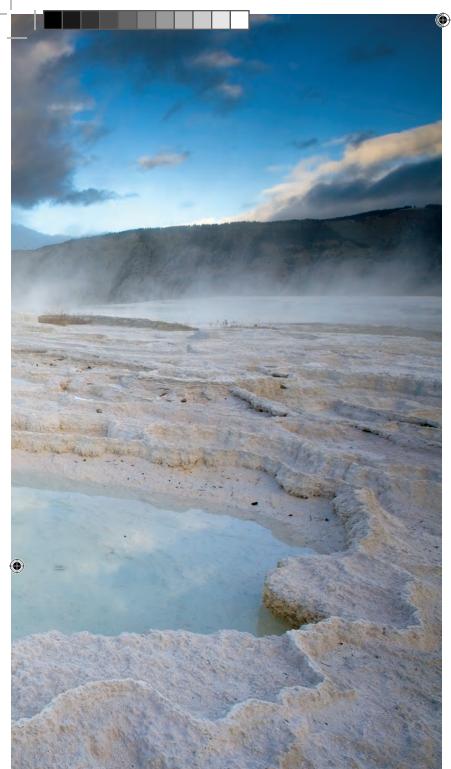© Ian Shive

Adventures
in Motion

Nature photographers **GET SERIOUS** *about capturing video and producing multimedia.*

BY ETHAN G. SALWEN

"I was walking along a fire road and came across a swarm of digger bees near the ground," recalls Rob Sheppard. It was a beautiful spring day and, camera in hand, Sheppard was once again exploring the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, nestled among the urban sprawl of Los Angeles, where he lives. "It's a unique ecosystem and under photographed," explains Sheppard, who approached the active, loud bees. Pushing into their midst his HD DSLR—a digital single lens reflex camera that can capture high-definition video and audio—Sheppard began to record a series of video clips. "In terms of a still image, the bees just looked like a brown splotch on a brown background—not interesting at all—but the video that I captured was truly amazing."

"I love exploring the natural world," Sheppard told me during a long conversation in which he enthusiastically discussed the incredible possibilities in motion capture and multimedia production that are opening up to still photographers. Sheppard is a well-known nature photographer and educator, the author of more than 30 books and the editor-at-large of *Outdoor Photographer*. He explained that the convergence of still and video presents many unknowns for photographers, from creative issues of how to balance capturing both stills and video to business issues of how to profit from multimedia. Continuing down the fire road this spring, Sheppard was not pondering such industry concerns. He was focused on experiencing nature as he switched back and forth between still and video. "It's so exciting to be able to explore nature with movement and sound in a way in which we simply cannot with still images alone. " (See Sheppard's "Buzz" at www.tinyurl.com/28v3rnc.)

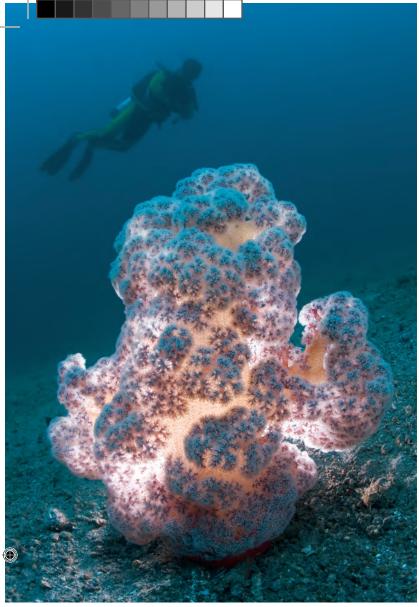### New Frontiers in Video Capture, Editing and Distribution

Like many photographers, Sheppard is excited about the new possibilities in video capture offered by HD DSLRs. All serious photographers soon will be able to capture quality digital video with their still cameras, and nature photographers are likely to embrace it. As Sheppard notes, "Video is a way to show off the wonders of nature in a way that can help make people care."

