



Top: Shooting wildlife at sunset means low light and high contrast, typically the domain of full-frame cameras. But while I was trying out the Fujifilm X-T3 in the Sacramento Valley last winter, I was blown away with my ability to crop and open up the shadows prior to making a 20x30-inch print from the 26-megapixel file.

Bottom: One of the advantages of full-frame when shooting this scene in the Sierras was the ability to use a tilt/shift lens to control the depth of field. Currently, none of the smaller-sensor systems offer perspective control lenses; lens selection remains a key advantage of full-frame systems.

The scene was very high contrast, so I bracketed for HDR, lessening in this case the dynamic range advantage of full frame.



reasonable ISOs with quality lenses and good technique.

Big Sensor Low-Light Advantage: Do You Need It?

Where things start to separate is when you are shooting in less-than-ideal conditions. Larger sensor cameras are going to beat out the smaller sensors when using higher ISOs to compensate for dim light. While the ISO breaking point of each camera is slightly different, if you mainly shoot in good light, this is a non-issue. Typically, it's the landscape photographer who's most concerned with the ability to make huge prints, but landscape photographers are almost always shooting at base ISO locked down on a tripod, so who cares how the camera does at ISO 6400 compared to other cameras? Worried about the narrower dynamic range of smaller sensors? Again, if you're shooting landscapes on a tripod, you're likely already bracketing for HDR in high-contrast scenes, making this another non-issue.

For me, it's when I'm shooting wildlife, sports or assignments where I have to produce quality images no matter how bad the light that I appreciate the edge full frame gives me.

At this point, the smaller formats have replaced my full-frame system for some of the projects I shoot and for nearly all of my personal work. When I do a backpacking trip or ski tour, I always end up choosing

Top: This image is from the very last time I carried a heavy full-frame kit on a long backcountry adventure. My camera system without the tripod weighed close to 10 pounds.

Lately, I have been carrying the smaller Sony a6500 with the 10-18mm F4 OSS and Vario-Tessar T* E 16-70mm F4 ZA OSS lenses and have cut the weight in half.

Bottom: This image from Tuolumne Meadows was taken at sunset with the Olympus OM-D E-M1 that I owned and used extensively for a while as my backcountry setup. While I ended up upsizing to an APS-C system for better low-light results, when stopped down and bracketed for HDR on a tripod, the Micro Four Thirds sensor held up great in large prints.



an APS-C-sized sensor over my heavier full-frame Nikon D850 (though the new Z series brings down the weight of full frame closer to APS-C cameras). I first started off using the Olympus Micro Four Thirds system, which I loved in terms of size and features, but I eventually upgraded to an APS-C system because the image quality at higher ISOs wasn't where I needed it to be for the work I do. (To be fair, this was two generations ago in the Olympus world, so things have improved.) I really wanted to love the Olympus system because it's so small and portable, but I just found I needed a bit more ISO ability for shooting action in low light. That being said, I have one friend who's a full-time photo guide who has completely stopped using his pro Canon gear and says photography has "never been so much fun" now that he's using the Olympus system. There's really something to be said for how good and small the lenses are in the Olympus system, especially for a wildlife photographer who can now handhold a 600mm f/4-equivalent lens no problem.

For my needs, I've found the APS-C systems to be the sweet spot in terms of image quality versus weight and cost savings. I've been shooting the Sony a6500 alongside the Fujifilm X-T3 in an effort to figure out which system is right for me. While the Sony is a bit smaller and has a better buffer, the Fujifilm has far better lens offerings. The Fujifilm is also newer and thus has a better viewfinder, but the big buffer of the Sony



