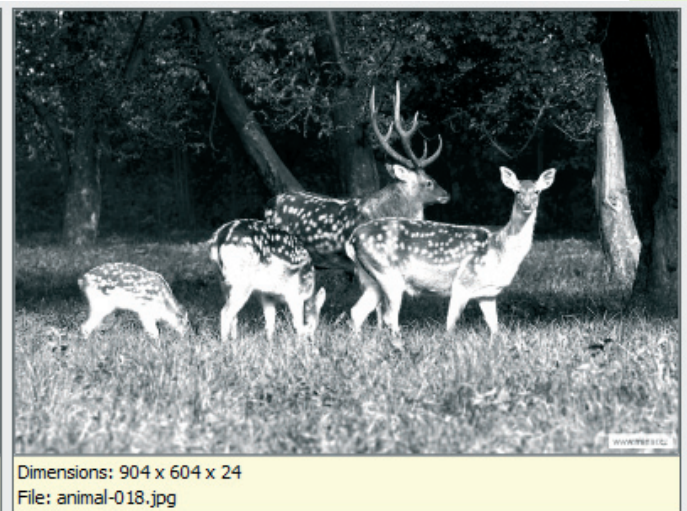


Creating Black-and-white Pictures

January 25th, 2011

Intended for: [pros](#)

In the days of film photography, it was much more common to work with black-and-white photos (also called grayscale) than it is today. There were two reasons for this. One, black-and-white processing was simpler, so it had the same advantage that digital does today: it could be do-it-yourself. Two, black-and-white film was cheaper than color film. With those factors gone, why use black-and-white today? There are still reasons.



Many people find black-and-white pictures to be more artistic than color ones. To a large extent, this is about the fact that a black-and-white delivery is less distracting and makes it easy to savor the whole range of half-tones and concentrate on the photographer's "message." Thus even in the digital age you will find many photographers using black-and-white work to get unparalleled atmosphere. Why not try it too? Just don't forget that black-and-white is no cure-all. A bad picture is still a bad picture, even in grayscale.

The Nuts And Bolts of Black And White

There are two basic roads to a black-and-white digital picture. The laziest one is to set your camera to its black-and-white mode, if any. It's not the best one, however. In fact, it's downright bad—avoid it. It tends to give poor contrast and detail throughout the picture. All it does is a one-size-fits-all desaturation of the image.

The other road is computer processing. This is at its core a desaturation process too, but this time with the ability for you to conveniently fine-tune the process. [Zoner Photo Studio 13](#) is a fine tool for this job, offer different basic routes to a grayscale picture.

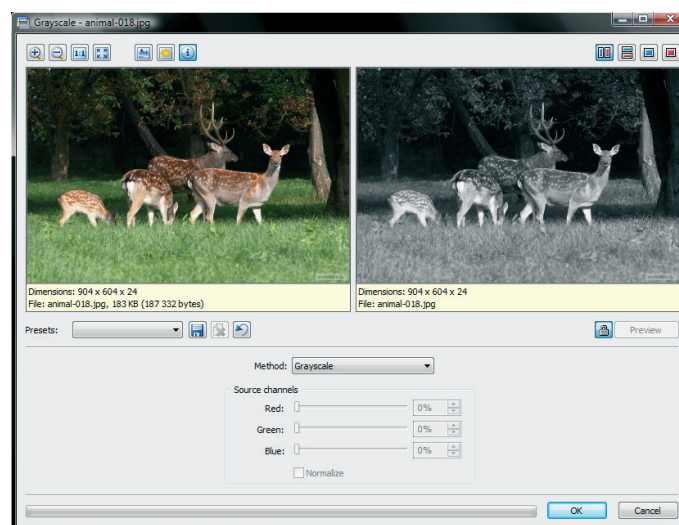


The original, unedited picture

Color Channels under Control

The program's first route for turning color pictures black-and-white is the grayscale conversion window. Open the picture in the Editor. Use **Effects | Grayscale...** to show the Grayscale window. Towards the top of the window are pre- and post-edit preview panes. Their layout can be changed. However, for easiest work, leave it unchanged. Do turn on the histogram display, however.

The main, bottom part of the window offers a choice of desaturation method and a trio of sliders. Use the sliders to adjust the representation of the individual RGB color channels (red, green, and blue) in the picture. The choice of **Method** is the core of the whole process, the foundation of how the converted picture will look. Most items in the list finish the imaginary sentence, "Set the shade of gray in each spot to be the same value as that spot's ____." The available methods are: Grayscale, Desaturation, Advanced, Average of Channels, Maximum of Channels, Minimum of Channels, Red Channel, Green Channel, Blue Channel, and Custom.

