

## GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPLICATIONS FOR FULL MEMBERSHIP

### Dear nature photographer,

If you are interested in becoming a full member of the GDT, we will assess the quality of your photographic work on the basis of 20 application photographs. To assist you with this matter, we would like to give you some important advice.

### An initial request

Please take the following guidelines very serious!

The number of applications for full GDT membership has constantly increased, which is great! However, we have also detected a rising number of absolutely insufficient applications, which clearly reveal that applicants have hardly read the guidelines. This is directed at applications which are in no way satisfactory in neither their technical implementation and composition nor in terms of careful execution.

Be self-critical! We ask for your understanding that we no longer discuss individual images of overall inadequate applications in detail, but will only give a short, more general explanation for rejection.

### Your choice of pictures

Your application photographs can be from the following areas: animals, plants, landscapes, nature-related macro photography as well as artistically abstract nature photography.

The number of photographs of animals that were restricted in their natural movement before, during or after the photograph was taken (reserve, game fame etc.) should be limited to two. These photographs must be marked "captive" in their file names. Pictures of domestic animals (among others this includes domestic pigeons or bred honey bees) and cultivated or ornamental plants are not permitted. Also not permitted are pictures that clearly show human references, such as roads, street lights, overhead power lines, houses etc. without featuring a strong connection to the main subject. Applications containing these elements will be rejected.

Allowed for your application are high quality colour prints (20x30cm) and digital images.

Each print has to be marked with a number from 01 to 20 according to your picture list.

Digital images have to be handed in on CD in two separate folders ("preview" and "high quality").

1. JPEG files with 1200 pixels on their longest side as preview.
2. JPEG files in full size and maximum quality as high quality. The file names of all 20 images must begin with consecutive numbers from 01 to 20, which must be the same numbering as on your picture list.

If submitted photographs do not comply to these formal rules of marking, the application will be rejected. This will also be the case, should any doubt arise that the photographs have been taken in accordance with the corresponding policies of nature conservation and the protection of species. The board of management will then contact you and will ask for special permits where applicable. Submissions with incomplete information will also be returned.

We attach great importance on authentic nature photography, but do not ignore the technical possibilities of digital image editing within the framework of our guidelines. For us recognizing the photographer's achievement has priority.

When editing your images digitally, **the following is PERMITTED:**

- moderate adjustments of contrast, tonal values, gradation, white balance, colour and saturation
- moderate use of the shadow/highlight tool, dodging/burning and digital graduated grey filters
- removal of sensor dust, marginal "clean-up" if it does not change the statement of the image
- cropping: longest side of the high quality image must have at least 3000 pixel, not interpolated formats deviating from the common 3:2, such as 4:3, 4:2, 3:1 or others
- moderate (selective) sharpening and (selective) noise reduction
- HDR images, stitched panoramas and images with focus stacking as well as multiple exposures (for all these techniques the requirement is that all images were taken at the same location at approximately the same time)
- removal of chromatic aberrations and vignetting as well as lens distortions
- black&white and infrared rendering (incl. filter and tonal adjustments)

When editing your images digitally, **the following is NOT PERMITTED:**

- Adding or removing objects (e.g. animals, plants, people, items of civilization and traces thereof), digital collages, frames or other decorations.

Please fill in the enclosed picture list with care (see form Application for full Membership in the GDT) and send it together with your letter of application, the application form and, if sending prints, a self-addressed, post-paid envelope to the GDT office.

Please understand that the GDT is not liable for damages that may occur in transit.

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Data carriers containing digital submissions will be destroyed after the application process. Simultaneously, data may be stored temporarily in the GDT's archive for the purpose of comparison. There will be no future use of your data. With your print application you agree that your pictures will be scanned in low resolution (72 dpi, 6 x 9 cm) and stored on CD for archiving and comparison purposes.

### Why does this "entrance examination" exist?

Nobody has to pass an examination to become a GDT member. There is the possibility of sponsor membership, which is often the first step towards GDT membership. Today the same applies to sponsor members which formerly had been granted to full members only: the possibility to participate in the contest "GDT Nature Photographer of the Year" and all other GDT projects. This includes the production of GDT books, calendars and exhibitions. However, sponsor members may use the logo and the name of the GDT only with the addition sponsor member. Especially since these privileges apply to all members now, we hold on to our demands for high quality when it comes to full membership. This high quality is exactly what the GDT wants to represent to the public and thus promoting nature and nature photography. We want nature photography above the average to be the GDT's trademark!

### How does an evaluation proceed?

The submitted digital photographs will be send with an evaluation sheet to the members of the board for individual assessment. When the evaluation sheets have been returned to the relevant member of the board, the overall number of points will be calculated and the applicant notified (please see also "Our evaluation process"). Print applications will be assessed by the members of the board during their meetings. Their evaluation is based on the same principles as those for digital images. All photographs will be discussed on the basis of certain criteria.

### Three criteria for a good picture

#### **At first some notes for your consideration:**

We do not want to see mere illustrations of animals or plants, no classification photos which depict a species in a large, colourful way. We find it especially important that we can comprehend on the basis of the picture how the photographer dealt with his/her subject before and during the shot. We do not evaluate only documentary performance but especially photographic achievements! In doing so, we place crucial importance on image composition.

