

What follows are the first impressions and problem solving tools the D3 brings to the wildlife and landscape photographer. I want to bring to you the excitement and awe I feel shooting with this amazing machine and at the same time, help you get up to speed on the potential of the D3 by going over settings and features I'm using and why. The D3 is a whole lot more than a high ISO stud, a whole lot more! Hold on to your seat, clear your mind of all you've read about the D3, pour yourself your favorite beverage (a good Merlot works for me), turn on your favorite music and let me introduce you to the start of an evolution.

### **The Logic that Escapes Most**

"Nikon has finally seen the light and come out with a full frame sensor!" When the email containing this line hit my mailbox, I just shook my head. It's as if the 1.3TB (that's Terabyte) of images I've captured with DX cameras didn't count, like they aren't photographs because they were captured with DX. I might as well throw them away because for the last eight years, I'd been fooled by a manufacturer. Isn't that a silly notion?! The introduction of the FX sensor is so much more important to our photography for reasons way beyond what the web prognosticators foretold.

The first HUGE benefit of the FX sensor is the vast improvement of the quality of the pixels that Nikon has NOT crammed into the sensor. What in the heck does that mean? Quality pixels are big suckers (in pixel terms), physically large wells, both in dimension and depth. Did you notice that the megapixel count of the D3 is 12.1 and the D2Xs is 12.4 and yet, the D3 is the new one with the amazing image quality in a physically bigger sensor (and yes, killer reduced noise)? What seems like a backwards movement, the D3 (FX format) has fewer megapixels for the real estate compared to the D2Xs (DX format) with the smaller sensor. When I say better I should say amazing. I mean if you could loupe a D3 image, you would find quality rivaling if not better than a Kodachrome 64 image. If we're just looking at numbers, how could that be? It's not the quantity of pixels (which I've been saying for so long), but the quality of the pixels that counts. This is the first, and major reason why FX is so evolutionary! But wait, there's more, much more.

FX brings to the geniuses at Nikon optics more real estate to blow our socks off. The DX sensor (D2Xs) is 23.7x15.7mm in size and the FX is 36x23.9 in size (35mm film is 36x24). The quality of the D3's pixels captures edge quality that you just aren't use to seeing. Not that the edges of our D2Xs suck, far from it. But the quality of the FX permits lens designs that are truly gorgeous. We have a sample of the possibilities in the 14-24AFS and 24-70AFS. I wish the printed page you're reading right now could bring to you all these lenses capture on the D3, but they don't. This is because this combination of the FX sensor and these lenses (and no doubt those to come) resolve more than the printing press. This is another major reason the FX sensor is so evolutionary. But wait, there's more.

My one regret of the D3 is that one of my favorite lenses now has a happy new owner. The 17-55AFS is a DX format lens and works perfectly on the D3. When attached, the D3 knows it's a DX lens and automatically switches from FX to DX. While the image quality doesn't suffer in my experience when shooting DX, having this big beautiful viewfinder partially grayed out just hurts. The way my good friend Joe McNally describes it, the D3 viewfinder is like looking at an HD TV! This fact along with the new lenses is why the 17-55AFS now has a happy new owner. This is just further evidence of the evolution but wait, you guessed it, there's more!

I found it a total mind strip when shooting with the D3 for the first time, switching to an FX format meant rethinking lens selection. The best example is really the first morning I went out shooting with the D3. We were in this little fishing village in MI. There was this really cool old bike. I wanted to photograph the front tire and accentuate the spokes. I grabbed the 14mm (14-24AFS wasn't in my hands at the time) and instantly found I was seeing a whole lot more in my viewfinder than I had for the previous eight years.

Lens selection in large part is a combination of previsualizing what we want for a final image and our experience with lenses and subjects. For the last eight years, I'd trained my mind's eye to see in a DX format and made lens selections based on that. My mind's eye had to be retrained for FX, which it now has been (it just required going back to film days). In that process some will say, "We have our ultra wides back," which is true and at the same time, we've "lost" the extra reach of our telephotos. Some will be

happy, some will be sad because the benefit of DX that made up for poor wildlife photography technique is lost with FX. That's part of the evolution, but wait, there is still more!

