

Opps Award 2009 -- Sam Skalak

Let me start by stating that it's not everyday that you are in the peculiar position of getting your.....how should I say it.....family jewels.....photographed. However, I was. Now this may come as no surprise to those of you who realize I conduct my fieldwork...typically alone...in the only region of North America where prostitution is legal. That's right! Legal.

Now don't get too excited. Granted, I mist-netted bats for an entire summer only 20 minutes drive down a dirt road from such esteemed places as Mabel's House of Prostitution, the Cherry Patch Ranch, and the 'famous' Brothel Art Museum¹. Rather, it was fellow wildlife researchers who, unbeknownst to them, photographed my "stuff."

It all happened during a rather unremarkable evening of mist netting. The sun had recently set, and the sky was a beautiful mosaic of reds, purples, and deep blues. We had several mist-nets set across spring pools with the hope of catching bats. The evening had started out normally, with the usual flurry of bat activity just after dusk, and then the calmer, darker periods following sundown. A soft warm breeze rustled the bushes periodically, and the night sounded of frogs and insects looking for some lovin.'

The location where I worked was the Mojave Desert. For those of you who don't know (and that's probably most of you), the Mojave desert is the hottest driest place in North America. It's dry, it's hot, and many would also say it's barren. The location where I was catching bats, was a place where springs of water bubbled out of the ground year-round, and provided a reliable source of water for a variety of wildlife. The study I was part of was investigating how bats were using these spring pools. There were many other studies going on in the area that were looking into how other wildlife used the spring pools as well.

Around midnight, I decided to pee. Wandering off into the dark, I looked for a suitable location. The best and most likely spot was a tree right next to the spring pool where we were netting. I walked over, and got right down to business. I was in the process of writing my name in the sand, when I noticed in my peripheral vision a little red light blink at me. I hesitated, assumed I was seeing things, and kept on peeing. A few seconds passed, and I noticed that little red light flash blink again....and this time I was looking directly at it.

Confusion regarding this little flashing light set in. I continued my business, and in the process saw the little red light flash a few more times. Finally, once finished, I readied myself and turned on my headlamp.....and there directly in front of me..... was a INFRARED-MOTION-SENSORED-WILDLIFE-CAMERA!!!!

I am sure the pictures were fantastic.

Footnote:

1. I say 'famous' (e.g. quotations) Brothel Art Museum because I've only seen it referred to as such on Billboards announcing its presence in nearby towns. Now...it may be famous, I don't dispute that.....I just have a few issues with the use of the term 'museum' for such an establishment. It's just that....well, its not really a museum in my opinion. More like a musty, smoke choked bar. Besides the skeleton of the handless woman who was found in the wall of an old building with a bullet hole in her chest.... who is by the way, supposedly the "oldest prostitute in Nevada"the only other items possibly of antiquity in the place was maybe musky green shag carpet that covered the floor, or possibly the barmaid (the local Madame?). The remainder of the "museum" was a collection of newspaper clippings that cover the walls associated with the legal issues and the fight for legal prostitution. It felt more like a waiting area for the brothel, especially since the first question Mark and I were asked when we visited (for the museum of course) was "Are you fellas lookin' for the brothel?" But that's just my opinion.....Mark's opinion may differ. Again, we visited for research purposes only. Let me make that clear...research.