

Fundamental Editing Case Study #6

USING FE TO FIX ATMOSPHERIC HAZE AND MIMIC LIGHTING

By Kent DuFault

A real challenge to photographers is overcoming unknown elements. We can't always have perfect weather, perfect light, or dictate the moment that we will encounter a picture opportunity.

We often have to go with what is given to us.

Such was the case with the cute chipmunk in Image 001. My wife and I were on vacation and driving up the California coastline.

We pulled into a wayside rest with a view of the Pacific Ocean. This chipmunk was located at the end of the parking lot.

He was quite used to humans, and he let me get very close.

It was mid-morning when I took the picture. There was a heavy lifting fog and the sky was completely overcast.

As you can see, the original picture file is deficient in contrast, lacks color saturation, and has exceptionally flat lighting.

I'm going to use Fundamental Editing to put some visual energy back into this shot.

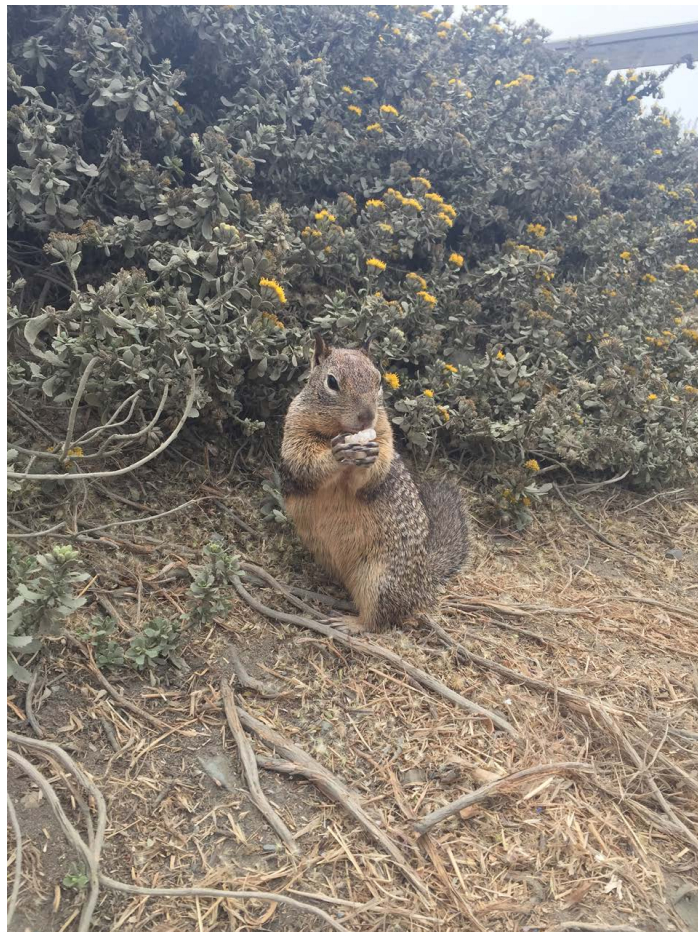


Image 001 – Photograph by Kent DuFault



Image 002 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

My intent for this picture includes the following.

I really want to concentrate any viewer's interest in the area of the red oval.

Also, the railing in the background is an eye snag, and I need to get rid of that.

I included those foreground roots to act as leading lines. They work in that capacity, but I will likely remove some of them in the cropping step and perhaps subdue their visual weight a bit.

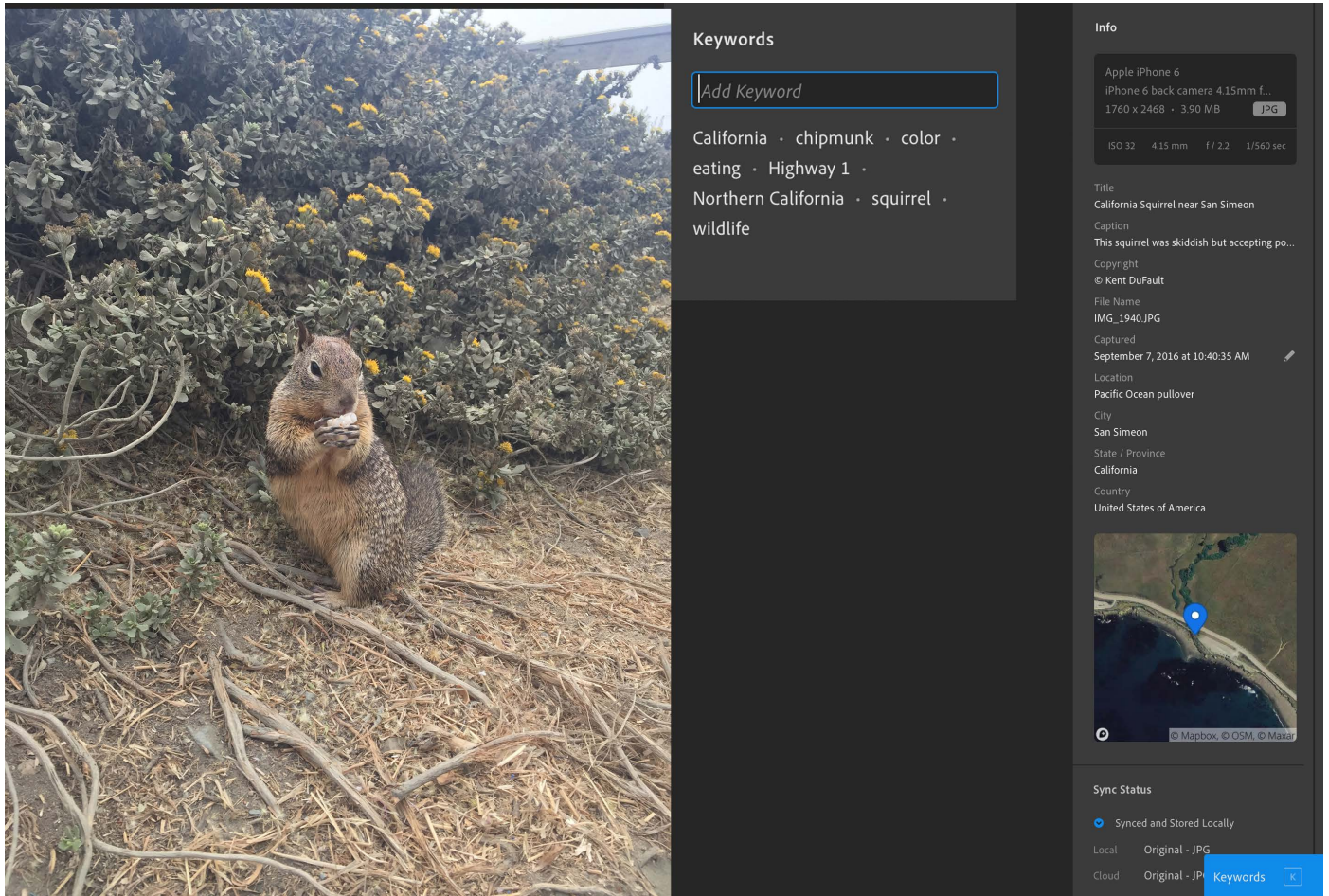


Image 003 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

If you have an interest in selling your photography, having the pertinent metadata and keywords are crucial! I always perform this step first!

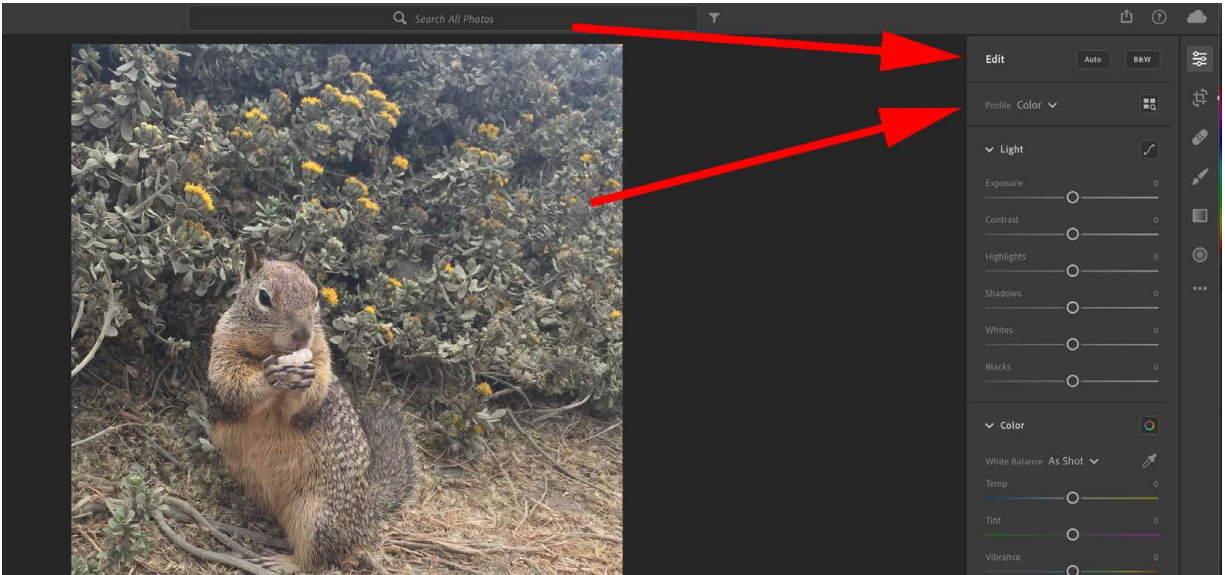


Image 004 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

As I begin the Fundamental Editing process, I want to make sure that Lightroom is in the 'Edit' mode and my 'Profile' is set to 'Color.'

