

Critiques May 2012.

All images were critiqued by Roger Thwaites,

Greetings to you all at Matamata. I was invited to judge your 'Open' category, and themed subject images of "Creepy Crawlies", for the month of May. There were 36 projected images in all. My approach to the judging is to look at, and assess each image individually, with a view to giving a brief comment about them. If there are some problems with an image, I usually flag up one or two issues, and try to offer a solution for improvement. To those who were not successful, I would encourage you to keep on striving to improve your images, and keep entering your club competitions, as this is probably one of the best ways to gain a good grounding in photography.

SOME GENERAL COMMENTS:

Most of the "creepy crawlies" entries were either Close-up, or Macro, and generally with this type of photography, it is important to try for as much depth-of-field (DOF) as possible. That means, that we need to get the camera lens face as parallel to the subject as possible. Some images, struggled to get enough DOF, and this resulted in most of the subject being unsharp. Some images were taken with the camera at its closest distance to the subject, which meant that the DOF was very narrow. Stepping the camera back from the subject a small amount, and refocusing, can have the effect of increasing the DOF. (This is especially so, if you are using a Macro lens).

Additionally, with Close-up work, it is vitally important to be aware of what is in the background of your image, and to take steps to exclude any unwanted distracting influences. This includes 'negative' spaces.

Lighting, and how it is played onto the subject, can make or break close-up/macro images. Some images suffered from harsh lighting, where diffused lighting would have been a better option. Using a small reflector can sometimes give a much better result.

This concludes my commentary. I hope that most of you found my comments helpful, and that you are inspired enough to keep on striving for improvements to your photography. I wish you a very good evening at your club night, and look forward to hearing from you again in the near future.

All the very best of photographic successes.

Roger Thwaites (PSNZ Panel judge)

Theme Digital – Creepy Crawlies



B-Grade: A String of Pearls

Well taken and well placed in the frame. Would have created a little more interest if we were able to see more of the head area of the Huhu grub. However, it's well done, with a good title Highly Commended.



B-Grade: Afternoon Tea

The idea is there, but you probably need to give some more thought about the composition, and in particular, how the subject fits into the frame. The caterpillar is 'crowded' into the right third of the image, with the other 2/3rds, showing as negative space (i.e. – nothing else that adds to the image, in this space). It is critical that the caterpillar should be pin-sharp, but in this case it is a tad too blurry. The exposure and colour are great, but with a little more thought and imagination, a better image is just begging to be made. Entry.



B-Grade: Buzzing About

The image as a whole, has a pleasing look about it, and has a slightly ethereal feeling to it, because of the out-of-focus flowers in the foreground. Good composition, and effective use of the rule-of-thirds. The focus on the bee should be pin-sharp, and it is probably borderline, but a very good effort. Merit.



B-Grade: Feeding Time

A very sharp image which shows the body hairs of the wasp, in very minute detail. Well done. It is however, slightly overexposed at the bottom right of the image resulting in a fall-off of colour and sharp detail. A crop of about a quarter of the image from the top would make it stronger. It is otherwise, a very well handled macro shot. Highly Commended.



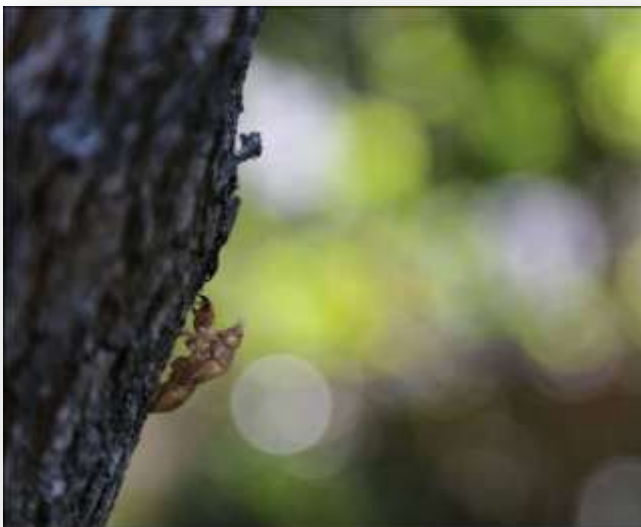
B-Grade: Gotcha

Once again, a very narrow depth-of-field, with very little of the insect in sharp focus. I would go so far as to say that the DOF is too narrow for this shot, or you need a slightly different lens angle to obtain more detail of the insect. I fully realise the difficulties of getting the shot, but I don't think you have quite succeeded with this one.
Entry.



B-Grade: Grasshopper

A great little image. With close-up work, you need to be mindful of what's in the background of your image. The grasses in this case, tend to be quite distracting and compete with the insect. Just a pity about the nearest leg being out of focus. Otherwise, your image has good exposure, and has a pleasing composition – a very good attempt.
Merit.



