



If you have grown tired of manually correcting color-casted images (as described in last month's Perl column), you might appreciate a script that automates this procedure. **BY MICHAEL SCHILLI**

Last month, I wrote about using reference cards to correct the white balance in digital photos by taking a test snapshot (see Figure 1) [2]. The black, white, and gray plastic cards, which are available from any good photography equipment dealer, should not generate any color values in a digital image. This provides three calibration points for low, medium, and high light intensity, which the GIMP photo editing

tool can then reference to correct your snapshots.

### Perl Magic

How can a simple Perl script find out which pixel values the three cards create, even though their position in the image is not known, without using artificial intelligence?

If the photographer manages to spread the cards in the center of the image as

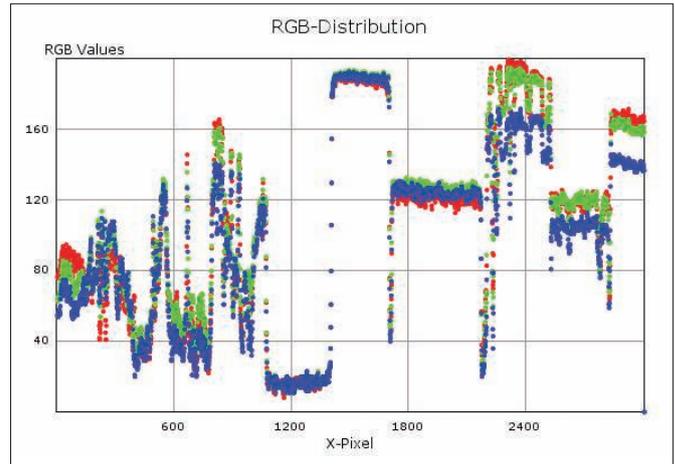
shown in Figure 1, the script can follow an imaginary horizontal line and identify the cards on the basis of pixel values along the  $x$  axis.

The light intensity measured along this line remains constant for a fairly substantial distance, as long as the line lies within one reference card.

Once the line touches the background, the pixel values will start to fluctuate significantly.



**Figure 1: Discovering the color values for the three cards in the picture - the script reads the RGB values along the horizontal line at the center to obtain the graph in Figure 2.**



**Figure 2: The values in the unfiltered image fluctuate too strongly to identify the cards reliably.**

Listing 1, `graphdraw`, uses the CPAN `Imager` module to create the graphs shown in Figure 2.

The graphs represent the red, green, and blue components of the color values along the horizontal line drawn in Figure 1 on a coordinate system in which the x axis matches the x coordinates in the image and the y value represents the color component value with a range of 0 through 255.

The CPAN `Imager` module's `read()` (line 12) is a multi-talented beast that can identify, read, and convert any popular image format to its own internal `Imager` format for editing.

### Errors

If something goes wrong, the `Imager` methods return false values. For more details about an error, cautious programmers tend to call the `errstr()` method to

return a cleartext description of the issue. The `getpixel()` method (line 30) examines the RGB values of a pixel in the image at a location defined by its x and y coordinates and returns an `Imager::Color` object, which contains the pixel's RGB values.

A call to `rgba()` (line 35) returns these values along with the value for the alpha channel. Here, you are just interested in the first three RGB values.

### Listing 1: `graphdraw` (continued on p74)

```

01 #!/usr/local/bin/perl -w           23
02 use strict;                        24 my $data = {};
03 use Imager;                         25
04 use Imager::Plot;                  26 for my $x ( 0 .. $width - 1 )
05 use Log::Log4perl;                 27 {
06                                     28     push @{$data->{x}}, $x;
07 my ($file) = @ARGV;                29
08 die „No file given“                 30     my $color = $img->getpixel(
09     unless defined $file;           31         x => $x,
10                                     32         y => $y
11 my $img = Imager->new();             33     );
12 $img->read( file => $file )          34     my @components =
13     or die $img->errstr();           35         $color->rgba();
14                                     36     for my $color_name (
15 $img->filter(                         37         qw(red green blue))
16     type => „gaussian“,              38     {
17     stddev => 10                     39         push @{$data
18 ) or die $img->errstr;               40             ->{$color_name}},
19                                     41         shift @components;
20 my $y = int(                          42     }
21     $img->getheight() / 2 );         43 }
22 my $width = $img->getwidth();        44
                                         45 my $plot = Imager::Plot->new(
                                         46     Width => 550,
                                         47     Height => 350,
                                         48     GlobalFont =>
                                         49     „/usr/share/fonts/truetype/
                                         50     msttcorefonts/Verdana.ttf“
                                         51 );
                                         52 for my $color_name (
                                         53     qw(red green blue))
                                         54 {
                                         55     $plot->AddDataSet(
                                         56         X => $data->{x},
                                         57         Y =>
                                         58         $data->{$color_name},
                                         59         style => {
                                         60             marker => {
                                         61                 size => 2,
                                         62                 symbol => „circle“,
                                         63                 color =>
                                         64                 Imager::Color->new(
                                         65                 $color_name),

```



Figure 3: Setting the blur filter to “Gaussian Blur” with a radius of 10 pixels defocuses the image and smoothes the pixel values.

