



WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2012 PHOTO COMPETITION

The Wildlife in North Carolina Photo Competition attracts photographers of all types, many of whom bring tens of thousands of dollars of equipment and years of experience into the field in hopes of capturing prize-winning images. But in the end it's the brain behind the equipment that ultimately makes the difference. Our grand prize winner, Mickey Moten, is proof.

Moten, of Kings Mountain, used a \$400 camera, some homemade equipment and a dose of ingenuity to come up with the winning picture, a shot so strong that it was a unanimous choice among the four judges. Moten had some thoughts on winning.

"I'd like to thank my wife, two daughters, and great friends for all their support and encouragement," he said in an email. "As far as my photography is concerned, I'd just like the readers to know that you don't necessarily need to have the latest and greatest photographic equipment to take nice photos. My basic setup consists of a \$400 camera, \$65 flash and \$75 macro lens, which is fairly inexpensive, as I'm sure you know, considering many very good DSLR [digital single lens reflex] lenses out there cost well over twice that alone. I've got a homemade diffuser attached to the flash; those are the white reflections you see in the water drops. One of my macro accessories is a small bottle sprayer that will spray a very fine mist of water. The point is to get out there, with whatever camera you own, and have fun."

Moten said he discovered that macro photography has a definite learning curve. A large percentage of the photos he's taken are not "keepers," but if you are persistent, you'll improve over time.

"That's the great thing about digital photography in general; once you're past the initial investment, the only other thing used is your time," he said. "If you're learning and doing what you enjoy, then I'd say it's time well spent. Please express my gratitude to the judges for selecting one of my photos as their favorite. I am still astonished by all of this. A co-worker of mine, David Elliott, used to bring me his *Wildlife in North Carolina* magazines when he finished reading them, so that my family and I could enjoy them as well. David is a beekeeper and all around one of the nicest people I know. Actually he was the one who encouraged me to submit some photos to your annual competition."

This was the first year the competition was open to subscribers only, so the total number of entries was down, but not the quality. A total of 1,611 images were entered in the following categories: Animal Behavior, 192; Birds, 267; Invertebrates, 209; Outdoor Recreation, 116; Reptiles and Amphibians, 163; Wild Landscapes, 208; Wild Plants, 190; Youth 12 & Under, 38; and Youth 13–17, 66.

Marsha Tillet, art director at *Wildlife in North Carolina* and one of the four judges, commented on the winning photo. "This image was so striking, the color, the composition, the depth of field," she said. "We all just really liked it. And the water droplets on the eyes really made this an engaging image."

The other three judges were Mike Dunn of the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences; *Wildlife in North Carolina* graphic designer Alyssa Stepien; and magazine photographer Melissa McGaw. Each judge picked his or her top 10 images in each category, and then all were reviewed on a television screen. During the second viewing, a judge had to vocally support an image or it was culled. A final vote set the winners.

All winning photographs may be seen on exhibit through March at the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh.

—Mike Zlotnicki

GRAND PRIZE WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2012 PHOTO COMPETITION



Mickey C. Moten, Kings Mountain
Striped horsefly, Kings Mountain

I've just gotten into photography again over the past year or so. Macro photography has opened my eyes to a whole new world I never noticed before, and as a result, I've gained a new appreciation for these small creatures. The shot: A female *Tabanus lineola*, aka striped horsefly, sitting on some *Liatris* in one of our flower beds. I had never had the opportunity to photograph one of these flies with such amazing eyes before, so I was very cautious not to move too quickly. I clicked off a few shots, zoomed in and took a few more. Since it didn't attempt to fly away, I decided to spray a light mist into the air. In this case, I sprayed it lightly and from a few feet away so as not to irritate the fly. I took a few more pictures before she left (mostly out of focus). The result in the competition is my favorite of the bunch.

(Panasonic DMC-FZ100, 108mm (600mm equivalent) Raynox DCR-250 macro lens, ISO 100, f/8, 1/640 of a second, YongNuo YN-560 Speedlite with homemade diffuser)



BIRDS FIRST PLACE

Robert Travis, Cedar Mountain
Male ruby-throated hummingbird, Cedar Mountain

I noticed this male ruby-throated hummingbird flying around next to a feeder which had been set up to attract the birds. I soon realized that this particular hummer kept flying to one or two branches in his "territory," so I set up on one of his perches and waited. It wasn't long before I captured this image. I was reminded of something a naturalist had told me about watching animal behavior: If you take the time to observe, the actions of the subject will give you a good idea of what it will do next. This has served me well in my photography.