The D3 incorporates the new EXPEED. What does this new term mean to your photography? EXPEED is the heart that makes the D3 image quality so much better. It is involved in all aspects of the picture making process. It means making 24"x30" prints are easier with quality you've never seen in your digital photography. It also means that all those mistakes you make at the point of capture that you've relied on Photoshop to fix will look worse than ever. The D3 requires better photographers driving them if they want the better image quality (which means not shooting at ISO 6400 just because you're too lazy to use a tripod and proper technique). This holds so true for Capture NX as well.

The logic behind bringing the FX sensor to the line now is so totally clear it's not funny. Waiting until this point in time was well worth the wait. Nikon has taken a lot of lumps holding to their guns and bringing out the D3 when it was right rather than when the public thought it was the right time. I applaud Nikon for this, the camera they have delivered to us and appreciate the logic behind what they designed. Let me explain how I've incorporated the D3 into my photography so far.

### **Applying What's Been Learned**

Where does the time go? It's been what two months since I was first able to shoot with the D3 and already, it's in the hands of you fortunate ones able to purchase it. In this very short time, many are wondering just what the D3 can do. What are its outer limits of performance? While this might be a valid question, as visual communicators I think we need to know what fundamentals it can do well before taking the next step and pushing it. Just what is the baseline performance of the D3, and how do we obtain that day in and day out? As wildlife photographers, what new technologies can we combine with biology for new looks at our wild heritage? While my gut tells me and my idea list suggests that the next six months will be very exciting, let's look at what we know the D3 offers us now so we can move forward.

**D3's Autofocus** is all new from the ground up (which includes the D300 as well). I have to tell you, I think it's just marvelous! I also think it will take some time, first to know when to turn which mode on and second to get fast enough to do just that. The D3 has a number of AF modes that can work for wildlife/action photography and I believe some are better than others for particular applications. I want to help you along by telling you what I've learned, how I've applied it and when it works, up to this point in time in my own mastering of it. This is just a starting point for all of us. I strongly suggest that this is something YOU need to experiment with as well to fine tune to your own photography.

I've found that for the vast majority of my photography up to this point, having the firing rate set to CH, Focus mode selector set to C (Continuous Servo) and the AF set to 21AF (CS#a3) and AF-area mode selector set to Dynamic, works great, and I mean, great! All the D3 photographs you see here in the BTJ were taken with these settings. In addition, I've been shooting with the D3 CS#a8 set to 51. What does all of this mean and how can YOU apply it to your photography?

With the camera set to CH firing, all the good focus lock and tracking (which doesn't operate exactly the same as it did in previous bodies) is engaged no matter what you select when you have C on the focus mode selector. Focus lock and tracking though operates slightly differently behind the scene based on what you select on the AF-area mode selector. In my opinion, they work even better. This combination as in the past of CH and C is then essential in cranking of the D3's AF speed.

There are three positions on the AF-area mode selector (back of the camera): Single, Dynamic and Automatic Area Autofocus (AAA). The first option, well isn't even an option for us so we'll move on to the two that are, Dynamic and AAA. The vast majority of the time so far, I've been in Dynamic with CS#a3 selected, providing 21 AF sensor autofocus. What you see in the viewfinder with this mode is 1 lit up AF sensor, but if you depress the Info button on the back of the D3, you'll see the 1 lit up AF sensor and the 20 that are active surrounding it. This provides you with the 21AF Dynamic coverage. This might sound a little confusing at first. To make the most of it though (and not just guess and have it work the majority of the time rather than all of the time) we need to go a little deeper into using the AF than leaving it at this setting.

We have a photograph here of a ram & ewe Rocky Mtn Bighorn Sheep just after mating. In the old days (of just a couple months ago), we would have placed the AF sensor on either the eye of the ewe or ram, acquired focus and then closed down the lens so DOF would make up for any change in focus because

of a change in position of the two sheep. That's not what was done here. With the D3, placing the 1 lit AF sensor on the breast of the ram was all that was required to get focus on the eye of both the ram & ewe with no extra DOF required to make up for focus point. Does that make sense?

