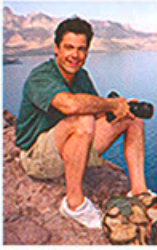




DANIEL J. COX

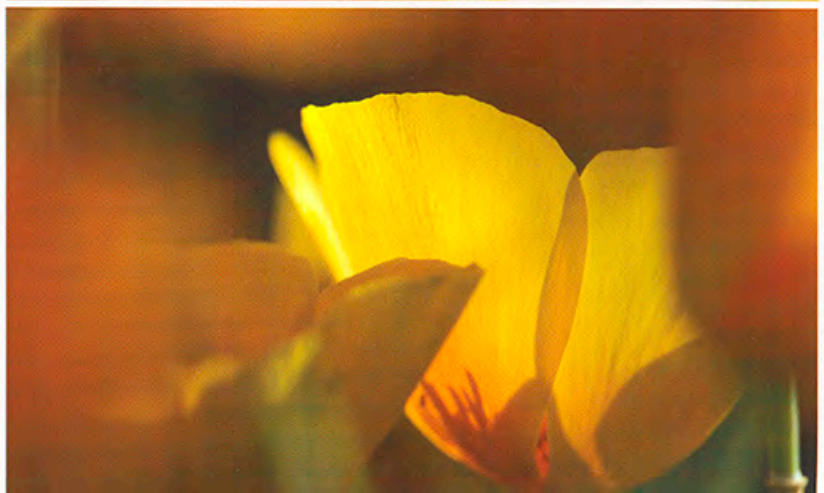
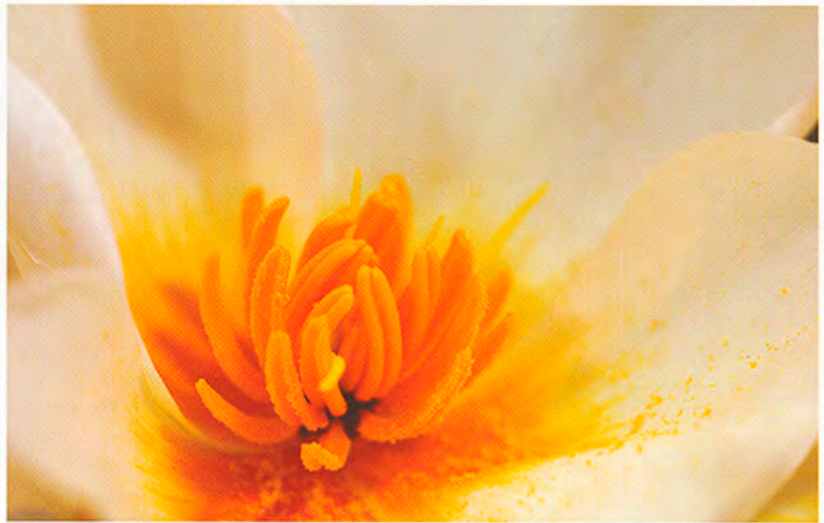
desert bloom





Tom Walker

The adage bad weather is good weather for photography usually comes to mind in relation to immediate circumstances. Rain, snow, fog, ice storm? Grab the camera and get out there—you're going to get some cool photos. But sometimes bad weather pays off a little farther down the line. In this case, the bad weather was particularly heavy rainfall in the Southwest. As a result, some areas saw more than 50 varieties of wildflowers appear from long-dormant seeds. Overall, the lure of deserts dotted with yellow, white, red and purple blossoms was irresistible to naturalists, tourists and photographers.



Outdoor and wildlife photographer Daniel J. Cox traveled throughout Arizona in late March and early April, visiting, among other places, Saguaro National Park. For Dan it was a chance to photograph something we may not see for another 50 or 100 years.

"The thing is, it can be overwhelming," Dan says. "Here's a desert filled with wildflowers—where do I start, and when do I stop?" He looked for colorful and interesting subjects, but most important was finding an area that gave him room to work. "You're out there because you love these flowers," he says, "but I saw people lay all over them to photograph them. The first thing I wanted was a place where I could put my feet, or my knees if I was going to get down on the ground,

or a place to stretch out for a really low-angle view."