(Canon EOS 5D Mark II, Canon EF 500mm f/4 L IS USM lens, ISO 1250, f/7, 1/1600 of a second)

BIRDS SECOND PLACE

Ellen Devenny, Kings Mountain
Chickadee, Kings Mountain

Outside our kitchen window there is a window box which we lined with carpet that our two cats enjoy sitting in. One morning in April around 7:30 a.m., I spotted a little chickadee busy gathering cat fur to line her nest. The bird continued gathering cat fur in her beak while I quickly grabbed my camera. This image was taken through the window and shot at a high ISO. This was handheld. I was only a few feet away from the bird on the other side of the window when this shot was taken. I thought it ironic that the enemy of the bird was the unknowing provider of the fur that was to line the nest.

(Canon 50D, Canon 24-105mm L series lens, ISO 1250, f/4, 1/200 of a second)



BIRDS THIRD PLACE

Charles English, Wilmington
Kingfisher, Airlie Gardens

The photo was taken at Airlie Gardens Wilmington. I had been seeing this kingfisher land on some small branches about 2 feet out of the water every morning for two or three days. I decided to put my blind up the next morning and wait. After three hours he flew in to land and I was ready. He even had a fish for the photo.

(Canon 5D Mark IV, Canon 500mm lens and 1.4x tc, ISO 1250, f/7.1, 1/500 of a second, manual mode)





MAMMALS FIRST PLACE

Karl Chiang, Greenville

Bull elk, Cataloochee Valley

I took this photo of the bull elk in Cataloochee Valley two years ago on a crisp fall morning in October. I had been there the day before, but I wanted to see them in the morning light. I was shooting another elk when this elk walked across the misty valley bugling with the morning light behind him to back-light his silhouette. I was about 200 yards away. I went back again another day, but I have never gotten a better picture. I have photographed elk out west, but this herd in North Carolina has always fascinated me. I hope they can someday be plentiful again in our state for the general public to appreciate.

(Nikon D300, 200–400mm Nikkor lens at 400mm, ISO 200, f/14, 1/200 of a second, Manfrotto tripod)

MAMMALS SECOND PLACE

Ed Ziegler, Raleigh

Squirrel close-up, Raleigh

Numerous bird feeders and a bird bath in our backyard provide an opportunity to spend time capturing images of visitors. Squirrels feast on seeds that drop from the feeders and occasionally pause for a quick refreshment. I just happened to be out on the deck with camera in hand to capture one of our guests.

(Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, Canon EF500mm f/4L IS USM lens + 1.4x tc 700mm, ISO 800, f/6.3, 1/320 of a second)



MAMMALS THIRD PLACE

Stephen Atkins, Weaverville

Red fox, Asheville

This fox lives less than a mile from downtown Asheville. He is regularly seen poking in and out of the bushes. He has at least two siblings who are much warier and rarely let themselves be seen. He had recently tangled with something that injured his ear when this picture was taken. The last time he was seen, his ear was completely healed and his winter coat was coming in.

(Nikon 300s, Nikon 70–200 f/2.8 Nikkor lens at 200mm, ISO 250, f/11, 1/125, aperture priority)





REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS FIRST PLACE

Sharon Canter, High Point
Tree frog, High Point

Tree frogs are common visitors to my back door on summer evenings. They typically cling to the glass door in order to search for insects attracted to the house lights. On this August evening, I decided to photograph my visitor in this interesting "underside pose." I turned on the outside patio light and then quickly assembled my equipment. Of the several shots that I took, this first pose with his outstretched toe pads and side view of his head became my favorite. It was nice to have my photography subject actually come to my back door for his portrait session.

