

For someone who has only been practicing serious photography for about eight years, Frank Ellison has done pretty well for himself. Ellison, 53, took first place in the Invertebrate category in the 2014 Photo Competition and now earned the top prize in the 2015 Wildlife in North Carolina Photo Competition.

"It gives me something to do," Ellison said of his photography hobby. "I actually don't like to shoot people. I like nature better. I like shooting micro. On that winning picture the flower is actually touching the lens."

Ellison, who is head of maintenance at Industries for the Blind in Winston-Salem, lives in Clemmons with his wife Julie and sons Taylor, 10, and Austin, 12. A small garden planted next to his house is a favorite haunt for Ellison and the bugs he likes to shoot.

"I usually come out early in the morning and look for micro shots," he said. "We have tomato, squash and butterfly bushes next to the house. I saw a dark object in the yellow bloom and looked in and saw he was looking right back."

Ellison shot about seven frames and went on with his morning. He has had several images published online at National Geographic's Your Shot picture gallery, but didn't think he had a winner with the assassin fly when he first saw it on his computer monitor. So, it's taken a while for the reality of winning to sink in. "I don't have anything to compare it to," he said. "It's the first major photo competition that I've won."

If Ellison has a "secret weapon" it might not be his Nikon D700, but perhaps his little garden next to his house. He said the winning shot he got for the 2015 contest was taken 10 feet from the spot he shot an assassin fly to win the Invertebrate category last year. It's proving to be a very fertile garden.

Marsha Tillett, the art director at *Wildlife in North Carolina*, commented on this year's contest, including Ellison's assassin fly image. "The *Wildlife in North Carolina* staff really enjoys the photo competition issue. We like seeing what our readers are experiencing, and once again the submissions for this year's contest were filled with many beautiful images. But the remarkable eyes of this fly, and the striking contrast of colors in this photograph stood out to all the judges and was easily chosen as our grand prize winner."

The other four judges for this year's contest were staff graphic designers Amy Friend and Bryant Cole and staff photographer Melissa McGaw. Mike Dunn, retired senior manager of outreach at the N.C. Museum of Natural History, was also a judge and is a veteran photographer in his own right.

This year we had an uptick in entries with almost 1,500 images uploaded. All winning photographs may be seen on exhibit at the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh and on our website at newildlife.org.

–Mike Zlotnicki

GRAND PRIZE WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2015 PHOTO COMPETITION



Frank Ellison, Clemmons Assassin fly, Clemmons

I picked this photo to enter in the contest because of one simple thing: the eyes. I love to shoot the assassin fly for its eyes. I also like the way the insect eats its prey. It will land on a bee or other larger flies and stab them in the back with the post on its face. I never kill one as they are one of the best insects to have around the house to kill other pests. I was walking by the garden and spotted this one in a squash bloom. I ran to grab my camera and popped on the micro lens to get this picture.

(Nikon D700, Nikon 60mm micro lens, f/18, 1/100 of a second)



BIRDS FIRST PLACE

Daniel Pullen, Buxton

Slow-shutter gulls, Cape Hatteras

I shot this from my truck on my way out to Cape Point at Cape Hatteras National Seashore. A ton of birds gather on the beach in the winter and they just all take off and scatter if a car gets close. I was driving and shooting at the same time (probably not recommended) but it added a little extra blur to the photo.

(Nikon D4s, Nikon 70–200mm/2.8 at 200mm, ISO 100, f/16, 1/15 of a second)

BIRDS SECOND PLACE

Neil Jernigan, Snow Hill Cormorant in the rain, Lake Mattamuskeet

While searching for wildlife to photograph at Lake Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge, I came across this double-crested cormorant. Having not seen much, due to it raining all day, I decided to stay and photograph it. After a few moments of just sitting still, it started to reposition itself. Seeing this, I got ready and started photographing the moment it began to fly off. Since it was overcast I had set my ISO pretty high to get a fast enough shutter speed to freeze the rain drops, which also helped me in capturing the exact moment it took flight.

(Canon 5D Mark III, Canon 500mm F/4 IS II, 1.4x Extender, ISO 3,200, f/5.6, 1/1,000 of a second)





BIRDS THIRD PLACE

Gene Furr, RaleighEgret on the Wing, Southport

It had been seven weeks since I had orthopedic surgery on my left foot. I was having a bad case of cabin fever. Therefore, I took a road trip to the Southport area searching for birds while I was wearing an orthopedic boot. I found a location where I could set up and with a lot of patience wait for the birds to come to me. After two days, a great egret made a visit searching for food at sunrise. I waited for the egret to fly past the beautiful reeds in the background.