Sheppard explains that the advent of HD DSLRs is not the most critical development in putting video in the hands of still photographers. He notes that HD video camera prices began dropping seriously about five years ago. However, an earlier, even more critical development took place in the late 1990s when professional video editing software began to run on the same computers photographers used for their digital still photography. Access to powerful, professional-level editing tools allowed pioneering still photographers to cross over into the realm of filmmaking and multimedia production.

A storm breaks at sunset creating dramatic light over Mammoth Hot Springs in Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming. This image by Ian Shive is featured in the multimedia project "Wild Exposure." (Episode one can be seen at www.vimeo.com/5787116.)

Soft coral in the Lembeh Strait, Indonesia, was photographed by Tony Wu, whose multimedia projects can be seen on his blog at www.tonywublog.com.

© Tony Wu

music to movies captured entirely in motion featuring complex soundtracks. Their efforts show how affordable digital video capture and editing tools meeting the incredible advances in video sharing on the web have collided to create what can be considered, without risk of hyperbole, the most exciting creative opportunities in the history of photography.

Proceed with Excitement and Respect

The video learning curve is steep. Completely new technical skills are required to capture motion, record sound and edit multimedia. Just as critical, an entirely new way of seeing and thinking about storytelling is needed. While basically giddy with excitement about the possibilities in motion, all the photographers I spoke with offered the same word of caution. Just because photographers can now easily capture video with HD DSLRs (and, of course, point-and-shoot cameras and cell phones) doesn't mean they are savvy at producing multimedia at a professional level. They urge photographers to get started with video—learning through doing, just as they did with still photography—and to have fun. But they advise that photographers respect the skill sets that filmmakers, videographers, sound technicians and editors have spent years acquiring.

One book resource of immense value is *From Still to Motion: A photographer's guide to creating video with your DSLR* (New Riders, 2010). Written by James Ball, Robbie Carman, Matt Gottshalk and Richard Harrington, it is an engaging, comprehensive techniques manual geared specifically for knowledgeable photographers. *The Lean Forward Moment: Create Compelling Stories for Film, TV and the Web* (New Riders, 2009) by Norman Hollyn is a lucid, eye-opening book focused on storytelling and production concepts critical to multimedia success.

There are many websites featuring HD DSLR equipment reviews and recommendations, techniques and resources, including www.dslrhd.com, www.dvinfo.net and www.dslrfilm.com. PhotoCineNews.com is an information-rich blog dedicated to the convergence of photography and video. Still photographers learning video will definitely want to seek hands-on training. It is also critical to embrace the idea that, just as with the pursuit of mastering still photography, learning multimedia will be an ongoing, lifelong process.

Having Fun and Learning by Sharing

"What I've seen is that people who are afraid of embracing new technology just freeze," says Eric Cheng. "This is not helpful." Cheng, a nature photographer specializing in underwater photography, says that the most important step to mastering multimedia is to dive in, enjoy the new possibilities and share work online. To overcome the technical hurdles of multimedia production, he suggests that photographers focus on short, simple projects. Cheng, who licenses both still images and video segments, runs Wetpixel.com, a community-oriented website for underwater photographers. The site is geared specifically to facilitate the kind of sharing that Cheng feels is critical for a modern photographer's development.

The ability to easily distribute video to a worldwide audience via the web is the third factor that has dramatically opened up possibilities in motion for still photographers. With video sharing one of the most signature aspects of today's web experience, it can be hard to recall that only ten years ago video distribution via the web was still relatively novel, clearly outside the realm of the casual amateur. YouTube recently celebrated its fifth birthday, and in a massive communications paradigm shift that is hard to fully grasp, casual videographers from all walks of life are daily uploading hundreds of thousands of videos to YouTube and other video-sharing sites, as well as blogs. The YouTube site explains that "every minute, 24 hours of video is uploaded to YouTube." This incredible fact is all the more significant because "share" functionalities allow video viewers to post most videos to other sites, allowing video content to go "viral" in a way that still images simply do not.