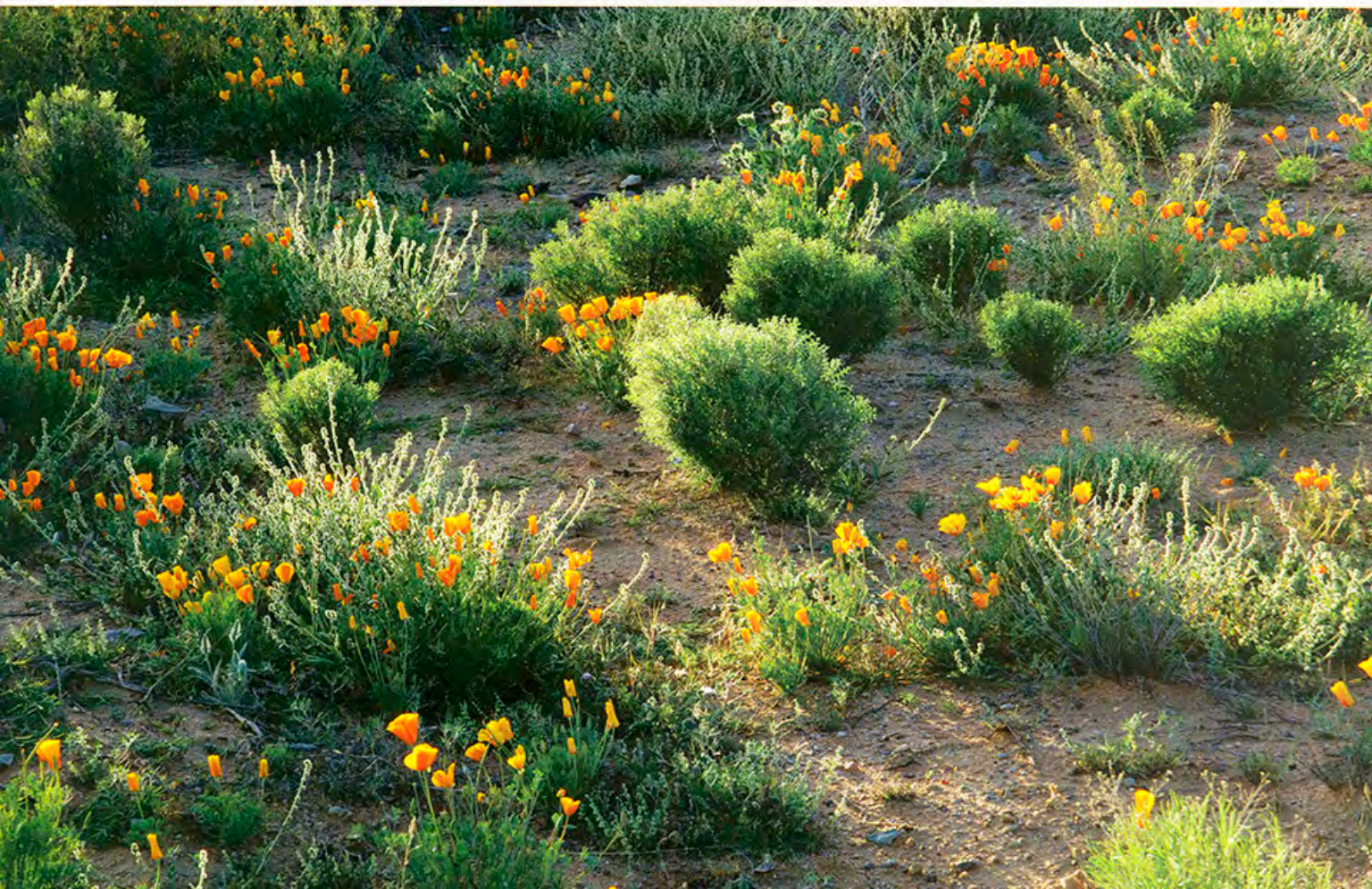
Areas thick with flowers are particularly inviting, but there are techniques for sparser areas, too. "I photographed Mexican poppies in little groups, and when they were sparse I could make them look their best by taking advantage of the compression effect of a 70–200mm zoom."

