



ASOCIACION
FLAAR
MESOAMERICA

Suggestions for photographing landscapes

For nature photographer, for landscape photographers,
for botanists, zoologists and biologists who study eco-systems

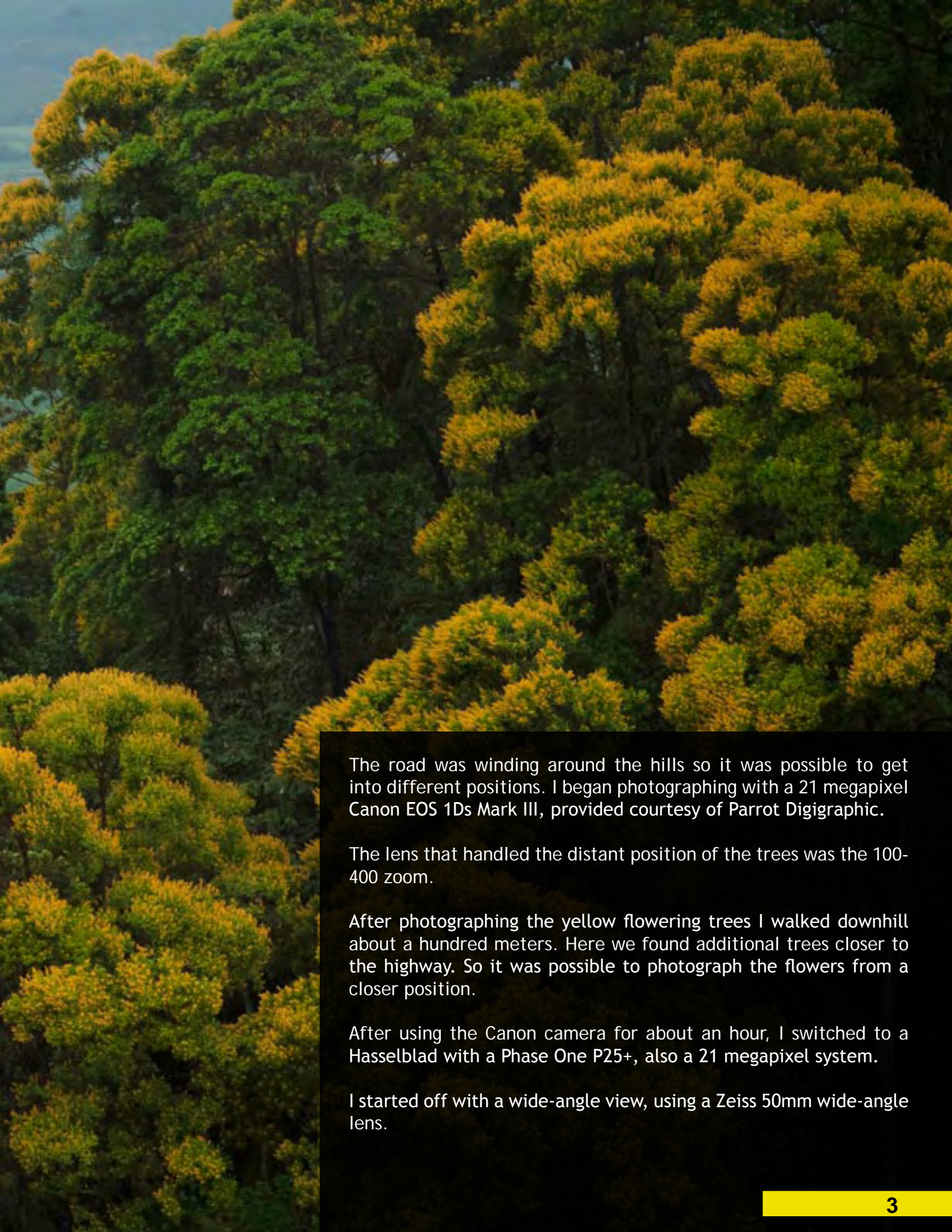
Introduction

The last week of May we drove to Senahú, Alta Verapaz, hoping to find various trees that we have been looking for. The day after we arrived it was raining so rather difficult to photograph anything.

So we decided to return back to our office (since I had to fly out on Tuesday to a 3D conference).

We drove only a few minutes from our meeting in the new Senahú swimming recreational area and suddenly saw a remarkable hillside full of brilliant yellow flowering trees. Even though it was still drizzling I decided to take photographs even if I got wet.






The road was winding around the hills so it was possible to get into different positions. I began photographing with a 21 megapixel Canon EOS 1Ds Mark III, provided courtesy of Parrot Digigraphic.