The photographers interviewed for this article are using different combinations of still images, video capture and diverse forms of audio to produce a rich spectrum of multimedia productions—from relatively simple digital slideshows set to

"I didn't come up through the photography industry in a traditional way," Cheng says. "I became recognized based on my own efforts with web publishing. So I appreciate the value of sharing images." Cheng, who worked as a software engineer before focusing on photography professionally, says that he has benefited from being more web savvy than the average photographer. "I shared my images wherever I could online," he says. "They were watermarked with my copyright and linked back to my main website." This turned out to be essential to Cheng's success, as he was inspired to improve, receiving helpful feedback from members of online communities and getting noticed by editors, all while building a robust online presence of images. Cheng regularly posts his video experiments to YouTube, Vimeo.com and his blog, and suggests that still photographers pursuing video do the same.

Cheng finds it is much more difficult to make money with video than with still photographs due to the complexities of editing and marketing. However, right now he's too busy enjoying the thrill of creating and sharing content to worry about how he will make money from video. Cheng encourages photographers not to be distracted by the pressure to use the highest-end video equipment. "The camera in my pocket is the best tool I have," he says, "because I'm always ready to take photographs and capture video." Cheng suggests that photographers experiment with any device that will capture motion, knowing that the quality will stand up to web-sharing standards. Most important, it will allow them to advance their learning.

Understanding New Paradigms in Publishing

"The web is everything," says Ian Shive. "I think that the web will become the primary portal for all forms of media: books, magazines, movies, TV. We won't go to a book first and then get directed to the web. Rather, we will go to the web first and then be directed to the book." In his early-thirties, Shive is a nature photographer who turned professional only a few years ago—from a background in marketing major Hollywood motion pictures. Driven and focused, Shive is having tremendous success, recently publishing *The National Parks: Our American Landscape* (Earth Aware Editions, 2009) and having launched Wild Collective, a full-service multimedia production company with partner Russell Chadwick. Wild Collective has produced multimedia pieces for the *National Parks* magazine website and continues to gain commercial clients eager for high-end multimedia pieces to promote products.

"While working in Hollywood, I really learned what it meant to market and communicate using today's media," explains Shive, who played a key role in the publicity campaigns for all three "Spider-Man" movies. Shive says that at about the time that high-definition video was merging with DSLRs, he encountered Brian Storm, the founder of the multimedia production company MediaStorm and one of the most influential figures in promoting the use of multimedia in photojournalism. "When I saw the type of work Storm was promoting, I was very impressed," Shive recalls. "But I thought it was very journalistic.

I thought we could use multimedia to cover the natural world with a sense of drama in the form of a Hollywood cinematographic style."

One of Shive and Chadwick's first Wild Collective projects was to create a four-part multimedia series called "Wild Exposure with Ian Shive." The original idea was to create a single multimedia piece to promote *Our American Landscape* on the web. When the team returned from their 28-day, 7,500-mile national parks road trip, Shive says they realized that Chadwick had shot "36 hours of the most stunning footage you have ever seen in HD." They decided to use Chadwick's video footage, Shive's stills, voiceover narration and an original music score to create "Wild Exposure." Each five-minute video serves as a brilliant portfolio piece for Shive's imagery, a documentary of specific national parks as well as a unique opportunity to see a nature photographer at work.

Shive published "Wild Exposure" to the web without a clear sense of where it would lead. He was rewarded by Current TV—the broadcast station started by Al Gore—picking up the series. So did Virgin American airlines, which featured the series on its in-flight entertainment systems. "Wild Exposure" received extensive attention through viral exposure on the web, and this led directly to new clients seeking the services of Wild Collective.

Everyone I talked with regarding multimedia agrees with Shive's web-focused sentiment. Photographers focusing on multimedia efforts would do well to think of the web as their primary publishing platform and to consider an audience that Shive says has "become very educated, in some sense jaded." He notes that although it's easy to publish videos to the web, "it can be very difficult to get people to watch content." Shive says that people have incredibly short attention spans when viewing online videos, so photographers need to create content that is brief, beautiful and energetic and delivers targeted messages to specific audiences.