(Nikon D300s, Nikkor 105mm lens, ISO 200, f/14, 1/60 of a second, Nikon SB-800 Speedlight)

**REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS
SECOND PLACE**

Stephen Atkins, Weaverville
Box turtle, Weaverville

A friend had told me about a turtle nest she found hiking the day before near her home. I asked her to show me, and I was surprised 24 hours later to find three little turtles still struggling to escape their eggs.

(Nikon D80, Sigma 150mm f/2 macro lens, ISO 200, f/16, 1/60 of a second, Nikon SB-600 Speedlight)



**REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS
THIRD PLACE**

Kirby Samantha Lua, Hillsborough
Anole, Chimney Rock State Park

It was a sunny afternoon in Chimney Rock when my family and I stumbled across this anole peeking out from between the craggy boulders. I am always on the lookout for wildlife, and he was the perfect subject, posed as if he knew that I was taking his picture.

(Canon EOS Rebel T3, Canon 18-55mm lens at 55mm, ISO 3200, f/5.6, 1/500 of a second, on Automatic)





INVERTEBRATES FIRST PLACE

John Petranka, Chapel Hill

Praying mantis, Johnston Mill Preserve

Because the light was becoming too bright and contrasting, I was about to pack up for the morning when I came across this praying mantis. This time the high contrast between light and shadow worked in my favor as the mantis emerged from the shaded interior of a plant and peered out into the bright sunlight. The camera exposed for the brightly lit head and legs, shifting the background exposure into deep shadow.

(Canon EOS XSi, Canon 100mm macro lens, ISO 400, f/9, 1/125 of a second)

INVERTEBRATES SECOND PLACE

Tyler Lee Bailey, Browns Summit

Skipper, Browns Summit

The picture was taken in Browns Summit in the field in front of my house. It is a reversed roadside-skipper. The picture was taken in mid-September. I was out walking around enjoying the beginning of the fall colors, looking for something to photograph when I came across a plant covered in these tiny butterflies. I got to a vantage point that I liked and waited until there was only one butterfly in the frame and then snapped the picture.

(Nikon D3000, Nikkor 55–200mm VR lens at 200mm, ISO 200, f/8, 1/400 of a second)



INVERTEBRATES THIRD PLACE

Stephen Atkins, Weaverville

Orb weaver spider, Weaverville

My son had caught the orb weaver spider near our home in Weaverville and suggested I get a picture of it on a sunflower that had grown under our birdfeeder. When I saw the results, I sure was glad he asked me to get my camera!

(Nikon 300s, Sigma 150mm f/2.8 macro lens, f/8, ISO 320, 1/15 of a second)





WILD PLANTS FIRST PLACE

John Petranka, Chapel Hill
Dewy grass, Chapel Hill

One of the things that I like most about macro photography is that you can find interesting subjects just about anywhere. I took this shot as the sun rose over a hayfield across the street. I noticed the sunlight glistening in the grass, grabbed my camera and tripod and found this pleasingly symmetrical plant decorated with droplets, each a tiny lens forming an inverted image of the sunrise.

(Canon EOS XSi, Canon 100mm macro lens, ISO 100, f/13, 1/60 of a second)

**WILD PLANTS
SECOND PLACE**

Sharon Canter, High Point
Rhododendron, Roan Mountain

My husband and I love to hike at Roan Mountain especially during the June Catawba rhododendron bloom. In order to arrive for sunrise on Grassy Ridge, however, we had to leave our house a little after 1 a.m. After enjoying and photographing a beautiful sunrise, I was attracted to this location where I could compose a photograph with fresh close-up blooms as well as more distant blooms in warm, early morning light. We both agreed that our effort was worth the experience!

(Nikon D300s, Nikkor 18–200mm lens at 18mm, f/22, 1/25 of a second, with the aid of a reflector)



**WILD PLANTS
THIRD PLACE**

Stephen Atkins, Weaverville
Fiddlehead, Weaverville

After learning about the Fibonacci sequence from my young nephew, my children and I went for a hike on our property looking for examples in nature to photograph. When we returned, we had enough fiddlehead pictures to fill a bucket.