Where we had just 1 active sensor with the old system, we now have 21 working for us (when in CS#a3 and it could be more as we'll discover) even though we have only 1 lit AF sensor. While the D3 doesn't visually move the one active sensor about to indicate it's changing AF sensors, it does even in this "none moving" scenario to one of the other 20 AF sensors to keep *the* focus point active. While the camera didn't move, the sheep did. I locked the composition within the rock bowl and not on the sheep but as the sheep moved, the D3 dealt with focus so I could concentrate on the action. This means that the AF is vastly more accurate and "sensitive" to our composition than we've been use to *and* (and this is a BIG and) we can use less DOF if we want because we don't have to make up for AF "looseness."

As I mentioned, all the images in this issue of the BTJ, including the landscape images were taken with the D3 using these settings. I bring this up because the sensor was not always on an actual "solid" element in the landscape images. Just to push the D3, I composed for the image and hit the shutter release button to see if the D3 could focus on "air." Darn if the camera wasn't able to focus by grabbing onto blue sky or gray cloud. I don't know about you, but I got tired of composing, hitting the shutter release and then recomposing to find a focus point, recompose again and hold in the AF lock to make the shot (or simply manually focusing). Yeah, we're spoiled because that's really not that much work, but now we don't have to do that.

Technically and by Nikon's specs, the D3's AF requirements are the same as in previous bodies when it comes to obtaining AF. You need a lens at least f5.6 or faster and contrast in the scene to focus. This means if you're using an f/4 lens and attaching a 1.7x you *might* have focusing issues. I am very pleased to report that I've been operating outside of Nikon's AF specs and having great results! The AF operation works in dimmer light with less contrast than the D2Xs and in the one side by side comparison that I did, the D3 did out perform the D2Xs when focusing on the same, dim, low contrast subject. With the 1.7x attached, I was able to obtain critical focus even though I wasn't using the center AF sensor. We never could do that before. Now should we count on this AF performance all the time? I think we should just tuck this knowledge into the back of our minds, so that when the opportunities arise, we try working in these conditions outside of the norm rather than just saying to ourselves it won't work.

So we have our basic AF setup and it's working for us, do we stop there? No way! This next step into AF operation takes a little more technical knowledge on your part to start your testing and then applying what you've learned. Let's jump right in then.

You have the addition of two more new AF modes in the D3, Dynamic 51 3D and Automatic Area Autofocus (AAA). While by title and selection method they sound completely different, yet in many ways they are very much the same. To start with, they both work off Subject Recognition, which is governed mostly by the EXPEED. So, we need to understand EXPEED a little more before we apply one of the two AF modes to wildlife photography.

The EXPEED is the heart of the D3 and is a very understated hardware/software system invented by Nikon. In the D3, the EXPEED has its hands on these functions/tool/operations: Real Time Lateral Chromatic Aberrations, 12 Channel, 14 Bit, Shutterlag, Live View, HDMI, CF Dual Slots, Fast Start, FPS via 12 Channel, Noise Reduction on the Chip and 16bit image processing. It also indirectly works with/controls AF, Metering, and AWB. As it was explained to me, this comes from a whole lot of Nikon history and came about because of a Digital Processor Concept, Digital Image Processing and most importantly, a Passion for Digital Photography. Of course, this is just the "stuff" I was told that can be shared and doesn't even cover the proprietary goodies associated with the EXPEED system. What does this have to do with AF operation?

Dynamic 51 3D and AAA both work off Subject Recognition. Subject Recognition works off the information received from 1005 RGB meter and processed by EXPEED. The Auto White Balance now has its own 20,000 "image" database to interface with in making its WB calculations. This is separate and unique from the 30,000 "image" database the 1005 RGB Matrix metering uses. This information being fed into the pipeline makes the AF fly at blistering speeds and "lock" the AF onto our subjects. This brings us to the differences in these two AF modes.