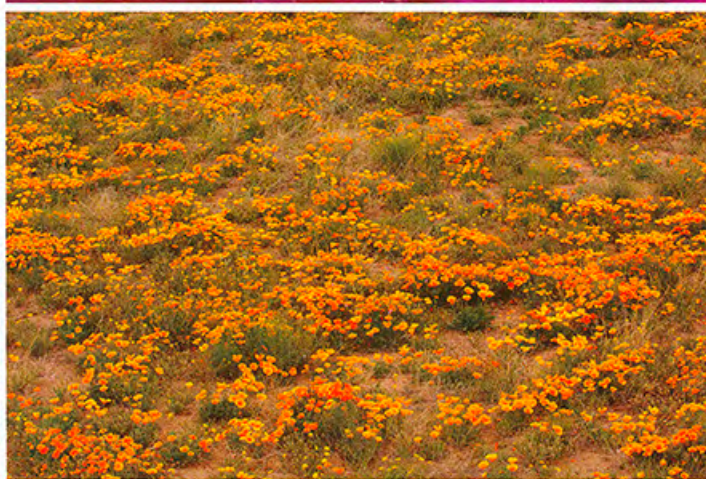
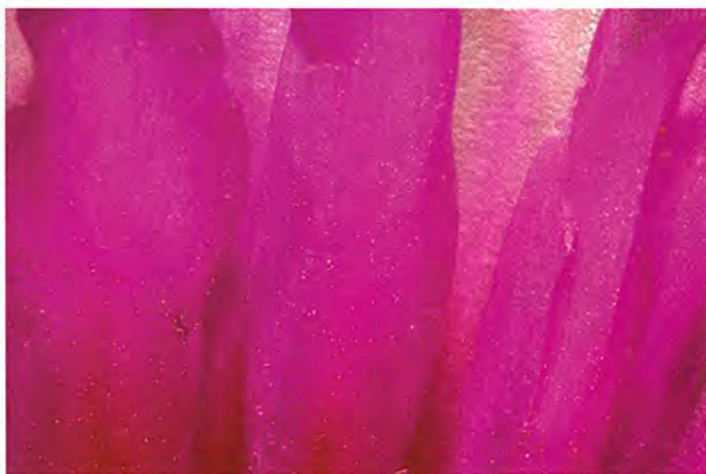
What he also looked for were variations in the views. "Flowers six to eight inches high gave me the chance to photograph them a few different ways—from a low angle looking up into them, or straight on, or from above looking down. If I'm looking directly into them I'm going to see a lot of color variations at different depths from, say, five to ten inches. I won't get all of that in focus,

so I select one group of petals and frame and focus so that group is sharp and all the other petals and color shades go soft around it. I don't try for $f/22$ and everything in focus. The idea is to play with selective focus and use what a particular flower offers."

Dan also spent some time in the slot canyons of northern Arizona, and they presented a similar challenge—there are just so many interesting angles, colors, shapes and views. Dan agrees that the tendency is to rush in and try to get it all. "You can't; there just isn't time, and you'll change your mind from moment to moment about what's important." He suggests slowing down and thoroughly exploring a few favorite areas. Unlike the abundance of wildflowers, the canyons will be there for a repeat visit.

*"Don't try for $f/22$ and everything in focus.
Play with selective focus and use what a particular flower offers."*





"Most people are surprised that I almost always set program exposure on my Nikons..."

ABOUT THE PHOTOS

All the pictures here were taken with a D2x. Dan carried three Zoom-Nikkors—the 12–24mm f/4G ED-IF AF-S DX, 17–35mm f/2.8D ED-IF AF-S and 70–200mm f/2.8G ED-IF AF-S VR—and a 200mm f/4D ED-IF AF Micro-Nikkor. He also had two SB-800 Speedlights.

Dan says that "technically, it was a pretty simple deal" to handle exposures for the bright open sky of the desert as well as the deep shadows of the canyons. The tripod-mounted D2x was set for program exposure and the shutter fired by a Nikon MC-20 remote trigger release. In the slot canyons, Dan used the camera's noise reduction setting for shots made at 1/2 second or slower—"some were four, five or six seconds," he says. He also used the mirror lock-up feature on the camera for additional stability.

"Most people are surprised that I almost always set program exposure on my Nikons, especially with digital," Dan says. "They think it doesn't give you

control. But it's Nikon's flexible program, which I can adjust for higher shutter speeds or more depth-of-field. Basically, you can control the parameters of the programming. It's automatic and very accurate." With a turn of the camera's command dial, the program's shift can be biased toward shutter speed or f/stop while the proportions of the exposure are maintained.

After the trip Dan designated the D2x his landscape camera due to the size of the image file and the incredible detail and clarity of the picture. For his wildlife work, he says he'll probably stick to his D2H.

Then again, maybe not. "The D2x and its High-Speed Cropped mode [which switches the camera from five frames per second at 12.4 megapixels to eight frames per second at 6.8] is very tempting."

It'll probably take another road trip for Dan to decide.

