitations (HP Pavilion, CPU 1.7 GHz 2 core and 8 G RAM)

The 2 controls for stacking are Radius and Smoothing:

Radius is a feature that needs to be played with to get the right balance, but is only available in Methods A & B. When performing focus stacking the program analyzes each pixel of the source image in order to define if it is in focus. Then the detected focused areas from the whole stack are combined into one output image. Radius is the control that sets the size of the analyzed area around each pixel. The smaller the value of the Radius is, the sharper the intersecting details are. Increasing the Radius almost eliminates the halo effect that sometimes happens in the stacking process. Excessive increase of the Radius value will negatively affect details. It is a balance and best to try a few values (starting with the default ones Helicon selects) to determine the best result.

Smoothing is (per the Helicon help) – *"When analysing the stack, the program detects the most sharply focused areas of source images to combine into one output image.*

For methods A and C smoothing determines how these sharp areas will be combined. Low smoothing produces a sharper image, but the transition areas may have some artifacts. Setting a high smoothing value will result in a slightly blurry image, though without any visible transition areas.

For method B this value determines how depth map will be smoothed out."

I used the default value of smoothing but this also should be experimented with for best results given different light and textures.

Macro example 1 –

In the following example, I used a stack of 20 images taken with my Nikon D810 f/16 1/6 s ISO 400 Tamron 90 mm lens using **Method B** with a **radius=13** and **smoothing=4**. In the first stack shot even at f/16, there was a part of the flower that was not in crisp focus. So this was my first attempt and basically, I was able to shoot the pictures, drag and drop them into Helicon and pressed render. Picture 1 is 1 of the 20 shots in the stack showing the DOF in a single shot. I brought

the output picture (picture 2) into Photoshop in DNG format and reduced the image size for this article.

Original first picture in the stack.   *Output from Helicon*

Back of flower is out of focus.

Macro example 2 –

In the following example, I used a small stack of 9 images taken with my Nikon D810 f/5.6 1/10 s ISO 100 Tamron 90 mm lens using **Method A** with a **radius=8** and **smoothing=3**. Picture 1 is 1 of the 9 shots in the stack showing the DOF in a single shot. I brought the output picture (picture 2) into Photoshop in DNG format and reduced the image size for this article.

1 of 9 pictures in the stack.   Output from Helicon

Key feature : With Helicon Focus you can process Raw files opening them directly in the program or importing from Photoshop Lightroom. Output can be done in dng format (Helicon Pro version only), tiff or jpeg. I found the process easy and was able to re-render using different Methods and adjusting the Radius and Smoothing parameters to determine the best results by just changing options and pressing render again.

Landscape example -

Below is a landscape example where I took 3 shots to focus on the foreground, mid ground and background. I was not able to find a better example but I could see how this would be great for a possible flower foreground and mountain background shot. I used the lakeshore at my cabin with the kayaks in the foreground and a receding shoreline, trying to keep as much in focus as possible in the shot.

Foreground in focus

Mid ground focus

Background in focus

Front to back in focus using Method B, Radius=8 and Smoothing =4

There is also a handy dust map feature which will allow dust on the sensor or lenses that would be amplified in the stacked image to be documented and be ignored. See the Helicon help for a detailed explanation of this feature. The advantage of this is obvious. file:///C:/Program%20Files/Helicon%20Software/Helicon%20Focus%207/help/english/HeliconFocus.html#HF_DUST

All in all, I found the program easy to use and flexible in options. The retouching feature is helpful if there is a small part of the image (ie insect movement) that you need to pull from one source image and paint in. This feature I found to require some practice to use.

I am grateful to Helicon Focus for providing a copy of the software for us to evaluate for this article and I would recommend the product especially for people like me that do not like to get hooked into a subscription model.

➢ SPPC is looking for a videographer

Do you have expertise or do you know someone who would be willing to volunteer to assist on a future SPPC video project.

➢ SPPC is looking for Online Competition Judges

SPPC is looking for volunteers to judge our monthly GDCCC competitions online until we can meet in person. Please contact us at 7pondsphotoexpo@gmail.com to volunteer.

Milky Way Season is starting!

Did you know for our area, the best time to see the Milky Way is from late March to late August. The whole "season" however goes from late February to late September.