Shive notes that the advent of Apple's iPad, which displays still images and video with stunning fidelity, is heralding in new platforms that will accelerate the evolution of new types of media. For example, the next generation of electronic books and magazines will richly weave together diverse combinations of text, audio, still images, multimedia shorts and longer movies. Publishers of these new media experiences will be increasingly hungry for creative forms of editorial and commercial multimedia content. So in addition to becoming savvy to the sensibilities of web audiences, multimedia-producing photographers need to become aware of the evolution of new media delivery platforms and how they are being put to use.

Taking on Video Editing One Step at a Time

"You don't know what you're missing in terms of content until you begin editing," says Tony Wu, a commercial photographer based in Japan who specializes in underwater photography. Wu explains that it is critical for photographers to get started with video editing sooner rather than later. Three years ago, Wu created "A Very Hungry Frogfish," one of his first experiments

in multimedia. Editing with Boinx Software's FotoMagico (a slideshow and basic video editing program for Mac computers), Wu strung together a series of still images and narrated the piece with a voiceover he recorded directly into Apple's GarageBand sound editing program. "Yes, the quality of the audio sucks and the video processing is no good," Wu shared with me in his slow, calm, thoughtful manner of speaking. "But the end result achieves what I wanted, which was to make people laugh and to get people to emotionally relate to a fish."

"Frogfish" is endearing, captivating and educational, and Wu's low-tech approach to editing the project does not diminish it. If anything, the limits of FotoMagico forced him to focus more clearly on his story and his audience. In making "Frogfish," Wu created a storytelling experience that comes across with the sophistication of a great children's book. By editing together a handful of still images in a basic program with a clear creative goal in mind, Wu began traveling down the long road of mastering multimedia postproduction. (See "Frogfish"at www.tonywublog.com/20070418/frogfish.)

After creating "Frogfish," Wu continued to edit increasingly complex multimedia pieces using software such as FotoMagico, GarageBand and Apple's iMovie (a consumer-level video editing program for Macs). However, Wu's primary focus was to improve his video and audio capture techniques. "You can't take on every new skill at one time," notes Wu, who recently finished "Adventures with Craig," in which he focuses on dive boat operator Captain Craig de Wit to create a multimedia piece that beautifully highlights the unique coral reef ecosystem of Easter Fields of Papua New Guinea. To create "Adventures," Wu edited, for the first time, in Apple's Final Cut Pro, the popular pro-level editing software that has a dauntingly steep learning curve. Wu explains that he had finally reached a roadblock with the limitations of basic consumer software. He realized that he needed the power of Final Cut Pro to blend his magnificent underwater stills and video as well as graphics, timing them perfectly to a complex soundtrack. Tied together by a video interview of Captain de Wit, "Adventures" is a wonderful example of multimedia storytelling that presents what Wu calls a "layered dimensionality that goes way beyond still images alone." (See "Adventures" by Tony Wu at www.tinyurl.com/29vcehl.)

Practicing editing is critical to help photographers learn the importance of "B roll" motion footage and still images. B-roll content rounds out a story, helps with transitions and visually supports what a narrator or interviewee is saying on the sound track.

Photographers should feel comfortable starting with basic video editing software. For Mac users, iMovie is an obvious choice. Wu highly recommends FotoMagico, noting that the program handles still-only projects better than iMovie. For PC users, Sheppard highly recommends Adobe Premier Elements. There are a number of inexpensive (and even free) editing apps available online. Many experts insist that editing should be done in Final Cut Pro or Adobe Premier (an equally powerful pro editing program that also runs on PCs). However, it is more useful to begin working, learning and producing multimedia pieces than to get bogged down and discouraged by complex programs. Ultimately, the demands of the story should dictate which editing tools a photographer uses.

Listen Up: Sound is King

"It's really important that photographers understand that sound is more important than the visuals in multimedia production," says Ralph Clevenger. "Audiences are more tolerant of bad images than they are of bad sound." Clevenger, a commercial photographer who has taught nature photography and multimedia production at Brooks Institute for two decades, explains that in video and multimedia, individual images are flying by rapidly, not being stared at for careful dissection as with still images on a printed page. In multimedia, photographs that might be unacceptable as stand-alone, print images can illustrate essential points, create important transitions and round out the overall story in a significant manner. On the other hand, Clevenger notes that moviegoers will walk out of a theater with a lousy sound system. "We just don't tolerate bad sound."

