



WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2017 PHOTO COMPETITION

For the second straight year, the *Wildlife in North Carolina* Photo Competition produced a “first.” In 2016, Frank Ellison became the first photographer to win the Grand Prize two years in a row. The 2017 Photo Competition ended with our first Grand Prize photograph taken with a drone after Kevin Nestvogel took home top honors with his shot of the salt marsh in New Hanover County.

“I have been droning for about two and a half years,” said Nestvogel, a 25-year-old Wilmington resident who beat out roughly 1,800 entries to win the Photo Competition. “I’ve never won a photo contest before, so I’m stoked! I briefly skimmed the [congratulatory] email. My heart started racing and I read it again. I was at the office and I felt like I needed to scream.”

Nestvogel works as a video producer in the marketing department for Live Oak Bank in Wilmington, where he does photography as well as video. Nestvogel operates his own photo service on the side called Nested Photography, which focuses on landscape and print photography. His personal photographs can be seen at nestedphotography.com.

The winning photograph was taken from a drone roughly 350 feet off the ground. Look closely, and white birds are visible in the picture. Nestvogel said he repositioned the drone after spotting the birds so that he could capture them against a water backdrop. “The photo was taken right behind Wrightsville,” he said. “It’s so well-preserved. It’s like some remote place.”

Drones are becoming more common but still do not come cheap. Nestvogel estimates the price point for a good drone and camera is about \$500 to \$600 dollars on up. A higher price tag comes with “better video, faster speed and better stabilization,” he said.

“Like every year we have many amazing images submitted to the competition,” said *Wildlife in North Carolina* Art Director Marsha Tillett. “The winning photograph for this year grabbed the attention of all the judges. Maybe it was the unique perspective, a look at the world in a different way, or the well utilized light. But we were all drawn to it. This photograph is dynamic. There is a lot of visual interest in this image but the elements are not competing. It is balanced and well-composed.”

The other judges for this year’s competition included staff graphic designers Amy Friend and Bryant Cole and staff photographer Melissa McGaw. Also serving as judge was Mike Dunn, a retired senior manager of outreach at the N.C. Museum of Natural History and a veteran nature photographer.

A tip of the WINC cap goes to Neil Jernigan of Snow Hill, who placed second in four different categories this year, showing keen skill on different subjects.

All winning photographs will be on exhibit at the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh and on our website at ncwildlife.org.

—Mike Zlotnicki

GRAND PRIZE WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2017 PHOTO COMPETITION



Kevin Nestvogel, Wrightsville Beach

The maze

It was a brisk January morning, the sun had just begun to peak over the horizon, the tide was ebbing, and a cloudless sky illuminated the golden-brown marsh grass. As I took flight [with my drone], I was instantly mesmerized by the organic curves of the [Intracoastal] Waterway and started clicking away with the shutter. Before long my fingers became numb from the cold. I paused for a brief moment to take in the marsh’s beauty when suddenly a few birds came into frame and caught my attention. I quickly recomposed and waited for their flight path to intersect the contrasting clear blue water and I snapped this picture. Without the birds, the landscape would not have been brought to scale. In that moment, I realized I captured something special.

(DJI Inspire 1 drone with the Zenmuse X3 camera at 20mm, f2.8, 1/100 of a second, ISO 100)



BIRDS FIRST PLACE

Kirk Pullen, Mount Olive

Snowy egret

I was near a pond that had several birds perched on sunken tree branches. I made sure to walk slowly and take a few steps at a time so as to not startle them. My technique wasn't quite good enough because all the birds except one flew away. Lucky for me, this egret hung around for portraits. I took a few shots and noticed that if I changed my angle the lighthouse would be in the background. I got some good shots of the bird with the lighthouse before moving again, a few more steps around. I noticed that the calm water and unique branches would frame the bird even better. The lesson I learned is always search for different angles because it can take a good photo and turn it into an extraordinary one.

