

“Prairie Dancers” Photography Workshop



with **Noppadol Paothong**
Nature / Conservation Photographer

A Five-Day Grassland Grouse Photography Workshop

Monday, April 15 – Friday, April 19, 2019 (Burwell, Nebraska)

Introduction

The impressive and at times bizarre courtship dance of prairie-chickens and sharp-tailed grouse are known to nature lovers as one of the most amazing wildlife displays in North America. Usually shy and elusive for most of the year, in springtime, these dawn dancers put themselves in the field and try to impress potential mates with their dances.

This grouse photography workshop will be held in the heart of the beautiful and ecologically-important Sandhills of central Nebraska.

In this workshop you will spend four mornings and five days with the award-winning conservationist photographer, Noppadol Paothong, to photograph two species of prairie grouse, greater prairie-chicken and sharp-tailed grouse, at the peak of mating season.

Beside grouse, you will also be exploring the beautiful prairie landscape with opportunities to photograph the vast Sandhill prairie and other bird species. Although the area is primarily known for greater prairie-chicken and sharp-tailed grouse viewing, many other bird species also abound in the area and offer excellent bird watching/photography opportunities.

During the workshop, you will learn how to use your camera as a tool of your creative expression, including:

- the finer points of digital exposure to get the right exposure every time;
- how to understand and predict bird behaviors;
- how to spot the good wildlife and landscape situations;
- seeing and understanding “light” and the best perspective; and
- how to compose pleasing images by mastering your camera’s autofocus system.

**** This workshop is for advanced photographers with a good working knowledge of their camera. Contact nop@npnaturephotography.com if you have questions about whether this is the right workshop for you.****

Location

Switzer Ranch/Calamus Outfitters (83720 Valley View Ave, Burwell, NE 68823)

Directions:

- **By air:** Lincoln Airport (190 miles): Omaha Eppley Airfield (210 miles): Denver International Airport (379 miles). Rental cars to drive to workshop headquarters available at the airport.
- **By car:** From Lincoln head west on I-80. Take exit 318 from I-80 W. Follow US-281 North, then take Hwy 11 North and NE-96 W for about 15.6 miles. The Switzer Ranch and Calamus Outfitters, workshop headquarters, will be on your right.

What this photography workshop includes

- Noppadol Paothong, workshop leader
- Photo instruction and presentations during the workshop
- Four morning photoshooting of prairie-chicken and sharp-tailed grouse in a photo blind
- Two afternoon/evening photoshooting of the Sandhills prairie and other bird species
- A guided tour on the Sandhill prairie (2 – 2.5 hours): Guided jeep tour highlighting the complex biodiversity of the Sandhills and bird species found here
- Five days and four nights at the lodge at Switzer Ranch and Calamus Outfitters (single or double room with private shower/bathroom)
- Four dinners and breakfasts. The meals will be prepared by Switzer Ranch staff known for their great meals. (Inform us if you have dietary restrictions.)

Photoshooting

Photoshooting in a Photo Blind

As a group, we will arrive at the photo blind one hour before sunrise, to avoid spooking the birds off the mating ground. There will be a short walk to our photo blind. This will allow time to configure your photo equipment. During this time, you should get familiar with where your equipment is located. You don't want to be fumbling around for equipment once the action starts.

Birds will arrive at the lek approximately 30 minutes before sunrise. We must remain very quiet throughout the morning and during the photo shoot to avoid disturbing the birds. You should avoid drinking excessive liquid beverages early in the morning since there are no restroom facilities in or at the photo blind and once in the blind, you should not leave.

- **During the morning photo shoot:** I will help with suggestions to get you ready for action. Throughout the morning I will offer my expertise and shooting tips along with gentle reminders to think "outside the box." The goal of each morning is to try to produce three images that we can share during class time. Each day I will provide an assignment to challenge each of you to get the most from this experience.
- **After the morning photo shoot:** Each morning a hot breakfast will be served when we arrive back from the photo shoot (around 9 a.m.). After breakfast, work on your images and get them ready to share with class later. This is a photo "discussion" and not a critique, so we learn from each other as a group.

- **Instruction & Group Discussion:** In the afternoon, we will have a presentation/instruction and group photo discussion on what we can learn from the morning photo shoot. This is the important part of this workshop where we push ourselves beyond our comfort zone.