(Nikon D80, Sigma 150mm macro lens, ISO 200, f/16, 1/4 of a second, Aperture priority)





OUTDOOR RECREATION FIRST PLACE

Scott Hotaling, Cullowhee
Hiker, Hawksbill Mountain

Adventure — that was the goal of this photograph. I wanted the audience to get a feel for the same adventure I experienced accessing this location on a cold, winter morning. A good friend who is a fellow photographer and I made a long trek down snowy, unplowed roads to the trailhead followed by a hike through dark, snow-covered woods. The rocky outcroppings at the top provided the perfect location for watching the sunrise and a dramatic setting.

(Canon 5D Mark II, Canon 17–40mmL lens at 17mm, ISO 400, f/14, 1/125 of a second)

OUTDOOR RECREATION SECOND PLACE

Jake Orr, Topsail Beach
Rameseas, off Morehead City

I captured this image during the Big Rock Blue Marlin Tournament in Morehead City aboard the *Rameseas* in June of 2011. Each morning during the tournament, upward of 60 boats make their way out of the inlet just before dawn, racing east past Cape Lookout as the sun breaks the horizon. The picturesque sportfishers rigged for a day offshore creates a one-of-a-kind sight that I was fortunate to capture in this photograph.

(Canon EOS Digital Rebel XTi, Canon 17–40mm f/4 L lens at 18mm, ISO 400, f/3.5, 3/10 of a second, Canon Speedlight 430 EX II)