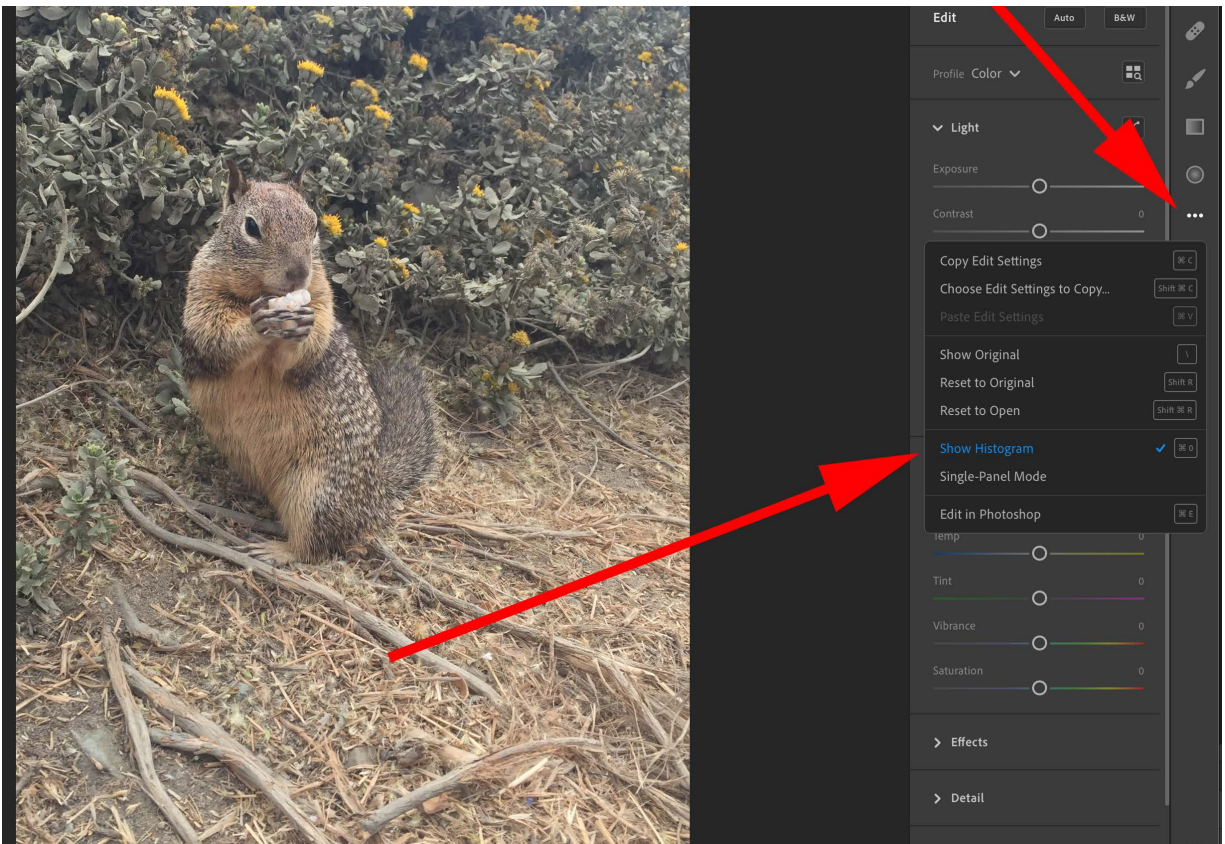


Image 005 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

You **always** want the histogram to be turned on while completing your Fundamental Editing steps.

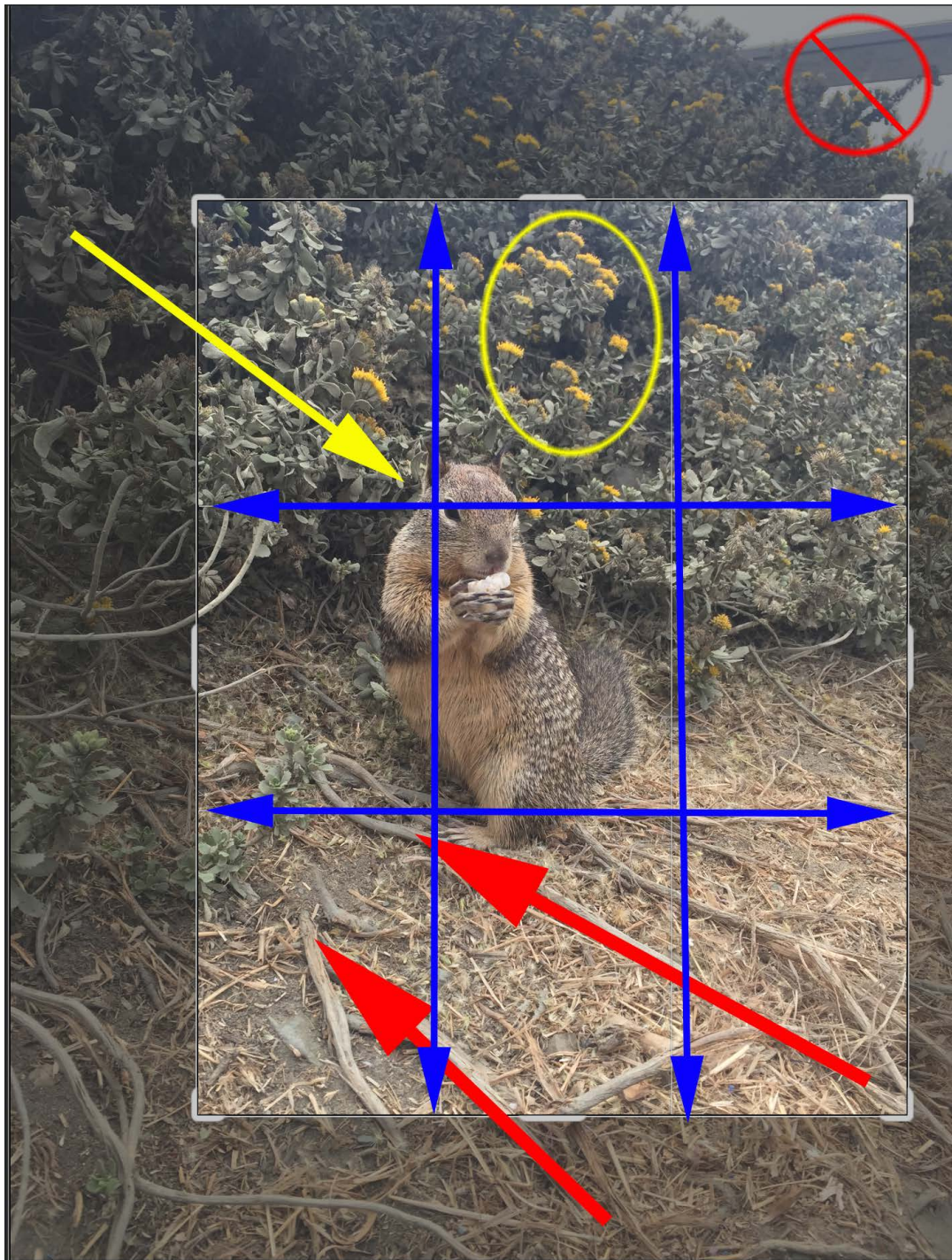


Image 006 – Illustration and Photograph by Kent DuFault

Once I've completed the metadata and keywords section of FE, the next **most** crucial step is to apply a crop, if one is needed.

In Image 006, you can see how cropping really helps me along with my intent for this picture.

I can get rid of the eye snag railing completely.

I'll place the chipmunk's eye right on the crosshairs for the Rule of Thirds.

I decided to leave a few of those foreground roots as leading lines. And finally, I have a nice patch of yellow flowers right behind my subject that can be an excellent focal point.

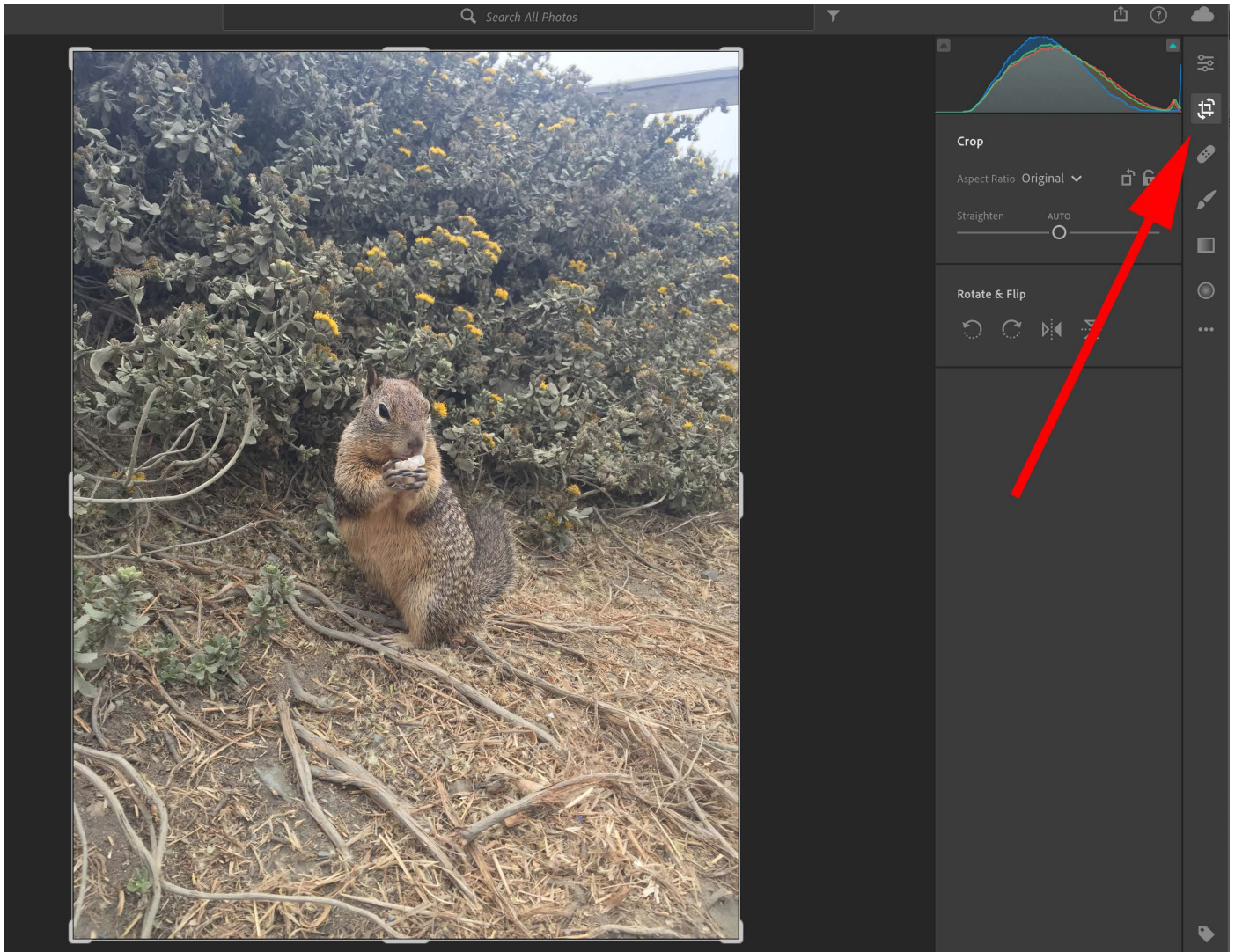


Image 06a – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

If you are new to Lightroom, you can find the 'Crop Tool' icon located right below the 'Edit' icon on the right side of the workspace.

