

# WorldWideWonders



A TRIP TO THE COLORADO PLATEAU AND THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

# SAND, SNOW AND SKY

A photographic journey across some of North America's most iconic landscapes - revisited through the eyes of an unbiased traveller





**Twilight at Sand Dunes National Park.**  
(Olympus E-5, Zuiko Telephoto Zoom 50-200mm, 1/2s, F11, ISO 100, Solidex tripod)





**Dunes fingerprint detail. Sand Dunes National Park.**  
 (Olympus E-5, Zuiko Macro 50mm, 1/100s, F14, ISO 400)

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About this portfolio: In May 2011, I travelled from Quito, Ecuador, to Fort Collins, Colorado, United States, to visit my girlfriend. The State encompasses much of the Rocky Mountains, as well as the northeastern portion of the Colorado Plateau and the western edge of the Great Plains. In ten days, we visited the Sand Dunes National Park, The Rocky Mountains, the Arches National Park and the Canyonlands (both in Utah State), and the so-called "Natural Areas" in and out of the city of Fort Collins.

My first impression discovering Nearctic nature was how "easy" could be to find wild fauna in this region. In Ecuador, it is quite hard to find yourself face to face of a big mammal unless it is a cow! In the tropics, even common animals seem to be more shy and are thus harder to appreciate, and of course, to photograph. The whole trip was scheduled to last a month, and photography was just a small part of it. I would say we spent 25% of the total time in nature looking for wildlife. However, I found that it was photographically highly productive. Animals we found are catalogued as "common", so I tried to briefly understand their behavior and get some more "uncommon" angles.

My second impression was how long beautiful crepuscular light can last: for hours! In the tropics, dawn and sunsets are highly ephemeral, and direct sunbeams

make light-contrast difficult to handle. I was just delighted to have such soft light for enough time to keep trying better compositions. I also found that inside a temperate forest there is some more light compared to tropical forests, where epiphytes cover canopy gaps.

My third impression, and something that shocked me more than anything else, was the mortifying and uncontrollable presence of the pine beetle, *Dendroctonus ponderosae*, a weevil-family insect that lays its eggs under the bark of mature pine trees. Every year, pine beetle outbreaks destroy thousands of square kilometers of coniferous forests ecosystems in North America, including vast areas of the Rocky Mountains. It was very sad to see such immense "evergreen" or coniferous forests completely devastated.

Scientists predict that this impact may convert the forests from a small net carbon sink to a large net carbon source contributing to global warming. Leading ecologists consider that climate change has contributed to the unprecedented extent and severity of pine beetle outbreaks. Astonishingly, U.S. National Park information centers do not explain evidences of the role of climate change in these abnormal insect outbreaks, thus hiding from the people the fact that this unfortunate phenomenon is one of the consequences of negative human actions. ●





**The Canyonlands National Park preserves a reddish landscape eroded into countless, nooks and rock pillars of all different sizes.** This ACME® trademark landscape made me feel like I was in “The Coyote and The Road Runner” cartoon, but I never saw either. (Olympus E-5, Zuiko Telephoto Zoom 50-200mm, 1/250s, F13, ISO 100)





**Canyonlands National Park typical landscape.**  
(Olympus E-5, Zuiko Telephoto Zoom 50-200mm, 1/250s, F13, ISO 100)





**Contrasting landscapes in the Arches National Park.**  
 (Olympus E-5, Zuiko Telephoto Zoom 50-200mm,  
 1/1000s, F10, ISO 250)



**The "Balanced Rock" in the Arches National Park is a rock that has a volume equivalent to three city buses!**  
 (Olympus E-5, Zuiko Wide angle Zoom 11-22mm,  
 1/100s, F16, ISO 100)





**Trees, shrubs and grasses seem to emerge from the rock in search of little holes to hold on to. Canyonlands National Park.**  
(Olympus E-5, Zuiko Wide angle Zoom 11-22mm, 1/200s, F16, ISO 200)