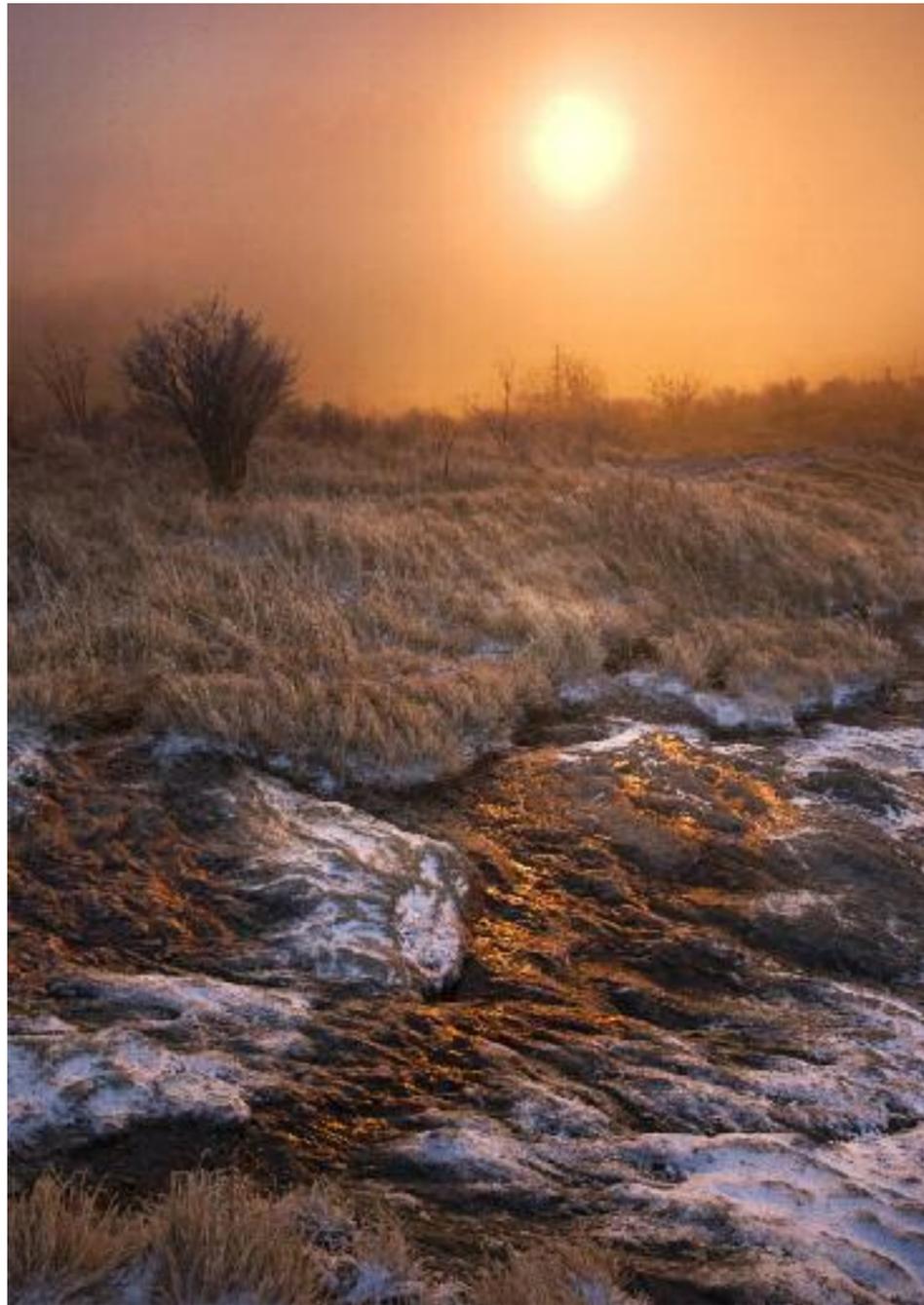
OUTDOOR RECREATION THIRD PLACE

Charles English, Wilmington
Surfer, Wrightsville Beach

This photo was taken on Wrightsville Beach the afternoon after Hurricane Irene passed. I went down to the beach to check the surf and get some shots of the passing storm. I noticed a surfer walking towards me and got down low to the ground to get him entering the photo and to get the dark clouds and the surf. The surfer looked liked he was surfed out. I converted it to black-and-white for impact.

(Canon 5D Mark II, Canon 24–105mm lens ISO 400, f/14, 1/160 of a second, AV mode)





WILD LANDSCAPES FIRST PLACE

Scott Hotaling, Cullowhee

Frozen field near Black Balsam, Blue Ridge Parkway

What looks like a summer evening with trickling water and grasses is actually a brutally cold, frozen sunrise landscape. The light dusting of snow is often mistaken for sand. To make the photograph work, I wanted to capture a sense of depth. This frozen trickle surrounded by icy grasses served as a great leading line into the foggy winter sunrise. A two-stop hard graduated neutral density filter was used to balance the exposure.

(Canon 5D Mark II, Canon 17–40 lens at 20mm, ISO 250, f/16, 1/15 of a second)



WILD LANDSCAPES SECOND PLACE

Wick Smith, Fayetteville

Calloway Peak, Grandfather Mountain

I began my hike at 4:30 a.m. from the parking lot of the swinging bridge at Grandfather Mountain. I followed the Profile Trail for about one mile to the Attic Window peak. I was hoping to get a sunrise shot from that location. The wind was blowing about 20–30 mph, and the dense fog was racing over the mountain. It occasionally cleared enough in 30-second increments to see Calloway Peak and the sun beyond. This was taken at 6:20 a.m., just after sunrise in one of the few opportunities I had.

(Canon 5D Mark II, Canon 24–105mm lens 4.0 at 47mm, ISO 100, f/18, 1/15 of a second)

WILD LANDSCAPES THIRD PLACE

John Riley, Raleigh

Swirling leaves, Wilson Creek

I found this little cascade while searching for leaf-filled pools at Wilson Creek during the fall of 2010. The brilliant golden glow from the backlit fall canopy made this spot special. Notice the whiter water on the right edge of the cascade shaded by overhanging rock. To get an exposure long enough to show movement of the leaves, I used two polarizing filters.

(Nikon D700, Nikkor 28–70mm lens at 28 mm, ISO 100, f/22, 8 seconds)





ANIMAL BEHAVIOR FIRST PLACE

Charles English, Wilmington

White ibises, Airlie Gardens

This photo was taken at Airlie Gardens in Wilmington. While I was walking one morning in the gardens around 11a.m., I noticed all the white ibises in this dead tree that the birds like to land on. I took some shots but didn't like them. I came back next morning and they landed about the same time. They all were jockeying for position on the limbs. Two of them just could not get along. This is what I focused on. I named it "A Misunderstanding."

