



Norbert Wu

Wildlife Photographer

1065 Sinex Avenue
Pacific Grove, CA 93950
USA

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Dear Photographer or Underwater Enthusiast:

I wish I could answer every one who asks me for advice personally, but I can't. I'm truly sorry, but I am deluged with questions about my career and photography, and I can't spare the time any longer. I enclose a form letter with the most commonly asked questions and my answers. I hope that this helps, and that you will seek out the sources I've listed for further information.

>>We scanned one of your photographs from a calendar and used it in a flyer. We are non-profit. Why can't you let us use this photograph for free?<<
Much as I would like to, our office policy is not to grant usage of our photographs without payment. We have to make a living at what we do. Did you pay the printer for printing up the flyer? Did you pay someone to use the paper stock for the flyer? Please think of us as a business. Our business happens to be a very difficult one that involves enormous expense in obtaining photographs.

>>I'd like to use some of your photographs in my Web page. Can I do so?<<
Much as I would like to, our office policy is not to grant usage of our photographs without payment. We have to make a living at what we do. There are many commercial products out in the marketplace which have underwater photographs on CD-ROMs. The Microsoft Underwater Scenes product has many of our photographs, and the Ocean Voyager CD-ROM contains some of our work as well. If you would like to purchase a CD-ROM of Norbert Wu's photographs which show about 100 of his images set to music, which can be browsed or played as a movie, please contact use directly at the number below. This is a new product and retails for \$35.

You should note, however, that purchase of a CD-ROM does not allow you to use the photographs in any way that you choose. For instance, if you purchase a screensaver, then the photographs can be used on your computer as a screensaver, but they can not be lifted from the disk and used on your web page. For that use, you must contact the photographer and ask for his permission to use his photograph.

Photographs are copyrighted works of art, and lifting images off web pages, CD-ROMS, or disks and using them in your computer, web pages, or publications without the photographer's permission is violation of copyright law. It is stealing.

Photographers don't *sell* pictures; we license the (copy)right to reproduce them on a per-use basis. That includes so-called "buyouts," which can mean a dozen different things to a dozen different people.

>>I am an educator working with second graders. We have been studying ocean wildlife and would love to use your photos in non-commercial Hyperstudio stacks for our own use. Would this be acceptable to you? I wanted to ask your permission first.

Of course, we credit all sources. I appreciate your time in this matter. They are beautiful photos! >>

I'm very sorry, but our policy does not allow usage of our photographs without payment. Please see my answer to the question above this one.

>>How do you get started as an underwater photographer?

You start by experimenting and reading books. Trying to answer this question is kind of like trying to teach how to drive, how to live, or how to work a computer. Trying to answer this question adequately could take a long time.

My best advice is to buy a couple of good books on underwater photography.

The best books are *Howard Hall's Successful Underwater Photography*, and I have to admit, my *How to Photograph Underwater*. Try Amazon or Helix (800-33HELIX) for copies of these books.

>>I am in the market for an underwater camera system. I am a very accomplished photographer above water, and understand the mechanics of photography quite well. I was planning on getting a Nikonos V setup. The questions I have are mainly which lens to buy. A bunch of people have told me that only the 15mm is worth getting, but they are pricey new and hard to find used. What disadvantages would I find with the 20mm? Also I was wondering which strobe to buy. Ikelite has some good setups that are less expensive than the Nikon strobes. Would you recommend one large powerful one, or two less powerful ones? If you could offer any advice, or point me in the direction of where to find a good how-to-buy-you-first-Nikonos-system book, that would be great.

<<

All of these questions are answered in my book (seriously).

I'm sorry, but I cannot help with equipment questions. I have been deluged with these questions, and my best suggestion is to read my book and follow its recommendations.

You should also contact the following experts for suggestions. They sell the gear that they can advise you on. All of these folks are divers, photographers, and a wealth of information about photographic gear. All shops carry full lines of parts for housings and do custom work and repairs on any type of photographic equipment.