(Nikon D750, Sigma 150–600mm lens at 280mm, f/8, 1/800 of a second, ISO 1,600)

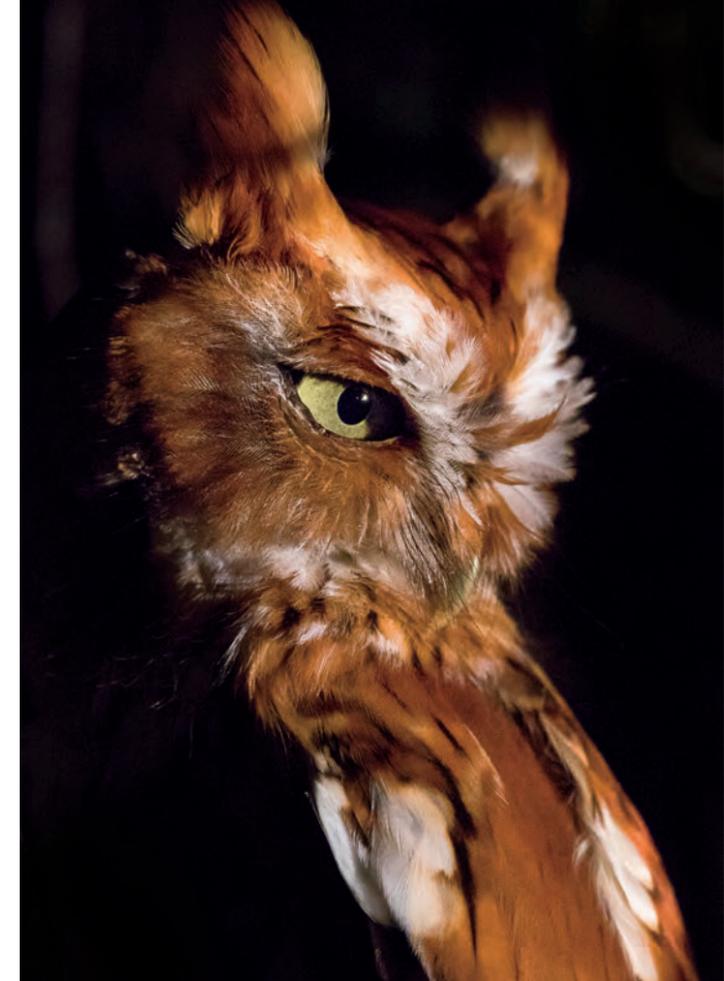
BIRDS SECOND PLACE

Neil Jernigan, Snow Hill

Screech owl

Late one evening, I discovered this screech owl hunting on the edge of a field. It was sitting on a limb just a few feet off the ground, giving me a great opportunity to photograph it. I created this image, along with others, by using a small handheld flashlight. After a few minutes of photographing, I decided it was best not to disturb the owl and left it there to hunt. I've seen and photographed this owl on several occasions.

(Canon 7D Mark II, Sigma 150–600mm lens, f/6.3, 1/250 of a second, ISO 3,200, flashlight)



BIRDS THIRD PLACE

Kimberly Brookbank, Greenville

Bobwhite singing

I had the opportunity to observe this male bobwhite quail while I was driving through Pungo Refuge. I had my windows down and heard him before I saw him sitting on a mound of dirt near the edge of the road. I eased my car up on the opposite side of the road and listened to him as he sang his heart out.

(Nikon D5, Nikon 600mm f4 lens, f/4, 1/4,000 of a second, ISO 640)





MAMMALS FIRST PLACE

Sujata Roy, Morrisville

Cottontail rabbit

This photo was taken around the front yard of our apartment in Morrisville in June 2016. I put out apple peels for the birds to feed on, which attracted these rabbits and squirrels, too. I had noticed a few of the rabbits had a white eye patch in their retina. I researched and found out that it is a cataract, and the animal does fine with it. I always lie low to capture these beautiful creatures and this one glanced at me. I was lucky to get the face straight on the frame. It has a white eye patch on its right eye. I edited the image to black and white to make it look dramatic.

(Canon EOS 7D Mark II, Canon 100–400mm 4.5-5.6 L IS II USM lens at 400mm, f/5.6, 1/640 of a second, ISO 1,250)

MAMMALS SECOND PLACE

Alan Clark, Raleigh

Gray squirrel

It was fun watching this gray squirrel and capturing a photo of it “sitting down” for a meal of tender red maple seeds with its tail resting on a branch behind it. The photo was further enhanced by the beautiful morning light and colorful seeds.

(Nikon D500, Nikon 500mm f/4 lens and Nikon 1.4x teleconverter at 700mm, f/8, 1/1,600 of a second, ISO 800)



MAMMALS THIRD PLACE

Riley Beck, High Point

Raccoon

This raccoon photo was actually taken in my backyard in the city of High Point. I had gone outside to get some things out of my car one morning and I must have spooked the little guy. I saw him run up a tree, so I quickly ran inside to grab my camera. Thankfully, he let me snap a few photos before running off.