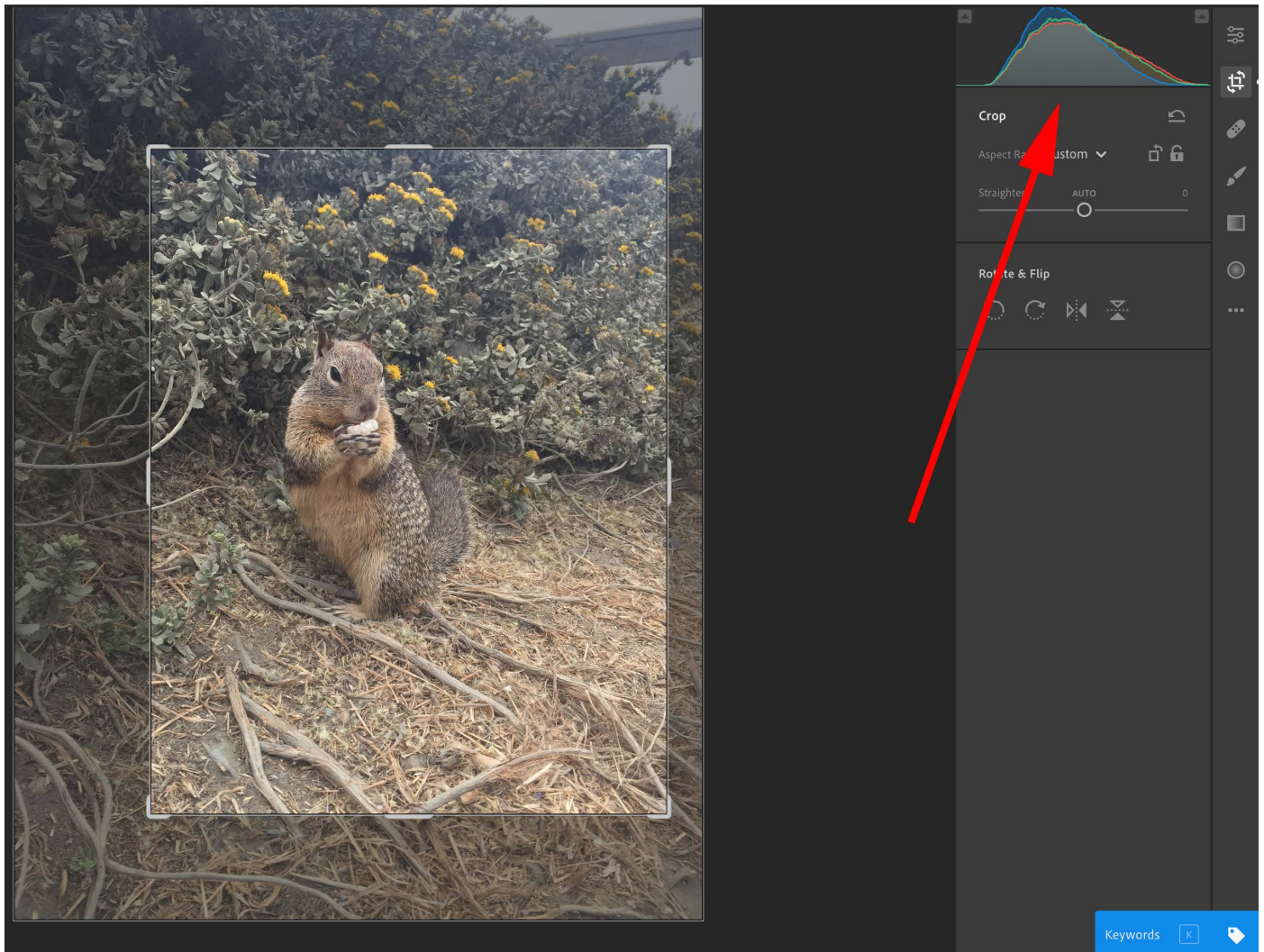


Image 007 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Image 007 is a screenshot of how I'm going to crop the picture.

Note: I wanted to point out the histogram to you. When you have a histogram with a significant peak in the center, but almost no values to the left or right ends of the scale, this indicates a **low contrast** picture.

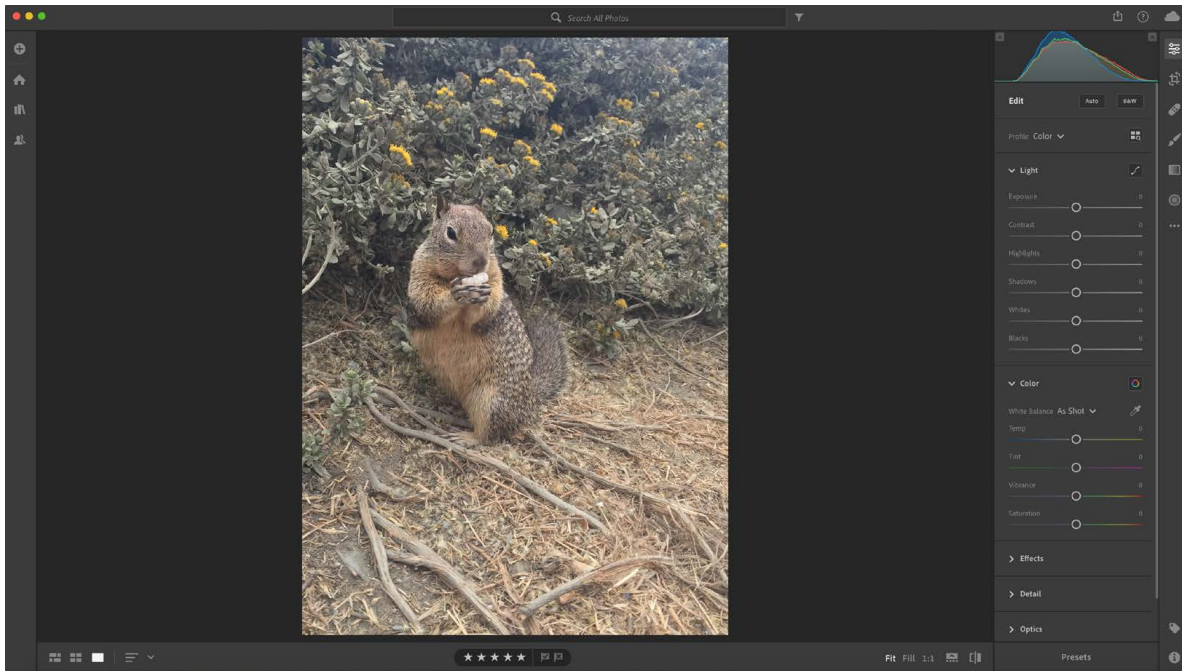


Image 008 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Here is my chipmunk photo with the cropping step completed.

This one step in the FE (Fundamental Editing) process has already vastly improved this picture! Let's see what else we can do.

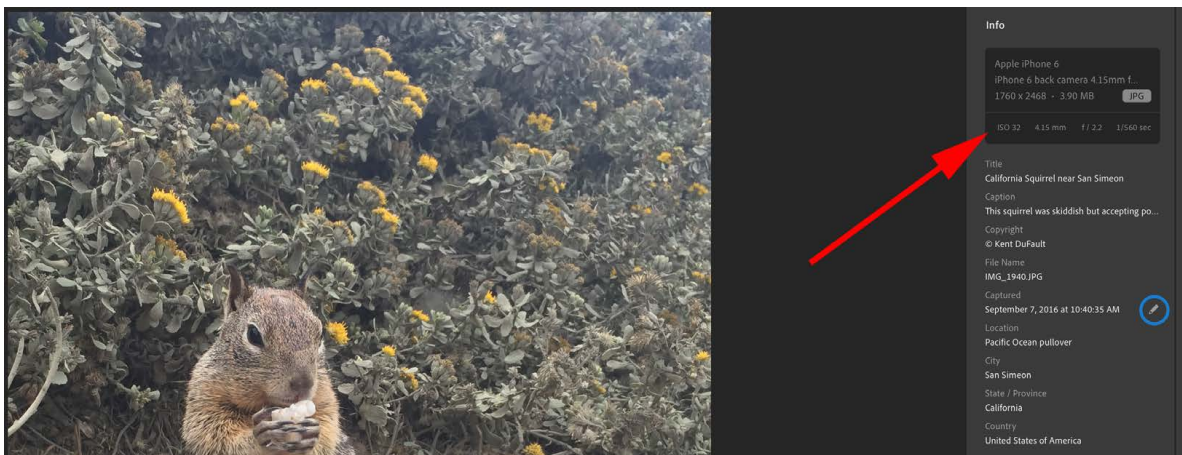


Image 009 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

The Fundamental Editing list has a specific order. In general, you should follow that order. However, you will often have to return to previous steps and adjust them as you move along the list.

No matter what, these three steps should occur first:

- Import and open the image and add metadata and keywords

- Crop if necessary
- Noise reduction if necessary

Note: When checking for digital noise, always set the Preview Window to 100% or 200%.

Image 009 shows that this photo was shot at ISO 32. It has no apparent noise at the 100% or 200% Preview. For this picture, we can skip the noise reduction step.