(Canon 5D Mark IV, Canon 70–200mm lens 2.8 with 2x tc, ISO 800, f/13, 1/1250 of a second, manual mode)

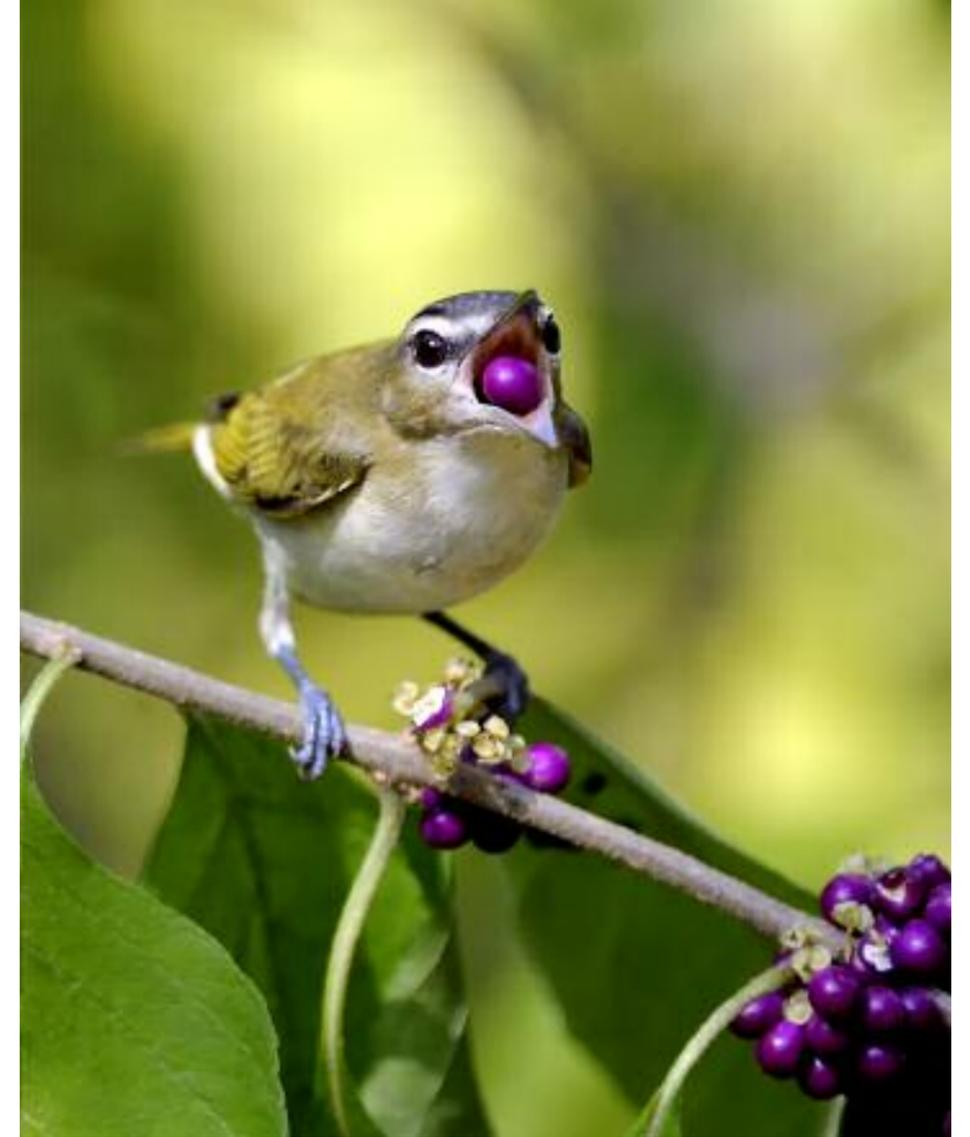
**ANIMAL BEHAVIOR
SECOND PLACE**

James Parnell, Wilmington

Red-eyed vireo, Wilmington

About two years ago a beauty berry (*Calli-carpa americana*) plant came up in my wooded backyard about 30 feet from a family room window. Last fall it was loaded with berries, and a variety of birds were feasting on the berries. I opened the nearest window blind and set my camera in the open window. The red-eyed vireo was one of the several species photographed, but was the only one that I captured in the process of swallowing a berry whole.