(Nikon D4, Nikon 400mm f/2.8 lens and a 1.4 extender at 560 mm. ISO 400, f/5.6, 1/1,500 of a second, tripod)

MAMMALS WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2015 PHOTO COMPETITION



MAMMALS FIRST PLACE

Dan Beauvais, Kitty Hawk

Red fox kit frightened by a crow, Duck

While at a reception for an art show where I was exhibiting, news quickly spread that a fox family was currently active around a nearby structure. As soon as the reception ended, I joined the watch. This red fox kit was initially out playing, but frightened by a crow, took cover in its den. After several minutes, the kit peeked out and warily scanned the sky to determine if it's safe to be back outside.

(Nikon D800, Nikon 200 – 400mm f/4 lens with Nikon 1.4x teleconverter, at 550mm, ISO 800, f/5.6, 1/200 of a second, Induro CT414 tripod, Really Right Stuff BH-55-Pro ball head, Induro GHBA gimbal head)

MAMMALS SECOND PLACE

Neva Kittrell, West End

Squirrel running with hickory nuts, West End

I was taking pictures of my horses in the pasture when I heard some noise up in the nearby hickory tree. I looked up to see three squirrels harvesting the nuts. The leaves were gone so it was easy to see them. They were stretching and jumping to reach the highest ones and I watched for a while and took a few photos of them. One of the squirrels ran down the tree and across the pasture in a big hurry to hide his prize. I set the camera on continuous shutter and kept shooting while I panned. He was really fast, so I felt lucky to catch this one shot.

(Nikon D800, Nikon 70–200mm lens at 200mm, ISO 400, f/7.1, 1/160 of a second)



MAMMALS THIRD PLACE

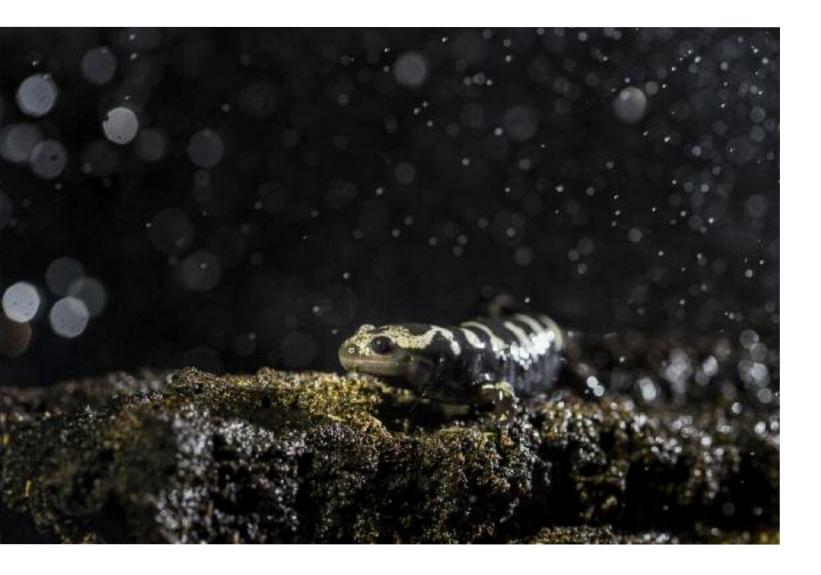
TJ Hilliard, Fuquay-Varina Wild horses, Corolla

I am a lifelong North Carolinian and had never seen the wild horses that inhabit the Outer Banks. On a trip to Nags Head in February of 2015, I decided to take a ride with friends up to Corolla. I caught a glimpse of a few horses walking into the brush in the village, but I didn't have much of an opportunity to photograph them. As I drove out along the beach, I noticed a group of five horses standing on top of the dunes as if they were awaiting me. I parked on the beach and approached slowly, making sure to keep a comfortable distance for the horses. It was 21 degrees that day, so I took about 20 or 25 frames and returned to the warmth of my vehicle. This was one of several frames that I was especially proud of.

(Nikon D7100, 400mm, ISO 400, f/6.3, 1/640)



REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2015 PHOTO COMPETITION



REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS FIRST PLACE

Neil Jernigan, Snow Hill

Marbled salamander, Snow Hill

Late one evening, I received a call from my dad saying he had discovered a large salamander in his yard. I gathered my equipment and went straight there. It had been raining most of the day and was still sprinkling. I wanted to show the rain drops in the image, so I lit the salamander with a portable spotlight and quickly set up an off-camera flash behind it. The flash from behind, when triggered, lit up all the rain drops. I knew immediately after creating this image that I had achieved my goal.