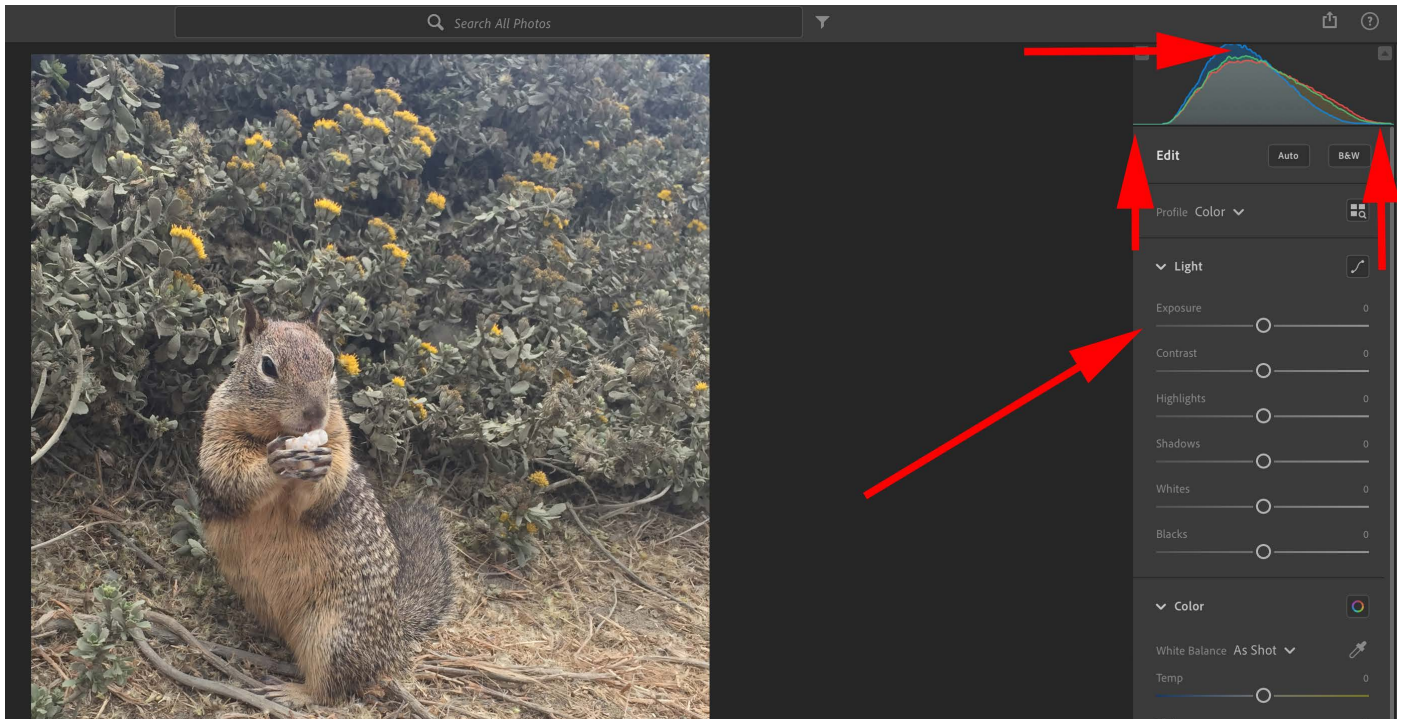


Image 010 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Note: When you move the global Exposure slider, it transfers **all** of the tone values. Knowing that tells you that moving the global Exposure slider doesn't work very well for an adequately exposed low-contrast or high-contrast picture.

Overall exposure isn't the problem with this picture, so we won't be making an adjustment here.

Contrast is the problem. To fix the contrast is going to take several steps, and I will explain why in a minute.

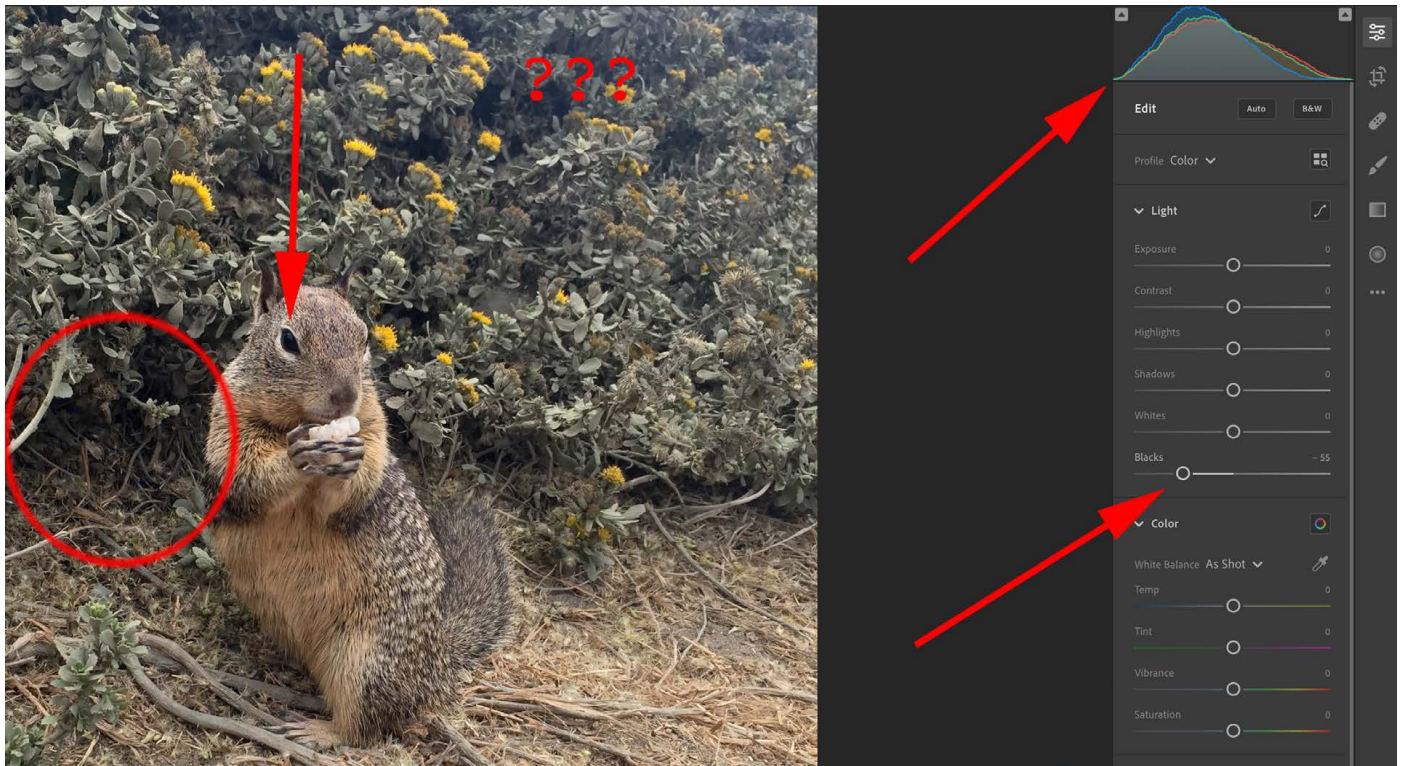


Image 011 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I need to establish a Black Point to help put some dark tones into this picture.

I reduced the Blacks slider to -55. This moved the Blacks/Shadows side of the histogram all the way to the left, as shown in Image 011.

The Black Point was placed in the chipmunk's eye. This is the deepest black in the picture. I'm now getting some nice shadow contrast in the foreground as well.

But what's going on in the background near the red question marks?

Fog, mist, and atmospheric haze can create uneven contrast within your pictures. In some

cases, that might be acceptable. In this picture, I don't want that appearance. So, I'll show you how to fix it while completing your Fundamental Editing list.

You may be wondering, why not just move the Contrast slider to add contrast? The Contrast slider is a global adjustment.

When the slider is moved, it affects the entire picture. In this case, we have a contrast problem. But even more importantly, we have an **uneven** contrast problem.

This cannot be fixed with a global adjustment. I will have to adjust it in several phases.



Image 012 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Note: If I had further reduced the Blacks slider to **bring contrast to the background**, look what happens to the foreground.

All the shadow areas are becoming Clipped! This is a direct result of the uneven contrast.

This problem will have to be resolved in another way.

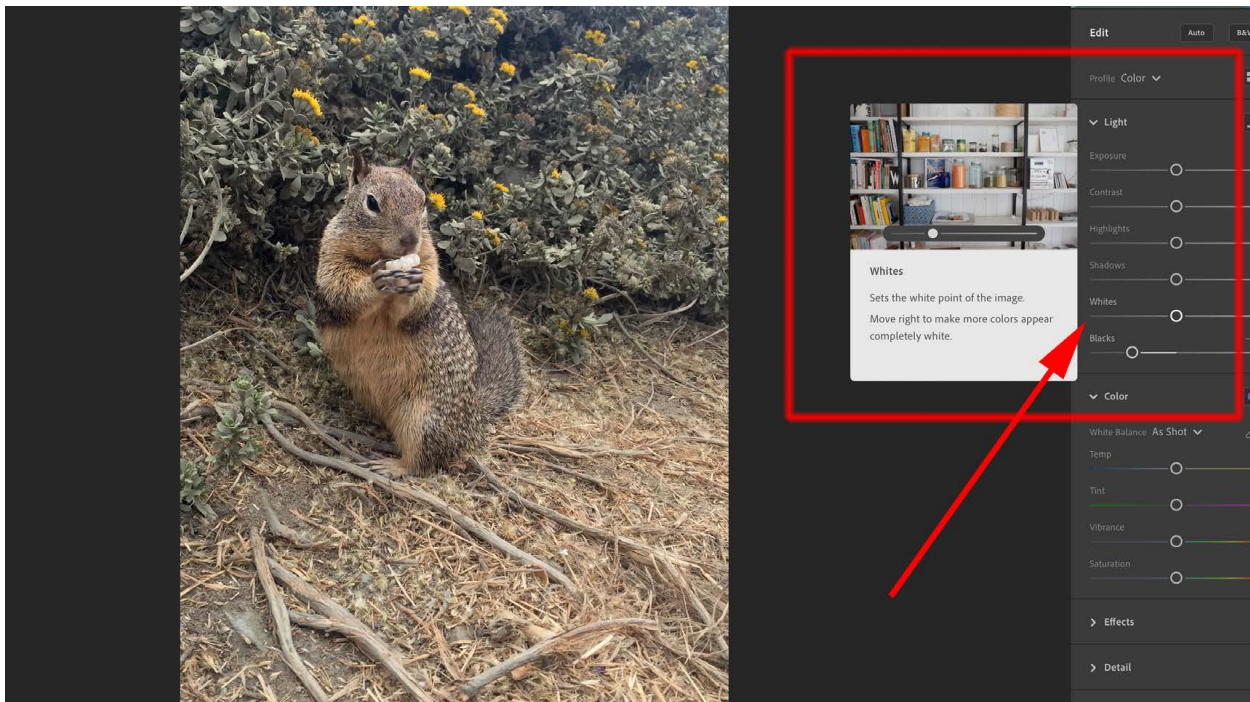


Image 013 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Adobe really dropped the ball with its labeling in Lightroom. When you're setting the White Point, you typically do so with the Highlights slider and not the Whites slider. It's the Highlights slider that

is biased to affect only the far-right end of the histogram scale. However, in this case, we will use the Whites slider because there are no tones located in the right part of the histogram scale.



Image 014 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Look at the histogram in Image 014. Notice how the scale has been dragged out to the left and to the right from its previous positioning. This was accomplished by moving the Blacks and the Whites sliders.

I will now click on the two triangles located at the top of the histogram to turn on the Clipping Indicator masks.