**More hardy vegetation from the demanding environment of the Canyonlands National Park.**  
 (Olympus E-5, Zuiko Wide angle Zoom 11-22mm, 1/200s, F16, ISO 200)



**Details of a spiny lizard *Sceloporus* sp. (*Phrynosomatidae*).** Sand Dunes National Park.  
 (Olympus E-5, Zuiko Macro 50mm + 20mm extension tube, 1/320s, F9, ISO 320)





**The American Antelope *Antilocapra americana*.** This female belongs to a herd of about 8 antelope that were grazing near the camping grounds. I started to follow them until the alpha-male, showing obvious signs of distress, told me to go away. I did. Sand Dunes National Park. (Olympus E-5, Zuiko Telephoto Zoom 50-200mm + 1.4x teleconverter, 1/640s, F11, ISO 200, Solidex tripod)





**American White Pelicans can be found in fresh water lakes on the inlands of North America.**

In winter, they migrate to the warmer Eastern and Western coasts. The Rocky Mountains.  
(Olympus E-5, Zuiko Telephoto Zoom 50-200mm + 1.4x teleconverter, 1/1000s, F7.1, ISO 200)





Just outside of the city of Fort Collins, wild animals are fighting to survive. **This fox *Vulpes* sp. found a prey and jumped unsuccessfully to try to catch it.**  
(Olympus E-5, Zuiko Telephoto Zoom 50-200mm + 1.4x teleconverter, 1/1000s, F4.9, ISO 400)





Sand, rock and water dunes. **Sand Dunes National Park.**  
(Olympus E-5, Zuiko Wide angle Zoom 11-22mm, 1/160s, F18, ISO 200)



**The top of the sand dunes can be a very windy place.**  
Sand Dunes National Park. (Olympus E-5, Zuiko Wide angle Zoom 11-22mm, 1/400s, F14, ISO 200)