I'll do a more in depth look at gear, setup and some photos in the next newsletter but let's get out there and do a little night shooting and be sure to share those images on our SPPC Shared Images Facebook page.
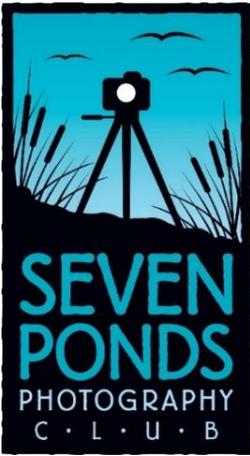
In the meantime checkout the following site for more info:

https://petapixel.com/2020/01/22/this-milky-way-calendar-will-help-you-plan-your-next-astro-shoot/

There is too much light pollution in the metro area so plan on traveling out to a dark area (preferably not alone). The following apps help determine the best times for viewing:

- ✓ The Photographer's Ephemeris
- ✓ PhotoPills
- ✓ Stellarium
- ✓ SkyView *(see App Store/ Google Play)*

more in the next issue…

Spring - 2021

SPPC - Activities and Events

Meeting Location
Seven Ponds Nature Center
3854 Crawford Road Dryden, MI 48428-9776

The Seven Ponds Photography Club holds its meetings on the 1st and 3rd Friday of each month from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm. All meetings are open to members and nonmembers. *Note: for 2021 the in person meetings continue to be canceled until further notice. These meetings are replaced with meeting online via Zoom.*

Upcoming Events

5/21/2021 - The Properly Equipped Macro Photographer By Mike Moats

Contests

Six River 2021 Nature Near You Photo Contest
Closes by August 27, 2021

Detroit Digital Salon of Photography 2021
Closes August 30, 2021

Upcoming Virtual Workshops

May 24th "I was lost but now I am found-Discovery of our artistic vision"
Register in advance for this meeting **https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register /WN_9-wFdD7HSk6sQaUqlxjCqA**

> *"It is an illusion that photos are made with the camera… they are made with the eye, heart, and head."*
> -Henri Cartier-Bresson

Assignment Topics
(Review @ 1st Friday Zoom Meetings)

Upcoming Assignments
May – Mammals, June – Birds, July - Patriotic

Assignment Reviews are typically reviewed on the first Friday of the month following the assignment month, unless otherwise noted. Please send your images to 7pondsphoto@gmail.com, by noon on the day of the meeting.

Club Outings

Informal outings have been happening like the April Kensington Outing, look for details on the SPPC Facebook Page or FaceBook SPPC Photo Ops page

Lead a photo club trip - Trip request form. https://form.jotform.com/90283795109161

Newsletter Content
We are looking for members to contribute articles related to photography or club activities. Please email germaine.finley@sppc.com

Self-guided Trips

5/20 – 5/30/2021 Dinosaur Shoot Canterbury village

5/22/2021 Romeo Michigan Car Show **a.k.a MayFest**

5/29/2021 Skyhoundz, AWI, UFO at Frankenmuth Dog Bowl 2021

5/28/2021 Balloons Over Bavarian Inn

06-26-21 National Beard Event   Imlay City

7/10/2021 Rock N Roll K9s Performance

7/19 thru 7/24/2021 Skerbeck Family Carnival Goodells County Park

7-20-2021 **Eastern Mich State Fair** Imlay City Mi

8/27, 8/28/2021 Metamora Country Days and Hot Air Balloon Festival

Please click on link for any Covid 19 Restrictions or cancelations

Meetings

The Seven Ponds Photography Club typically holds its meetings on the 1st and 3rd Friday of each month from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm.

1st Friday meetings focus on educational presentations and monthly assignment photographs.

3rd Friday meetings are competition night, photographs submitted by members are scored and reviewed. Selected photos are then sent to the Greater Detroit Camera Club Council (GDCCC) to compete with other clubs. Currently, club meetings on the 3rd Friday are used for optional speakers. Competition images are reviewed after the judged in the 1st Friday meeting. Competition images are reviewed online during the 1st Friday meeting.

In person and Mentoring sessions have been canceled for 2021.

SPPC Home Page SPPC Facebook Page
SPPC Member's Shared Images

GDCCC Home Page

In photography there is a reality so subtle that it becomes more real than reality.
Alfred Stieglitz