The lens that handled the distant position of the trees was the 100-400 zoom.

After photographing the yellow flowering trees I walked downhill about a hundred meters. Here we found additional trees closer to the highway. So it was possible to photograph the flowers from a closer position.

After using the Canon camera for about an hour, I switched to a Hasselblad with a Phase One P25+, also a 21 megapixel system.

I started off with a wide-angle view, using a Zeiss 50mm wide-angle lens.



Here I have selected a point of view so you can see the farmland in the river valley at a lower elevation far away. This is evidently the Cajabon River, a tributary of the Polochic, which eventually flows into Lake Izabal.



Here is another view with no foreground and no background. This way you can concentrate on looking at the treetops





Here is a view with background but with only hills visible.

I selected a point of view, and a lens (so not the wide-angle) so that the background was only another distant hill.

So your eye is not distracted with the river or farmland in the valley.









Phase One P25 +, HDR 3 photos

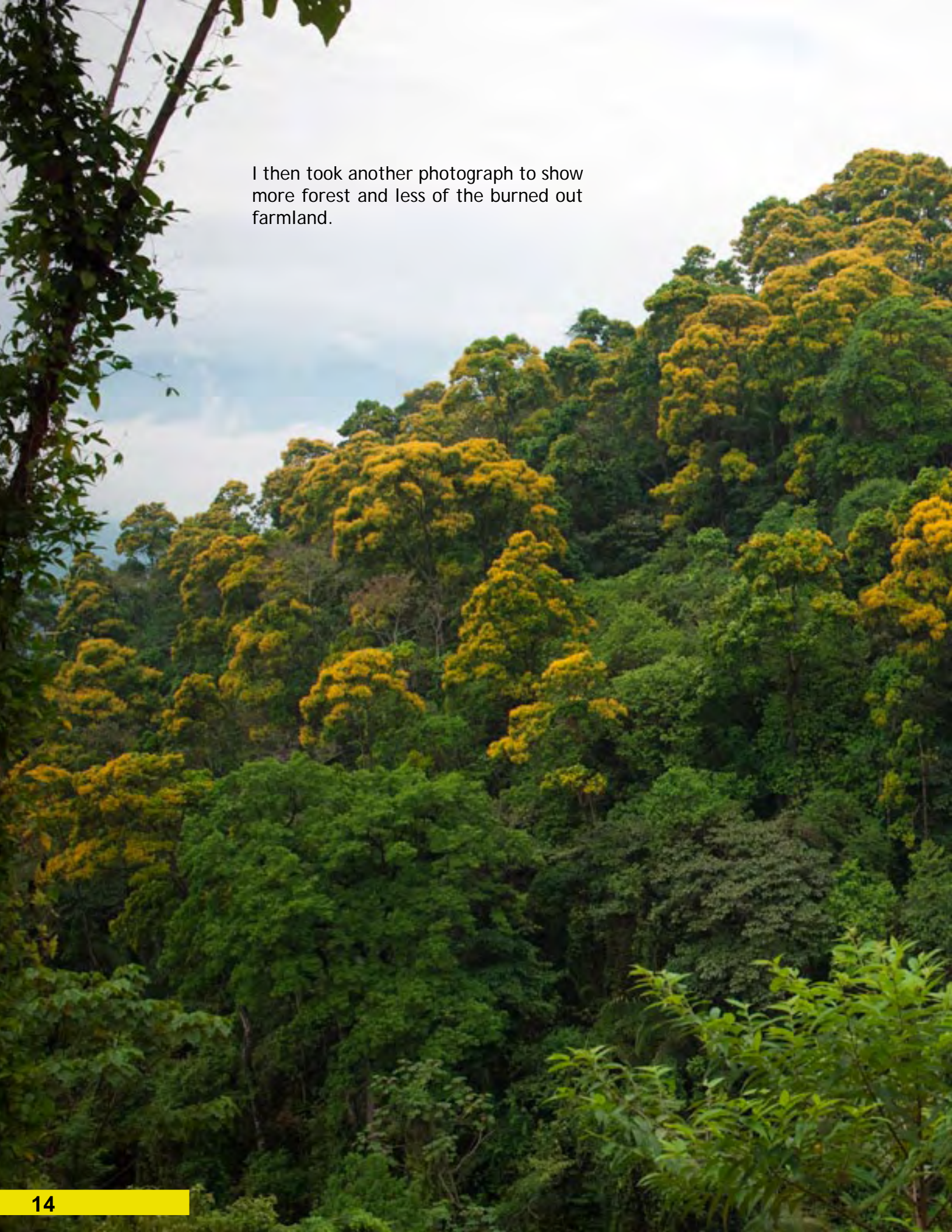
Immediately adjacent to the beautiful hill with the gorgeous yellow flowers there was another hill slope completely denuded of vegetation. I felt this was a good contrast to show the destruction of the land by milpa-style agriculture.