(Nikon D7200, Nikkor 55–300mm f/4.5–5.6 lens at 300mm, f/5.6, 1/125 of a second, ISO 12,800)





REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS FIRST PLACE

Dustin Smith, Asheboro

Copperhead snake

I observed this copperhead for a few minutes, following as it slithered through the leaf litter around rocks and over a few logs. As it peered over one more log, it stopped momentarily and that's when I took the shot. Copperheads are one of the most attractive snakes in the state, unfortunately, they are underappreciated and too often persecuted. This guy was lucky, because the only shot I was taking was with my camera. It was my first attempt at using a wide-angle lens, as I was hoping to capture the beauty of the animal in its habitat.

(Canon 5D Mark II, Rokinon 14mm f/2.8 lens, f/2.8, 1/50 of a second, ISO 1,000)

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

SECOND PLACE

Gary Carter, McLeansville

Three frogs

The “three wise frogs” were photographed in a small pool in my parent’s backyard in McLeansville. As I was mowing, I noticed the frogs sitting on the water tube in the pool. I decided to use a telephoto lens to keep some distance between me and the frogs, to isolate them and hopefully not scare them. I was fortunate the frogs sat still and didn’t jump.

(Canon 7D Mark II, Canon 200–400mm lens plus built in 1.4x extender at 560mm, f/16, 1/40 of a second, ISO 200)



REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

THIRD PLACE

Anton Sorokin, Greenville

Toad in grass

Spadefoot toads spend most of their time underground and only emerge after heavy rains. So when heavy rains swept through Greenville I knew there was a good chance of spadefoot activity. As soon as the rain stopped, I took my gear and went out into the forest. I was able to find this large spadefoot, which was very tolerant of me photographing it. With such a willing subject and by lying on the forest floor I was able to get a perspective emphasizing some of his best features!

(Nikon D810, Laowa 15mm lens, f/12, 1/50 of a second, ISO 800, Nikon SB 800 flash)





INVERTEBRATES FIRST PLACE

Dianne Stankiewicz, Raleigh

Praying mantis

This image was taken in February 2017 and features one of the first praying mantis nymphs to emerge from an egg case that I found in my yard in Raleigh the previous September. I waited patiently with great anticipation for the first one to appear. I thought the colors and texture of this dried leaf made the perfect platform for this macro nymph portrait. It was a fascinating experience to watch these tiny insects emerge and develop. I hope I am lucky enough to experience it again.

(Canon 70D, Canon 50mm portrait lens using a 10x magnification filter attachment, f/8, 1/250 of a second, ISO 400)