Take note that the background still has low contrast.



Image 015 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I saw no Highlights Clipping, so I continued to raise the Whites slider. When I got to +75, I saw some Highlights Clipping in the yellow flowers and in the seed that the chipmunk was eating. I

pushed the Whites slider back until I only had a little Highlights Clipping on the seed for my White Point.



Image 016 – Photograph and Illustration by Kent DuFault

The next step in the FE list is to correct White Balance.

Fog, mist, and atmospheric haze create contrast problems. They can also create WB problems.

Look at Image 016. The area within the yellow boundary is a warmer WB. The area within the blue boundary is a different WB that is cooler.

In a situation such as this, completing a global WB adjustment can be tricky depending upon how far off the different WB settings are.

We are going to skip some steps and go straight to localized editing with the Adjustment Brush to fix the White Balance (WB).

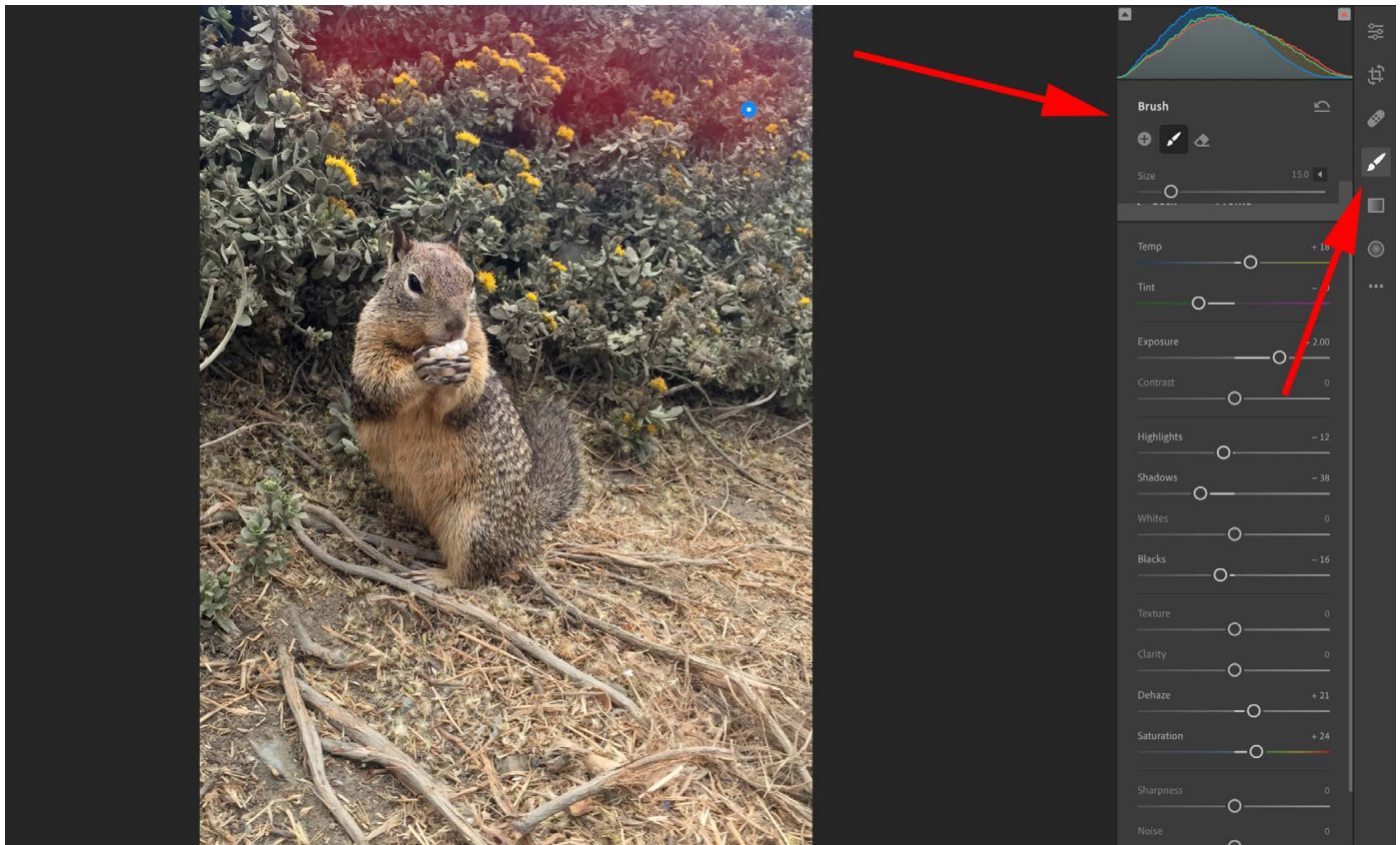


Image 017 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

If you are new to Lightroom, the Adjustment Brush is the fourth icon down on the far-right side of the workspace.

You will see the word 'Brush.' Underneath that are three icons: a + symbol, a brush, and an eraser.

With the center brush icon activated, you can paint on the Preview Window to create a mask that will allow you to make adjustments to that particular area.

When a mask is created, there will be a blue pin left to indicate that there is a mask there. The mask can also be made visible in the color red so that you can see the boundaries of it.

By pressing the 'o' key on the keyboard, you can cycle through pin on, mask on, pin and mask on, and pin and mask off.

Once you have your mask painted and you're happy with the boundary, it's best to turn the mask and pin off, so that you can clearly see your edits.

If you paint your mask onto an area that you don't want to be affected, click the eraser icon and erase over that area.

If you've finished editing an area and you want to create a new mask for a different edit, click the + icon.

Note: Always make sure to reset all of the sliders for your new mask after clicking the + icon.

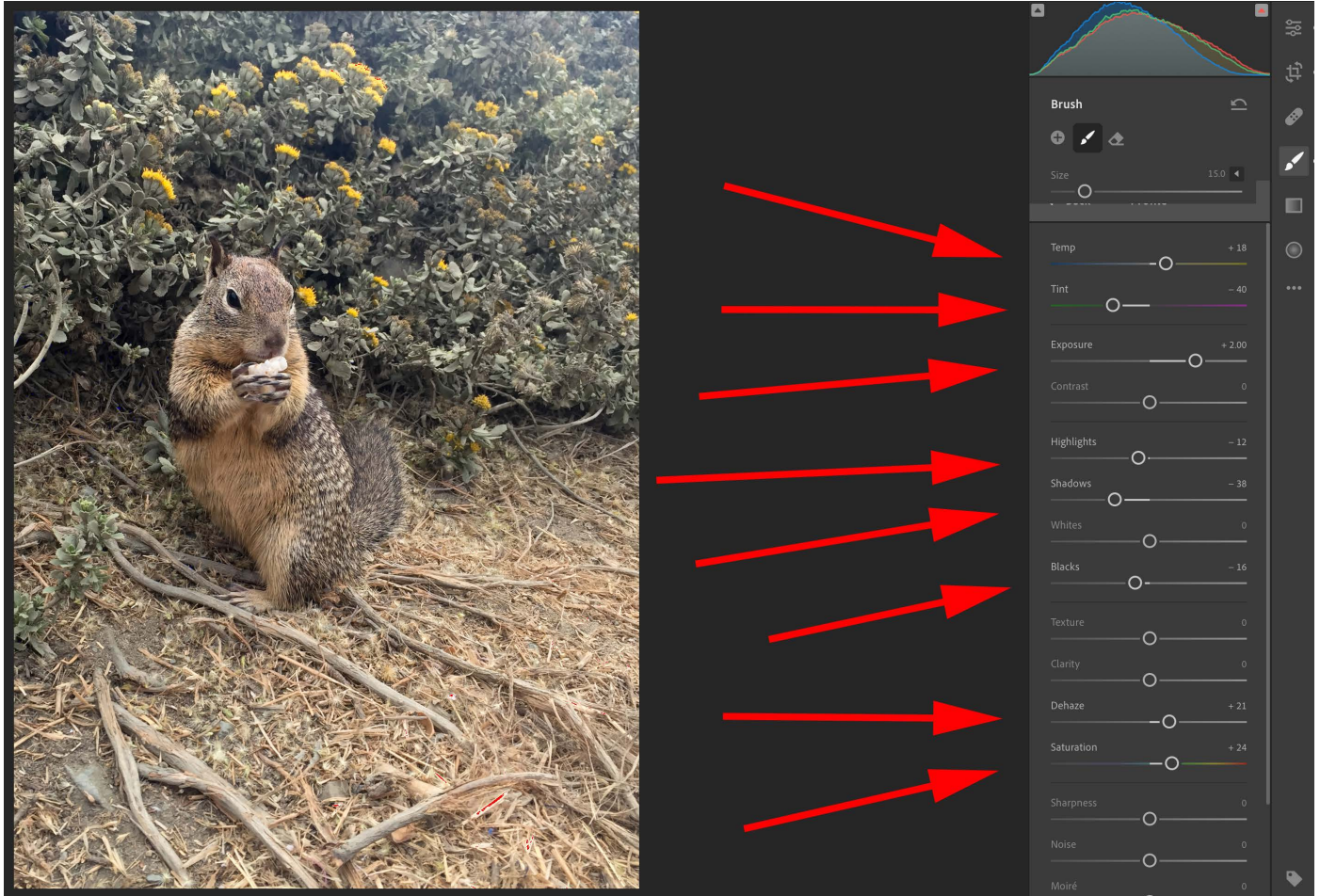


Image 018 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

You saw the mask that I created in Image 017. I'm going to adjust the area that was in the blue boundary of image 016 to more closely match the foreground.

Image 018 shows you those edits.