Dynamic 51 3D and AAA both work off Subject Recognition, while the AAA works with Closest Subject AND Subject Recognition. The Dynamic 51 3D does not use Closest Subject in its operation. The Dynamic 513D is accessed via CS#a3 and AAA is a flip of a lever. How does this knowledge help you? Let's explore a couple of scenarios and see.

You're photographing Bald Eagles up at Homer, AK and you're concentrating on just the eagles in flight. You have a black/white subject against a blue sky. In this scenario, if you switch the D3 to Dynamic 51 3D, no matter how bad your panning technique is, once the D3 acquires focus it ain't gonna lose it. It will move the sensor all over the viewfinder to hold focus, and man, does it hold focus! What if you have a half a dozen Bald Eagles in the sky? In this scenario, the D3 might not hold focus on the ONE Bald Eagle you want sharp. If you have bad panning technique, it might grab focus on another Bald Eagle and not the one you want sharp. If you have good panning technique though, this is not a worry. What about the AAA mode, would that do a better job in this scenario?

You're probably already thinking this through, but in AAA operation, the D3 holds focus on the closest subject and "tracks" it through the viewfinder via Subject Recognition. If the eagle you want sharp is the closest, then this AF mode is golden for you. If the eagle is and then isn't the closest, well, then this might not be the best mode. Holy Crap Batman, this is too damn way cool! Is there a hitch to this? A small one, but I think we have a work around.

The hitch is, what AF mode do we shoot in and when in that mode, how do we instantly switch to another AF mode? This is the work around I have going for myself right now. The D3 has the ability for you to create your own Menu using the My Menu feature. In the My Menu, I entered the CS#a3. Before shooting, I depressed the Menu button and then accessed My Menu so it's the most recent thing I've selected via the Menu Button. Then I can either hit the Menu Button and Multi Selector to go into Dynamic 51 3D or I switch the AF-mode selector lever to move from Dynamic to AAA or back again pretty darn fast! (BTW...My Menu is a very cool feature you need to check out for more than this solution to a problem!)

You're probably wondering why I'm mentioning this since I'm printing images all shot in Dynamic 21. Well, I played and tested with both Dynamic 51 3D and AAA prior to having an instruction book and prior to talking with a Nikon person about what the heck I was doing. Now that I know what I was doing and understand what the camera did, I can tell you that these two AF features rock. I haven't had an opportunity though to push them hard in the field since learning what I've shared here with you. You can check out a blog posting for 12.03.07 where I posted an image shot with 51 3D and see how the D3 nailed the image. It's an image of a wild Mallard Duck drake coming into a pond. It's dumping the air out of its wings as it comes in for a landing. Look closely, as it appears as if the photo was taken from above the flying Mallard until you see the head, which is in a normal flight position. The D3 made the shot possible, permitting me to just concentrate on the moment and composition, not the focus.

What if you're at Bosque shooting the Farm Field and 5000 Snow & Ross' Geese rise up in front of you, what AF mode do you use? More than likely, I would be in AAA mode prior to blast off as there are always small splinter groups of geese flying about. I tend to like the "closer" geese tack sharp in this scenario. When the blast off begins I would flip the AF-mode selector to Dynamic and the D3 would be set to 21AF operation. Why, in a mass group like that, focus point is more an aesthetic choice than a technical one. In a large mass, I prefer the geese a little ways into the flock sharp to give a visual clue to the depth of the mass of birds lifting off. There's no way the D3 can know how we're composing then select the right goose to focus on and track. We've got to start the process by telling the D3 which goose in the thousands is the important one and then pan, so compositionally it stays where we want it in the frame.

What about the simple critter portrait or macro shot, what then? You can use any AF method you want for static subjects because there isn't anything difficult to do focus wise. Nothing has changed there, that's still the same old photography. The catch is, when you're photographing that grizzly bear grazing on the grass and all of a sudden it takes off, how will you capture the action? That's what you've got to be prepared for and know what setting you want to use and how to get to it to make *the* shot.