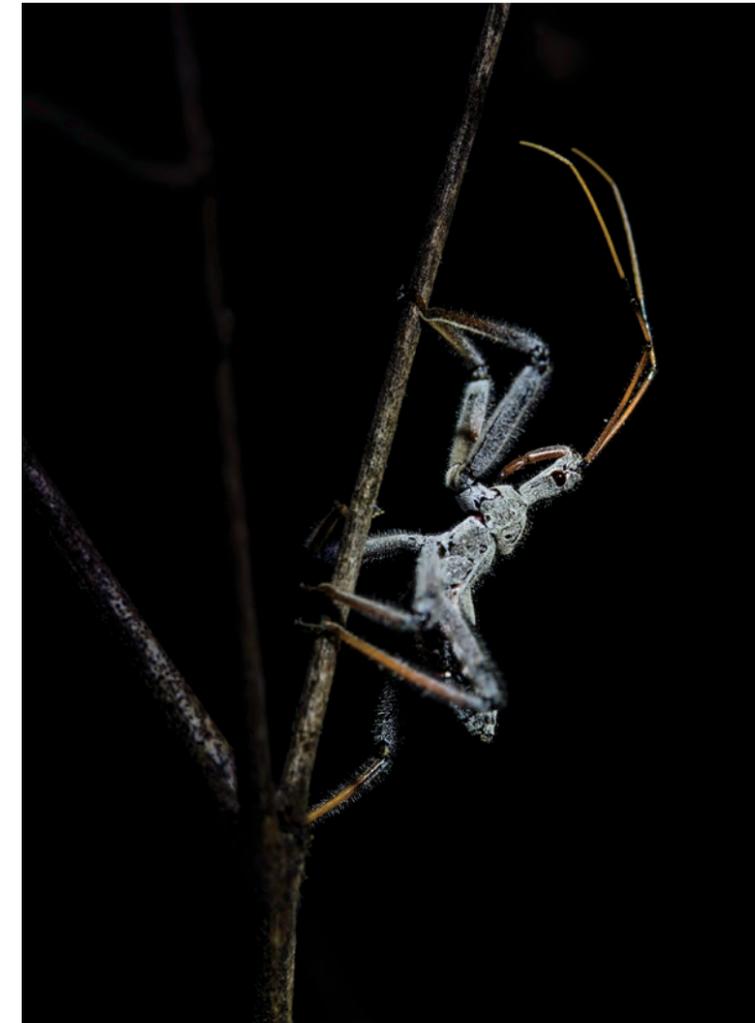
INVERTEBRATES SECOND PLACE

Neil Jernigan, Snow Hill

Assassin bug

One night while photographing frogs and insects, I happened upon this assassin bug. The way it was resting on a dead twig caught my attention. It took a minute or two to get the lighting just right using an off-camera flash. But I was able to manipulate the light in a way that made the background fall completely dark.

(Canon 5D Mark III, Canon 100mm lens, f/8, 1/160 of a second, ISO 800, off-camera flash)



INVERTEBRATES THIRD PLACE

Kirk Pullen, Mount Olive

Fly on railing

While flies can be annoying to most people, they make good subjects to photograph. This one sat still on my parents' porch railing for quite a while. I didn't notice it until after I took the photo, but this fly seems to be wearing flip flops, which makes sense because the house is only about a mile from the ocean. I rested my lens on the railing 3 to 4 inches away from the fly and took the photograph.

(Nikon D750, Tokina 100mm 2.8 lens, f/14, 1/500 of a second, ISO 1,600)





WILD PLANTS FIRST PLACE

Eric Abernathy, Asheboro

Ferns and pitcher plants

The bracken fern and pitcher plants were photographed in a portion of the Sandhills in Scotland County. I wanted to give the viewer a bug's eye view to what it must be like looking up from the ground at the plants towering above. To help with the perspective, I photographed with a fisheye lens placed on the ground looking up.

(Nikon D300, Nikon 10.5mm fisheye lens, f/8, 1/250 of a second, ISO 400)

WILD PLANTS SECOND PLACE

Neil Jernigan, Snow Hill

Mushroom spores

While searching for frogs late one night, I discovered this oyster mushroom growing on a dead tree. At first glance it appeared to be smoking, but it was actually releasing millions of spores. I knew this was something special and needed to figure out a creative way to photograph it. I used a small handheld flashlight and an off-camera flash. I worked for several minutes, experimenting with different lighting techniques and I was able to create this image.

(Canon 5D Mark III, Canon 17–40mm lens, f/8, 1/200 of a second, ISO 100, off-camera flash)



WILD PLANTS THIRD PLACE

Matt Williams, Cornelius

Wild raspberry bud

While on a hiking trip to the North Carolina mountains last summer, I found a patch of wild purple flowering raspberry bushes that were in full bloom. I started taking some macro photos of the flowers, and this particular bud just starting to open caught my eye. I really liked the texture, color and intricate folding of the petals inside of the bloom. I also thought the texture of the glandular hairs on the outside of the sepal were very interesting. I wanted to get a really close shot to show off all of these details, which was challenging with the breezy conditions and using such a shallow depth of field. After several attempts, this shot really captured what I was going for.

(Nikon D500, Tokina 100mm 2.8 macro lens, f/5.6, 1/400 of a second, ISO 800)





OUTDOOR RECREATION FIRST PLACE

Karl Chiang, Greenville

Beach camp

This was taken in early May 2017 while on an overnight camping expedition with three of my friends just prior to a Carolina Nature Photographers Association photo weekend, where we were all volunteers. I had camped at Cape Lookout before, so I was able to convince them to join me for a beach camping adventure. It was so windy that night and we had to wait until the half moon set before we could see the Milky Way. While waiting until 2 a.m. we decided to document our experience with a night photo of our tents lit by the moon and our headlights from inside. The stars twinkled through the clouds before finally clearing. It was a magical night with wonderful friends and a night to remember.

