

GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPLICATIONS FOR FULL MEMBERSHIP

Dear nature photographers,

If you wish to gain full membership, we will assess the quality of your nature photographic work on the basis of 20 application photographs, and in the following we would like to give you some important advice.

An initial request

The number of applications for full GDT membership has constantly increased, which is great! However, we have also noticed a rising number of absolutely insufficient applications, which clearly reveal that applicants have hardly read the guidelines. This means 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.

From 1 January 2017, there will be a waiting period of 12 months for all rejected applications. Fresh applications will only be accepted after this period of time, which starts on the day when the assessment has been concluded. Photographs that have already been accepted can be part of a new application. However, they will be assessed again under consideration of the whole application.

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.

The number of photographs of animals that were restricted in their natural movement before, during or after the photograph was taken (reserve, game farm 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. Applications containing these elements will be rejected.

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 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.

Allowed for your application are digital images.

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

- as JPEG files with 1200 pixels on their longest side as preview.
- as 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 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 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 this does not change the statement of the image
- cropping - longest side of 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 picture list (picture_list_application_full_membership) with great care.

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

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.

Why does this "entrance examination" exist?

Nobody has to pass an examination to become a GDT member. For common membership you can simply fill in a form and post it to the GDT office.

Within the GDT the same applies for both types of membership: 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. Nature photography above the average are here the GDT's trademark! Therefore, the logo Full Member of the GDT may only be used by those who have successfully gone through this "entrance examination".

How does an evaluation proceed?

A jury consisting of experienced nature photographers appointed by the board of management will review and assess the submitted photographs. When each member of the jury has concluded the evaluation process, the overall number of points will be calculated and the applicant notified.

Three criteria for a good picture

At first some notes for you to consider

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?

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 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 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 jury 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 biologists in our team, who so far always 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; 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 12 points overall you will be granted full membership.

When your photos have been assessed and your application was rejected, you will receive a brief review of your application in which some of your photographs will be discussed by means of example. If your application was accepted you will be granted full membership. This means you are allowed to add "GDT" to your name.

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.

For any further questions please contact our administration office verwaltung@gdtfoto.de !

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