(Nikon D3s, Nikkor 600mm f/4 lens with 1.4 tc, ISO 1,600, f/5.6, 1/1,000 of a second)



**ANIMAL BEHAVIOR
THIRD PLACE**

Ed Erkes, Seven Springs

Wood ducks, Seven Springs

The image was taken on a foggy morning on my 1-acre backyard pond last spring, where I've been photographing wood ducks for the past year and a half. The hen is performing a courtship behavior called allopreening. The behavior, when a duck preens the feathers of its mate, is thought to strengthen the pair bond. The ducks on my pond are very skittish, and all photography has to be performed from a camouflaged blind. The wood ducks feed on my pond each morning and evening. I have to be in my blind before they begin to arrive at about 30 minutes prior to sunrise. I leave the blind after they leave the area, usually about 9.

(Nikon D700, Sigma 300–800mm lens, ISO 1600, f/5.6, 1/400 of a second)





YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17
FIRST PLACE

Lucas Bobay, Holly Springs
Hummingbird, Holly Springs

After taking out the trash, I noticed this hummingbird flying around a light in my garage, so I ran inside and grabbed my camera. I climbed up onto our boat to get at eye-level with the bird, and began shooting. The hummingbird's speed and the dark surroundings proved to be a challenge, but I managed to capture the bird illuminated against the black background. Fortunately, the hummingbird found its way out of the garage a few minutes later.

(Canon EOS 7D, Canon EF 70-200mm f/4 lens, ISO 2000, f/4.5, 1/1250 of a second, Manual Mode)

YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17
SECOND PLACE

Alyssa Hester, Cornelius
Green tree frog, Wendell

My grandfather had wanted to photograph a green tree frog for a while, so one day while I was out with him we found this one in a tube that my grandfather set up. Photographing the frog was fun, but required patience because it kept jumping everywhere and we had to try to catch it and put it back on the branch. This is a neat little creature and has a unique color and look to it. Very eye catching—that is if you can spot him.

(Canon EOS 30D, Canon EF 70-300mm f/4-5.6 IS USM lens at 300mm, ISO 1600, f/5.6, 1/125 of a second. Standard flash on camera used)



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17
THIRD PLACE

Jacob Thomas, Waxhaw
Fly, Fairview

I was at my grandma's house talking about my week at school on her glider swing, when suddenly I stopped my chatter and pulled out my camera. A fly had just landed right next to me and it was too good for the photographer in me to pass up. In one swift motion, I documented this simple fly's landing. This picture captures the simple beauty in the everyday things we take for granted.

(Olympus SZ-31MR; ISO 80, f/4.4, 1/200 of a second)





**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13–17
HONORABLE MENTION**

Kirby Samantha Lau, Hillsborough
Dandelion, Hillsborough

The clear blue sky and vibrant yellow petals of a dandelion formed the perfect contrast for a simple picture with a high influence from the idea of changing perspectives. My thought was that the viewer would be given the opportunity to see the world from the eyes of a beetle, or maybe a bee. These creatures seen as insignificant by many, actually make an impact in our ecosystem.

(Canon EOS Rebel T3, Canon 18–55mm lens at 55mm, ISO 320, f/5.6, 1/800 of a second, Automatic setting)



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13–17
HONORABLE MENTION**

Kelly McLendon, Wilmington
Broadhead skink, Wilmington

I was sitting on the front porch with my mom this past summer in Wilmington when she saw this huge lizard on the bricks. I ran in to get my camera and was lucky to get this shot because he ran away very quickly after the picture was taken. I just used the automatic setting on my Nikon Coolpix P80. My dad looked at the picture and thinks it might have been a broadhead skink, but this is the first time that I have ever seen anything like that here.

(Nikon CoolPix P80, 21mm, ISO 141, f/4.5, 1/60 of a second)



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13–17
HONORABLE MENTION**

Julia Sonis, Chapel Hill
Mating toads, Chapel Hill

Every year we go down to the creek behind my house to watch the toads gather in mating season. The male toads are so excited that they will sometimes grasp onto your fingers because they think you might be a female toad. We make this trip every year, and this year, I borrowed my mom's camera to take some pictures of the toads. It is a cool place that has beavers and many other animals.