**Speeding up** your use of the D3's AF can be achieved by working with a couple other custom settings. The main thing here is a retraining of your finger to take advantage of CS#a7 & CS#a8. CS#a7 permits you to "wrap" around the AF sensors. For example, if you're on the far right AF sensor and you want to be

on the far left, you just toggle the Multi selector once to the right and you've made the move to the far left AF sensor. CS#8 determines how you move through the AF sensors to select just one by pecking through either all 51 AF sensors or through just 11 of the AF sensors. With the Multi selector now permitting you to move diagonally as well as up or down, I find the 51AF selection to be killer. You can fine tune your focus a whole lot faster and a whole lot finer using this CS selection. The key is simply training your mind and finger to move in the right direction, which after seven years of doing it another way might take a few shoots to make the shift.

You have a Rocky Mtn Bighorn Sheep ram ban slowly, oh so slowly working their way across a slope in beautiful afternoon light. The slope is a busy place with rock ledges, sage brush and occasional vintage aged Juniper. You're turning the camera vertically and then horizontally. The light is fading fast and the earlier rush of activity is gone since the ewe group has moved up and over the ridgeline. Do you work in Dynamic 21AF, 51 3D or switch to AAA? Using either the 51 3D or AAA, which is going off Subject Recognition and closest subject might not be the best option with the light, color and more importantly, the background we're working. But with all the turning from vertical to horizontal and back again, using the 51AF sensor movement makes quick locking of the sensor on the ram a snap while in the Dynamic 21.

The D3 is set to Dynamic 21AF, you have a grazing herd of Pronghorn in front of you and you're photographing the buck that's up front and stage left. You have the lower left AF sensor selected as you're focused on the grazing buck. You're shooting away as they are grazing. But it's rut and without any notice, the buck springs into action and races through the herd to ward off the advances of another buck that just entered the herd. Which AF sensor & AF mode do you select? How do you make that happen? Personally, I would hit the Menu Button, hit the Multi Select twice to make the Dynamic 51 3D active (because I wouldn't want Closest Subject active), hit the Shutter release button, toggle the Multi Selector hitting it at the 2 o'clock position and move up in a couple of clicks to the buck. The whole time, I would be panning.

How do I know that or, how could I do that? Well, during our MT Base Camp we went to a locale just to do that, practice our AF skills. I used the opportunity to work with the D3 and not only figure out how its AF worked, but put it through its paces so it and my mind could become one. Since then, I've hit a few duck ponds and practiced by focusing on gulls. It requires not only reprogramming the D3, but more importantly our minds and how we think about AF. It's not a subconscious act for me yet, but it will be shortly because I just keep going out and practicing, practicing and practicing on subjects that aren't really important as in they are just practice subjects. The last thing you want to do is practice when it counts! This is the gist of what I've learned so far in shooting with the D3's very impressive AF system.

**Image Quality** in the D3 is just astounding! I'm not saying it's noiseless because it's not but rather the information being delivered to our CF cards is far superior to what we've been seeing. You might be thinking that if this is the case, what else needs to be said. There's nothing really unique about this that we need to apply to how we think about taking photographs. I would argue that this is very important and you need to sit up and take note or better yet, get out a piece of paper and write some things down. While the D3 will very easily take your gorgeous images and make them shine, it will also magnify your goof ups like no other camera. I'd much rather see you avoid the later by making the most of the former. Here's what I mean.

It's an awfully early fall morning, the kind where the nip in the air makes the tip of your nose and ears ping with numbness. You're in a big ass field of newly cut crops and in the middle of this field is a one room schoolhouse. The few clouds in the sky have no real color but the curve of the ridge in the east is a natural scrim for the light. Obviously, this calls for B&W photography (no, we're not switching to Monochrome at this point). With a white building, dark green, damp grass and far away forest all in shadow, it's a no-brainer! The lines where the clapboard siding of the schoolhouse meet up are magnificent fine lines, giving the schoolhouse tons of detail and life. The D3 handles fine lines without even breathing hard. With a 14mm attached, set the aperture to f/2.8, walk right up to the corner of the schoolhouse and click, make the photo without a second thought. Wait, f2.8, what gives? There's no DOF at f2.8.

