

## Photo Journal: July 26, 2007, a morning on Biscayne Bay at high tide

Four days ago, I was in the same area but at low tide. Today would be a different experience all together at high tide. Same place, opposite tides, what could possibly be different? I arrived early this morning, around 6:15 am. I wanted to spend some time photographing the sunrise from the shore. Disappointingly, today (like 4 days ago), the sunrise did not offer any color in the sky. It was rather bland and washed out. I wonder why that is? Could it be the clouds diffusing the light that cover the horizon where the sun is rising? I'm not sure about the answer because I have captured some beautiful sunrises from this same spot with lots of clouds in the horizon and there was color. Without doing some research on this topic, I am left puzzled by it.

Just for comparison sake, I've added a photo from last year (shot with the Canon Powershot S3). I included it to compare to one of the photos I shot on this day, from a similar point. The photo from last year was shot from the canoe, further out in the water and at 70 mm. The photo below it was taken today at 18mm, from land and with a tripod.



In the second photo above, look at the horizon line to the left of the tree and you'll notice some buildings. These are the same buildings you see in the first photo (the city of Key Biscayne). The cloud formations are very similar in the two photos, yet the sky in photo #2 has no red or yellow colors. For kicks, I took photo #2 and converted it to black and white. It actually improves it and gives it an interesting mood. Also notice on these two photos the softness of the water. I used 1/3 second shutter speed at a small aperture (f20), a low ISO (80) and stopped down 2/3. I think the effect makes the water look like it is moving fast toward the camera. For this type of photo, a wide angle lens might improve it, even though I was at the widest angle I could get to.



Shortly after a few sunrise shots from land, I load up the canoe and head out on the water. Today, I would see only a few wading birds with the high tide. The birds are either hiding in the mangroves or hanging out on the high mangrove canopies. I noticed a flock of white ibises in the distance; they seem to show themselves frequently in the canopies. But when they are not easily spotted in the high mangrove canopies, you'll find large colonies on the ground inside the mangroves. You'll hear them before you see them with their low toned honking voices. I take some photos of these guys, and didn't have the greatest success. I tried to get profile shots with the blue sky in the background so as to capture a blue eye and the curved beak. Here is one photo; it didn't come out sharply focused as I would have liked it.



If you're going to shoot birds from below, the position of the bird relative to you, the branches and leaves, and sky are keys to success of a photo. It's more difficult to catch the eyes of the birds from this angle, but strive for that at all times. Notice in the photo above that the legs are clearly in view. Strive for this as well. Keep an eye on where your boat is drifting. I had an in-coming tide that was pushing me into the mangroves while shooting these birds so I was constantly getting caught in the mangrove branches.

Later, I noticed two great white egrets perched in the small mangroves sticking farther out in the water. This was the same location of my last visit, where all the wading birds were enjoying the low tide breakfast bar. As I approached them, I got some shots and one would fly away, followed by the other. I followed them to their second perch and started the process again. The birds and I repeated this a few times until I exasperated my good luck and they found higher canopies to get away from the mad photographer. In the process, I managed some flight shots, but only one came out sharp enough to my liking. Here are 2 photos from this chase:



There were several cormorants on the water and I attempted to capture some flight shots with the cormorant taking off from the water. They look like they are skipping across the water and it's quite dramatic looking when photographed correctly. Unfortunately today, I didn't have any luck; they were too fast for me to get them lined up for a decent photo. You win some, you lose some. Since the bird action was minimal on the bay this day, I decided to venture into a creek. I hung out there for quite some time. While paddling through a mangrove creek, you'll notice all kinds of life among the red mangrove roots. Among my favorites are the red mangrove crabs. You'll see hundreds of them scuttling about on the roots looking for insects, leaves and algae to eat. They are very, very shy and as soon as you begin approaching them, they quickly scuttle to the other side of the root to hide. When seen up close, they are fascinating little creatures, with interesting looking pincers in the front and gelatin-like beads for eyes. I also saw some larger, red crabs that I believe to be stone crabs. Below are a few photos of some of these crabs.

I wasn't counting on any of these shots to turn out with sharp focus. First, the current was strong and carried my boat at will along the creek. Second, the mangrove canopies made it dark and my shutter speeds were as slow as 1/50 and no faster than 1/160. I could have bumped up the ISO but I really was content with experimenting with getting as close to the crabs as possible. With the 300mm lens however, I often had to back up to get in focus. I did have the aperture wide open to f4, which really provides an interesting bokeh with the mangroves and water as background. Maybe using the flash would help. I would like to get back in there and experiment more with these subjects. They are so interesting to look at up-close and the mangrove roots provide all kinds of interesting backgrounds and foregrounds.



I was also experimenting with the reflections in the water. I took the photo below in the bay as the morning sun reflected on the water near the mangroves. I really like the abstractness of it. The water has these “indentations” that were filled with blue color from the sky reflection, providing a nice contrast to the green mangrove reflections. Something else to experiment with! Always the scientist, always the student; I approach my photography methodically, but with openness, inspiration and a sense of wonderment. The more I photograph, the more fascinating the world becomes. Have you ever noticed that photography opens you up to your surroundings, makes you see more things that would normally be overlooked? Details are paid attention to, lighting is scrutinized, wildlife behavior becomes a study, and colors are more fascinating. As I continue to learn, I wonder where photography will take me. Will I ever grow out of it? Will I get bored with it? Will I continue to get better? I don’t have time to try to answer those questions, so I’ll just keep shooting for the present.



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