Berkley White
Backscatter
32 Cannery Row
Monterey, CA 93940
phone number: 831 645 1082
fax number: 831 -375-1526
email: sales@backscatter.com

Dan Blodgett
Sub-Aquatic Repair
249 San Benancio
Salinas, CA 93908
phone number: 831-484-6230
fax number: same
email: nikono5@aol.com

Fred Dion
Underwater Photo-Tech
16 Manning Street, Suite 104
Derry, NH 03038
phone number: 603-432-1997
fax number: 603-432-4702
email: fred@uwphoto.com

>>Can you critique my work? I can send it to you or perhaps you can look at it online. Regarding critiquing your work, I'm sorry but I simply cannot spare the time. A suggestion: the photography contests that various diving magazines and diving shows put on are a good way to learn and have your work critiqued. There are underwater photography societies -- clubs -- which have speakers like myself and a bunch of peers that will also critique your work. That's the best way. The diving magazines list diving shows all over the country as well as photo contests. The UPS clubs are in many major cities.

Here's a quote from Aaron Schneider, American Society of Cinematographers: A reel is as much about developing an ability to see yourself -- to see your own work from a critical point of view -- as it is a representation of your work. People talk about being your own worst critic, and that's what you have to become. But that only develops over time, as you progress as a cinematographer. You can't give someone an aesthetic -- it's common sense, and you can't teach that to someone who's just starting out. He has to learn it for himself. (American Cinematographer magazine, December 2000, page 94).

>>"I would like more information on how best to go about getting an education for underwater photographer. Where can I get the training? What kind of job market is there for this career? How much will I get paid?"<<

The best way is to read good books on underwater photography and marketing your photographs. Most photographers are self-taught. Brooks Institute of Photography does have an excellent undersea photography program:

Brooks Institute of Photography
801 Alston Road
Santa Barbara, CA 93108
phone 805-966-3888

As a freelance photographer, you are self-employed. So the question is "how much can I make," not "how much will I get paid." And the answer is: you will make as much money as you set your sights on. You have to be a good businessman, a good photographer, and a fair person. The possibilities are truly unlimited. On the other hand, no one is going to hand you something on a silver platter. Being in business for yourself can be the hardest thing you will ever do, but it is also the most invigorating, and the best way to make a great deal of money.

>>Obviously, you have enjoyed the challenge of underwater photography but I'd like to know what aptitudes you see in yourself and other successful photographers that might make the difference in success rate. <<

The ability to work 120 hour weeks. Total commitment to the work. Knowing that business and marketing is just as important as photography itself.

>>What professional associations are there that might disseminate information directly to such students? Do you have an address or phone number?<<

The best way to learn about the business of photography is to join the ASMP.

ASMP - American Society of Media Photographers, Inc.

150 North Second Street

Philadelphia, PA 19106

phone number: 215 451 2767

fax number: 215 451 0880

>>I will recommend to the students your book How to Photograph Underwater. Are there others you could suggest?<<

The more you can read the better. Another great book on UW photography is Howard Hall's Successful Underwater Photography. Any diving magazine has sections on underwater photography.

Our World Underwater Scholarship Society gives annual, year-long scholarships. They also put on an annual diving show. There are diving shows yearly all around the country. Check diving magazines for times and locations. These are good places to meet those in the business.

Our World - Underwater Scholarship Society

PO Box 4428

Chicago, IL 60680

>> Do you need an assistant when you travel?<<

I am asked this question a great deal. The answer is a qualified no. I already have a stable of friends and local divers who help me occassionally on my travels and locally. Quite honestly, it would be very difficult for me to bring anyone on a trip unless I have already worked with them and knew them. If you are local, perhaps we can meet (I live on the Monterey Peninsula in California). If you are not local, the best way for us to get to know each other is through one of the four or five trips a year that I lead to diving areas such as Palau, New Guinea, the Galapagos, Kenya, etc. For more information on my trips, please consult my web page. If you are interested in joining my mailing list for trip announcements, then please email or mail me your mailing (snail mail) address. Once you are on our list, you'll receive a semi-annual announcement of the trips that I lead.