(Canon 5D Mark III, Canon 100mm f/2.8, ISO 400, f/5.6, 1/100 of second, strobe and spotlight)

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS SECOND PLACE

Ellen Devenny, Kings Mountain

Tree frog on stump, Kings Mountain

This image of a tree frog was taken in my backyard in Kings Mountain. We have lots of old chestnut oak trees in our yard and there are plenty of tree frogs, but sometimes they show up in some odd places. Back in the spring we had one that was living in a birdhouse. We spotted this one on the edge of a window. We carefully moved it to an old tree stump in the backyard. Before it could hop away, I grabbed my camera to capture a few shots.

(Canon 6D, Canon 75–300mm lens at 300mm, ISO 100, f/8, 1/13 of second, Manfrotto tripod)



REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS THIRD PLACE

Alicia Heath, Sandy Ridge

Leopard frog, Hanging Rock State Park

While hiking on the Riverbluffs Trail at Hanging Rock State Park, my daughter and I went down to look at the river. We were walking along the riverbank and this leopard frog jumped out in front of us and into the edge of the water. It must have felt safe being partially submerged under the water because it let me get really close so that I could get some great shots. Its markings and colors were beautiful.

(Nikon D3300, Nikon VR 18–55mm, ISO 200, f/5.6, 1/320 of a second)



INVERTEBRATES WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2015 PHOTO COMPETITION



INVERTEBRATES FIRST PLACE

Timothy Faulkner, Kinston

Snail on a post, Kinston

I love photography and enjoy what wonders God reveals. While at a friend's house for a cookout, we were walking by the fence post when I noticed the snail sitting on the post. I then went to my car and grabbed a camera. I sat there and photographed him for a while. Then the sun broke and shined on the post, which singled out the snail and post.

(Canon 7D Mark II, Sigma 150–500mm lens at 500mm, ISO 6400, f/9, 1/320 of a second, turned black-and-white with Silver Efex Pro 2)



INVERTEBRATES SECOND PLACE

Kirk Pullen, Warsaw

Fly on a windshield, Outer Banks

In the spring and summer I like to shoot bug macros when I visit the Outer Banks. While searching around for bugs to photograph, I noticed a simple house fly on the side of my SUV. I am embarrassed at how dirty my vehicle was, but it ended up turning the dirt particles into intriguing bokeh.

(Nikon D700, Tokina 100mm macro lens, ISO 640, f/29, 1/80 of a second, Alien Bee 1600 strobe with portable power pack)

INVERTEBRATES THIRD PLACE

Ellen Devenny, Kings Mountain

Praying mantis portrait, Kings Mountain

The praying mantis shot was taken in my backyard in Kings Mountain. I love photographing praying mantis, so you can imagine my excitement when my husband found an egg case while trimming some bushes in the front yard. I placed the egg case in a netted butterfly habitat and waited for springtime. When the hatchlings arrived, they were moved to our backyard. The one that I captured in this image was probably one that reached adulthood.

(Canon 6D, Canon 24–105mm L series lens at 105mm, Kenko Extension Tubes, ISO 400, f/5.6, 1/60 of a second, Canon 430 EX Speedlight)



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WILD PLANTS WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2015 PHOTO COMPETITION



WILD PLANTS FIRST PLACE

Matthew Cuda, Tobaccoville

Dew on a leaf, northeastern N.C.

This image of a poplar leaf was a nice surprise while walking through a picnic area in eastern North Carolina. My 11-year-old daughter spotted it first and thought it looked interesting, so I bent over and noticed the dew had a beautiful pattern to it. The added bonus for me was the beautiful yellow color of the poplar leaves after they fall from the tree.

(Canon 7D, Canon 50mm/1.8, ISO 400, f/8, 1/500 of a second)

WILD PLANTS SECOND PLACE

Ellen Devenny, Kings Mountain

Starburst moss and leaves, Table Rock Mountain

The hike to the top of Table Rock Mountain was not the easiest I've been on, but definitely one of the most rewarding. The view when you reach the summit is one of the best in North Carolina. Coming back down the mountain, I was able to pay closer attention to the plant life. The starburst appearance of the moss is what captured my attention for this shot.