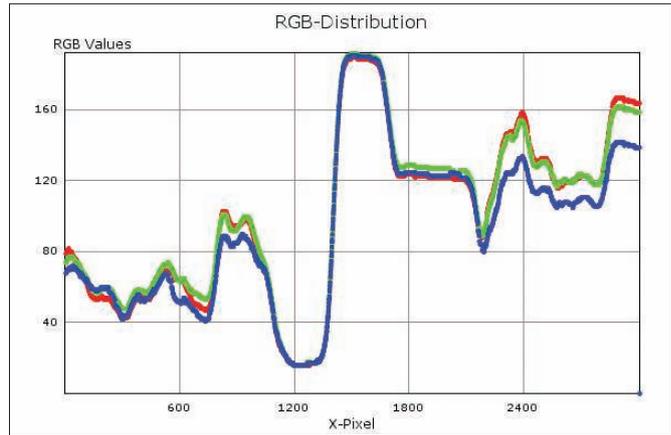


Figure 4: The image, defocused with the blur filter, has smoother graphs, making it easier to identify the flat spots caused by the three cards.

The script calls *shift* in line 41 to extract them one by one.

### Image View

The *Imager::Plot* module represents boring numbers as graphs in an attractive coordinate system without too much hassle with respect to scaling, axis labeling, or graphical layout, and it returns image files in all popular formats, allowing the user to check them later with an image viewer or web browser. The *new()* constructor (line 45) accepts the dimensions for the resulting image and the path to an installed True Type font, which it then uses for axis labeling.

The script collects the required coordinates in a hash of hashes, to which *\$data* points. It stores all the *x* coordinates in *\$data->{x}* and all red values in *\$data->{red}*; the green and blue values are stored in the same manner. The *AddDataSet()* method (line 55) then adds the data separately for each of the three graphs, each of which are drawn in a different color.

On completion, a new *Imager* object is created in line 71; later, it will create the resulting graphics file. Before this happens, the *box()* method colors the image background white, then *Render()* draws the coordinate system, the labels, and the three graphs in one fell swoop.

Finally, the *write()* method saves the output file on disk in PNG format.

### Nicely Out of Focus

Before a script can reliably identify the three areas at the center of the image, you need to make some preparations. Figure 2 clearly shows how much the graph fluctuates, and this is obviously going to make it difficult to identify the somewhat flatter areas. Thus, the *card-find* detection script (Listing 2) needs to run a blur filter that uses the “Gaussian Blur” method with a radius of 10 to defocus the image (lines 15ff.).

In an out-of-focus image (see Figure 3), the color transitions between individual pixels are less abrupt. Instead of jumping directly from a white to black

pixel, an out-of-focus image will show a transition with several gray scale values. The graph shown in Figure 4, which represents the pixel values on the same horizontal line, is far smoother as a result of this, and also simplifies the task of identifying the three areas to be identified.

### Back to School?

In these card areas, the curve is fairly flat over a length of hundreds of pixels. If you remember your math from school, you might recall that the first derivative of a graph like this at flat spots is constant and about zero, whereas the values will be far higher and fluctuate significantly everywhere else.

Figure 5 shows the first derivative of intensity values, which are calculated by adding the pixel values for the red, green, and blue channels. The recorded values are indicative of the fluctuation of the original graph and drop to zero over quite considerable distances.

The cards, with their homogeneous gray scales, occupy these positions in the

### Listing 1: graphdraw (continued from p73)

```

66     }
67   }
68 );
69 }
70
71 my $graph = Imager->new(
72   xsize => 600,
73   ysize => 400
74 );
75
76 $graph->box(
77   filled => 1,
78   color => ,white'
79 );
80
81 # Add text
82 $plot->{,Ylabel'} =
83   ,RGB Values';
84 $plot->{,Xlabel'} =
85   ,X-Pixel';
86 $plot->{,Title'} =
87   ,RGB-Distribution';
88
89 $plot->Render(
90   Image => $graph,
91   Xoff => 40,
92   Yoff => 370
93 );
94
95 $graph->write(
96   file => „graph.png“ )
97   or die $graph->errstr();

```

original image. Thus, the script just needs to follow this graph, create a ring buffer of about 50 investigated values, and alert when the buffer average drops to a value close to zero. When it does so, it has located a card.

