

GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPLICATIONS FOR **FULL MEMBERSHIP**

Dear nature photographer,

If you are interested in becoming a full member of the GDT, it is important for us that you prove the quality of your photographic work by sending us 20 application photos.

To assist you with this matter, we would like to give you some advice.

An initial request

It may sound simple: please take the following guidelines very serious!

The number of applications for full GDT membership has constantly increased, which is great! However, the board has 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.

Please make sure to visit one of the GDT regional groups prior to your application, and/or ask experienced nature photographers for advice and criticism. Be self-critical! We ask for your understanding that in the future due to our already tense time schedule, we will not 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 in the following areas: animals, plants, landscapes, nature-related macro photography as well as artistically abstract nature photography.

Every applicant should have done wildlife-photography in advance. A maximum of two pictures is allowed to be of animals that were restricted in their natural movement before, during or after the photograph is taken. These photographs must be marked "captive" in their file names. Pictures of pets, cultivated or ornamental plants are not permitted.

Only original slides or high-quality duplicates (no glass-mounts!), high quality colour prints (13x18cm to a maximum of 20x30cm) and digital images are allowed for your application.

Each photograph, slide or print has to be marked with your full name and 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 at 1200x800 pixel for preview
2. JPEG-files in full size and maximum 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 list of photographs. 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 not 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. 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 **high quality** image must have at least 3000 pixel, not interpolated
- 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

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 slides or prints, a self-addressed stamped envelope to the GDT office.

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

Don't be too disappointed if your application is being rejected. In any case we will send you a detailed evaluation of your pictures or contact you personally to discuss your pictures. You can also apply again in the future.

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 slide or 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 sponsor membership (an unfortunate choice of words for want of a better expression), which is often the first step towards GDT membership. For a number of years now the same applies to sponsor members what formerly had been a matter of course for 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! So it is the individual applicant's decision to have his or her photographic work evaluated by a committee, or to join the GDT as a nature photographer without this evaluation. By their evaluation the board wishes to show applicants how they can improve in nature photography without forcing a certain taste on other people.

How does an evaluation proceed?

During the board meetings the attending board members examine the applications on a light box or screen. In many cases this first overall impression gives a pretty good idea whether an application may be successful or not. In this first session it is possible to detect individual strong and weak points in technique and image composition quite well. After that every picture will be thoroughly looked at under a magnifying glass in the journal box or slide frame, or even be taken out and looked at again if necessary. Submitted prints will be dealt with accordingly as will digital data on a screen. This takes about 5 - 10 minutes for each application. The photographs will then be discussed in their given order on the basis of three 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 photo how the photographer, and not only the natural scientist, 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. Cold, uncaring pictures that hold no excitement usually fail, unless they have otherwise outstanding features.

I. Equipment & Technique: Almost every modern camera today is able to automatically expose an average subject correctly. Brilliant and high resolution lenses and films ensure a sharp image. Therefore, wrong exposures or blurriness that has not been used as a style device receive considerable minus points. The technical side of the picture has to be absolutely high quality. 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 point out 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 a photoelectric barrier or 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. We keep receiving photos of reptiles and insects that have been completely deadened by an over-extensive use of the flash: pitch black background, extremely cold and artificial flashlight, but of course stopped down and therefore crystal clear. However sharp the insects, however clear the tree frog's vocal sac - they are definitely not the kind of pictures we are looking for. These are photographs in which the intensity of a behaviour pattern or filigreed details have been destroyed by the thoughtless use of devices.

2. Layout: The most important layout feature is successful image composition. Almost all applications show weaknesses in this field, although 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 into the picture. In very much the same way, the human eye literally demands to work its way along area 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, for example the use of (extreme) wide-angle lenses for animal and plant photography, or the use of super-telephoto lenses for plants and landscapes. 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 picture element repeatedly and try to eliminate disturbing elements by adjusting your position or using a different focal length. Take photos more often in a portrait format. 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: A spot on layout and composition creates a highly effective photograph for most observers. Here we are on thin ice since photographs appear to have a different effect on everybody. And although we can give clear guidelines for the other two criteria, it does not quite work in this field: there are often quite different opinions within the team when it comes to the subject "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. With the latter photographs that have not received a good rating in the area of layout for instance, might still receive top marks. Talking about intensity is a difficult subject, but nevertheless it is irrefutably part of the evaluation of a photograph.

For example: What about rare species or rarely seen behaviour? In many cases it is extremely difficult to document behaviour. Nevertheless, the argument "But what I captured is behaviour" is not at all an excuse for a poor picture! "Well, but they don't recognize the rarity of what I photographed" might sometimes also be employed as an argument. Certainly this may be the case for a tiny fraction of photographs, but 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 conditions.

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: A choice of four or five ibexes and just as many griffon vultures that look to the right, left, up, down and straight ahead does not say enough about your photographic skills. 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 one "real" 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 and even the same individual, 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; copies or duplicates in (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 slide and print submissions) among other things. Nobody really enjoys looking at pictures that fall out of a wrapping of some photo lab in different small formats as they are pulled from the C6 envelope, or if one has to somehow get them out of the Kodak "slide coffins" sealed with textile-adhesive tape. Send us your photographs in clear plastic pockets, Kunze-Journal boxes or similar archiving covers. Do not forget to include sufficient return postage and an appropriately sized envelope. Make sure that also the formal part of your application is met.

Our evaluation process

After having checked several alternatives we resolved the following system: each photograph that we accept as an application for full membership because it complies to our requirements will be given one point. Photographs that meet the criteria only by a narrow margin or induce controversial arguments between members of the team will be given half a point. With ten points overall the application will be successful.

How can we express our evaluation and criticism in a comprehensible and clear way? 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. To a certain extent we will also try to give some suggestions for improvement so that your chances in a future application will increase.

Contact a GDT regional group

Before you send in your selection 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, although this is of course not a guarantee for admission as a full member.

The meetings are usually held four times. They 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" (Your way to better pictures), which is run annually within the context of the International Nature Photography Festival of the GDT in Lünen. Here you can ask board members, 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!