Clevenger has been involved with filmmaking as long as he's been involved with still photography. "When I was in college studying zoology I had an 8mm movie camera, and I used it to shoot class projects," he explains. "I edited the film and showed it in class—lugging around a projector. So I kind of got started in photography from the motion picture side." After earning his degree in zoology, Clevenger studied photography at Brooks, and his first job out of school was working for a media production company, primarily creating audiovisual slideshows. These AV shows required rapidly projecting hundreds of images on multiple slide projectors, perfectly timed to a soundtrack. "AV shows were just a bridge between still and motion," Clevenger says. "You had to have all of the skills to produce excellent sound, and you had to know how to tell a story."

"Multimedia production can be a one-man show," Clevenger says, noting that he once produced a broadcast commercial almost entirely on his own. However, larger, more complex multimedia productions are, by nature, collaborative. "As soon as you get sound involved, such as recording someone speaking, you need to have at least a two-member team. You need a person dedicated to monitoring the sound."

Sound for multimedia production can come from a number of sources. One audio source that is typically avoided like the plague is sound recorded with a camera's built-in microphone. The quality is simply horrible. For this reason, photographers will want to use an external microphone plugged into the camera, record sound separately or do both at the same time. In fact, multiple microphones can be set up for one video take, providing multiple tracks of sound to use in editing.

Another audio capture option, for use with both still and video editing, is to record sound separately—as a stand-alone act. Capturing rich, quality sound—from audio interviews and ambient sounds in nature—is critical for the best multimedia storytelling. Photographers can find excellent inspiration for

This domestic pig running wild was photographed in the Bahamas by Eric Cheng, whose videos can be seen at www.vimeo.com/echeng.

using sound in great documentary movies and public radio reporting. (See Clevenger's "Cage Diving with Great White Sharks" which uses music as a background at www.tinyurl.com/2dno2hp.)

"Most songs are copyright protected, and cannot be used unless they are licensed," Clevenger emphasized. Photographers, of course, are well aware of the importance of respecting the intellectual property of other artists. However, this simple concept of not using copyrighted music in projects might not seem obvious. After all, the vast majority of amateur videos on YouTube feature copyrighted music used illegally.

Clevenger says the easiest solution for acquiring music for multimedia projects is to purchase royalty free music, available online in amazing scope for under $30 a segment. Clevenger also encourages photographers to consider using sound effects. "When you come back from a photo safari in Africa, online you can find sounds of elephants, storms and every other sound a nature photographer will need," he explains. "So you don't need to worry about hauling around sound equipment."

It's All About the Story

"The way I approach multimedia is to think about each project as a storyteller and then to think about what tools I will need to best tell the story," says Mary Lynn Price, who since retiring from practicing trial law in 2003 has dedicated herself to video

journalism, with a specific interest in natural history stories that support conservation efforts. "You need to have the mindset of a storyteller at the beginning, before you go into production. It is much, much more difficult to make interesting stories if you do not have a clear story in mind, even if you have great images." Price is adamant that multimedia is "not just about stills and video." "You have the added dimension of sound: the interview, narration, ambient sounds. All this must be used well to bring the pictures to life."

Price says her biggest challenge has been to effectively tell stories in a short time. "I'm very interested in short pieces to better address the short attention spans of internet viewers," she explains. "It is challenging to whittle down content to tell a story quickly and in a compelling way." Price did this extremely well in 2008 while in Antarctica, where she traveled to report for "Women Working in Antarctica," a website she produced with support from the National Science Foundation and other entities. While at the U.S. Antarctic base, McMurdo Station, Price set up a video blog site and posted videos. She also distributed free podcasts of her reporting through Apple's iTunes website.