This view shows half forest and half destruction.





I then took another photograph to show more forest and less of the burned out farmland.





I then turned the camera 90 degrees to capture an individual tree. Since the trees are so close to one another it's tough to get any one tree fully visible.





Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 1/200s, f 16, ISO 320, lens EF100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM



Most of the trees were very tall, and the hill was about the length of a football field from the highway. So even with a 400mm lens there was no way to get details of the flowers that were on the hill.



Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 1/200s, f 16, ISO 160, lens EF100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM



But by walking down the highway it was possible to find several trees near the road and with branches low enough so I could take closer views. Nonetheless, with the wind blowing it is not realistic to get a really sharp image. The drizzle did not help either. Only when you can ask for permission to cut a sample and use a studio to do close-ups can you get a sharp image



Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 1/100s, f 16, ISO 160, lens EF100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM



Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 1/125s, f 16, ISO 320, lens EF100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM



What was interesting is that whereas most of the flowers were pointed upwards, some were mostly diagonal, almost horizontal (though perhaps recent heavy rains had bent them down into this position; a botanist will need to answer this question).



Here are some more views, as close as I could get with the lenses currently available. If funding or a grant would allow a 500mm prime lens then we could get better images of flowers high up in tall trees



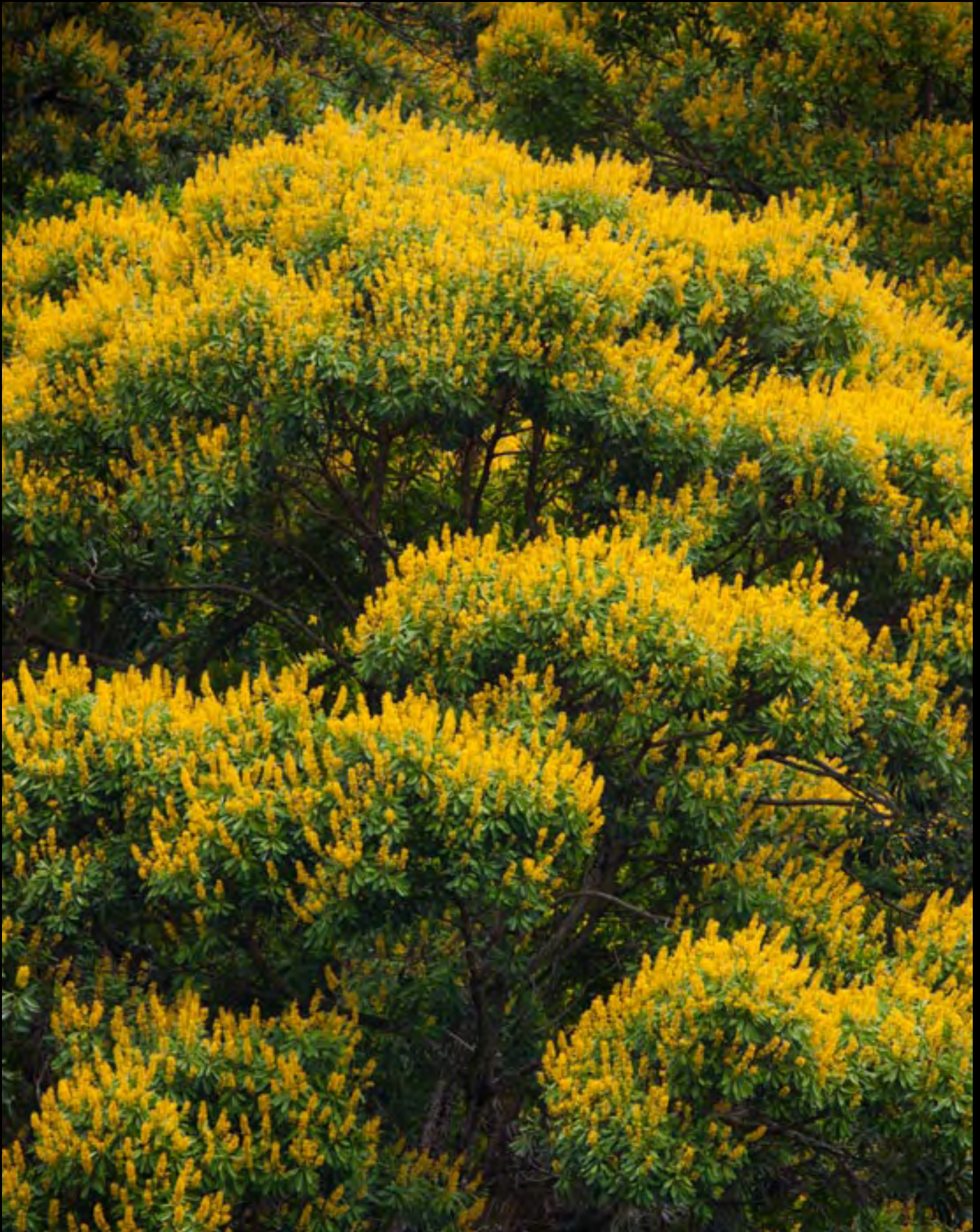
Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 1/50s, f 16, ISO 320, lens EF100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM



Fine Art Style

When I see an individual flower, or an entire forest, I have two competing instincts: one is to take the kind of photo that a botanist will prefer. But the overriding instinct is to compose a fine art photo (yet still recording information that would be helpful for a botanist and ethnobotanist).

Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 1/200s, f 16, ISO 320, lens EF100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM



These two photographs here are admittedly a fine art style. I call it “cascade of yellow flowers.”
Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 1/200s, f 16, ISO 320, lens EF100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM





Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 1/25s, f 14, ISO 250, lens EF100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM

Before and after gray balance (color balance)

In digital photography we do “gray balance” as color balance. In video you do “white balance.”

Here is a pre-color balance photo, and a photo after I did color balance with the in-camera back system. Phase One has one of the easiest-to-use color balance systems. With a Nikon or Canon you have to do a lot of stupid extra steps, and you need to read the instruction manual to remember. With Phase One you simply press the color balance button and the camera firmware walks you through what needs to be done, step-by-step. And the steps are idiot-proof.



Taken before the color balance

Phase One P25 +, 1/500s, ISO 400

before



after



Phase One is simple and easy to use (yet is the absolute top quality and sophistication). Canon and Nikon have instruction books over 200 pages long. The new Nikon D800 has an instruction book reportedly 400 pages long.

The Phase One instruction book only needs a few pages. And the resulting photos will beat any Nikon or any Canon (especially if you use a typical cheap low-bid Nikon lens—the ones made in Thailand).



Taken after I did an in-camera color balance
Phase One P25 +, 1/500s, ISO 400

Snapshot of the photography

98% of our photos of flora and fauna are taken with a tripod (provided courtesy of Gitzo and Manfrotto). Here we show some snapshots of Nicholas doing the photography.



photos by Mishell Ordoñez





Lessons to learn for nature photography

Be sure you have several completely different focal length lenses with you. A prime lens will generally take a better photograph than a zoom lens. An ultra-wide angle lens will introduce distortion if the lens is pointed up or down. If you point an ultra-wide lens straight ahead, it will have less distortion.

A 14mm or 15mm lenses would have been too wide a view for the scene here. Even a 17mm lens would have been too much. A 24mm lens would have been one good choice.

Then you need a telephoto lens to get details. A 500mm prime lens is essential. Do not get any cheap brand. Get an original Nikon or original Canon lens. Or if you simply cannot afford these, then opt for a Sigma brand lens. We do not accept any other lens as impressive (other than obviously a Leica lens, but not too many people use a Leica digital camera today).

A study tripod is essential. We use a Gitzo tripod. Our tripod head is an aging Arca Swiss ball head. It was great the first thirty years. But now even this Swiss-made head is totally worn out (more than 30 years of use).



The area of Senahú, Alta Verapaz

Since it was raining most of the day we were here, we don't have photos of the town. But it is a great place to visit and the drive here is a double adventure: one adventure from the main highway (near Tactic) to the turn-off to Senahú; a second adventure is the drive up the endless mountain to Senahú itself.

Acknowledgements:

We thank Filiberto Choc for his hospitality in Senahú. If you wish to do studies in this town, we recommend him as a person of confidence to contact: phone: 5732-8760. His three sons are expert musicians with the marimba and his daughter is part of a local traditional Maya dance group.

The photography was done Sunday May 20, 2012.





ASOCIACION
FLAAR
MESOAMERICA

PHOTOGRAPHS COPYRIGHT 2012 FLAAR AND FLAAR MESOAMERICA