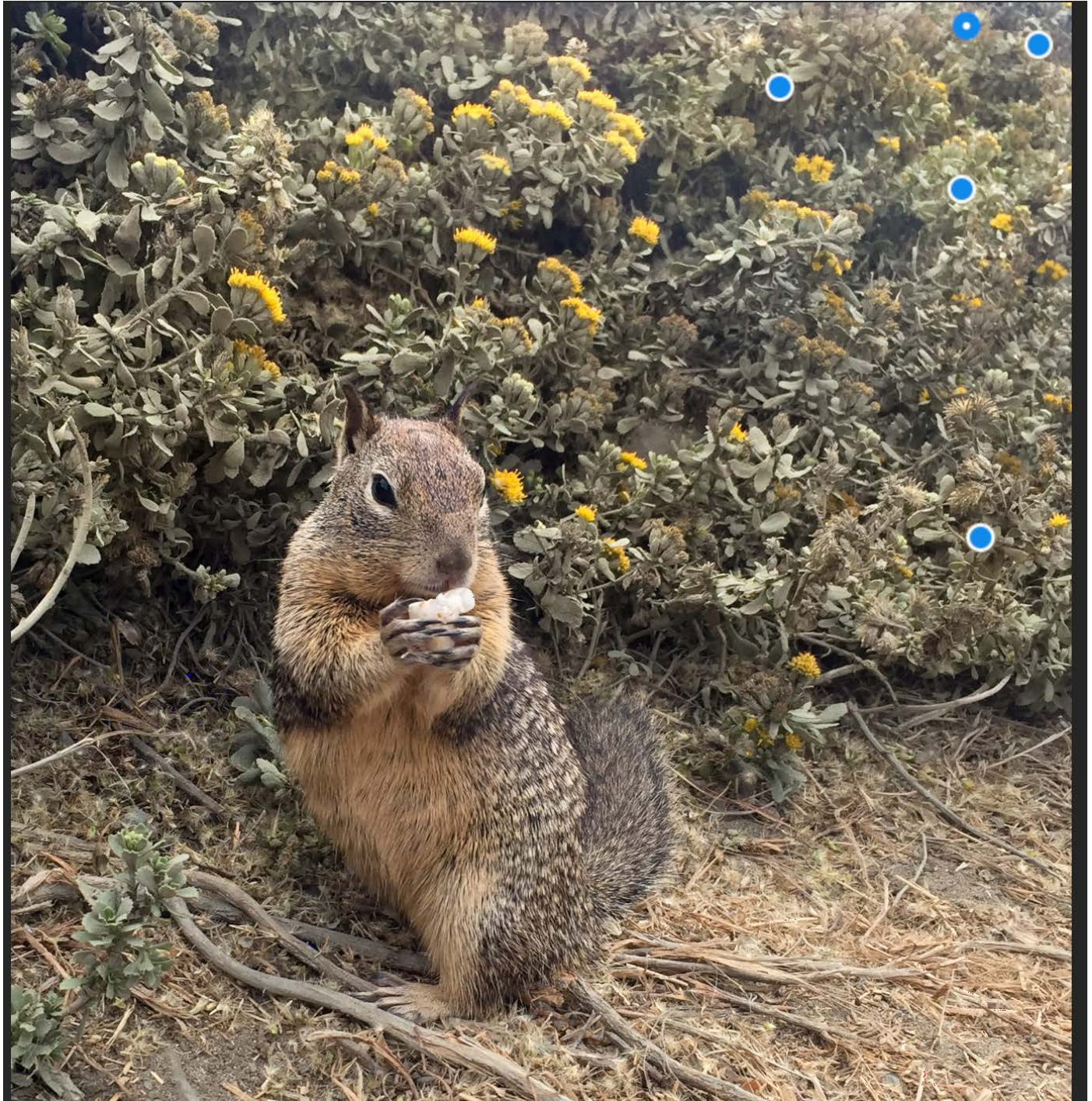


Image 019 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

That background area of this photo was tricky. In Image 019, you can see that I had to create five separate masks to get it to match up well with the foreground.

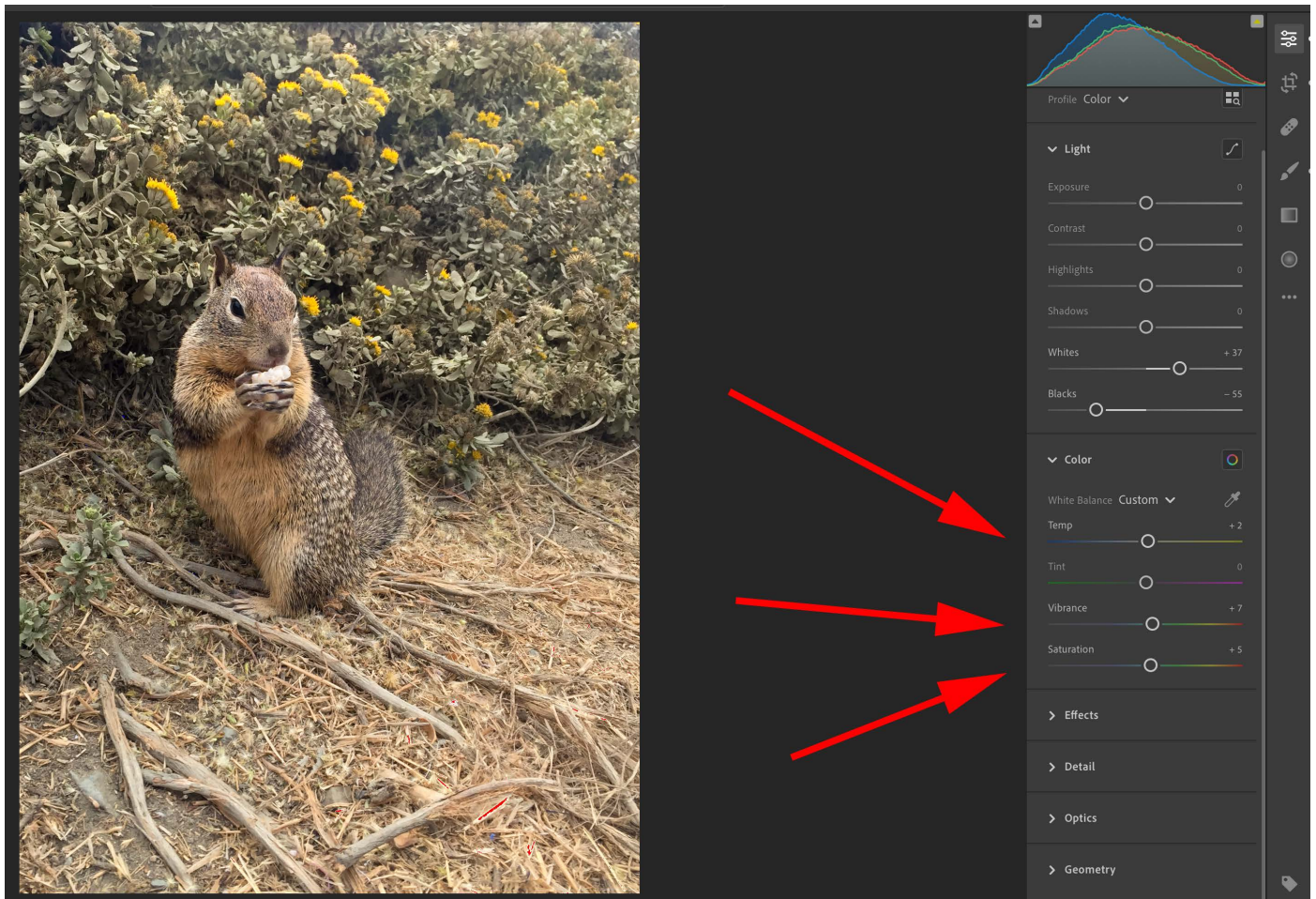


Image 020 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Now that the background and foreground are blended in contrast, exposure, and color, I can make a global adjustment to the White Balance Temp and Tint sliders, as well as the Vibrance and Saturation settings.

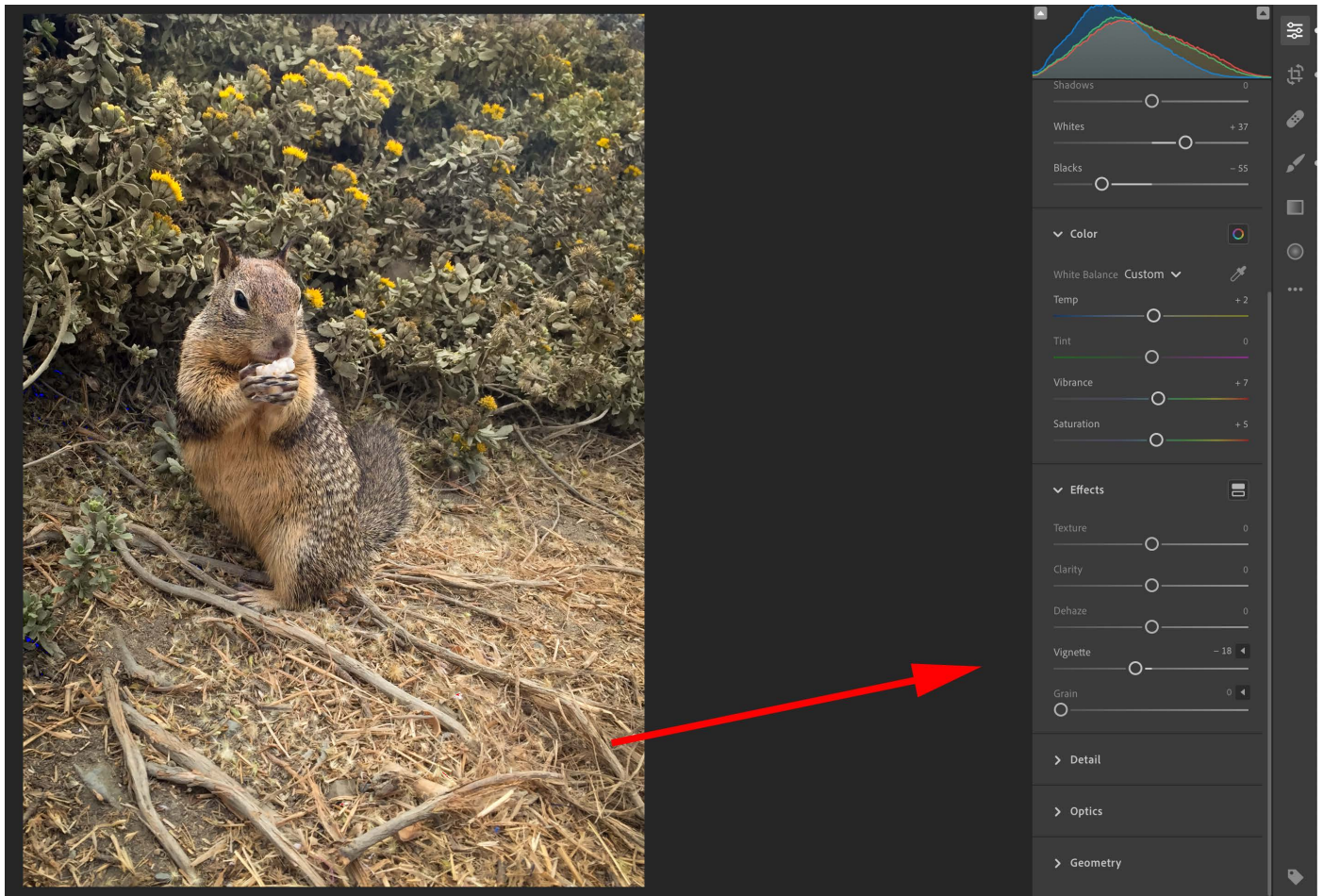


Image 021 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I often use a dark vignette to highlight a subject; although, I do try to be light-handed with it so that the Vignette isn't apparent.