(Canon 7D, Canon 70–300mm L lens, ISO 1250, f/7.1, 1/250 of a second)



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
FIRST PLACE**

Emma Kate Halstead, Walkertown
Bumblebee on sedum, Walkertown

I took this photo last September in my yard on some sedum blooms. This bumblebee was very cooperative and let me take a bunch of pictures of it, and this was the best one. I love the detail on its fuzz and wing. The flowers were in full bloom and bees were all over them. I took this photo with my mom's camera.

(Nikon D40, 85mm lens, ISO 800, f/8)



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
SECOND PLACE**

Emma Kate Halstead, Walkertown

Grasshopper, Walkertown

I took this photograph in my yard on a sunny day in July 2012. My mom and I were walking around when we saw this cute little grasshopper that looked like it was smiling, and I decided to take a picture of it. It was sitting on some wilting iris plants. I took this picture with my mom's camera.

(Nikon D40, 85mm lens, ISO 800, f/8)



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
THIRD PLACE**

Susanna Swicegood, Shelby

Skink, Shelby

I like looking at *Wildlife in North Carolina* magazines. When I saw the photo contest, my daddy and I thought I should enter. I got my mom's camera and started shooting. This five-lined skink was running around on our deck, and I was taking pictures of it. It stopped in this position and I thought it would make a great picture, so I snapped it. Later, when I looked at it, I thought it looked really neat the way the stripes on his back went one way and the wood grain went the other way.

(Sony DSC-H20, 63mm focal length, ISO 80, f/4.4, 1/640 of a second, flash)



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
HONORABLE MENTION**

Zane Carlson, Swannanoa

Rainbow web, Blue Ridge Parkway

Getting a spider web to show up in pictures is hard. I saw this spider web with rainbows in it and really wanted a good picture of it. I decided to zoom in and push the exposure value button all the way to the darkest setting so the background would be black and the spider web would show.

(Sony Cyber-Shot DSC-HXS5, Sony G 10x optical zoom lens at 42.5mm, ISO 400, f/5.5, 1/250 of a second)



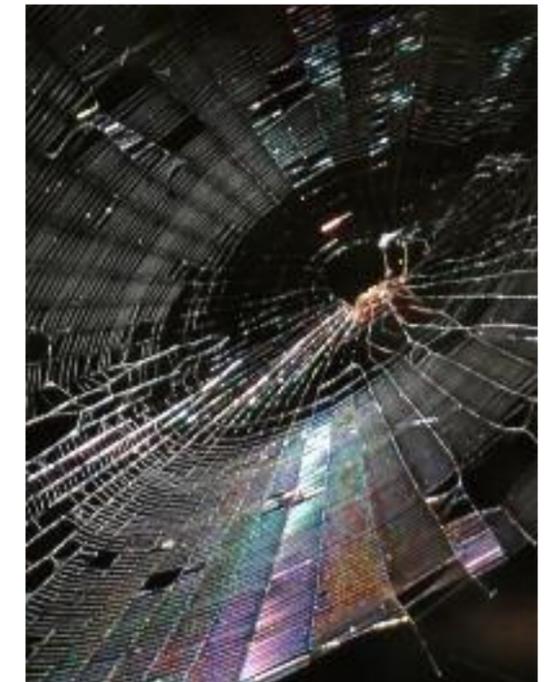
**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
HONORABLE MENTION**

Coleman Davis, Swan Quarter

Pearl crescents, Lake Mattamuskeet

In July I took a lot of walks near my home so I could learn how to identify butterflies and dragonflies. I always carried a camera with a macro lens so I could photograph the species I saw and then identify them later. I took this picture on a warm morning while walking along a path near Lake Mattamuskeet. This pair of pearl crescents allowed me to get very close.

(Canon EOS 50D, 60mm lens, ISO 640, f/4.97, 1/3200 of a second)



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
HONORABLE MENTION**

Julia Scruggs, Huntersville

Fawn, Huntersville

I have always wanted to enter the *Wildlife in North Carolina* photo contest. I got a camera for Christmas last year and took pictures all year but not one of them seemed like a winner. Then one day my dad came back from mowing on his tractor and said come quick and see this fawn! So I grabbed my camera and we walked down to the field and found it curled up.

(Sony DSC-S2100, ISO 100, f/5.4, 1/500 of a second, flash)