

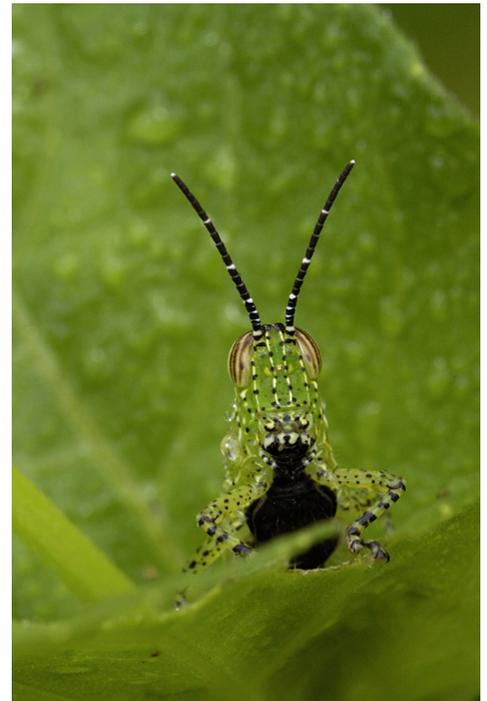
Beginning Photography with Nature Close-up

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Nature close-up photography, normally considered a specialised interest in photography can be a good platform for the beginner to learn the basics of photography. For a beginner learning the basics, the principles of photography are the same no matter what the area of specialisation. This is so because of the following:

- It offers a focused approach to the task at hand.
- It involves all the basic skill that produce a good photograph.
- There are abundant natural subjects which are easily found.
- It does not necessarily involve the use of expensive equipment.

One of the most common mistakes made by the beginning photographer is to get too distracted with the different areas of photography. By concentrating on one specific area, your attention is optimised towards a narrower spectrum. This helps in getting you more familiar with your own camera, especially with exposure settings. Here, you really get to work with your camera beyond the program mode. What is wrong with the 'P' mode? There are at least two things wrong with the 'P' mode. First, because of the way it works, chances are it does not expose the same scene exactly the same, especially if you change your composition. Second and the more damaging to your long term development as a photographer, it keeps you from learning how to control even the very basic exposure settings of your own camera. Most close-ups are taken with the aperture-priority mode. It is also the most common mode used in general photography. 'AP' as it is commonly known, is when the photographer determines the aperture setting and the camera decides the shutter speed. By concentrating your effort on this mode, you stand to get familiar with it faster and it also helps when moving to other modes in the camera.



A photograph looks good because it is made good.

And this involves some basic knowledge and skill.

Whether you are shooting a panoramic landscape or an ant on a lalang blade, there is a series of mental processes that goes on in your mind. Unless this is done properly, the resultant image would not be up to your expectation. A good photograph must have accurate exposure. The focus must bring out the area of interest and the composition is pleasing to the mind. By narrowing the subjects of interest, it helps you to focus on a smaller set of parameters. You have less to contend with and with time, you would build up a mental workflow for capturing a good photograph.

OK, shooting insects is not everyone's idea of nature close-up. And who says it is. Nature at close quarters offers an immense variety of species. They come in all forms and shapes and colours that challenge even the most seasoned in the field. The best part of it is that you don't have to go far. You may be able do it in your balcony or front yard or more likely, at a public park nearby. Natural subjects range from colourful wild flowers to the many tropical butterflies that visit them for nectar. Then there is the possibility of abstract pattern that nature can offer. By taking a closer look at nature, it reminds us of how much we have missed in our busy living. To a nature



photographer, the journey is the reward, the image is just a bonus.



Admittedly, you can burn a hole in your bank account on equipment, but this does not necessarily have to be so. One can start nature close-up with a dioptre. A dioptre is a close-up filter that screws onto the front of a normal lens. It acts like a piece of magnifying glass and helps to enlarge the subject on the image sensor or film. It is not expensive and most long time photographer may own a few. Borrowing one can save you any start-up cost. An alternative is to go with extension tubes. These tubes are attached between the SLR body and the lens, which enable the lens to be positioned closer to the subject. The ultimate approach is a dedicated macro lens. These days, even third party lenses are yielding very respectable

results. Many roads lead to Rome, pick one that suit you best.

How to get started?

Like so many other things in life, start with an aim in mind. May I suggest that you start with trying to capture an image with a simple composition (i.e. one subject and a clear natural background). No matter what natural close-up subjects you fancy, start with something manageable, like a flower that is not swaying in the breeze. Pick one that is mid-tone (i.e. not white or one with light or dark colours). Set your camera to aperture-priority mode and select manual focusing. Set an aperture value so that the subject is within acceptable sharpness. This would depend on your equipment and camera distance from the subject. Start with f/16. Stop down for greater depth and open up for less. Adjust your composition with a clear mid-tone background (avoid messy vegetation). If you are a rank beginner, work on getting accurate exposure and sharp focus. Leave composition to a later stage. Experiment with different aperture value to get the subject with acceptable depth of field. Use exposure compensation to fine-tune your exposure setting. It actually helps in your focusing if your camera set-up is mounted on a tripod. Did you know that close-up photography can help build bicep muscles and strengthen your spine?

After each session, evaluate your images for sharp focus and accurate exposure. Work on your mistakes and try to improve on your composition each time. You'll be surprised how your photography will improve with time. The important thing is to keep on practicing. Better yet, enrol yourself in a photography course. An experienced instructor can shorten your learning curve.