## Return to Search

When the buffer values start to fluctuate again, the script has left the card area and returns to the state “search for the next homogeneous location.” The script should be able to find all three regions you are looking for and return the RGB values it finds there in YAML format. This lets the *picfix* script I discussed in last month’s Perl column adjust the white balance of other images with the same light conditions.

## And Repeat

The photographer still needs to repeat the reference card shot whenever the scene changes. All following photos of

the same scene can then be corrected by GIMP and the *picfix* script.

To make sure this approach works even if the snapshot happens to have a fairly homogeneous background, lines 66 through 68 not only check to see whether the mean value in the buffer is less than 3, but also whether the algorithm is in the middle third of the image, ignoring the left and right thirds.

The script uses normal Perl arrays as ring buffers and uses *push()* to append new values before checking to see whether the array exceeds the maximum

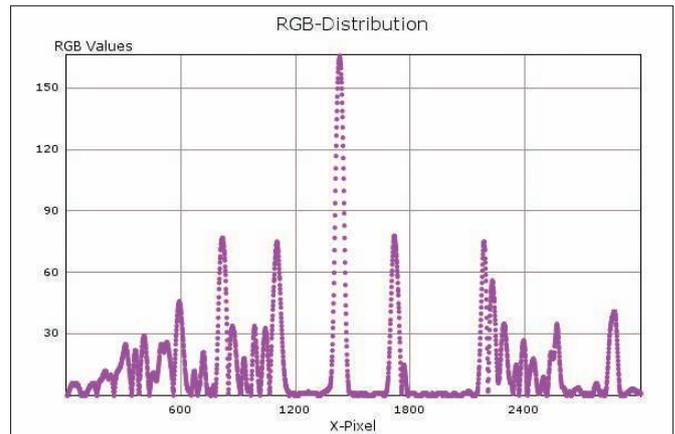


Figure 5: The first derivative of the intensity graph tends toward zero for homogeneous sections of the image.

length of the buffer. If this is the case, it deletes the first array element by calling *shift()*. This shortens the array by one element, and the second element moves up to the first spot.

To calculate the first derivative of the fairly complex pixel function, you can

## Listing 2: cardfind (continued on p76)

```

001 #!/usr/local/bin/perl -w          026 my $found      = 0;          051 shift @diff_ring
002 use strict;                       027 my @ctl_points = ();        052   if @diff_ring > 50;
003 use Imager;                        028                                     053
004 use YAML qw(Dump);                029 for my $x ( 0 .. $width - 1 ) 054   if ($found) {
005                                     030 {                             055
006 my ($file) = @ARGV;                031   my $color = $img->getpixel(   056   # Inside flat region
007 die „No file given“              032     x => $x,                   057   if ( avg( \@diff_ring ) >
008   unless defined $file;            033     y => $y                       058     10 )
009                                     034   );                             059   {
010 my $img = Imager->new();            035   my @components =              060     $found = 0;
011 $img->read( file => $file )        036     $color->rgba();            061   }
012   or die „Can't read $file“;      037                                     062 }
013                                     038 # Save current intensity       063 else {
014 # Blur                              039 # in ring buffer              064
015 $img->filter(                       040   my $intens =                 065   # Outside flat region
016   type => „gaussian“,              041   @components[ 0, 1, 2 ];      066   if ( $x > $width / 3
017   stddev => 10                     042   push @intens_ring, $intens;   067     and $x < 2 / 3 * $width
018 ) or die $img->errstr;             043   shift @intens_ring           068     and avg( \@diff_ring )
019                                     044   if @intens_ring > 50;        069     < 3 )
020 my $y = int(                        045                                     070   {
021   $img->getheight() / 2 );          046 # Store slope between         071     $found = 1;
022 my $width = $img->getwidth();       047 # x and x-50                 072     push @ctl_points,
023                                     048   push @diff_ring,            073       [ @components[ 0, 1,
024 my @intens_ring = ();              049     abs( $intens -             074         2 ] );
025 my @diff_ring = ();                050     $intens_ring[0] );        075   }

```

use a simplified numeric approach.