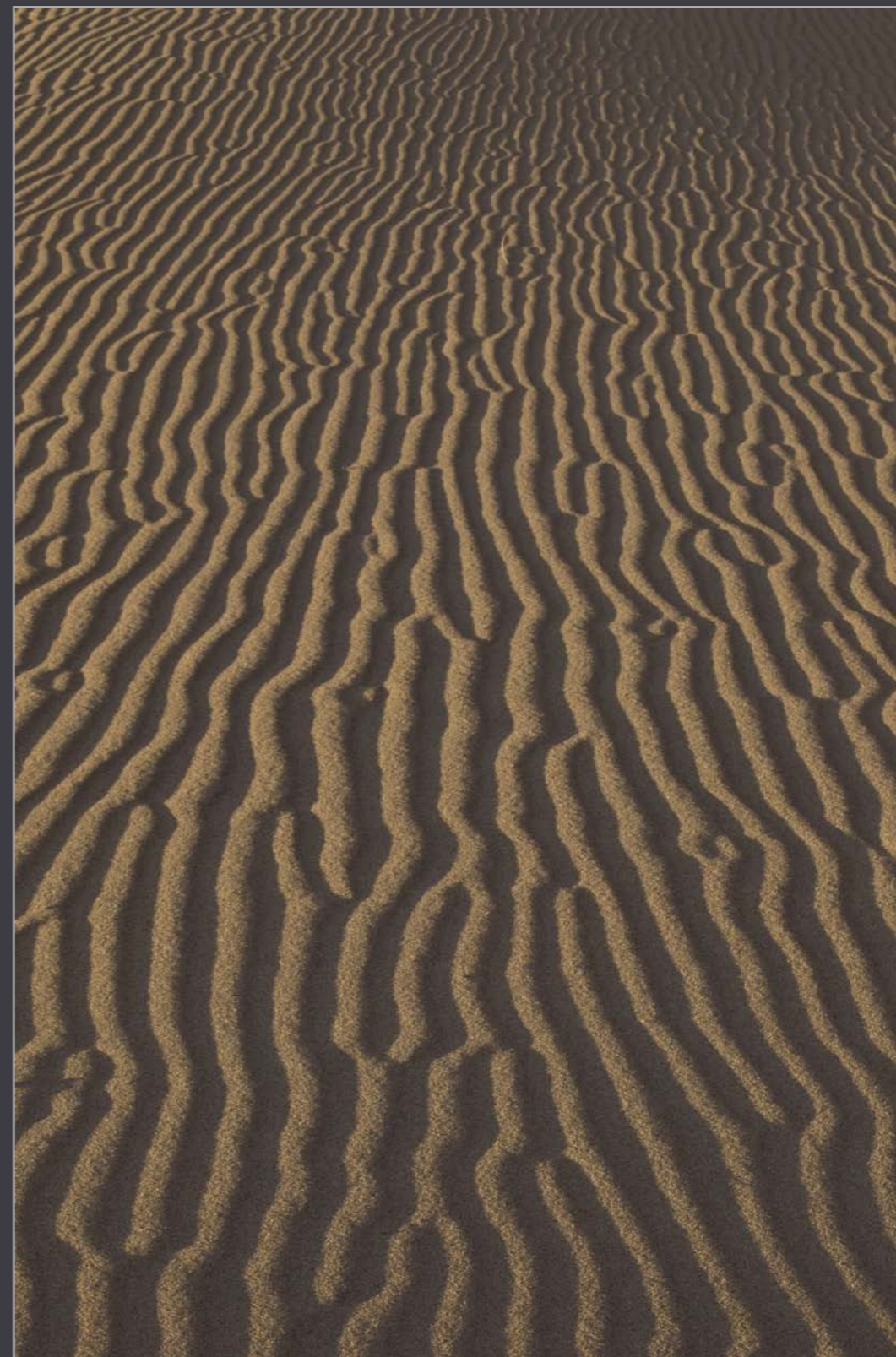


Tourist in the Eye. **Arches National Park.** (Olympus E-5, Zuiko Macro 50mm, 1/160s, F9, ISO 100)





**Sand, rock and water dunes.** Sand Dunes National Park.  
(Olympus E-5, Zuiko Wide angle Zoom 11-22mm, 1/160s, F18, ISO 200)