>> I love photography and diving. Can you give me a job?<<

I get asked this question all the time. The truth is, I sometimes need to hire office assistants. I have three people working in the office for me now. However, these are office jobs. They don't involve diving or photography.

>> I just got back from a Scuba Diving trip to Antarctica. I lucked out and played underwater with a Leopard Seal for about 15 minutes, got it all on DV Video! Could you give me some advice on how I can sell this footage? <<

I'm sorry, but you ask a question that could take a career to answer. Video has no inherent value. You have to put a huge amount of work into marketing the video before it has value. You either find someone who needs the footage and is willing to look at it and pay for it (very difficult) or you need to convince a producer or television station to pay you to produce a program using your footage (also very difficult). Either way, trying to sell any video footage entails a huge amount of work which is not worthwhile unless you have a lot of footage, are very professional, and are in it for the long haul.

>>I've been emailing you and calling you with questions for several months, and you've answered them. Why have you not answered my questions recently?

I have to be direct here. I've given you a great deal of advice over the past few months. At some point, if I have not met someone in person and developed a personal relationship, I have to say "stop." If you are ever in town, let's have coffee! If you have a book, send me a copy so I know what you do! Otherwise, I can't continue to give you advice. I've had to stop giving suggestions to other photographers because doing so has sometimes come back and slapped me in the face. Most photographers don't understand reciprocity.

> I'm thinking about trying to make some of the wildlife
> pictures I've taken over the years more available for sale to help support
> my research and students. I don't know what might be a good marketing
> company. Do you have suggestions of who I should contact?

You ask a question that could take an entire career to answer. I spend almost 90% of my time marketing my photographs, organizing them, and doing the paperwork needed to create a profit.

Most people think that photographers make a lot of money with their photographs, and have fun doing so. Having the photographs is 10% of the work. Making money off those photographs is a full-time job that requires as much, if not more, expertise than taking them.

Lately, the stock photo agencies that used to be relatively easy to approach with photographs have been consolidated. Getting your photos in these new agencies is very difficult. The amount of work it takes to service an agency with photos could be better spent writing grant proposals, in my opinion.

I have written a book called *Selling Nature Photographs* that is available, I believe, on Amazon. I attach an article that relates to this also. It's 10 years old, but still applies.

Best of luck in your photography!

Norbert Wu
Norbert Wu Productions
Pacific Grove, CA 93950
Email: office@norbertwu.com

PS. With his permission, I attach an article that Stan Waterman wrote on the question of pursuing underwater photography as a career.

I also attach an article I wrote about photography; it is after Stan's great article.

The Magic Formula

A few days ago I had a call from a young man whose family I know. I think I knew why he was calling even before he started to speak. Either he was going to travel to Australia and wanted introductions, or he was in a workaday job, thought what I was doing was wonderfully adventurous, and hoped to find a formula for entering the world of adventure. It was the latter. I sighed and glanced at the pile on my desk, an accumulation of work from having been away for a week in the Caribbean. Two days hence I would leave for Australia and my annual white shark caper.

Whether or not his family were old friends I would take the time --at least some time-- to talk with him. I always have. Do you know why? Because over the bridge of years I remember as if it were yesterday dreaming of far horizons. I remember making tent of my bedding after lights out and reading with the light of my two-cell flashlight Col. John Craig's *Adventure Is my Business*. When I was a nipper and tucked into the third-floor room of the big house I grew up in, I remember listening to the sound of cars going by and thinking they must be engaged in travel to some sort of adventure. And much later, when I was old enough to do something other than dream, it was *Diving To Adventure* by Hans Hass and the first accounts of Cousteau's experiences that were the catalysts for my breaking out of the mould, taking a chance. In Conrad's *Lord Jim*, the philosopher, Stein, listens to Jim's lament about being afraid to take a chance, to risk disaster. He replies: "The way is, to the destructive element submit yourself; and by the exertion of your hands and your feet in the water make the deep deep sea hold you up." I remember those times in my early days, when I was going the path of least resistance and needed the proverbial goose to get going. So I listened with empathy and talked with the young man without indulging in sanctimonious pontificating. It's very easy to evoke inspiring quotations and leave a desperate seeker impressed by your erudition and empty of any practical thoughts at all. In *The Wind in the Willows*, Kenneth Graham gave these words to the debonair, footloose seafaring rat, who was advising his land-bound, stuffy cousin, the water rat, who wanted to escape from his dull life by the riverside: "'Tis but a banging of the door behind you, a blithesome step forward, and you're out of the old life and into the new." Sounds splendid, doesn't it? It has the siren song of a recruiting poster. Yet even the most unregenerate romantic would find there was no practical substance to it the next morning. So I try to talk straight with some practical thoughts and avoid cutting dead the hopeful.