For this shot, I applied a dark Vignette of -18. This reduces the visual weight on the edges of the frame and pushes the eyes inward towards the chipmunk.

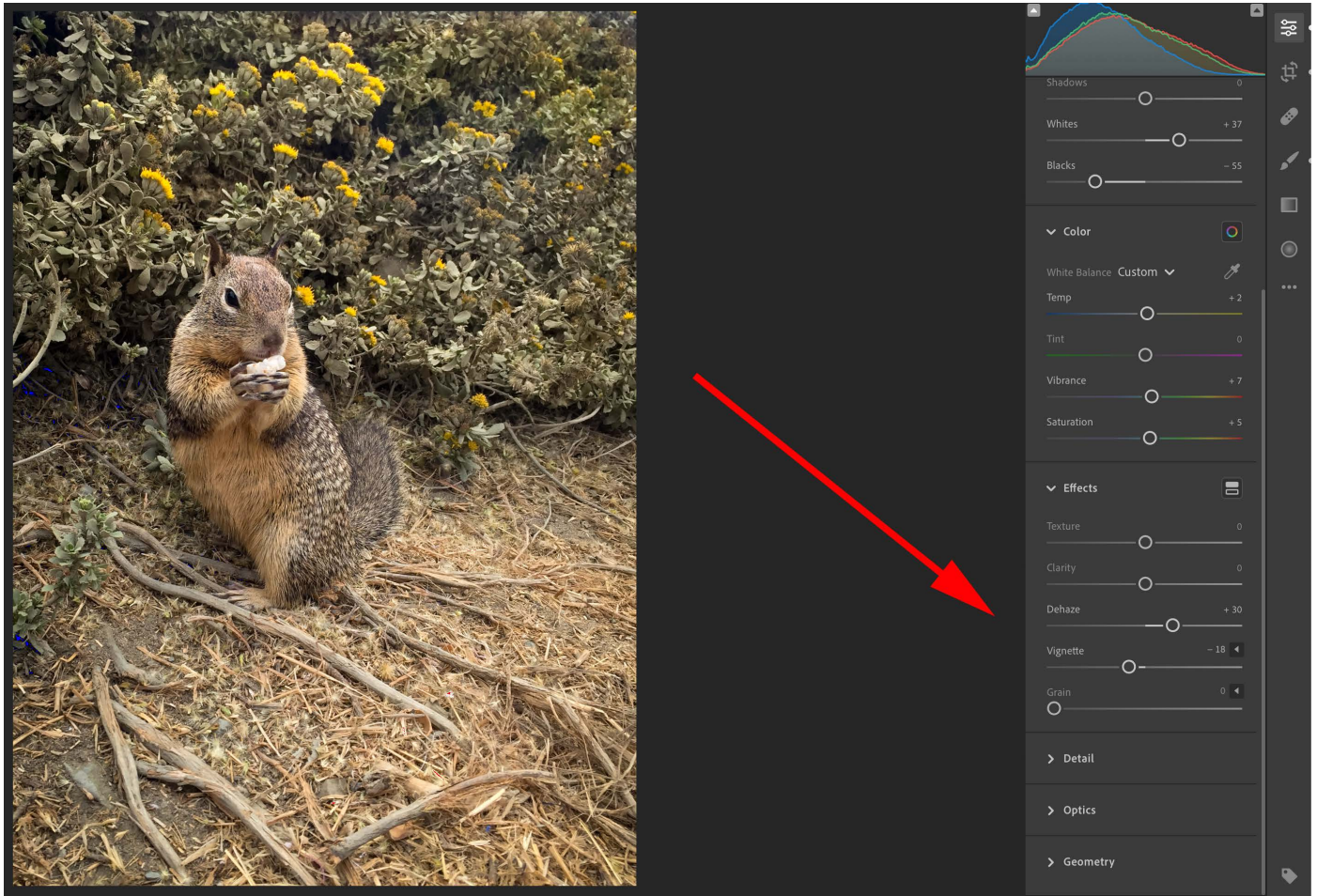


Image 022 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Dehaze was designed to help with the exact problem that we had with this picture. I find that Dehaze works well occasionally. It isn't my favorite tool in Lightroom.

For this case study photo, however, it really helped balance out the background nicely. I set the Dehaze to +30.

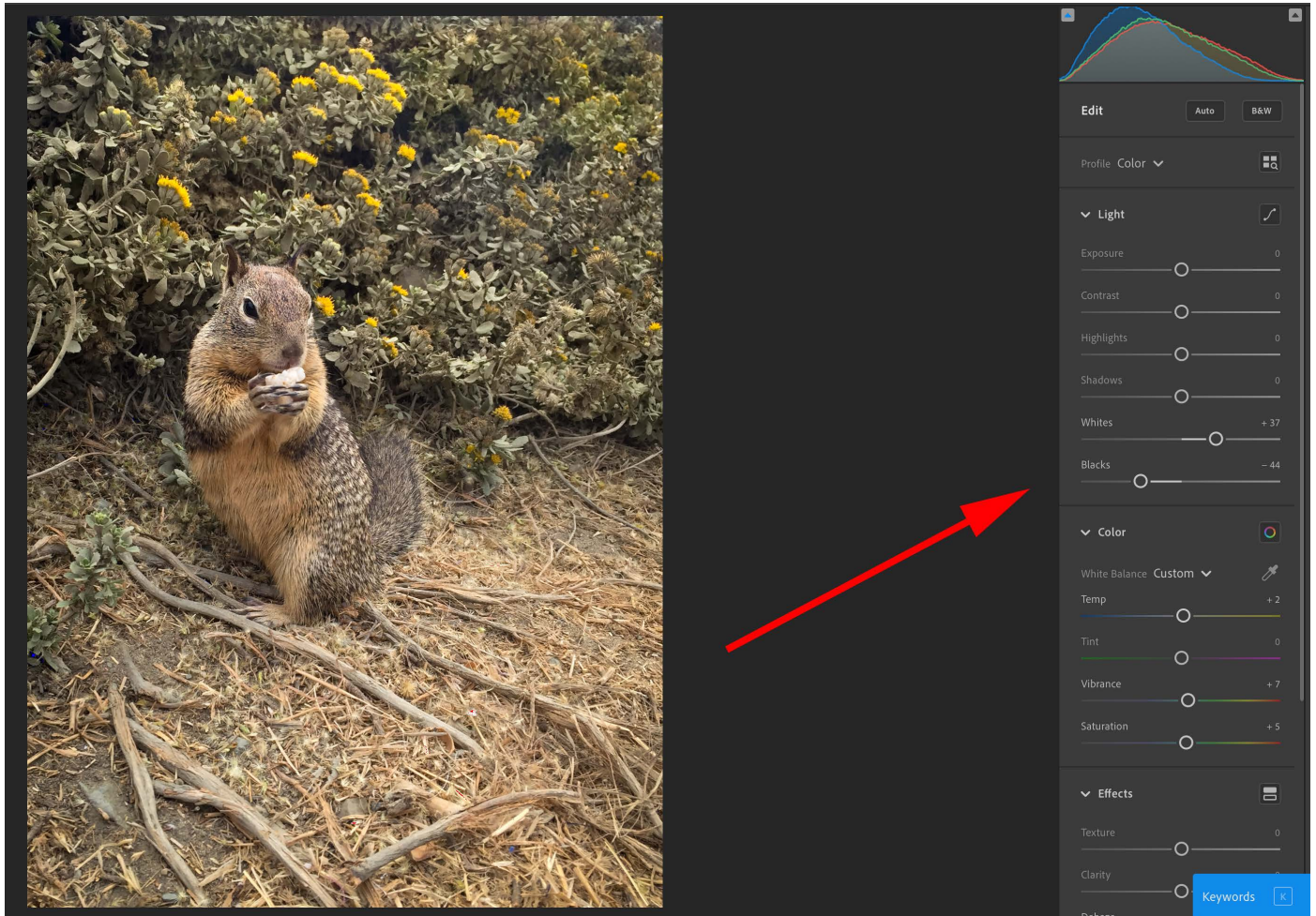


Image 023 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

The last few edits caused my Black Point to bleed out away from where I previously set it, so I returned to the Blacks slider and raised it to -44.