(Canon 6D, Canon 24–105mm L series lens at 67mm, ISO 400, f/8, 1/50 of a second)



WILD PLANTS THIRD PLACE

Wick Smith, Fayetteville

Frosty plants, Pungo Lake

I was at Pungo Lake shooting the varied birds that were wintering there. It was a very cold morning with a heavy frost on the ground. Just after sunrise, I had gotten all the shots of birds I was going to get. I looked around for other compositions and noticed some incredible patterns in the plant life due to the frost. This frame was particularly intriguing, with the icy water picking up just a bit of the blue in the sky and the contrast with the white frost on the plant stalks.

(Canon 5D Mark III, Canon 70–200 II 2.8 at 200mm, ISO 400, f/11, 1/2 of a second)



OUTDOOR RECREATION WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2015 PHOTO COMPETITION



OUTDOOR RECREATION FIRST PLACE

Jake Orr, Topsail Beach

Retriever training, Ocracoke Island

This photo was taken on Ocracoke Island when my brother, Rob, and I decided to break from our work for a quick training session with his 2-year-old Chesapeake Bay retriever, "Deep." As an early summer thunderstorm mounted over the Pamlico Sound, I was provided the conditions to capture this timeless moment of a man and his dog in a classic Carolina setting.

(iPhone 6, 4.15mm, ISO 320, f/2.2, 1/2,000 of a second)

OUTDOOR RECREATION SECOND PLACE

Daniel Pullen, Buxton

Drum fisherman, Cape Point

I went out to Cape Point with the intentions of shooting portraits of fishermen and their catch. My brother Kirk Pullen came out to help hold a flash for me. The flash is just to the left of the camera to add a little light to my subject.

(Nikon D800, Nikon 35mm 1.4, ISO 320, f/3.2, 1/80 of a second, Nikon SB900 flash with Magmod Grid)



OUTDOOR RECREATION THIRD PLACE

lan Privette, Whitefish Mont.
Quail hunt with Brittany, Bladenboro

I took this picture of a father and son at the end of their quail hunt in Bladenboro. As a guide, there are a lot of times during a quail hunt where it can be difficult to choreograph hunters and dogs, let alone find a place to take a photo. Here, I was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time, take a knee, and take a picture. I love the story it tells with the father and son mirroring each other over a bird dog. It speaks of the tradition handed down through the generations. The photo was taken with a simple waterproof point-and-shoot camera that frequently jostled around in my bird vest, just in case, if things came together (light, composition, and subject) I could at least capture a split second of the day chasing bobwhite quail until the fading minutes of sunlight.

(Olympus Stylus Tough-3000, ISO 64, f/4, 1/400 of a second)



WILD LANDSCAPES WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2015 PHOTO COMPETITION



WILD LANDSCAPES FIRST PLACE

Daniel Pullen, Buxton

Rough surf, Cape Point

This was shot during the "golden hour" out at Cape Point. Two major currents collide to create the shoals off of Cape Point. They sometimes collide right at the perfect time to create water works of art.

(Nikon D4s, Nikon 70–200mm/2.8 zoomed at 200mm, ISO 200, f/4, 1/1,000 of a second)

WILD LANDSCAPES SECOND PLACE

Greg Mills, Fuquay-Varina

Broken pier, Frisco

Along the Cape Hatteras National Seashore sits one of my favorite Outer Banks subjects, the Frisco Pier. I arrived well before dawn on this particular morning, focused on capturing sunrise between broken sections of the pier. Little did I know the sky would deliver one of the most spectacular scenes that I have ever been blessed to photograph. Sadly, there are no plans to rebuild this pier, but until it's gone I plan to continue chasing the light at this coastal landmark.

(Canon 5D Mark III, Canon EF24–105mm f/4L IS at 82mm, ISO 100, f/22, 1 second)



WILD LANDSCAPES THIRD PLACE

Carl Chiang, Greenville

Hatteras Lighthouse, Hatteras

This was taken after midnight June 13, 2015. I had just started doing astrophotography as a hobby in May of 2015 and I was mesmerized by the infinite number of stars visible in the night sky with the newer digital cameras. I wanted to do a panoramic photo to capture the magnitude of the Milky Way in all its glory over one of the most iconic structures in all of North Carolina.