All the grubstake in the war& isn't worth a pisshole in the snow if you don't love what you're doing, stay with it, and have at least a modicum Of creativity.

How do you get started? That's the question that usually starts the ball rolling after a few preliminaries to the effect that the aspirant has recently become certified, is keen on photography, and my own evolution from farmer to what I do today was not exactly routine. I had an economic buffer. An inheritance from my father had left me with the

means to make a choice. I have never lost sight of that wonderful privilege nor taken it for granted. A liberal arts education had left me with no really marketable skills. Out of college I might otherwise have dropped into the mass of unemployed labor. Instead, I became a farmer on the coast of Maine, where we had a summer home. If you watched the Discovery Channel show "The Man Who Loves Sharks," you will know that I developed and farmed blueberry land, acquired possibly the first Aqua Lung in the State of Maine, was much inspired by Hans Hass and Jacques Cousteau (in that order), decided to take a chance on earning my bread in the pursuit of adventure in the sea, built a boat especially for diving, took it to the Bahamas, and set up shop. It was what Robert Frost called, "The road less travelled by. And that," he went on to say, "has made all the difference." I like using an example of other similar experiences by friends of mine who had some inherited help. David Doubilet, one of the finest underwater still photographers in the world, underwrote his first work in the field until he gradually gained recognition, was taken on by National Geographic magazine as a contract photographer, and has now had more of his own pictures on the cover of National Geographic than any of their staff. He also became a fine writer and in time did both text and pictures for as many as two articles in one issue. Marjorie Bank, another friend, had means of her own to indulge a hobby. She dived all over the world, often arranging her own charters. At the same time, she practiced and studied 35mm underwater still photography, becoming so skilled and creative that her pictures were published with increasing frequency. She forced herself to overcome a painful shyness and in time became a much sought-after speaker at film festivals and a scheduled seminar leader. She now regularly leads dive tours and has become a force in promoting conservation practices and attitudes among divers. This year she will receive the NAUI Environmental Enrichment Award. Perhaps my favorite and most effective examples of people who have achieved the state of adventure and success for which my eager friend sought a formula come from the ranks of those who started from scratch with no economic aid. The need to just plain survive, to keep a roof over your head, feed yourself, and get on with the process of daily life can so sap and dissipate the energies of a person that ambition and enterprise give way to basic survival. Ron Taylor, the worldfamous Australian underwater cinematographer, became a world champion spearfisherman while he earned his daily bread working in a photoengraving shop. Some years back, when he and his wife Val and I were driving along the Queensland Coast, he became reflective. Recalling the early days, he said: "The other blokes spent their money on girls and cars and beer. I spent my money on cameras and lenses." He and Val both worked for years at their ordinary trades until Ron's spare time photography developed enough currency in a growing market for underwater stories to enable him to work full-time at what he loved doing. Even then, he and Val knew lean times, living on beaches and working out of their sixteen-foot aluminum skiff, the famous Tinn~y Not until they were in their late thirties did they achieve worldwide recognition. Al Giddings was a telephone lineman and an ardent spearfisherman, as were so many of the California high-schoolers living by the Pacific coast. He saved enough money to start a dive shop in San Francisco with a partner, in time he machined his own camera housings, became expert with 16mm cinema and 35mm still photography, and was ready for the challenge when he was tapped by Peter Guber, director of *The Deep*, to both direct and shoot the underwater sequences. From there he went on to major underwater series for the networks.