Photoshooting the Sandhill prairie and other bird speices

Beside grouse, you will also have opportunities to photograph the vast Sandhill prairie and many bird species. Promptly after dinner, we will travel to an ideal location to explore wildlife and embrace the vast prairie for an evening landscape photo shoot. This is the time that you can work as individuals to create your own unique photo perspective.

- **Guided tour of the Sandhill habitat:** On Day 2, there will be a 2.5 hour guided jeep tour on the ranch highlighting the complex bio-diversity of the Sandhills and the bird species found there.
- **Landscape photoshooting opportunities:** Although the area is primarily known for greater prairie-chicken and sharp-tailed grouse viewing, many other bird species also abound in the area and offer excellent bird watching/photography opportunities. The Platte River is located just two hours from Burwell and is where hundreds of Sandhill Crane gather during spring migration. March has brought large numbers of bald eagles to Calamus Reservoir in recent years, and there are usually a number of waterfowl migrating through. April brings migrating American White Pelicans, Swainson's Hawks and several species of sparrows.
- **Before/after workshop:** There are many photo opportunities nearby, including hundreds of thousands Sandhill Crane (and some whooping cranes) for spring migration, bald eagles, and a number of waterfowl. I would encourage you to take this opportunity to explore other photography opportunities before or after this workshop. Please visit <http://rowe.audubon.org/>

Photo Equipment & Clothing

Photo Equipment:

This is the photo equipment that I personally bring when photographing in a photo blind. My advice is to keep it simple. Not only do you have to carry your photo gear, space in the blind is also tight.

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| • 2 camera bodies | • Extra batteries for camera |
| • 400mm-600mm prime lens or long zoom lens such as 150-600mm | • Extra batteries for flash and other accessories |
| • 70-200mm lens | • Extra memory cards |
| • Wide angle lens (16-35mm or 24-105mm) | • Lens cleaning tissue |
| • 1.4x and 2x teleconverter | • Camera backpack to carry gear |
| • Tripod with gimbal head to support a long lens | |
| • Tripod with regular tripod head for landscape photography | |

If you can only bring two lenses with you during this trip, bring the longest lens you have and one zoom lens. Having a fast long lens will allow you to get the most from the morning shoot at the lek.

Equipment (Cannon) is available for rent. Advance notice is required. Please contact me for a list of available rental equipment.

Other Equipment:

- Laptop computer with photo browser and photo editing software (Adobe Lightroom and Adobe Photoshop, recommended and preferred)
- Card reader for your memory card
- External hard drive for image storage

Clothing:

Spring weather on the Sandhill Nebraska prairie can be unpredictable with an average temperature from low 25°F to upper 60°F. But it can snow and get very windy and cold, especially in the morning sitting in the photo blind. Wearing multiple layers is recommended. Please note that the photo blinds are NOT heated.

The more comfortable you are, the more productive you will be making great images. Below are clothing recommendations.

- Insulated jacket (and optional insulated pants). I would avoid bright colors as birds can see us inside the photo blind.
- Rain/windbreaker jacket
- Rain/windbreaker pants
- Long underwear
- Hiking boots (waterproof would be an ideal)
- Wool socks
- Gloves
- Winter hat
- Ball cap (for the afternoon photo shoots)
- Sunglasses
- Headlamp and/or flashlight with fresh batteries (you will be hiking to and setting up in the blind in the dark)
- Handwarmer packets (HotHands)

Itinerary

Shooting schedules can be altered to effectively meet the photographic desires of the group and to adapt to changeable weather conditions. (All times are Central Daylight Savings time.)

Day 1: Monday, April 15

- **3 p.m.** Check-in at the Switzer Ranch/Calamus Outfitters Lodge
- **3:30 – 5 p.m.** Meet and Greet: A chance to get to know each other. Kent Skaggs, the general manager of Switzer Ranch and Calamus Outfitters will give a brief description of the history of the ranch, and I will discuss the workshop. Also, I will present a naturalist history of prairie grouse explaining grouse behaviors and what you can expect when we go into the field. This information will be critical to the success of your trip. I firmly believe you make better photos when you understand your subjects.
- **6 – 7 p.m.** Dinner with the group at the Calamus Outfitter Lodge
- **Evening on your own** to prepare, so you are ready for the early morning departure next day

Day 2: Tuesday, April 16

- **5:30 a.m. sharp!** Sunrise photo shoot of sharp-tailed grouse in blind
- **8:30 – 9 a.m.** Breakfast with the group at the lodge after field outing
- **9 – 9:30 a.m.** Download images from morning shooting