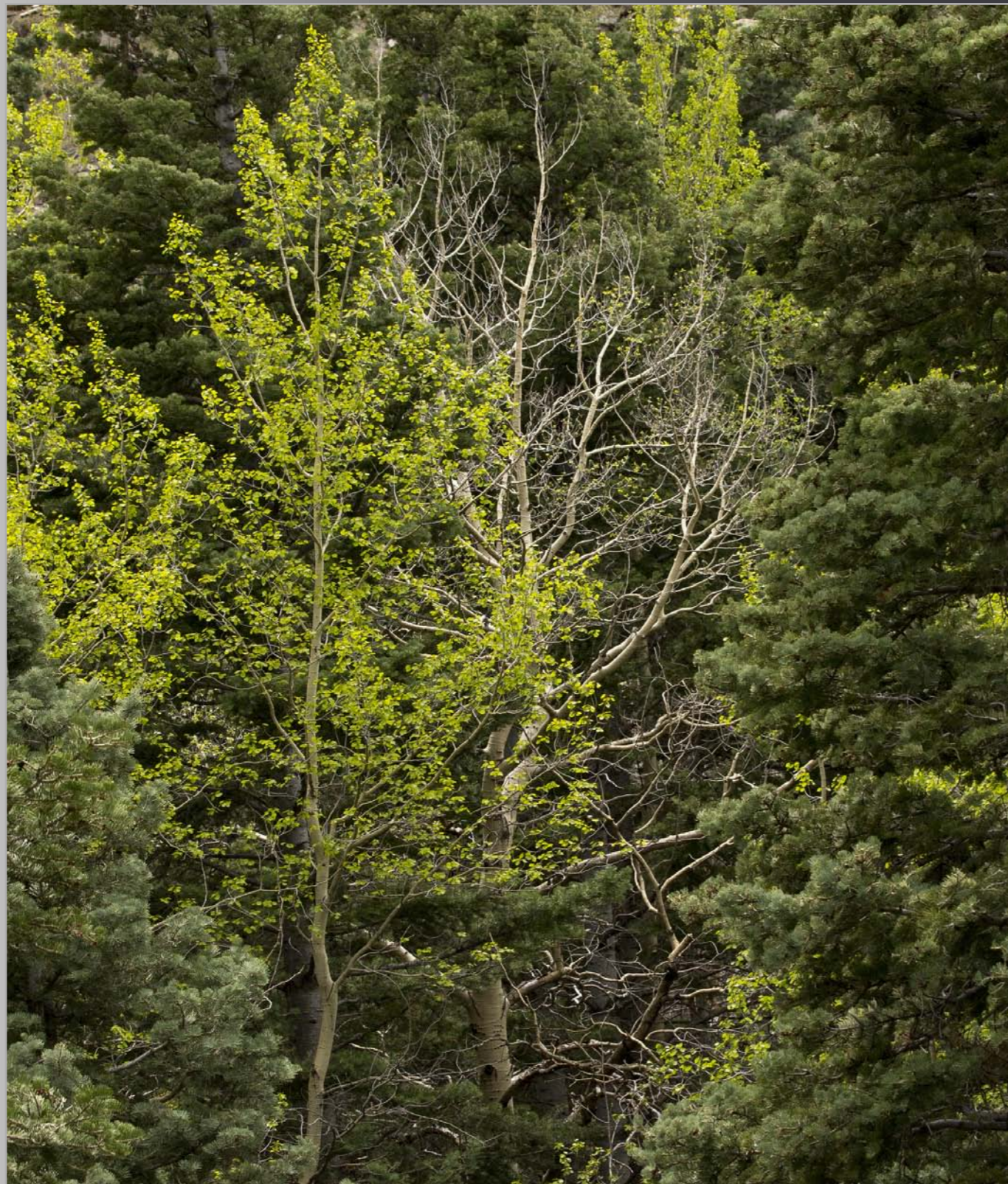
**Dunes fingerprint.** Sand Dunes National Park.  
(Olympus E-5, Zuiko Macro 50mm, 1/100s, F14, ISO 400)