Howard Hall, possibly the finest underwater documentary cinematographer in the world today, started in [that womb of famous divers, Chuck Nicklin's Diving Locker in San Diego. Chuck himself, Howard Hall, Marty Snyderman, and Chuck's son, Flip

Nicklin, all worked their way up through dive shop apprenticeships to affluence in the underwater photographic world. From safety man on the Coral Sea location for The Deep, and a contract to organize a blue shark sequence for a film I was shooting for Survival Anglia television, Howard grubstaked his first underwater 16mm system. I am fond of saying about Howard that he is an example of what Wordsworth wrote: "The child is father to the man." On his first shoot with me, his instinct with the camera and easy rapport with the marine animals enabled him to outshoot me, hands down. For many years he filmed for minor productions with parsimonious budgets for little more than expenses. He grew as television's capacity for underwater material grew, shooting for ABC's "American Sportsman" shows and for the ageless series, "Wild Kingdom," sharpening his skill and his knowledge of marine ecosystems year by year until he landed a contract to produce an hour for "Nature" on the marine environment of the California coast. Three years of work, with Howard putting more patience and unflagging energy into it than the budget could possibly compensate, resulted in "Seasons of the Sea" It won the Wild Screen Award. This most coveted and highly esteemed award in the documentary field is presented each year in England. It recognizes the finest animal behavior documentaries of the year. It is usually won by the BBC or Survival Anglia and the likes of Richard Attenborough. "Seasons of the Sea" was the first American entry to win this most coveted of all prizes in documentary filmmaking. Howard went on to two more productions for "Nature" and is presently filming for the IMAX productions. He has reached the top and will probably stay there for years. The road to that pinnacle was characterized by thousands of hours of experience, plenty of disasters, the patience and determination to rise again and work with the sea, and a willingness in the early days to work for almost nothing as long as the job got him into the sea with his cameras. I suggest to aspirants to a photographic career in the sea that they hang onto their jobs, join a dive club, and start diving all the free time, weekends, and holidays that they may have. In general, dive clubs provide an opportunity for more diving at a lower cost for group activity. Take up photography as a hobby. Most divers do. That's the way to start. The acquisition of an underwater 35mm camera with housing or an 8mm video system and used equipment is always up for sale—does not represent a major investment today. The recreation and hobby is the start. That's the base on which anyone may grow. There are excellent photography courses that combine with holiday dive trips. That's a way for working people to sharpen their skills and make a diving holiday a constructive experience. Among the best of the courses today are those offered by Jim Church, Chris Newbert, Cathy Church, and Marty Snyderman.

On the road to adventure, the young person is apt to discover that recreational diving and photography is a more satisfying adventure in itself. Perhaps the dull job at the bank or the insurance office or the countless pedestrian businesses that make the marketplace hum can generate enough revenue to dive the world's oceans year by year. Those are the people I meet and work with. They all have a sense of adventure and in varying measure make their lives work to achieve that end. The young person who loves tennis may decide that being a tennis pro for a career is a splendid way of making an avocation a vocation. Another may be made for skiing and go the same route. One ends up not long afterwards tossing tennis balls to spoiled, petulant youngsters at a country club. The other, too many years later, may still be freezing his or her buns off on a ski slope, instructing a class in snowplows. The joy of play and competition can be diminished and finally killed by unrelenting commercial exposure. Dive masters at resorts and dive shops and on dive boats are notoriously transient. I need not labor the point. I did work it out, stuck with it, and found that the sea replenished my sense of

adventure, and year by year, sustained my pleasure in working there. Perhaps it is the infinite variety in diving the many parts of the world's oceans and the satisfaction of sharing my experiences with others in the films that I do. In thinking about where I am and what I do and where I stand in the vale of years, I often find myself returning to the words of Tennyson in his poem, "Ulysses." With the voice of that Homeric seafarer and wanderer he spoke: "Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough gleams that untraveled world whose margin fades forever and forever when I move. How dull it is to pause, to make an end, to rust unburnished, not to shine in use! As though to breathe were life."