(Nikon D810, Nikkor 20mm, ISO 3,200, f/2.0, 10 second exposures stitched in Lightroom)



ANIMAL BEHAVIOR WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2015 PHOTO COMPETITION



ANIMAL BEHAVIOR FIRST PLACE

Matthew Cuda, Tobaccoville

Screech owl vocalizing, Huntersville

I took this image of the eastern screech owl while he was vocalizing and most likely working on his breakfast a bit at the same time. Because it was so early in the morning, fill flash was used to fill in some of the shadow and provide a catch light in the owl's eye. This image was captured at the Carolina Raptor Center during a special event featuring birds of prey in natural habitats.

(Canon 7D, Canon 70 – 200 mm f4 L lens, ISO 1,250, f/4, 1/125 of a second, fill flash)

ANIMAL BEHAVIOR SECOND PLACE

Daniel Pullen, Buxton

Seal on beach, Cape Point

I had no intentions of shooting wildlife this particular evening. I was actually out at Cape Point trying to get photos of waves. This little guy swam up right at sunset. I guess I was at the right place at the right time.

(Nikon D4s, Nikon 70–200mm/2.8 at 170mm, ISO 400, f/2.8, 1/250 of a second)



ANIMAL BEHAVIOR THIRD PLACE

Eric Abernethy, Asheboro

Eastern coachwhips, Scotland County

This photo was taken in the North Carolina Sandhills. While I was cruising for reptiles these two Eastern coachwhips crossed the road and I followed them into the brush and began photographing them. They did not care that I was there so I took some close up photos of the interaction between the two.

(Nikon D7000, Nikon 10.5mm fisheye lens, ISO 800, f/6.3, 1/400 of a second)



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17 WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2015 PHOTO COMPETITION



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17 FIRST PLACE

Nicole Howren, Cary

Winter sunset on beach, Frisco

I composed this photo at the Frisco Pier, where we visit often ever since I was a little girl. I wanted to do something different than the usual beach sunset picture. It was winter and the water was freezing, but as a photographer, the most rewarding photos are the ones where you have to endure different situations. I love the colors of a winter sunset on the Outer Banks.

(Canon 5D Mark III, Canon 50mm, ISO 640, f/4, 1/2,500 of a second)

YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17 **SECOND PLACE**

Madison Woodard, Burnsville Mallard duckling

My grandparents have a little pond where two mallard ducks live. Each year we had the hopes that they would have ducklings. Well this is the very first year they have! My Grandpa called me saying there were babies, so I grabbed my camera and snapped away! It was just too cute to not take a picture.

(Canon EOS Digital Rebel XT, 300mm lens, ISO 100, f/5.6, 1/250 of a second)



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17 **THIRD PLACE**

Noelle Deichler, Pittsboro

Ruby-throated hummingbird in flight

Hummingbirds have always been fascinating to me and their quick movement lured me to attempt catching one with my camera. I got this shot from my front porch. A column was my hiding place while I waited patiently with my camera poised. Straining to be perfectly still, I took many shots toward the feeder about 10 feet away. I was thrilled to discover later when reviewing my catch, this proud male in a most majestic pose.

(Nikon D3200, Nikkor 55 – 300mm 4.5-5.6G ED at 270mm, ISO 400, f/6.3, 1/1,600 of a second)







YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17 **HONORABLE MENTION**

Emma Halstead, Walkertown

Spiderweb on deck, Walkertown

For days this spider had its web on the bathroom window, then it moved over to the broken railing where I took this photo of it. My whole family had been watching it, and as of the last time I checked it is still living in our yard. This spider was interesting to watch because it would rebuild its web every morning, and when it was on our bathroom window we would sometimes see it catch bugs.

(Nikon D3100, Nikon lens at 85mm, ISO 400, f/7.1, 1/125 of a second)



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17 HONORABLE MENTION

Joshua Hunter, Salisbury

Basking dragonfly

I was able to photograph this beautiful dragonfly on a warm day in August. The insect was basking on a fence while I had my Canon kit/macro lens on. I slowly crept up to the animal, and as silently as I could, took a few shots. After about 20 seconds, most animals no longer see you as a threat. I was able to have a good five-minute session with this dragonfly, and the photographs I got were amazing.

(Canon T4i, Canon 18-135mm IS STM lens at 135mm, ISO 500, f/5.6, 1/250 of a second)



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17 **HONORABLE MENTION**

Madison Woodard, Burnsville

Wasps on a flower, Roan Mountain

During the summer, my grandpa took me on a day hike on Roan Mountain. While we were hiking, I noticed several flowers with groups of wasps on them. I thought it was really interesting so I took a picture!

