

Monday Morning Tips

Cleaning dSLR Sensors - Updated

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Many new dSLRs have cool dust reduction systems, the efficacy of which is highly suspect. Dust can be the bane of dSLRs if you regularly change lenses in a dusty environment. But, don't obsess about it. Dust is a fact of life and you don't want to be like some people I know who spend 90% of their time cleaning their sensors and 10% of the time shooting. To check your sensor for dust, switch your lens to Manual Focus, place the camera into Manual Mode and stop down the aperture to about f22. Point at a clear blue patch of sky and release the shutter. Now, download the image to your PC, bring it up in Adobe Photoshop or PS Elements and look for dark fuzzy spots. If you have lots of dust (more than 8-12) or they are in the top half of the frame (where the sky is usually found) than you might want to consider cleaning your sensor. This is a trivial process BUT one boo-boo and it will cost several hundred dollars to replace your sensor. I'm not going to tell you how to do this because I don't want you blaming me for your boo-boo but I will tell you how I do it. BTW, you're not actually cleaning the sensor but a glass filter over the sensor but any damage has the same effect, big bucks.

This what I used to do:

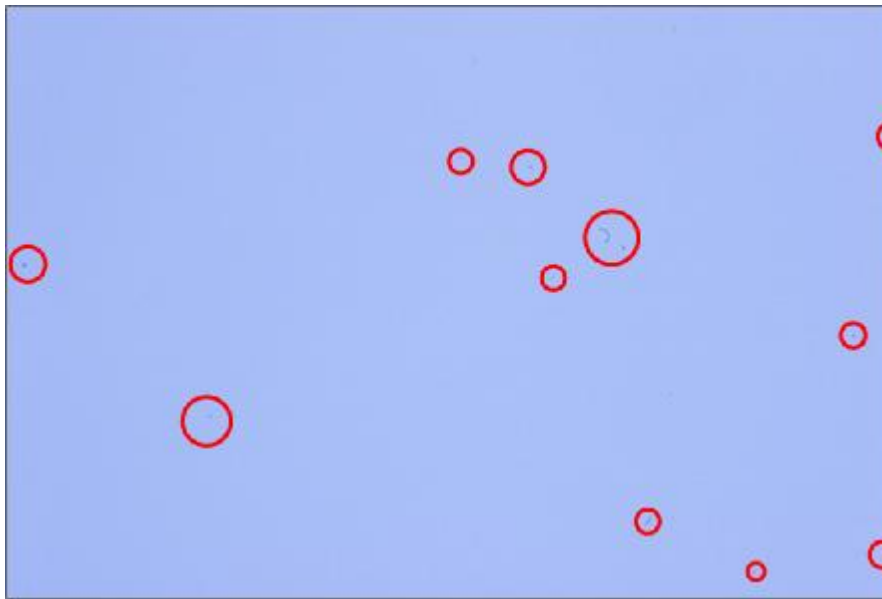
I use Eclipse fluid (available at Calumet in Escondido or Oceanside Photo & Telescope in (guess where) Oceanside. I wrap a clean PecPad (available same places) around a Q-Tip, completely covering the cotton tip. I don't want loose cotton fibers floating around inside my camera. I tie the PecPad in place with a paper-covered wire wraps like those at grocery stores being sure to secure the ends so they don't accidentally scratch the sensor. BTW, I wear latex gloves to avoid contaminating the PecPad with oils from my fingertips. I place 2-3 drops of Eclipse fluid on the PecPad and gently wipe the surface of the sensor. I change the PecPad after the first pass to avoid grinding a piece of grit into the sensor. On the second PecPad, I usually make 2-3 passes to make sure there aren't any streaks left on the glass. I try not to obsess here. It's not necessary to polish this like a Marine's bayonet on parade. I then reshoot the sky to make sure I haven't made things worse. If it's worse, I repeat until it's reasonably clear.

Today, I've changed to a whole new process:

At Bosque del Apache last November, I heard a lot of people talking about how LensPen from Artie Morris worked so well. I just passed it off as impressionable newbies who were just too afraid to touch their sensor with a wet PecPad. But, eventually, my curiosity got to me and I ordered a LensPen from Artie's site www.birdsasart.com. Actually, you can buy a LensPen from anywhere but Artie includes secret instructions to make this process work. Besides, for US\$20, how can you go wrong?

Why do you need Artie's instructions? As the name implies, LensPen is designed for cleaning lenses, not sensors. While this may seem like a nit, there's a huge difference between lenses and sensors. Artie's instructions show you how to use the LensPen to clean sensors. DO NOT use LensPen on a sensor without Artie's instructions, you'll make things worse!

Here's my 20D sensor before cleaning (below). Using LensPen and Artie's instructions, I cleaned it in less than 60 seconds (bottom image).

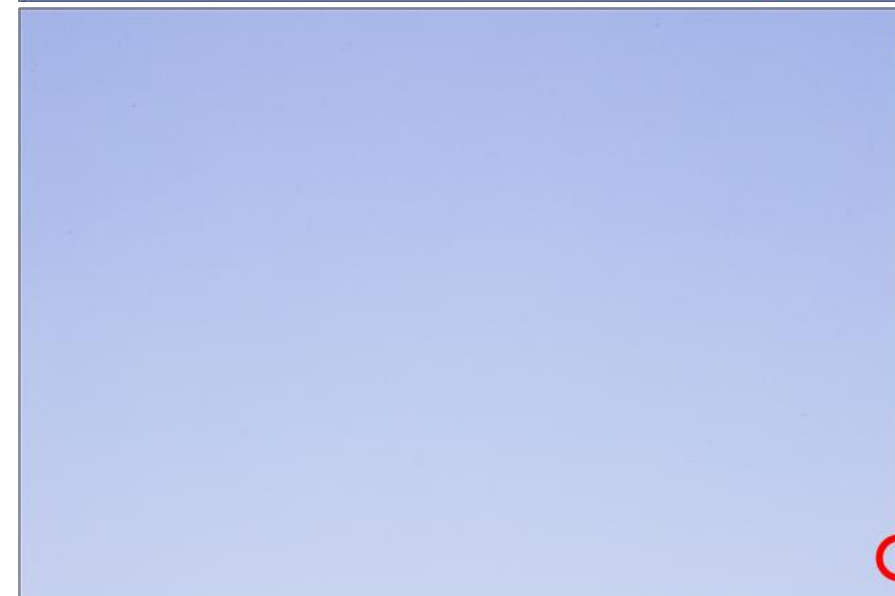


The remaining speck in the lower right corner will never be seen in any photo due to "ground clutter". If it bothers you, use the Clone Tool or Spot Healing Brush.

Artie's kit includes 2 LensPens. Use the small one for sensors and the large one for lenses.

Don't use the brush on the opposite end of the LensPen on your sensor.

While you're on Artie's site, buy a Giotto Rocket Blower. That will clean all the



big boulders before using LensPen. If you don't have PecPads, you might as well also buy the microfiber cloth. You'll need it for Artie's instructions.

~~Caveat: If your dSLR has a "self-cleaning" sensor (the type that shakes, rattles, rolls, etc, it's probably better not to use the LensPen. LensPens have been found to be effective on all sensors.~~