Arnlee Bradford, in his book *Ulysses Found*, traces the course of the odyssey home to Ithaca and the patient Penelope and then conjectures on the days beyond for that classic seafarer and his men. He wrote; "I do not think he was content. One night they slid the black ship down into the sea and unloosed the mooring rope from the pierced stone. They turned the eyes of the ship to the west and sitting all in order, they smote the gray sea water."

The likelihood of a hobby evolving into a vocation, as it did years ago for Ron and Val Taylor, depends entirely on the energy, the will, and more than anything on the enterprise of the aspirant..

The Hard Truths of Nature Photography Life as a Freelance Photographer

Many people think that life as a professional photographer is a romantic one, and they dream of pursuing that existence themselves. In reality, however, life as a photographer means a lifetime of failures, rejections, uncertainty, and isolation. You never hear about these failures, but it is simply because photographers never talk about them, and because stories about photographer's failures, other than the humorous ones involving charging rhinos and broken cameras, do not sell. For instance, what book is going to describe its author in something other than glowing terms? What magazine will bring up the past failures of a photographer featured in their issue's portfolio? More likely, any photographer that is featured in a magazine or book is touted as one of the best photographers around, one of the most adventurous, one of the most talented, or one of the rising young stars. So the average reader gets an extremely skewed view of the true lives of photographers.

This article will discuss the profession of nature photography, and point out some popular misconceptions of this profession. In particular, I'll talk about emotional topics that are rarely discussed in magazines or by other photographers. I hope that you, the reader, will get a better idea of the realities of life as a nature photographer, and thus make a better decision about taking up nature photography as a career. It is a rare photographer that is satisfied with both his work and his career. Here are some truths and myths of the profession:

Myth #1: We lead adventurous lives, make lots of money, and travel for free.

Truth: I spend most of my waking hours in the office. I do travel quite a bit, but rarely for free, and only then with strings attached. I made a good living last year, but do not know how things will go this year. A lot of it depends on how much I work in the office, writing proposals, duplicating submissions, and negotiating sales. The more

time I spend in the office, the more money I make, but the less I enjoy myself. When things get too bad, I go out and play with the dogs. Sam, our golden retriever, can now catch an Aerobie thrown six feet high, nearly one hundred yards away. Ange, our yellow Labrador, still can't do much of anything.

It would be nice if a magazine would simply call me up and pay all my expenses to photograph a story on wildlife in Africa, but the fact is, almost no magazines do this. I have been published in thousands of books and magazines, but 99.99% of these sales have been from existing stock. Only the very top of the heap, the very pinnacle of nature photographers have the reputations and connections to be assigned regularly to nature and wildlife stories. I only know of one magazine in the country which regularly assigns nature stories to photographers, and that magazine, which is of course National Geographic, is increasingly oriented to topical issues. My story Antarctica Under Ice which will appear in the February 1999 issue of National Geographic was not assigned; I funded the project myself with support from a National Science Foundation Artists and Writers Grant. In short, you're on your own. You've got to find your own money to fund your expeditions and photography -- no magazine is going to help you.

Myth #2: We get all sorts of free equipment from the camera companies.

Truth: I have never, ever, received a single free piece of gear from a camera company. Nor has any other photographer that I have talked to. I do hear stories once in a while about a famous photographer receiving free gear in exchange for actively using and promoting the camera brand, but when I later meet these people, I find that this is a myth. Nikon, Canon, and other companies do offer professional photographers membership in what they term "professional services," but these "clubs" offer little more than quick repair services and limited loan of equipment. More often than not, I have found their loaner programs to be unworthy of my time. The lens that you need is often loaned out, too old and banged up to give good results, or only available for a few days, rather than a few weeks. I buy all of my equipment myself after careful research.

Myth #3: Photography buyers come knocking at your door, once you have developed a reputation.