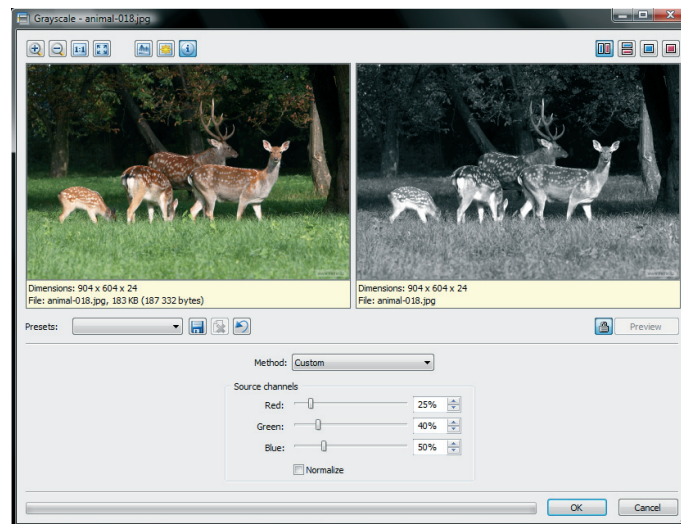


Grayscale is the most basic method, but it gives poor contrast.

The best automated results come from the Advanced method, where Zoner Photo Studio uses complex calculations for conversion to grayscale. However, the best control over results comes from the Custom option. Use it to set the precise ratio for how the individual color channels are represented in the picture.

Choose **Custom** and the sliders for the individual channels became available to use. Activate **Normalize** to make the program force the channel percentages to add up to 100%. Otherwise, the picture can look unrealistic.

To put it simply, raising the value for a color channel makes that color lighter, and lowering the value makes that color darker. Experiment with the settings for the individual color channels until you find the optimum grayscale translation of the original's colors. Seek sufficient contrast and as much representation for the various shades of gray as you can obtain.

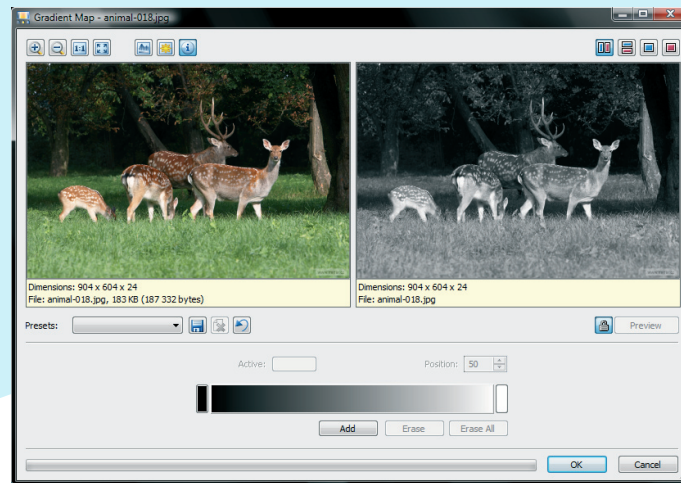


Here the Custom method is active, and a ratio for the representation of the three color channels in the picture has been set

A Whiter Shade of Pale

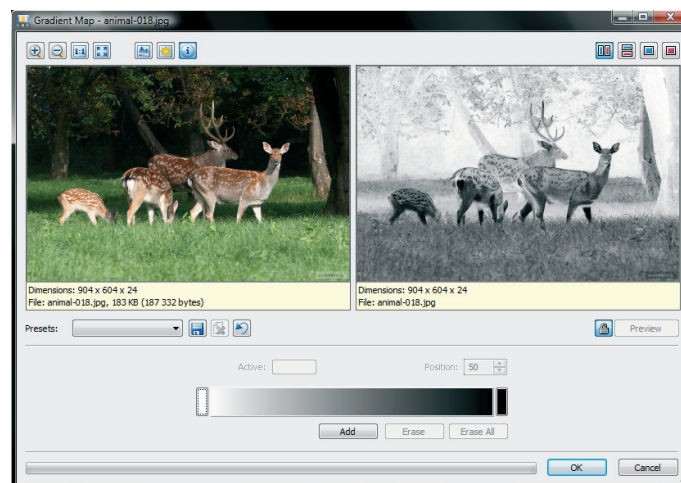
The other way to convert a photograph to grayscale is to use **Effects | Gradient Map....** Like the preceding method, this opens a window. This window is simpler, showing just a bar with a range of shades from one color to another.

To get grayscale conversion from this window, set (or keep) the left color at black and the right color at white. To set these colors, click the rectangles at "their" ends of the scale. This displays a color picker; use it to set black and white respectively.



With the right settings, Gradient Map gives results very much like Grayscale.

The benefits of this technique are simplicity and the ability to use colors other than black on the left and white on the right. For example, for a “yellowed” black-and-white picture, replace black with brown. There are also other interesting possibilities, like flipping black and white to create a negative. Experiment and find out!



Flipping the Gradient Map scale gives interesting results.

After converting a color picture to grayscale in the Editor, save a copy of it using **File | Save As...** And if you're having fun, move on to the next... but we don't need to tell you that!