(Nikon D5, Nikkor 14–24mm lens at 14mm, f/4, 10 seconds, ISO 3,200, Really Right Stuff head and tripod)

**OUTDOOR RECREATION
SECOND PLACE**

Neil Jernigan, Snow Hill

Surf fisherman

Early one morning near the Bogue Inlet Pier in Emerald Isle, I noticed several fishermen casting their lines into the ocean. After getting their permission, I began to create images from different perspectives. I was laying down for a lower angle and waited for the exact moment when Jerry cast his line. It was a beautiful morning for photography and fishing.

(Canon 1DX Mark II, 70–200mm f/2.8 lens, f/2.8, 1/8,000 of a second, ISO 100)



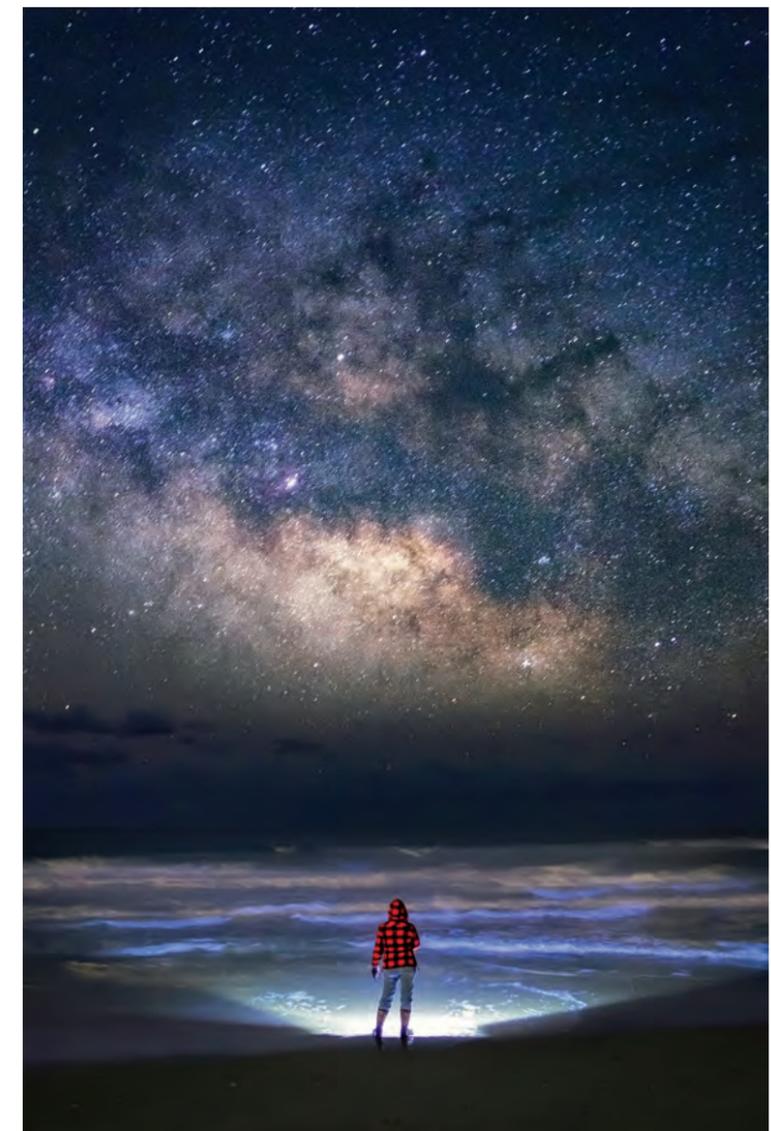
**OUTDOOR RECREATION
THIRD PLACE**

Carey Plemmons, South Mills

Outer Banks stars

It was a cold and windy morning, but so worth getting up at midnight to see the core of the Milky Way rise over the beaches of the Outer Banks. This is me and my trusty flashlight trying to stay as still as possible for the long exposure shot.

(Canon 5D MKII, Canon 24–70mm f/2.8 lens at 50mm, f/2.8, 30 seconds, ISO 3,200, taken at 4:10 a.m., Gitzo tripod, Really Right Stuff ball head)





WILD LANDSCAPES FIRST PLACE

Jack Ollis, Black Mountain

Hoar frost

The photograph of the hoar frost was taken in the Round Bald area of the Highlands of the Roan on the Appalachian Trail. I camped at 6,000 feet using a rain fly for shelter. When it got dark, heavy rain began to fall and continued throughout the night with a wind of about 30 mph. By morning there was a glaze of ice on just about everything. The 3-mile hike toward Carvers Gap seemed short because of the beauty of nature. Every blade of grass and every spruce and fir needle were coated with ice. Suddenly, the sun peeked out for a few seconds. That's when I was able to capture the beautiful sight of the sun briefly shining through the clouds and fog.