- **9:30 – 11 a.m.** Morning discussion & critique. Each participant will provide three images from the morning shoot. This will give you a chance to build on successes and learn from mistakes.
- **11:30 – 2 p.m.** Lunch on your own (A list of area restaurants available) & break
- **2 – 4 p.m.** Afternoon Lecture: “Photo Techniques: Understanding exposure, perspective, and light”
- **4 – 6 p.m.** Sandhill Habitat Ecotour – Guided jeep tour on the ranch
- **6 – 7 p.m.** Dinner with the group at the Calamus Outfitter Lodge
- **Evening:** Explore on your own

Day 3: Wednesday, April 17

- **5:30 a.m. sharp!** unrise photo shoot of sharp-tailed grouse in blind
- **8:30 – 9 a.m.** Breakfast with the group at the lodge after field outing
- **9 – 9:30 a.m.** Download images from morning shooting
- **9:30 – 11 a.m.** Morning discussion & critique. Each participant will provide three images from the morning shoot.
- **11:30 – 1:30 p.m.** Lunch on your own (list of area restaurants available)
- **2:30 – 4 p.m.** Afternoon lecture: “Creativity in Nature Photography – The Art of Seeing”
“Photoediting & other tips in Adobe Lightroom”
- **5:30 – 6:30 p.m.** Dinner with the group at the Calamus Outfitter Lodge
- **Evening field session:** Promptly after dinner, we will travel to an ideal location to explore wildlife and embrace the vast prairie for an evening landscape. Part 1 of the “Creativity in Nature Photography”: Learning to think outside the box. Learn to shoot landscapes by using strong foregrounds and how to use this technique with what we’ve learned so far.

Day 4: Thursday, April 18

- **5 a.m. sharp!** (note earlier start time) Sunrise photo shoot of prairie-chickens in blind
- **8:30 – 9 a.m.** Breakfast with the group at the lodge after field outing
- **9 – 9:30 a.m.** Download images from morning shooting
- **9:30 – 11 a.m.** Morning discussion & critique. Each participant will provide three images from the morning shoot.
- **11:30 – 2:00 p.m.** Lunch on your own & Break
- **2:00 – 4:00 p.m.** Afternoon lecture and critique. Each participant will choose the three best images in the workshop.
- **4 – 5:30 p.m.** Break
- **5:30 – 6:30 p.m.** Dinner with the group at the Calamus Outfitter Lodge
- **Last evening together:** Travel to an ideal location to explore wildlife and embrace the vast prairie for an evening landscape. Part 2 of the “Creativity in Nature Photography.”

Day 5: Friday, April 19

- **5 a.m. sharp!** Sunrise photo shoot of prairie-chickens in blind
- **8:30 – 9 a.m.** Breakfast with the group at the lodge after field outing
- **9 – 9:30 a.m.** Download images from morning shooting
- **9:30 – 11 a.m.** Lecture and critique, final remarks, workshop feedback
- **11:30 a.m.** Workshop concludes
- **12:30 p.m.** Lodge checkout

Disclaimer:

This grouse photography workshop requires a moderate short hike with their photo backpack and sitting in an unheated photo blind 3 - 4 hours. There are no restrooms in or at the blind. If you have concerns about your own capabilities and/or fitness as it relates to a trip, please contact us before registering. We cannot be held responsible for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, or weather. Participants will also be responsible for their photographic equipment during the entire workshop. Weather conditions can change dramatically in the springtime in Nebraska. We cannot be held responsible for bad weather that might delay or postpone the workshop schedule.

Workshop Fee & Registration

Workshop Fee: \$2,500

To secure your spot, a \$500 non-refundable deposit, payable by check, is due when you register. Balance must be paid in full by no later than **30 days (March 15, 2019)** prior to the workshop date.

Registration

You can register by emailing your name and contact information at nop@npnaturephotography.com and sending a \$500 deposit (payable to Noppadol Paothong Photography) to the following address.

Noppadol Paothong Photography, LLC
PO. Box 7801
Columbia, MO 65205

Your spot is secured once the \$500 deposit is received, and you receive a confirmation email. Feel free to email at nop@npnaturephotography.com for any questions.

Cancellation

Your cancellation notice must be received by January 31, 2019. 50% of your deposit will be charged as a cancellation fee. After January 31, 2019, your deposit is non-refundable.

I look forward to meeting you
and sharing my passion and knowledge of grassland grouse.