#### **1. Technical aspects**

The technical side of the picture has to be absolutely high quality. Therefore, wrong exposures or blurriness that has not been applied as a style device receive considerable minus points. Aspects of artificial and natural light conditions are also part of this field of criteria.

How did the photographer use the available light in his / her photograph to highlight aspects of the subject or situation for instance? Did he/she avoid light that is too harsh?

How did he/she use devices such as reflectors or flashes and diffuser screens to deal with poor light conditions or to emphasize certain aspects? Have employed equipment and technique been used creatively by long term exposure, panning, fill-flash or by the use of photoelectric barriers or a remote shutter release?

These can be considered as special performances of the photographer that are judged higher than just taking a picture of a more or less trouble-free subject.

## 2. Layout

The most important layout feature is successful image composition, which is quite a challenge! But in most cases it would be enough to follow one single rule: Move your subject out of the centre!

For example: The gaze of an animal needs space if it is not looking straight into the camera. Plants usually do not grow straight up, but branch out and lean more to one side than to the other. This should be taken into consideration for the layout to bring about a balance in the picture.

In very much the same way, the human eye literally demands to work its way along areal structures, lines and surfaces towards the horizon in landscape photographs. Guide the observer through your picture, set the direction and main emphasis or do them justice with exciting or harmonious balancing of the picture elements.

Another part of this field is the creative use of different focal lengths.

The choice of place from where the picture is taken is also extremely important. Do your motives justice by carefully choosing the perspective or emphasizing them in that way.

Blurriness in the foreground is not always stylistically valuable, but can distract from the main subject. This also applies to a background with too many details or highlight areas. Check your selected image section repeatedly and try to eliminate disturbing elements by adjusting your position or using a different focal length. Consider using the portrait format more often. Upward movements or shapes actually demand that kind of format. Be courageous every once in a while and cut your motives or place them in the corner of your picture on purpose! Show us your creativity!

## 3. Intensity

While we can give clear guidelines for the two previous criteria, it does not quite work in this field: there are often quite different opinions within the team when it comes to the subject of "intensity". You may even say: "Layout - it's all very well, but often there is just no time to be fussing around for long." For example when it comes to documenting fast behavioural sequences. To do this matter at least some justice we subdivided this criterion into subjective and biological intensity. In some case, the latter may be rated higher than well-composed images.

We are lucky (and so are you) to have several biologist in our team, who so far succeeded in recognizing most species and behaviour patterns and appraising their rarity value. In case of doubt we are able to read from the picture list, which has to be enclosed in every application, whether the picture should receive bonus points because of rarity aspects or not.

### What else is important?

**Subject "animals in captivity":** Most photographers of the GDT also take pictures in preserves or enclosures. However, your application should not include more than two animal pictures that have been taken in any kind of controlled environment.

**Subject "variety":** Make sure you present a wide range of different photographs in which the elements for a good picture as mentioned above can be found. Avoid repetitions!

For example: If pictures of species or sites occur repeatedly, they should be so distinct from each other that it is clear from the photograph that the photographic procedure has been different in each one of them: four pictures of a chameleon for instance, including a portrait head-on right between the eyes, one wide-angle shot from down below in front of the typical habitat of that species, a catch situation with the tongue shot out and maybe an unusual shot of a chameleon in the mist or as a silhouette in front of the setting sun. Indeed, it would show the same species four times, but would tell us a lot about your photographic skills.

**Subject "formalities":** Again and again we receive pictures that do not meet the requirements for an application: no numbering; fewer than 20 photographs; no preview files; copies of (very) poor quality so that the technical side of the photos cannot be assessed at all; no return postage or the return envelope is missing altogether (for print submissions) among other things. Make sure that your application also meets the formal requirements.

### Our evaluation process

Photographs that comply to our criteria will be given one point. Photographs that meet the criteria only by a narrow margin will be given half a point. With ten points overall the application you will be granted full membership. If your application was not successful, we will note down a few keywords for each photograph on your picture list stating what we liked and what we did not approve of. We will also try to give some suggestions for improvement so that your chances in a future application will increase. Insufficient applications, usually applications with less than 2 points, will only receive a rather general statement.

### Contact a GDT regional group

Before sending in your choice of photographs, contact a regional group in your area if possible. Discuss your photographs with the members there and learn to judge yourself. The leaders of the regional groups of the GDT are all experienced photographers and are willing to discuss your photographs for an application.

The regional groups provide ample opportunities for discussions and can certainly give you fresh ideas about nature photography.

It is also recommended to participate in the seminar "Auf dem Weg zu besseren Bildern" (Taking better pictures), which is often run within the context of the International Nature Photography Festival of the GDT in Lünen. Here you can ask members of the board, professional nature photographers as well as editorial staff and representatives of photo agencies for opinion regarding your selection of photographs.

For any further questions please contact our office!

**Well, there is nothing left to say but to wish you all the best for your application!**