(Nikon L820, Nikkor 30X Zoom, 4.0–120 mm at 16.6m, f/4.4, 1/800 of a second, ISO 125)

WILD LANDSCAPES SECOND PLACE

Kathryn Greven, Winston-Salem

Lake Mattamuskeet

I visited Lake Mattamuskeet on Feb. 17, 2017. I drove around the area and chose a sunrise location for the next morning. As the earth turned, it was not what I had envisioned so I quickly changed locations to an area of cypress trees that I had noted the night before. The water was as still as glass and the reflections were beautiful. I was alone to witness the colors, the intricate shape of the trees and the changing light as the sun rose.

(Nikon D810 with Nikon 24–70 2.8 lens at 32mm, f/14, .4 of a second, ISO 100, Really Right Stuff tripod)



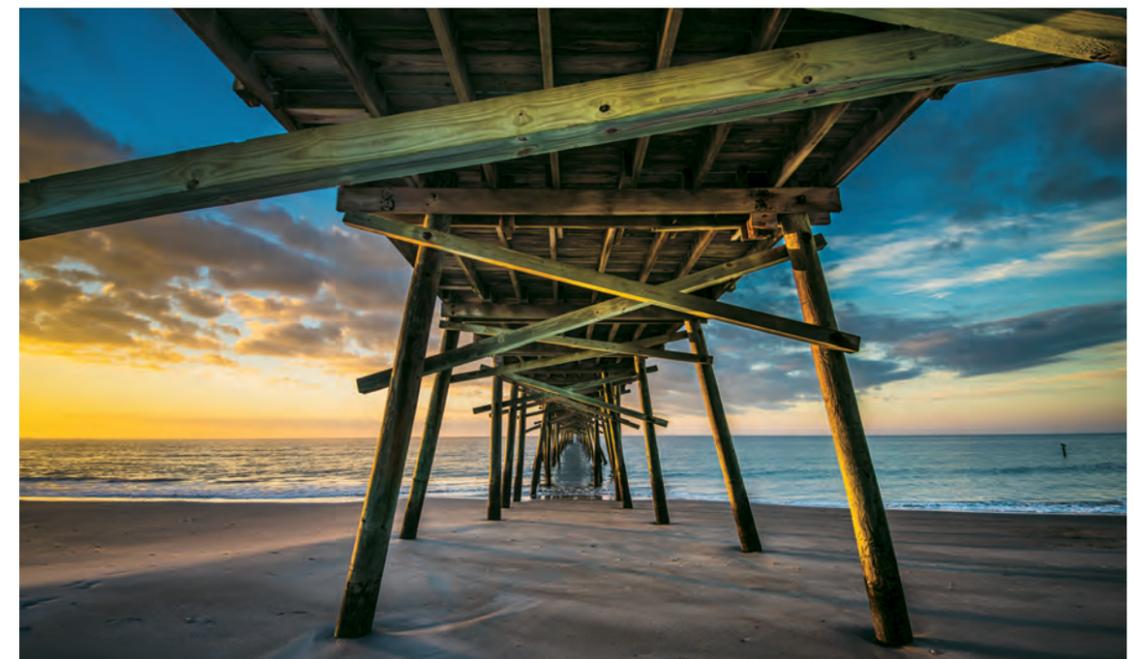
WILD LANDSCAPES THIRD PLACE

David Galyon, Morehead City

Oceanana Pier

My favorite time on the beach is sunrise in the winter. Watching the sun rise up from the ocean is quite beautiful. The Atlantic Beach shoreline runs nearly east to west, therefore the sun rises and sets in the ocean during the winter months. The morning color of the sunrise is apparent, bringing out the detail and texture of this massive structure.

(Nikon D810, Sigma 12–24mm lens at 17mm, f/5, 1/50 of a second, ISO 64)





ANIMAL BEHAVIOR FIRST PLACE

Anton Sorokin, Greenville

Toads breeding

On warm spring nights, it is possible to see Southern toads in action, like these near Greenville. Males trill from pools of water trying to attract females, but competition is fierce and not everyone finds a mate. So when a male toad finds a female, he will grab onto her back and not let go until she lays eggs and he fertilizes them. For frogs and toads, this mating grasp with the male holding onto the female's back is called amplexus. Here, I encountered two pairs seemingly warily eyeing each other. The next morning, this pool was filled with strings of toad eggs, and not soon after with plenty of tadpoles.