B-Grade: Insect Captured

I tend to think that the insect has gone! And that this is what's left of the pupa case. I thought that the image as a whole, had a rather appealing abstract look about it, and although there is a lot of negative space to the right, there are a lot of magical shapes and colours within it. I would say that the narrow depth-of-field combined with camera shake, has produced something quite different to what you first intended. An interesting effect.
Accepted.



B-Grade: Keeping An Eye On You

The very narrow depth-of-field limits the amount of detail of the insect, with only the eye and parts of the head in sharp focus. While it is the eye that is the centre of interest, I keep wanting to see a bit more detail, and feel that if the camera was placed more to the side, this could have been achieved. An interesting idea.

Acceptance.



B-Grade: Little Critter

A great little portrait of the hedgehog, with good eye contact and catch light. The spines and facial features are all very sharp with great definition. Very good composition and placement of the animal within the frame. Well done, and congratulations.

Honours.



B-Grade: Monarch Caterpillar

The caterpillar is well posed and is sharp. Well done. The overpowering white background lets your image down – Cropping away the right half of your image, gives a vast improvement. The dead twig hanging down adds a distracting influence that could have been easily removed. A vertical format might have been a better option for this image.

Acceptance.



B-Grade: On The Run

You might find it useful to change your shooting angle, so that the face of the lens engages with more of the snail's shell (more of a shot from the side). Front-on shots seldom work that well, because of narrow depth-of-field issues. Only a very small part of this image is in sharp focus. Try stepping the camera back a little from the subject and refocusing, to gain more DOF. A good attempt, but needs more work on the composition and focussing, to do better. Entry.



B-Grade: Ready To Pounce

The insect itself is quite sharp with good eye contact, and the narrow depth-of-field has, to a degree, taken care of some of the distracting background (but not fully). Try to avoid mottled backgrounds. The colour tones look slightly flat, which could be due to slight over-exposure – better colour saturation may be obtained by using computer software. A good attempt. Accepted.



B-Grade: Slug

Excellent detail in the front half of the slug, but then sadly, the sharp focus suddenly falls away, which is a great pity, as this image has the potential to be much better. Getting the lens face parallel to the slug is essential to getting good detail throughout the image. Nearly there, but not quite! Accepted.



B-Grade: Smelling The Roses

An unusual composition, with almost an abstract appeal to it. Very little of the image is sharp, with the sharpest part of the image, being the front claws of the insect. You could try stepping the camera away from the insect slightly, and refocus, so that you gain some more depth-of-field. This should give you improved sharp definition.
Entry.



B-Grade: Stuck To The Ceiling

Not an easy subject to photograph, but you have done quite well with this one. The delicate form of the spider is well depicted against the light background. It's not the most colourful spiders, so it is difficult to show it off really well, but a very good effort all the same.
Merit.



B-Grade: Suspended In Ice

A good try at a different approach. The exposure looks to be a little on the "hot" side. Try dropping it by up to -1 EV, for a better result. The placement of the spider in the frame is a little tight, on the left side – could do with a slight shift to the right. Otherwise, very well done.
Merit.



B-Grade: Time Out

A good attempt, but I think the fly ‘twitched’ at the wrong moment, resulting in movement, which means that nothing is really in sharp focus. Technically, the lighting and exposure are good – just gotta get the bug to cooperate!
Entry.



B-Grade: Waiting To Take Off

The wasp is nicely placed within the frame, with good attention to cropping. The wasp itself lacks the crisp sharpness that you saw in the previous image. There looks to be some movement – either camera shake, or the wasp moved at the critical moment the shutter was open! A reflector could be useful to light up the head detail more. A good attempt, but more attention to camera technique might be an advantage here.
Entry.



B-Grade: Weta In The Corner

The pose of your weta seems to be a little unwieldy, with the white stucco background also making exposure difficult. Also there appears to be quite harsh lighting(maybe from a flash?), and although this has brought up the detail of the insect, it’s slightly overdone, and giving the insect a rather stark looking contrast You might find that you can control the light more by using a small reflector, or diffuser. You could “carefully” shift the insect to a better location to overcome the overpowering white of the background.
Accepted.



A-Grade: Crane Fly

The definition of the fly is crisp and sharp, showing good detail of the fly's form. Well done. The neutral white background makes the form of the insect really stand out, so that it can easily be identified. The central positioning of the fly would make most entomologists very happy! A very well defined image.

Highly Commended.



A-Grade: Is This My Good Side

This shot of the praying mantis, is compositionally, a better idea. Good definition of the head and nearest eye, except that there is slight over-exposure which means that some of the head detail isn't quite so well defined. Try some diffused lighting, and/or cutting back the exposure, using the camera exposure compensation. A crop of about quarter of the image from the right, would make your image stronger, but I enjoyed the way that you put your image together.

Merit.