The ring buffer, `@intens_ring`, stores the intensity values of the last 50 pixels, which were created by adding the red, green, and blue values at the processed `x` coordinates.

To extract the three values from the four-element list returned by the `rgba()` method (line 36), the script relies on the array slice technique `@components[0,1,2]` (line 41). The value of the first derivative – that is, the slope of the graph at this point – is then approximated as the difference between the first and last elements in the ring buffer at constant distance `x`. Positive or negative slopes are of no interest, so `abs()` converts them to positive values if needed.

To find out whether the algorithm is currently in one of the flat parts of the

```
$ cardfind a5.jpg
---
high:
  blue: 190
  green: 191
  red: 189
low:
  blue: 16
  green: 16
  red: 16
medium:
  blue: 126
  green: 129
  red: 123
```

**Figure 6: The cardfind script accepts the name of an image file, autonomously performs various calculations, and outputs YAML-formatted color values to reflect the values measured for the reference cards.**

graph that are being investigated, or in a more mountainous region, the script sets up a second ring buffer, `@diff_ring`, which contains the last 50 values determined for the first derivative of the graph (lines 51, 52). The `avg()` function defined in line 107ff. calculates the mean value of 50 intensity values. If the algorithm is currently in a peaky region, a mean value below a threshold of 3 is all you need to identify a flat part.

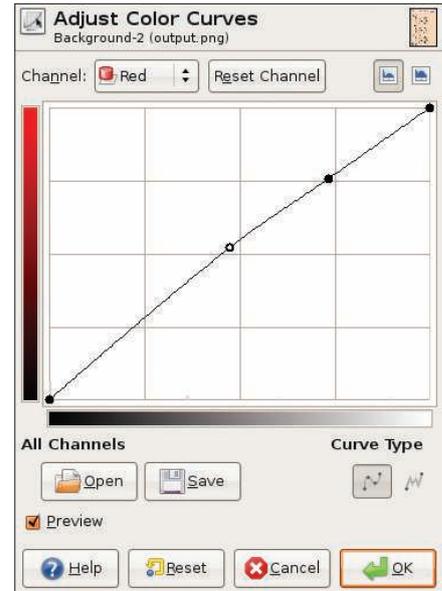
Once the script hits a flat area, it takes a mean increase of more than 10 to convince the state machine that it is back in the mountains.

Each time the script identifies a flat area, line 72 stores the RGB values of the first pixel found in this area in the `@ctl_points` array. Because you are only interested in three flat spots; the `last` instruction in line 101 scraps any others.

### Results

Finally, the `Dump()` function from the `YAML` module from CPAN outputs the results (Figure 6) in the form of a `YAML` file, `sample.yml`.

Storing the results and passing them in to last month's `picfix` script as `-c sample.yml` lets you correct the color casting in the image with the cards, and any number of images you took with the same lighting – but don't forget to hold the cards in the middle of the photo to make sure that the simple algorithm



**Figure 7: Using color values read from the reference cards, the picfix script will adapt the red channel, using 16/16, 123/129, and 189/191 as reference points.**

finds them. To find the cards otherwise, you would need a far more sophisticated algorithm.

On the other hand, Perl, with its treasure of modules on CPAN, gives you ample fodder for your experiments. ■

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**INFO**

[1] Listings for this article:  
[http://www.linux-magazine.com/resources/article\\_code](http://www.linux-magazine.com/resources/article_code)

[2] "Color Play" by Michael Schilli, *Linux Magazine*, September 2008:  
[http://www.linux-magazine.com/issues/2008/94/color\\_play](http://www.linux-magazine.com/issues/2008/94/color_play)

### Listing 2: cardfind (continued from p75)

```
076 }
077 }
078
079 my $out = {};
080 my @labels =
081 qw(low medium high);
082
083 # Sort by intensity
084 for my $ctl_point (
085 sort {
086 $a->[0] +
087 $a->[1] +
088 $a->[2] <=> $b->[0] +
089 $b->[1] +
090 $b->[2]
091 } @ctl_points
092 )
093 {
094 my $label = shift @labels;
095 $out->{$label}->{red} =
096 $ctl_point->[0];
097 $out->{$label}->{green} =
098 $ctl_point->[1];
099 $out->{$label}->{blue} =
100 $ctl_point->[2];
101 last unless @labels;
102 }
103
104 print Dump($out);
105
106 #####
107 sub avg {
108 #####
109 my ($arr) = @_;
110
111 my $sum = 0;
112 $sum += $_ for @$arr;
113 return $sum / @$arr;
114 }
```