We're cruising on an empty MT highway, just out exploring north of Bozeman places we'd never been. It's bloody bright out. In Big Sky country when there's not a cloud to be found can be a hard place to find photographer's light. We go down this slight grade and make a bend in the road and come almost face to face with this old schoolhouse out in the middle of nowhere. From the road we can see this gigantic slide

behind the schoolhouse (no way they'd build that size today, someone might get hurt playing on it...ha!) so we pull over to check it out. It is one big mother slide, nearly fourteen feet tall in the middle of a field. The 16Fisheye goes on the D3 and a couple clicks are made. Then off in the distance an old merry-go-round and swing set are spotted. Off we head. Another no-brainer B&W image fills the viewfinder (and how nice it is to have an FX size viewfinder again!). But this won't be just any ol' B&W, heck no! It will end up being an infrared B&W. This time the f/stop is f/9.5. We liked Sedan!

I'm highlighting these two B&W images because, at least in my book, capturing beautiful blacks, beautiful whites and all the detail in between takes more than the better than average file. More importantly, bringing out the texture you see in the side of the schoolhouse or the seat of the swing in light (which are grays) about as opposed to each other imaginable demonstrates even more the quality of the D3 file. How does this help you?

Photographing wildlife and nature, texture is a very important element in our images. As we've learned in the last couple issues of the BTJ, focus and the placement of sharpness in the photograph is a vital tool in how we compose. You put those two together, sharp texture and then add to the mix a digital camera that can deliver that sharpness and you end up with owning the viewer's eye! Damn, that's very important!

In the photo of the schoolhouse this knowledge is very important. I focused on the front, closest window sill with its peeling paint, knowing I could pull focus on the front door with its peeling paint. This meant the name of the school would be sharp as well. This also brought into play the front steps that while not technically sharp, the contrast would make them appear sharp and lead the eye up to the door. The contrast in the side windows between the black paint sills and reflection of the promised sunrise make them seem sharp even though they are nowhere close. Finally, the way the light is playing in the morning dew in the air finished off the framing. Knowing the detail the D3 captured in its file made it possible for me to quickly and very, very easily compose and make this photo. Heck, I had to be fast because lots of folks were photographing it beside me. I asked permission, ran in front of them, made my snaps and ran out, fast!

In the photo of the swing, I again depended on the file quality of the D3 to make it all work. The first and main thing was the subject itself, the swing. I knew because of the hard light and how I was going to finish the photo, the chain would look like it was hanging from the heavens. That composition would have never worked if that chain and the detail in it were not maintained. Next, I incorporated that burnt out post on the end of the swings because I needed the eye to stop and head back along the shadow on the ground, back to the swing itself. As the eye travels that path, the detail of the grasses, the other swing, its chain and the shadow were also part of the composition. That tall grass that's in focus is playing a big part in this little play, telling you where this lonely swing set stands.

Now could this have been done with another camera, was it only possible with a D3? Heck no, you could have obtained the same thing but you probably would have had to jump through some more hoops if shooting with another body. Like the photo of the schoolhouse, that was shot hand held. If I had shot with another camera, I would have probably had to close down to f/5.6 or greater, forcing the use of a tripod. For the photo of the swing set, I don't think the 10.5 could pull down this kind of sharpness so perhaps, only the D3 or an FX camera with the same 16mm could make the shot. The bottom line is the incredible image file quality we now have available to us makes better photographs possible, easier. By using the concepts we've learned about composition, the D3 permits us to control the viewers' eyes even better and therefore, make us better visual communicators.

Sharpness is a vital part of composition, so with a camera that now brings even more sharpness, especially the appearance of sharpness to a file, you must think about composition either differently or, even more so than you did before shooting with the D3. Does this also apply to DOF? It might, it all depends on how you use it. You can see in the schoolhouse image the way in which I thought about and used DOF in that image. I guess the way you might think about it is, in those situations where you have to juggle between amount of light available and DOF, you might be able to use less DOF to take advantage of the lower light and not sacrifice focus for communication or composition. Just this addition to our visual arsenal is very exciting and gives our photography a whole lot of room to grow! But this brings up the question that seems to be so prominently on the minds of digital photographers.