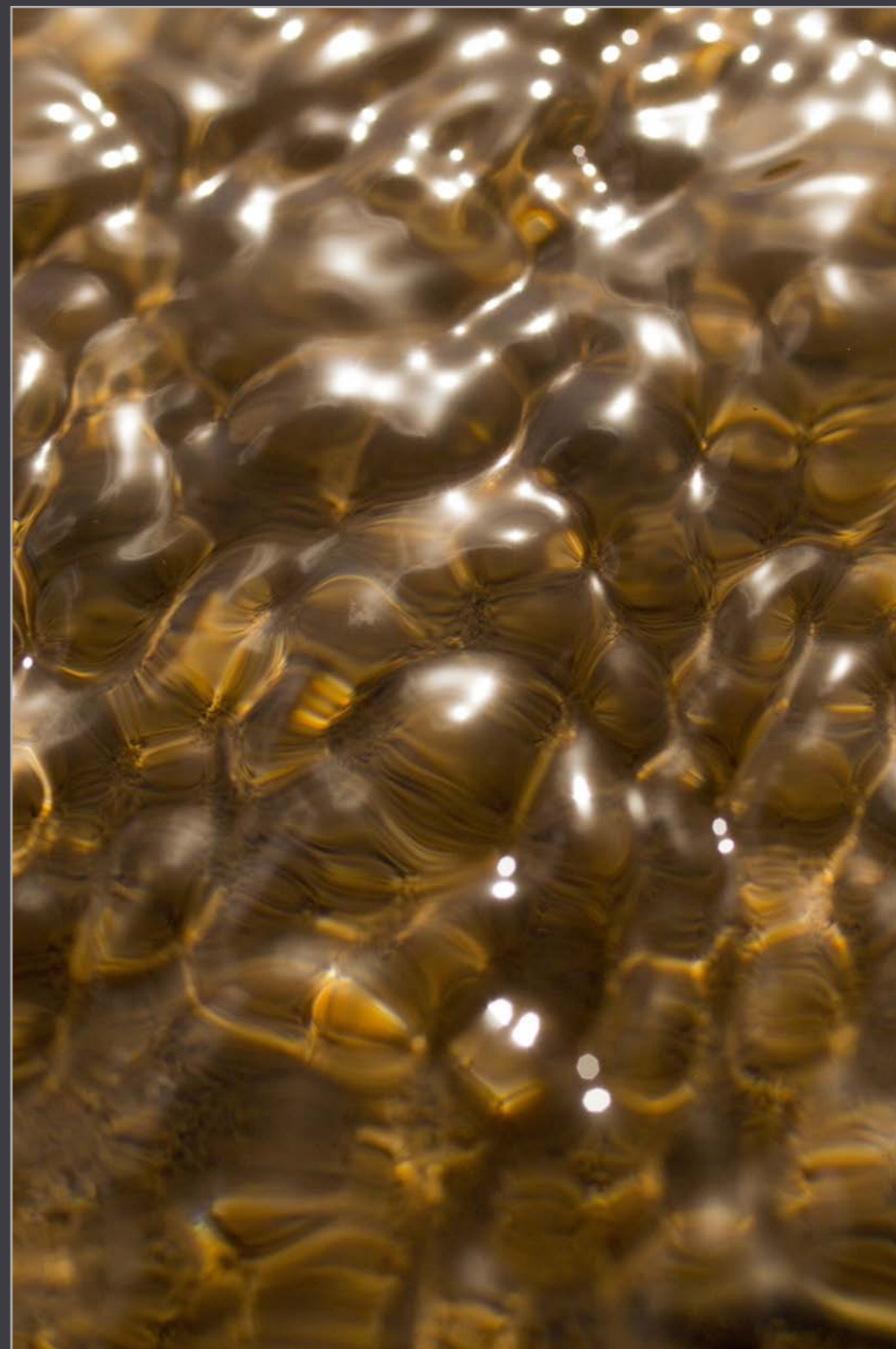


**Although spring arrived late in 2011, birds started looking for material early on to construct their nests.**  
The Rocky Mountains. (Olympus E-5, Zuiko Telephoto Zoom 50-200mm + 1.4x teleconverter, 1/800s, F9, ISO 320)





**Temperate forest**, Sand Dunes National Park.  
(Olympus E-5, Zuiko Telephoto Zoom 50-200mm, 1/400s, F6.3, ISO 400)



**Jelly pond**, Canyonlands National Park.  
(Olympus E-5, Zuiko Macro 50mm, 1/3200s, F5.6, ISO 400)





**Caducifolia forest, Sand Dunes National Park.**  
(Olympus E-5, Zuiko Telephoto Zoom 50-200mm, 1/400s, F5, ISO 400)





The Rocky Mountains. **Low clouds blanket the ecological disaster and make this dead forest seem to be a healthy one.**  
(Olympus E-5, Zuiko Telephoto Zoom 50-200mm, 1/250s, F10, ISO 320, Solidex tripod)





The Disaster. From Canada to Mexico, **pine beetles destroy thousands of millions of hectares of coniferous forests every year.** The Rocky Mountains.  
(Olympus E-5, Zuiko Telephoto Zoom 50-200mm, 1/80s, F8, ISO 320, Solidex tripod)