(Nikon D810, Tokina 10–17mm lens, f/29, 1/200 of a second, ISO 1,250, Nikon SB 800 flash)

ANIMAL BEHAVIOR SECOND PLACE

Matt Cuda, Tobaccoville

Eastern screech owl

This image is of an Eastern screech owl yawning in early morning. The image was captured at Carolina Raptor Center at a special event to raise money for wounded raptors. I like the image because it shows the screech owl with its mouth completely open and in full yawn. It is a behavior that I do not commonly see.

(Canon 1D Mark III, Sigma 150–600mm C lens at 244mm, f/6.3, 1/250 of a second, ISO 1,600)



ANIMAL BEHAVIOR THIRD PLACE

James Parnell, Wilmington

Black skimmers

This photo was taken near the large skimmer/least tern colony at the south end of Wrightsville Beach. Black skimmers frequently conduct these aerial gymnastics during nesting season, and the flights are spectacular.

(Nikon D500, 80–400mm zoom lens, f/6.3, 1/8,000 of a second, ISO 800)





YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13–17 FIRST PLACE

Emma Barnhill, Harrisburg

Tufted titmouse

I love tufted titmice but have always found them hard to capture. I saw this one perched on my neighbor's lightpost just looking over at me. After trying to zoom in and get a few shots, I realized that one of us was going to have to move, either me or the bird. As if reading my mind, the tufted titmouse flew over and landed on the rim of our basketball hoop about 10 feet away from me. I held my breath and prayed that it wouldn't fly away before I could get the shot. I managed to snap two photos. When I looked up, the bird was gone.

(Nikon D5200, Tamron 70–300mm lens at 250mm, f/5, 1/500 of a second, ISO 900)

YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13–17

SECOND PLACE

Ciara Duncan, Fletcher

Skipper butterfly

This summer I was sitting on our back porch waiting for a hummingbird to visit our feeder. When I glanced over to my right, I saw a skipper butterfly had alighted on one of our purple verbena flowers. I immediately crept quietly over to it but I was only able to take one picture before it fluttered and skipped away. It's times like this that help us to pause and take a moment to enjoy and awe at the minute details of God's magnificent creation.

(Nikon D3000, Nikkor 55–200mm 1.4–5.6 ED lens, f/5.6, 1/1,250 of a second, ISO 400)



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13–17

THIRD PLACE

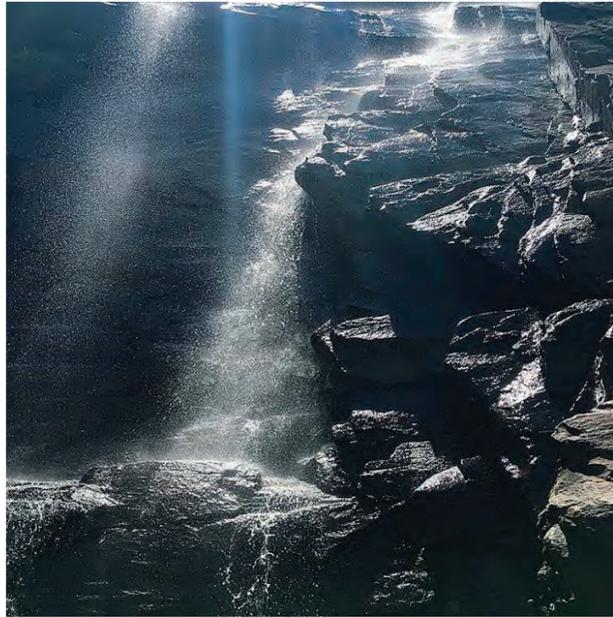
Jeffrey Bradley, Rocky Mount

Anole

This small green anole is a frequent visitor under our carport near Rocky Mount in Edgecombe County. He is approximately 5 inches long and is very fast. He darts around as he searches for small insects. On this day, he paused on a canvas bag long enough to have his picture captured. The anoles are native to North Carolina and can change from a green color to brown when needed for camouflage. We enjoy observing anoles and other small reptiles like him as wildlife in our backyard.

