

A Prairie Calling

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FRIENDS OF
NACHUSA
GRASSLANDS

Winter Photography

The north wind blows incessantly cold; the snow is deep, making walking difficult and hazardous. Winter has come to Nachusa, yet there is an unparalleled beauty to the starkness of the landscape. Winter may be nature's quiet "down" time but there's plenty for a photographer to see and experience.

Winter photography is challenging. The cold is an always-present fact, especially noticeable for hands. Fingers must be exposed to manipulate the controls to adjust the camera's

settings. Fingerless gloves help, but nevertheless hands get very cold! The camera also faces challenges. Cold rapidly reduces the charge of batteries and may deplete the charge completely if exposed over a lengthy period. Sometimes the camera may even freeze up. Add to these problems the deep snow or ice on the trails, making traveling the terrain very difficult, and you may ask why even go out to photograph in these conditions? The answer to such a question is, the challenges pale to the rewards. □

Charles Larry

Charles Larry has been interested in photography for most of his life, but did not seriously pursue it until digital photography. He will shoot anything that engages his eye and has been photographing at Nachusa Grasslands since 1994. He has a Master of Fine Arts in painting.



Plants



Flowering is a memory; seed time is over; all growth has stopped. And yet, some prairie plants retain their essential structures, like delicate sculptures in the landscape. Winter plants are often enhanced by snow or frost, like icing on some favorite holiday treat. □



"In winter, nature is a cabinet of curiosities, full of dried specimens, in their natural, order and position."

*Henry David Thoreau,
"A Winter Walk."*



Wildlife

"The recent tracks . . . remind us that each hour of the night is crowded with events, and the primeval nature is still working, and making tracks in the snow."

*Henry David Thoreau,
"A Winter Walk"*

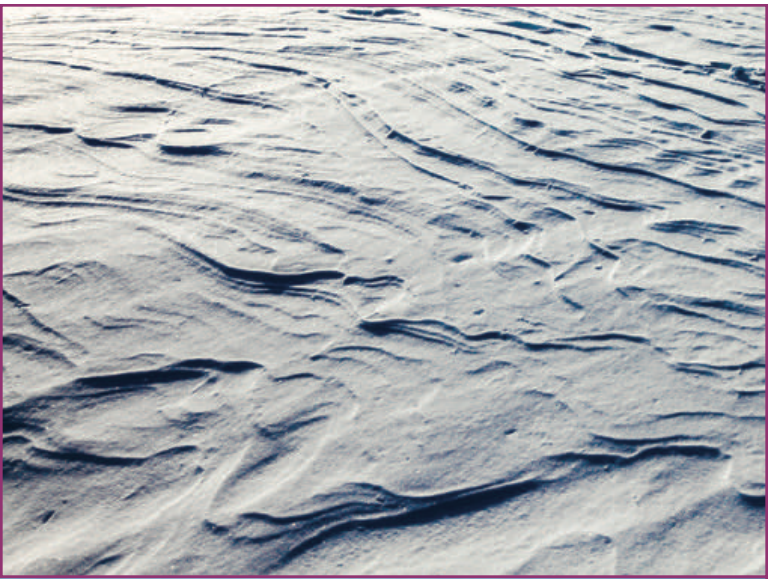
Wildlife is much more scarce in winter months as animals stay sheltered, insects are not seen, and many birds have migrated to warmer regions. Yet there are the usual suspects to be found, if only in the tracks they leave in the snow. Most notable are the bison. Winter doesn't seem to faze them at all as they roam over the prairie, grazing on the dry grasses and other vegetation throughout the season. Deer are also plentiful and are sometimes more easily seen against a snowy background. Coyotes are always elusive but may sometimes be spotted, even if they are not particularly receptive to camera capture. Rabbits and squirrels are often seen, but opossum and raccoons, being more nocturnal, are rarely in view. A few birds remain and can be found in some winter months. Turkey vultures and hawks can be seen, circling slowly in the sky. Late winter/early spring may even bring the arrival of sandhill cranes or flocks of great blue herons! □



Winter Photography Tips

- * Wear warm clothing, maybe layered, including a hat.
- * Wear insulated, waterproof boots with good traction.
- * Wear gloves. To manipulate the controls one glove may have to be fingerless. Hand warmers are also helpful.
- * Take an extra camera battery and keep it in an inside pocket away from exposure to air.
- * When photographing snow, especially on an overcast day, overexpose one to two stops. Otherwise your snow may look gray.
- * When returning indoors, leave your camera in the camera bag for several hours to prevent condensation. □





Landscape

"The snow falls on every wood and field, and no crevice is forgotten: by the river and the pond, on the hill and in the valley."

*Henry David Thoreau,
"A Winter Walk."*

stand stoically in the freezing temperatures, with their limbs and twigs forming an intricate filagree against the pale sky. Patterns emerge everywhere. Snow drifts are continually shifting like sand dunes in some desert region. Ice patterns are an always wondrous surprise.

While in winter a photographer faces many challenging obstacles, I find winter photography to be a time of spiritual renewal. What some see as a bleak and dull season I find to be exciting and incredibly beautiful. Winter photography does present a very different visual experience. But then, this can also be said of every season at Nachusa. □



*Common Milkweed
Asclepias syriaca*

This newsletter was produced by Friends of Nachusa Grasslands volunteers:

Editor-in-Chief: Bernie Buchholz

Editor: James Higby

Illustrations: Betty Higby

Design: Dee Hudson

Website: www.nachusagrasslands.org

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