**Noise, is the D3** the noise dream machine? The D3 still produces noise, no way around that for the amount of money we end users are willing to pay (or not pay) for a digital camera. But the noise the D3 has in its files is less in quantity than you've ever seen before. More importantly though is the kind of or the construction of that noise. What little noise the D3 produces does not destroy image information. This is very important and is what in part makes the files coming from the D3 just so bloody amazing! (Head to our D3 website to see examples of what I'm talking about.)

This begs the question, "What ISO is Moose shooting at?" The answer is real simple, 99.9% of the time I'm at ISO 200. Why, when we have a machine that can go so much higher? There are a couple of reasons. The first being, I'm a photographer and that's just what I've always done as a photographer to obtain the highest degree of quality. The D3's files are so gorgeous at ISO 200, I sure don't want to do anything to mess that up. This includes not only **NOT** raising the ISO, but also shooting to get it right, right from the start. Now I have the luxury of not having to shoot in a dark church where flash is not permitted or on a playing field lit by just sodium vapor lights. If you have requirements that require a high ISO, then the D3 is the camera for you because it can do it and deliver amazing quality.

"You said 99.9%, what .1% will you raise the ISO?" Ah, that is a great question, thanks for asking! The answer to that one will be in the next issue of the BTJ. (Ha, gotcha!)

You are aware that there are other factors affecting noise production in an image that you need to avoid. For example, take a photo with your Picture Control set to Standard with the default sharpening and then take a photo in Vivid with the sharpening set to 6 or higher in bad light. Or, try one of those and set Active D-Lighting to high and watch what happens. And if that isn't enough, experiment with these in low light and over exposure. The point being that the D3 has the lowest to non-existent noise you've ever seen in a Nikon camera, but if you're not paying attention to what you're doing, your actions can make it grow. Even at its worst though, there isn't any noise that has been present or that I've created in testing that I couldn't cleanly remove using Nik Dfine 2.0 without losing subject detail.

This is just a piece of trivia for you that you might not ever notice. If you use the LiveView feature of the D3 for a period longer than an hour, the D3 guts start to heat up. This internal heating up can cause your noise level to increase. If you were thinking of setting up the D3 at a bird nest this spring and watching the action on your notebook from the comfort of your home to shoot, be forewarned that there are limitations to the LiveView at this time for this scenario.

That brings up the metering and white balance of the D3. The metering in the D3 is a tad better in that in more difficult light situations, it exposes the way I prefer. Now, that might not be the case for your photography. I think you'll find the metering for flash is better in the D3, which is really cool and I hope that's a hint of better flash to come. Coupled with this is the white balance. The white balance has its own, unique database of 20,000. You may have noticed the D3 doesn't have the second color meter sensor on the prism like that of the D2 family. And yet, even with that missing, the D3 does a better job with AWB. That's totally attributable to the new database and EXPEED system. Is the white balance so perfect you can stop performing black point / white point, color cast correction? No, it's not that perfect.

**9FPS...this sucker flies!** Nothing has changed when it comes to FPS when it comes to settings. The D3 is set to CH, period! I've never heard such a great sounding camera as the D3 when it's ripping 9FPS. I just sit at my desk, camera set to M mode, 1/8000 and just let 'er rip for the sheer sound of it. If I hadn't received so many nasty emails from my old F5 website where you heard the motordrive rip off when you launched the page, I would have done the same thing for the D3. I'm off point though. The D3 is capable of doing 11FPS, don't do it (unless you have thought through all the consequences). In the 11FPS mode, you can only shoot in DX mode and you lose some operational features. Basically, you lose AF & metering operation when shooting in this mode. What the D3 does is take the focus point and metering for the first frame in a burst and uses those settings for all subsequent frames in that burst.