(Canon Rebel T2i, Tamron lens, f/7.1, 1/200 of a second, ISO 800)





YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17

HONORABLE MENTION

Sierra Schnars, Mooresville

Falls near Lake Lure

My photo was taken while we went on a day trip through the Blue Ridge Parkway with my brother and mom. I took it during our stop at Chimney Rock State Park overlooking Lake Lure. We hiked in to take photos of the falls at Lake Lure. I like how the water is bouncing off the rocks, and how the sun is gleaming through the water on its way down. When I took the picture I was actually squatting down in a small cave with an overhang across from the falls. The mist from the water was cold but refreshing.

(Iphone 6S with the normal camera settings)



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17

HONORABLE MENTION

Sean Hewitt, Richlands

Toad in grass

My brother and I were out walking our dogs in our backyard when my brother pointed out a toad nestled in the grass. I put the camera on macro mode, getting progressively closer until the toad started paying more attention. This shot shows his wariness through his slightly upright posture, yet he remained there. I really like the soft light and wonder if he could have been looking at me with just that sliver of his left eye.

(Nikon Coolpix P530, 12 mm, f/3.9, 1/50 of a second, ISO 400)



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17

HONORABLE MENTION

Ciara Duncan, Fletcher

Hummingbird

As I sat a few feet away from our hummingbird feeder, I snapped this photo of a male ruby-throated hummingbird. I have always been fascinated by hummingbirds ever since I first saw one zipping through our backyard. I was finally able to get a photo of one using my mom's camera and playing with the settings. I sat very still for about 20 minutes holding the camera to my eye. I found it relaxing to sit and watch the hummingbird on his perch high up in a tree. It was exciting to see him swoop down to sip from the feeder every so often.

(Nikon D3000, Nikkor 55-200mm 1.4-5.6 ED lens, ISO 800, f/8, 1/1,000 of a second)

YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2017 PHOTO COMPETITION



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER

FIRST PLACE

Zachary Smith, Asheboro

Spotted salamander

I started taking photography lessons from my dad when I was 9 years old. My dad and I love going "herping" [searching for reptiles and amphibians] and we are always looking for things to take photos of. I like taking photos of spotted salamanders because they are calm and they are interesting. I entered this photo because I feel like this one has a lot of detail. The salamander and the moss are in focus because they are most important to the photo.

(Canon t4i, Canon 100mm f/2.8 lens, f/2.8, 1/125 of a second, ISO 100)



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
SECOND PLACE**

George Wall, Wilmington

Beekeeping

I took this in my backyard. My mom was checking our beehive for honey. I was taking pictures to put together a slideshow for my little brother's classroom. I like how this picture is focused on the bees and their work.

(Canon EOS Rebel T2i)

**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
HONORABLE MENTION**

Madison Mays, High Point

Harris' hawk

The hawk's name is Hoppy. Madison said what she likes best about the picture is being able to see all the details in Hoppy's full outstretched wings as his feet were preparing to land. His sole focus was on the mouse in hand. This was the last flight that day for Hoppy and the mouse was his lunch. It was an awesome day flying the hawks and this picture is the greatest reminder of that day.

(Nikon D5500, Nikon 50mm lens, f/5, 1/800 of a second, ISO 1,000)



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
HONORABLE MENTION**

Drake Quincy, Tarboro

Tree frog

I was walking through our garden with my mother and saw this tree frog on one of the collard plants. I chased it around the plant for a while trying to get a good picture of it. It finally settled on this leaf and I took multiple pictures. This one was my favorite.

(Nikon Coolpix B500, Nikkor 40x 4.0-160mm, f/3, 1/250 of a second, ISO 125)



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
THIRD PLACE**

Sydney Purvis, New Bern

Dandelion

My mom and I were heading to South Carolina when we stopped at a store in Hampstead to stretch our legs. It was getting dark and I noticed a dandelion out of the corner of my eye in front of a pond. I didn't have my camera with me so I pulled out my phone and turned on the flash. I was amazed at how clear and sharp the picture turned out.

(Samsung J7 Android phone)

**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
HONORABLE MENTION**

Sydney Purvis, New Bern

Gulls

My Dad and I like to go into downtown New Bern to Union Point and take pictures of birds and ducks. On this day, someone standing beside us started throwing bread and all of the seagulls immediately flew towards us, so I started taking pictures and got this image. They were so close.

(Canon 50D, Canon 17-85mm lens, f/5, 1/1,000 of a second, ISO 320)