(Canon EOS Digital Rebel XT, 75 mm focal length, ISO 250, f/8, 1/500 of a second)



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER FIRST PLACE

Addison Latham, Apex

Immature bald eagle, Jordan Lake

My dad started teaching me how to take pictures when I was 8 years old. I love going with my dad and taking pictures at high school sporting events and around the house. This year I finally got a chance to go to Jordan Lake and take pictures of the bald eagles. On my first trip to the lake back in March I was practicing with my dad's camera and new lens shooting pictures of sea gulls. All of a sudden two bald eagles, a mature and a juvenile, came flying right at me. They were fighting over a fish. I turned the camera to get the eagles in focus. As soon as I could see them in the camera I started shooting as fast as I could. Afterwards I got several great pictures, including this one of the juvenile. My dad and I were so excited and had the best time together that day. I can't wait to go back this winter when the eagles return!

(Nikon D7100, Tamron 150 – 600mm at 600mm, ISO 640, f/6.3, 1/3,200 of a second)



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER **SECOND PLACE**

Tyler Jernigan, Snow Hill Eggs in nest, Snow Hill

While picking blueberries in the edge of his yard, Tyler noticed this Northern mocking-bird's nest. He wasn't able to see into the nest right away, so after getting a stool to stand on, he saw that there were four eggs located inside. Excited about his discovery he immediately went to get his camera. He returned to the nest with camera in hand and photographed it for a couple of minutes. Nervous that the mother of the eggs would soon return he quickly finished and left it just as he found it, hidden in the blueberry bush.

(Canon Rebel XSi, Canon 18–55mm, ISO 400, f/5.6, 1/60 of a second)

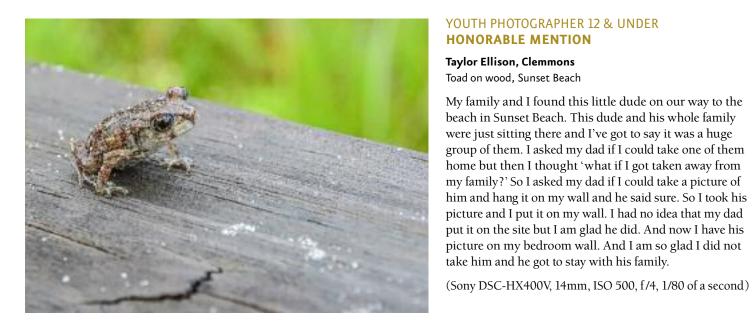


YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER THIRD PLACE

Kaitlyn Molnar, Raleigh Baby bunnies, Raleigh

One night my dog was outside barking at something and it turned out to be a baby bunny in the backyard. We couldn't find the nest so we brought it to a wildlife rehabilitator. The next day we found a nest under the deck and inside the nest there were three little baby bunnies. I told my mom this would be a great picture so I quietly and carefully went over to the nest and took a picture. The bunny picture was special to me because my dog found the smaller baby away from the nest and helped save it.

(Sony Cyber-shot DSC-WX50, Carl Zeiss VarioTessar Lens 28–140mm f/2.6-6.3, 1/1,600 of a second)



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER HONORABLE MENTION



Mature bald eagle, Jordan Lake

On this day my dad took me to the Jordan Lake dam to see if we could get pictures of the migrating ospreys. We saw several ospreys and even got some nice pictures, but just as the sun went behind the trees and we started to pack up a bald eagle came flying up the river right for us. Luckily we hadn't put up the camera yet so I was able to take about seven pictures before the eagle flew right over our heads! When we looked at the pictures my dad could not believe that I got all the pictures in focus. I really like this picture because of the way the eagle is flying right at us and making eye contact.

(Nikon D7100, Tamron 150–600mm at 600mm, ISO 640, f/6.3, 1/3,200 of a second)



Austin Ell Bass in the One day a

YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER HONORABLE MENTION

Austin Ellison, Clemmons

Bass in the net, Sunset Beach

One day at Sunset Beach on a golf course, I was throwing my cast net in water that was full of alligators. My dad and I had been to that golf course before but we had never thrown the cast net there before; we think that the alligators ate all the big fish. My dad and I love to see alligators in the wild. I read about when alligators almost went extinct. For this picture I saw the setting sun glittering off my net with the scales of a baby largemouth bass. I instantly thought that I should take a picture and that is how I got this picture.

(Sony DSC-HX400V, 4.3mm, f/3.2, 1/100 of a second)