What kind of buffer do we have to work with in the D3? Not big enough, but it's never big enough, is it?! I'm shooting in 14bit Raw +Jpeg and the D3 is delivering bursts of 16frames before the buffer is full. So far, there was only one time where this wall interfered with my photography. It would seem so far that the file management of the D3 is clearing out the files faster than was possible in the D2X. One thing that bugged the crap out of me on the D2Xs was the BUSY when the buffer was full and you were switching back and forth between DX and High-speed crop. One of the first things I tested with the D3 is when

switching between FX and DX mode if we had that same issue. It's gone, and I'm very happy. But what about the DX mode?

**The D3 is an FX camera.** This means it has a sensor the same approximate size as 35mm film. This is GREAT as I mentioned earlier for lens designs. It is obviously an advancement when it comes to shooting with ultra wide and wide angle lenses because we now have back, ultra wide and wide angle coverage. On the flip side, you might be anguishing over the loss on the telephoto end of the DX crop. I've had one heck of a lot of correspondence from photographers basically saying, "What are we going to do?" They ask if Nikon is coming out with super teleconverters or if switching back to DX mode in the D3 is the way to go. I don't think the answer I've been providing is bringing any comfort to these folks. My answer is, be wildlife photographers! This means you need to learn your craft and learn how to get close physically to the subject to get the subject size you desire in an FX format. Or, do it like you did in the days of film (for those of you who remember that long ago).

Does the DX mode work in the D3? Oh, most definitely and the file quality is the same if not better than the DX file coming from the D2Xs. I have a real gorgeous 24"x30" taken in the DX mode on the D3 so I wouldn't hesitate using it if there is NO other way to acquire the framing I desired.

**The Dual CF Card Slot** is too way cool for words! While it has only three settings, those three are a great start. For my needs, I have the 2<sup>nd</sup> slot set to Overflow. This means when we're shooting and card #1 fills up, the D3 automatically starts filling up Slot #2. This provides about 800 images (1600 files) with just one load of cards. I'm using strictly the Lexar 8GB UDMA cards, which are sweet. Something you should be aware of though is how the D3 treats these two slots. The priority is given to Slot #1. This means if you're shooting along and you fill up #1, then start filling #2 and during a lull you decide to swap out #1 with a new card, the D3 will instantly start writing to #1, not #2 where it has been writing. You can take the card in #2 and put it in #1, then put a new card in #2 to work around this priority setting.

You can format the cards the traditional way. By depressing the two Format Card buttons on the exterior of the D3, you can format Slot #1, but not #2. This method of formatting only formats Slot #1. If you want to format Slot #2, you either have to rotate the command dial while FOR is present to select Slot 2, place that card into Slot #1, or use the Format Card option under the Set Up Menu.

**What about the D300?** Where does it fit into the scheme of things? There are a lot of very happy D300 users out there as there should be. Here's my knock against the D300 FWIW. First and foremost, I compose in the viewfinder and as such, I must have a camera with a 100% viewfinder. The D300 is a 92% viewfinder, so I can't make it my prime body or a "backup" which might not be the case for you. I have a D300, which has replaced the D200 as my EDL body, but it's just not a prime wildlife shooting body. The other thing is, the D300 is still DX and at this point, I'm already back to FX composing. I just don't have the brain computing capacity to go back and forth. I am by no means though a D300 expert, as I only have a few captures under my belt and no real hard core shooting time with it.

**Where does this leave us?** It leaves us in a truly grand, grand place! If for no other reason, having a new camera body sparks a whole new interest and love in photography itself. That's a good thing! But we now have a new set of tools to learn, master and then apply to the wonderful world of wildlife photography. I added to my Idea List two concepts just in writing this piece, photographs I want to go out and attempt now that I wouldn't have prior to the D3 hitting my door step. Most importantly, I hope this helps you go out and play with knowledge of the D3's ability, it helps you quickly master its potential and most importantly, permits you to bring your photographic vision to life for all the rest of us to enjoy and celebrate! Let the evolution begin!