A-Grade: Mantis

These are difficult insects to get into sharp focus at the best of times, but you have managed to get the head and claws as well as the hapless victim, fairly sharp. I would be inclined to frame your image around that part, and leave out all the distracting unsharp bits, altogether. It would make your image much stronger. Needs more depth-of-field to do better, otherwise it has a lot of potential, interest-wise.

Accepted.



A-Grade: Nasty Surprise

An interesting image of wasps attending their nest. The honeycomb shapes of the nest are very sharp, and show good detail, but some of the wasps (top & bottom) show a fall-off of sharp focus, and they really need to be pin-sharp. It could even be, that the wasps are moving a lot, in which case, you need a higher shutter speed, to freeze the action. You managed to keep your nerve! Good attempt. Accepted.



A-Grade: Reaching For The Stars

An excellent image to finish with! The 'mono' effect works very well with this image (no distracting colours). The edge-blur gives a good effect, and concentrates the attention on the subjects. A well balanced image that tells the story of the snail 'reaching for the stars' (the dandelion seed head). It is imaginative, has a very good title, and is very well put together as a composition. Congratulations. Honours.

Open Digital



B-Grade: 4 Happy Friends

Indeed! A delightful candid portrait of 'the friends'. A very good pose of the four, with very sharp detail. The background is nicely diffused, the whole image works very well, and, the expressions are, indeed, happy ones! Well done.

Highly Commended.



B-Grade: Closest To Earth

I liked the simplicity of this image, but I don't believe it is large enough in the frame, - it requires a longer lens (say 500mm), or you could resort to photoshop, to bring it up larger in the frame. It's a good effort, which leaves no doubt as to where the focal point lies!

Accepted.



B-Grade: Fields Of Gold

I found this to be a very pleasing image, and one that is easy on the eye. The monarch butterfly is strategically placed as the focal point, but, I did want to pluck out the purple flower, which kept on catching the eye, all the time (distracting!). However, overall it a most pleasant image to look at. Well done.
Merit.



B-Grade: Happy

Shows the emotion of happiness, well, but tends to be more of a family snapshot than a serious competition shot. The arm distractingly covers part of the face and half your image to the right displays a lot of negative space, i.e. – nothing in that part of the image, that adds anything of interest to it. The smile, however, is delightful, and is well caught.
Acceptance.



B-Grade: Lazy Days

An interesting 'human interest' holiday snap. This could do with a tighter frame around the main subject, to exclude the distracting paddles at bottom right. The colour tones are marginally flat looking and could do with a little more saturation. Otherwise, it is well seen, and just needs a few refinements.
Accepted.



B-Grade: My Poppa And I

The tiny hands of the baby against that of the adult hand, has been done many times before, and with such close detail, it is important to ensure that both hands are really sharp. Poppa's hands are drifting in and out of sharp focus, here and there. You could create greater interest, by shifting the camera angle slightly, so poppa's hand is not so horizontal in the frame. Could do with a slight increase in the contrast, overall. Entry.



B-Grade: Rested Enough

A well framed 'human interest' image, which shows interaction between the horse and the woman. The narrow depth-of-field concentrates the view on the 'main players'. Good effort. Accepted.



B-Grade: The Haka

A crisp image, that is sharp around the main subjects and fits well into the 'human interest' PJ category. The facial expressions and the actions of the haka are excellent. A pity about the tape extending across the background of the image – it is visually annoying, and could be 'surgically' removed, with some digital intervention. Well seen and taken.

Highly Commended.



A-Grade: 6

Good use of contrasting shadows and lines to create an interesting abstract image. Once again, it is all about 'simplicity' of the composition, and the black and white tones that makes this a well composed and well balanced fine art photo. Congratulations.

Honours



A-Grade: Drop Zone

A typical 'human behaviour' shot! – A special trait of boys! - kick off the shoes into a heap, and let's go swimming! Excellent story telling image, with one slightly out-of-focus jandal out on its own, telling the viewer that everything happened in a hurry. Well spotted. Honours.



A-Grade: Tracks

Standing in the middle of the tracks, makes you appreciate just what might be coming from behind you, or what is just around the bend! A well composed image with simplicity in mind. Perhaps some of the sky could be cropped off, to make the image stronger, but then I think the sky does add to the mood of it. Sharp detail throughout with good flowing composition, and good balance. Highly Commended



A-Grade: Working Hard

Bees are not always easy to photograph, as they are continuously moving, yet, you have done fairly well with this shot (even managing to capture the eye). The composition is good, but the framing of the bee is a little too tight around its posterior! A higher shutter speed would be useful to freeze the movement of the bee as it scrambles about the flower looking for pollen. All things considered a very good effort. Merit.

Quote: “Impossible is just a big word thrown around by small men who find it easier to live in the world they've been given than to explore the power they have to change it. Impossible is not a fact. It's an opinion. Impossible is not a declaration. It's a dare. Impossible is potential. Impossible is temporary. Impossible is nothing.”

– *Muhammad Ali*