Price is focused on "the one-man-band" approach to video production, noting, "It's very likely that the future of journalism will focus on one journalist who does all of the writing, video and still photography on location and creates a consolidated multimedia package for distribution." Price's ability to do this

© Mary Lynn Price

Mary Lynn Price captured this image in the historic hut of Sir Ernest Shackleton at Cape Royds, Antarctica, in high-definition video for one of the video journalism pieces she produced for "Women Working in Antarctica": www.womeninantarctica.com.

and to leverage social media to gain greater audiences for her stories has resulted in her being hired to return to Antarctica this October, working as an independent contractor for Montana State University's Weddell Seal research team with funding from the National Science Foundation. "My role is to communicate the science taking place," she says. "I'll basically be telling natural history stories about Weddell seals to students and to the general public, and I will have to decide how to best communicate to them."

Photographers engaged in multimedia agree with Price that focusing on telling a story to a specific audience is the single most important key to success in video and multimedia. "At the end of the day, your multimedia project is only as good as your story," says Shive. Wu notes, "My 'Frogfish' piece is a good example of nothing mattering more than the story."

"Even music motivational pieces have to have a storyline," Clevenger says. "Photographers tend to freak out when they hear the word 'story.' Unlike with still photography, in multimedia you are now creating a piece that has a beginning, middle and end. That's a story." Clevenger explains that what he calls "music motivational pieces" (and many photographers refer to as "music videos") consisting of only still images set to music. "They can be absolutely wonderful," Clevenger says. "Most still photographers will go the route of creating these beautiful little pieces with beautiful images. They offer nature photographers a wonderful way to begin to tell stories about the species and environments that they love."

Price encourages photographers to think of simple stories they are eager to share. "A photographer visiting a national park can make a video of that trip," Price suggests. "Knowing that you are going to edit a story forces you to consider a shot list. You will need to show the park entrance and where you eat and sleep, which are topics you might not normally photograph."

Creating story-specific shot lists is critical for multimedia success. Shot lists help photographers deal with the extremely difficult task of balancing when to capture stills and when

to capture video. "If you have a shot list and you know your subjects, you can consider which content will look better in still and what you can convey better with motion," Price says.

When capturing motion and stills for use in multimedia it is essential to record all subjects in wide, medium and close-up shots. "The wide shot is the establishing shot," Price explains. "The medium shot clearly shows the subject. The close-ups give us the 'wow' factor." Clevenger explains that photographing for multimedia requires a fundamentally different methodology than when photographing stills for use as a stand-alone image. "We tend to think of still images in terms of how they will look on the wall," Clevenger notes. "For multimedia editing, you need to shoot a wide, medium and close-up image of every subject. Otherwise you don't have a story."

Beyond the Million-Dollar Question

One critical question professional photographers are asking is, "How can I make money from multimedia production?" This question does not lend itself to easy answers. For one thing, how to monetize multimedia is a topic that shifts with rapid evolutions of both technology and marketing trends. Also, as Clevenger explains, "Making money with video and still photography are totally different, from the billing process to the rights packages."

For photographers moving forward with capturing video, recording sound and editing multimedia, the question of how to profit from producing motion seems less important than focusing on expanding one's skill set with a sense of excitement, trusting that these skills will prove profitable. As Wu explains, "I'm convinced that everything that I grew up with in terms of traditional methods of marketing products will be radically different in the future. How photographers fit into these new markets will be radically different. However, whatever the future holds will require all of the skills I am learning in relation to multimedia storytelling." Wu says he wants to be in position to conceive, write, capture, develop and output the multimedia products that will be in demand. "Even if I do not perform every step in a project, it will certainly make me more competitive to be familiar with all of them."

"I have great respect for photographers who only want to capture still images," Price says. "That said, there is technology being created that opens up whole new ways of expressing what is important to us with motion and sound. Putting these technologies to work in the realm of nature is one of the most beautiful uses of new media that I can imagine."

A journalist based in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Ethan G. Salwen (ethan@ethansalwen.com) invites you to check out his initial multimedia experiments at: www.youtube.com/user/ethansalwen.

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