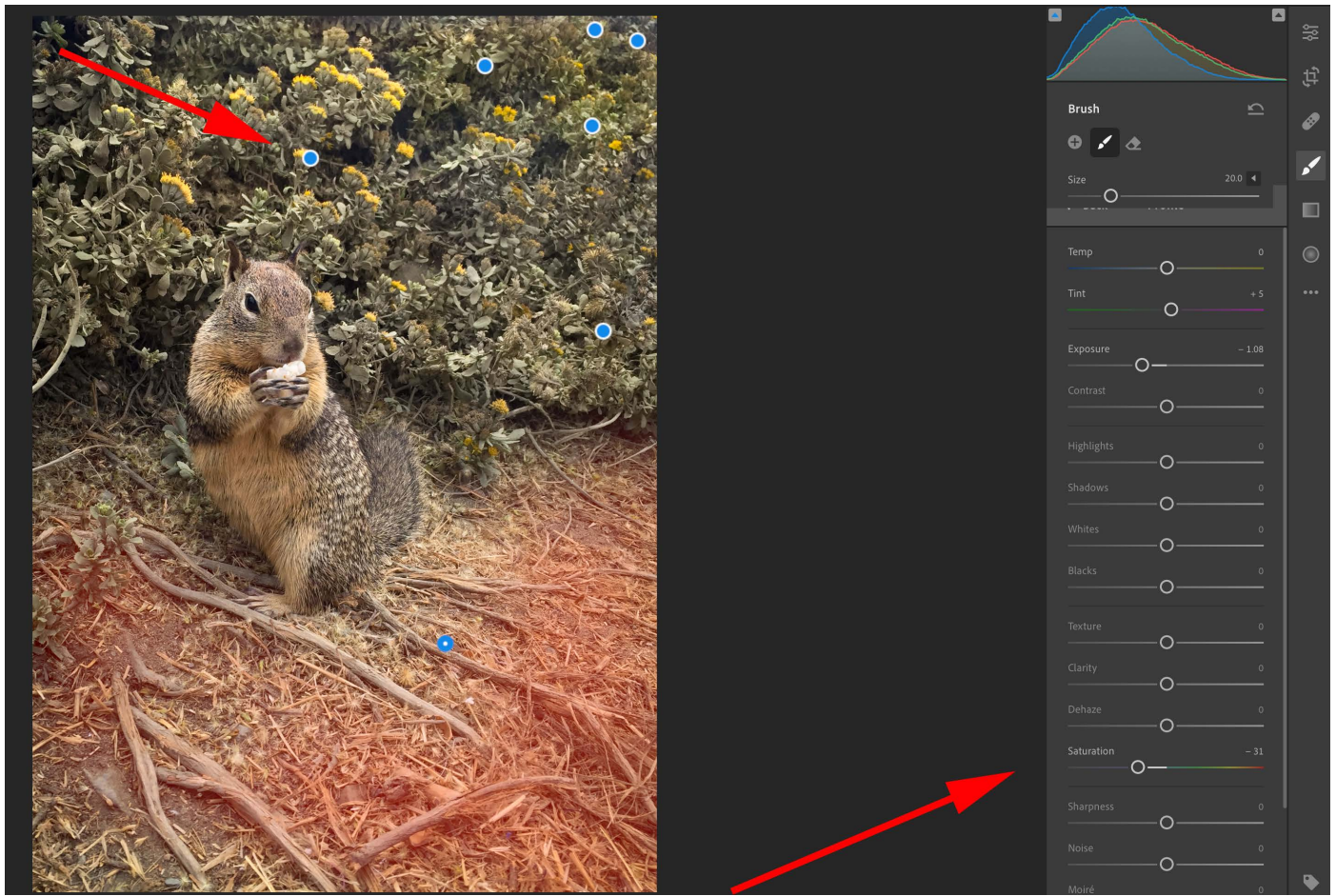


Image 024 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

After that, I returned to the Adjustment Brush.

I want to create two more masks: one for the yellow flowers and one for the roots in the foreground.

For the yellow flowers, I am going to decrease the Saturation to -72. I want their color to be present, but not overwhelm my subject.

In the foreground roots, I also reduced their Saturation to -31, and I reduced their Exposure to -1.08. That edit creates a 'half' vignette on the foreground only.

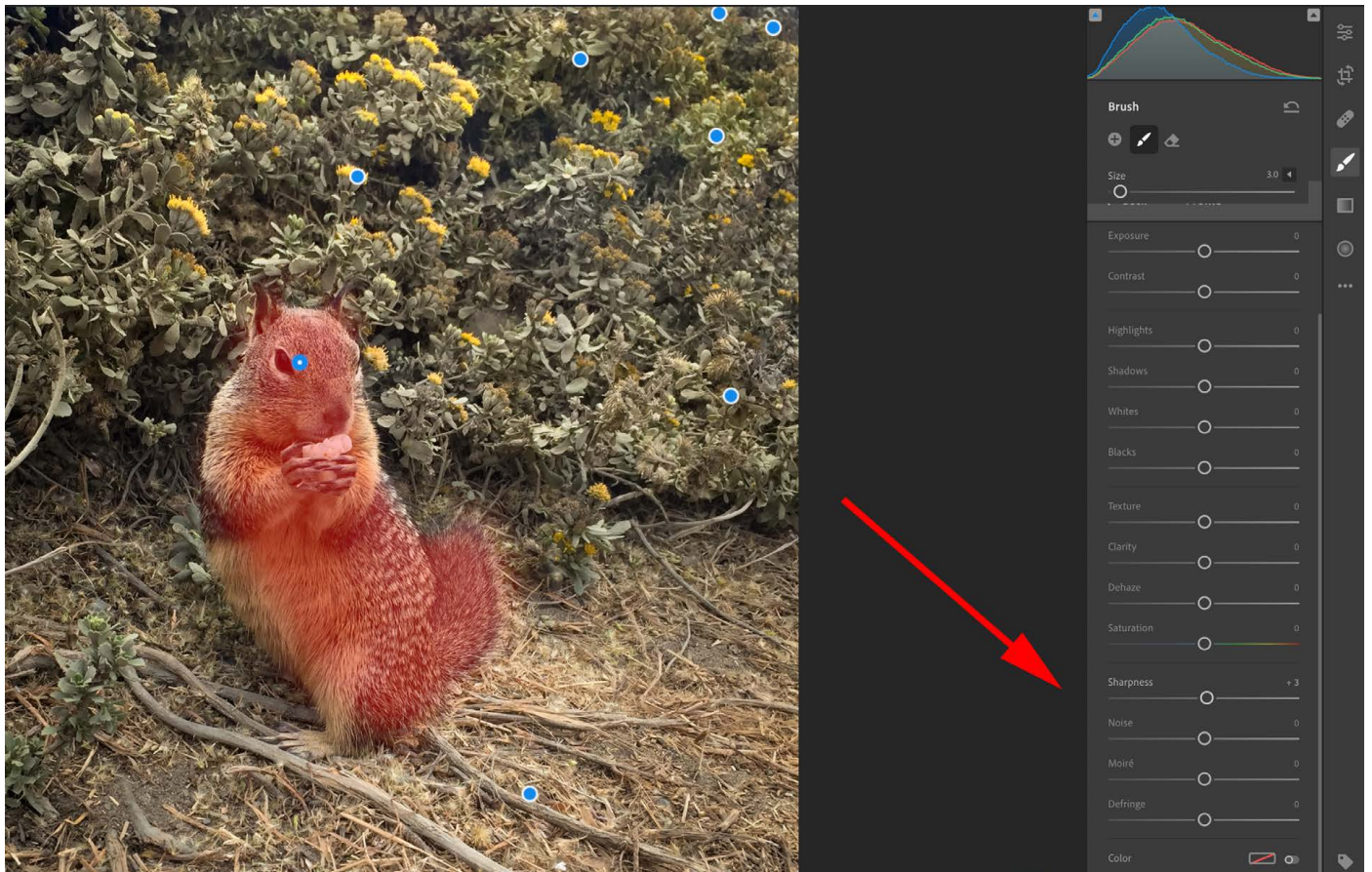


Image 025 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I always locally sharpen my subject with the Adjustment Brush as one of my final steps in FE.

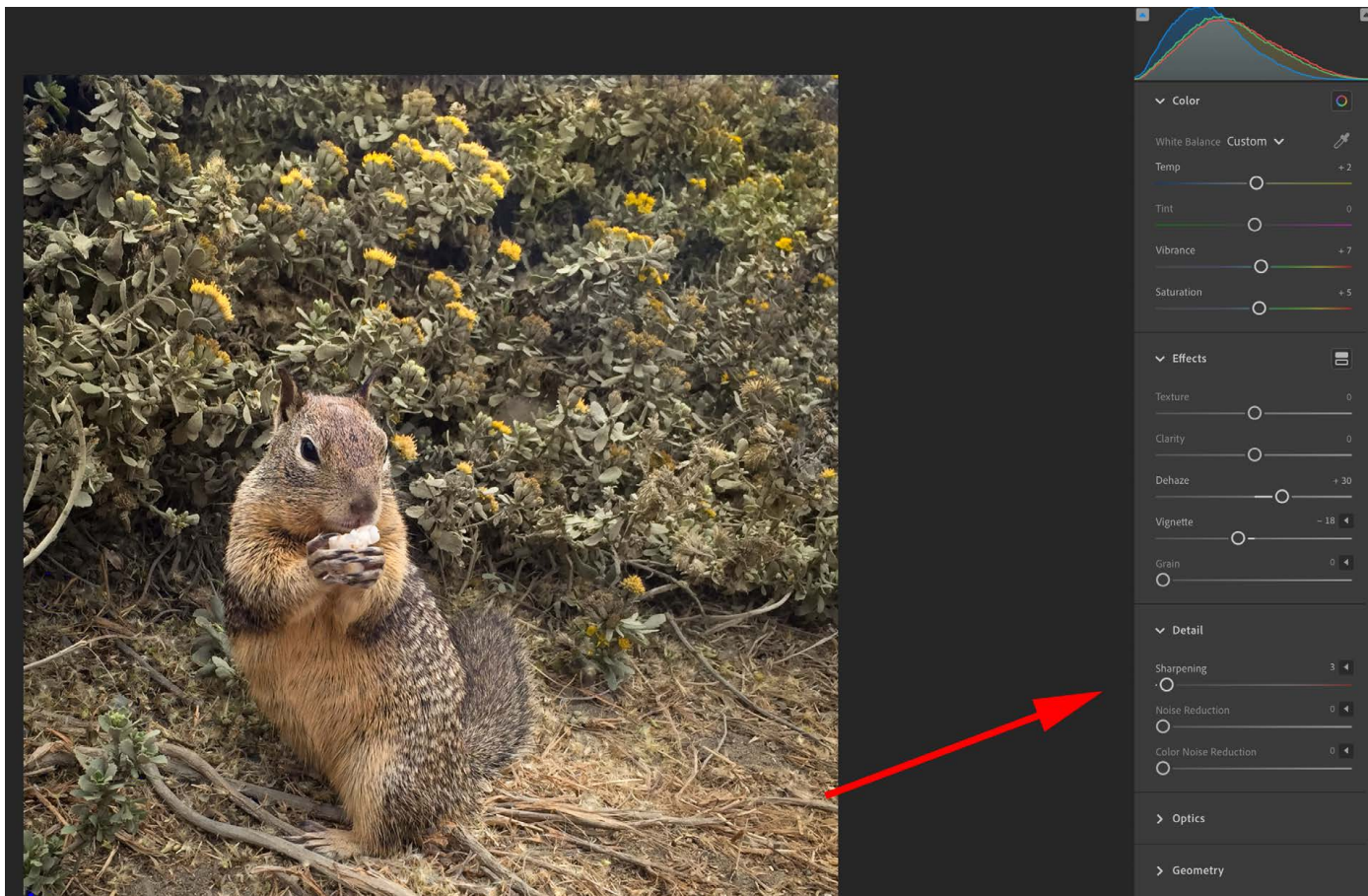


Image 026 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I will then generally, but not always, apply an additional global Sharpening. For this shot, I set the global Sharpening to 3.

This wraps up the Fundamental Editing list on this troublesome shot.

Before I show you the before and after image, take a look at the histogram in Image 026. Look at how nicely it now flows from left to right. This indicates an excellent tonal balance.



Image 027 – Photograph and Editing by Kent DuFault

On the left is the original camera file, and on the right is my final edited version. It's pretty easy to see how Fundamental Editing has vastly improved this picture!



Image 028 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Here is my final photograph ready for framing.