Truth: I don't know a single photographer who doesn't work very, very hard at selling himself. One of the things that I have learned through the years is that photography buyers don't necessarily remember you, or call you, even if you have worked with them before. They need constant reminders of your work. The other fact of life in this business is that constant rejection of your proposals and photographs occurs daily. I have learned to take rejections as well as anybody, but it still hurts when a project that I believe in, and which will undoubtedly be successful, is continually rejected. Robert Pirsig, author of the tremendously successful book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, has often stated that his manuscript was rejected by 120 publishers before finally finding one!

Myth #4: Stock agencies are a great way to make money.

Truth: Be very careful in signing with any agency. Never sign an exclusive contract, and don't believe anything that an agency will promise you. Never hand over your best work.

I believe that stock agencies are the most over-hyped myth of the industry. Not one of my agencies has grossed more than 5% of the sales that I bring in myself, working out of my one-man office. The main problem is that most nature photographers are specialists -- in behavior, a particular type of animal, or a type of photography. The typical stock agency makes very few sales of nature photography as compared to their

corporate/advertising images of people. The photo researchers in stock agencies simply don't have the knowledge of subject matter or the time to do a quality-oriented, scientifically accurate job.

I believe that the increasing presence of stock agencies is actually having a detrimental effect on the business of the nature photographer. They are taking bread-and-butter business away from photographers by selling photographs at cut-rate prices, in large bulk deals. Individual photographers are left handling the hard-to-get-requests from publishers who expect usage fees to match those of the cut-rate stock agencies. I have been appalled at how low my photographs have sold from one agency in particular. It was this agency which promised the world to me initially, and which required a monumental investment of time to caption each image its way. This agency asked me to submit my very best images to them, and it wanted exclusive rights to represent my work. Fortunately, I was very careful, holding onto my best images, and only agreeing to a non-exclusive contract. However, I did spend hundreds of hours captioning my slides its way, and filling its requests, even going to the extent of shooting stock for its want lists. After two years, this agency has performed worse than any of my others. It required more time than any other activity last year, and only did about 1% of my gross. In short, this agency promised great things, asked for a great deal of time and material, yet has never delivered. I would be out of business now if I had believed this agency's promises, and given in to their requests for exclusivity, and let my best photographs out of my office.

Myth #5: It must be great to be your own boss.

Truth: Life as a photographer is busier and more stressful than any corporate job could be. As a freelance photographer, you are isolated and inundated with the small, time-consuming tasks like captioning, sending off submissions, and maintaining the photo library. The isolation can be numbing; it takes a very strong sense of will and purpose to keep working alone, both in the field and in the office. Photographers are always the last person on the totem pole in terms of decision-making. Ann Guilfoyle, in a recent Guilfoyle Report , recently discussed how the electronic age is isolating nature photographers even further from their clients with impersonal answering systems, faxes, and computers. We work in isolation, with very little status or power, and with no job security whatsoever. We have no titles such as Doctor, and no status or connections with institutions, be they scientific or artistic. What I have found particularly aggravating is the fact that nature photographers have no source of funding at the national level whatsoever. Nature photography is not considered art, nor is it considered science. The federal grants of the National Endowment for the Arts or Humanities (NEH and NEA), the Guggenheim Fellowships, and numerous other grants in the arts and sciences don't consider nature photography to fall within any of their respective guidelines. It is astounding to me to see some of the "art photography" that is being funded by these programs, and I am always appalled at the obsession that people have with photographs of the human race, rather than the millions of other beings that share this planet.

Truth: It's Still Worth It

Of course, there is nothing like working for yourself, seeing your work in print, and seeing new photographs on your light table. Nature photography is not accepted as an art form by the establishment now, but I am certain that it will be considered an important view of the world down the line, probably the only significant art to come out of our generation. With hard work and a good eye, it is possible to make a good living at this profession. A good friend of mine recently sent me a cartoon with the

caption "The Advantages of Being Self-Employed." The picture showed a man sitting at his desk with a big grin on his face, and twelve framed photographs of himself behind his desk. Each photograph was labeled "Employee of the Month."