



Tips for Moth Micro Photography
~ Alberta Lepidopterists Guild Discussion ~



Oct. 5 – 9, 2007

Gary and Charley,

Out of curiosity, are you both still using a scanner for these images? I'd be interested to hear what the current techniques are for specimen photography-- they are quite nice!

John Acorn Friday, October 05, 2007 4:30 PM

Hi John and Joe,

My photo was taken with a Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ30 with a M-250 Raynox close-up lens. I haven't used a scanner for moth images for many years. I use Adobe Photoshop to darken the background.

In my opinion, the Gary's specimen is a bit worn, hence the somewhat frayed and shorter fringe. I also think that the slight pinkish sheen in his specimen is not from the specimen.

Charley Bird Friday, October 05, 2007 5:00 PM

Hi John (et al)

I am still using the Nikon Coolpix 995 with the lens that it came with. In my kitchen sink with natural light.

As for the moth id - I think I will go along with Jason. I have no doubt the genus is correct. The fringe is worn as Charley suggested. However - the pink is real and not an artefact of the light. The actual scales are pink - no refraction. I have no idea if that is a species level character or not. I shall call it *Vitula seratilineela* with a query until whenever.

Thanks all, Gary Anweiler Friday, October 05, 2007 7:42 PM

John,

I also take shots of specimens in natural light by a south facing window. Kitchen sink or elsewhere. I try to use a black background and use a Canon S10 set on 'super macro'. Having pretty good results if lighting is good and camera is held secure. The sink is nice because you can rest your arms securely while hovering over the specimen plus the sink reflects light around that kills some of the shadows.

To get a nice solid black background is the hardest part and that is why I decided to buy Photoshop Elements (\$125). I then trace out the specimen and paste it onto a black layer where I touch it up. Took me about an hour but I imagine that once I develop this skill, as Gary has, it may only take 20 to 30 minutes.

Anyhow here is my first attempt that looks not to bad.

Doug Macaulay, Sunday, October 07, 2007 1:13 PM

Re moth photos

Two things I do that I find help are to use a non-reflective black background (I use a piece of black felt) and I don't shoot in direct sunlight - always in indirect light. It is amazing how much light these little digital cameras can suck up.

The Photoshop magic wand usually takes care of un-evenness in the background.

Gary Anweiler, Sunday, October 07, 2007 5:55 PM

Dear ALG:

Standard background in photography for black is black velvet. Works great if it is atleast 2 cm behind the specimen. No shadows at all.

Best in all,

Ted Pike Monday, October 08, 2007 11:49 AM

Black backgrounds are great for web posting because of the nice contrast that it provides. However, if photos are intended for hard-copy publications, keep in mind that lots of solid black background on a plate may be calling for trouble in print.

JF Tuesday, October 09, 2007 7:48 AM

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Background color is a matter of individual preference, much like what coverings one puts on windows in their home. Some like white, some like blue etc. Personally I find the solid black background visually overpowering and from comparing different colors (by using flood fill on the image) I also find that the black 'plays tricks' on the mind with respect to the perceived color of the actual specimen, even if the specimen is photographed without a black background. I don't trust the color rendition of specimens photographed with black backgrounds. For example, specimens of *Lycaeides blues* photographed against a black background do not look at all natural or accurate to my eyes. White is OK for dark specimens but useless for species with white fringes. Grey works well with all colors of specimens and provides nice contrast without visually overpowering the specimen. Shadows are also easily dispensed with by using the 'glass plate' method. I get a grey background as a result of light attenuation through the glass; it is not necessarily a product of the 'background' paper color although a darker grey can be achieved by using grey instead of white paper. So long as the color of the specimen is accurate the color of the area surrounding the specimen strikes me as secondary. However using blue or black backgrounds would likely make the appearance of specimens with translucent wings appear unreal.

Norbert Kondla colias@shaw.ca Tuesday, October 09, 2007 8:52 AM

Dear ALGers:

I wrote a short paper about this, and the diffraction effects that the marginal scales have when light or reflective backgrounds are used. These can actually make the margin of the wing invisible so that there is no edge; the wing blends directly into the background. The lighter background also makes accurate colour reproduction more difficult than a uniform black background. The key to the overpowering nature of black is to make the margins between the specimen and the border as small as possible.

If you are going to use a grey background, best to get a grey card. Any photographic shop worth its salt will know what it is. It is an industry standard grey colour which is designed to ensure that colour balance is accurate, or that black and white exposures are uniform.

Best in all,
Ted Pike Tuesday, October 09, 2007 5:20 PM

One additional observation from my experimentation. I have found that centre-weighted metering gives better (truer) color than matrix metering. As previously mentioned, in my experience spot metering is a disaster.

Norbert Kondla colias@shaw.ca

Friday, October 12, 2007 8:16 AM
