



WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2009 PHOTO COMPETITION

CALL IT THE YEAR OF THE YOUNGSTER. For the first time in its five-year history, our photo competition was won by a teenager. Kaylyn J. Gruber, a 16-year-old photographer from Belmont, submitted her grand prize-winning black-and-white photo of a brown-headed cowbird chick in the Youth 13–17 category. In Wild Plants, 15-year-old Noah Boyd of Willow Spring was awarded honorable mention for his photo of dew on grass, while Youth 12 & Under saw its youngest honorable mention winner ever, 4-year-old Olivia Jordan Leigh of Pasadena, Md., who entered a picture of Hickory Nut Falls.

Gruber captured her winning image at her Gastonia high school, Highland School of Technology, in May 2009. Between classes, a friend spotted the tiny fledgling on a sidewalk and warned Gruber not to step on it. When the chick appeared unable or unwilling to move, Gruber ran to get a camera and took photographs before shooing the bird into the bushes and out of harm's way.

Gruber was not sure what species the chick was, so we sent her photo to John Gerwin, curator of birds at the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences. Gerwin identified the fledgling as a cowbird that was no more than one or two days out of the nest. He said that chicks of this size can fly despite their lack of a tail, unless they are injured. Their tail feathers develop fully over the course of about three weeks.

Gerwin also explained that the “problem” of brown-headed cowbirds, a brood parasite that lays its eggs in other birds’ nests for them to raise, was created by humans. When we extirpated their precolonial host, the bison, and altered natural landscapes to include a multitude of agricultural lots and lawns, cowbirds expanded from the Great Plains to occupy the newly created grasslands at forest edges. So whether you love or hate the brown-headed cowbird, Gruber’s photo is a great image of a species that survives exceptionally well.

The photo competition is intended to encourage high-quality nature photography and to identify talented wildlife photographers working in North Carolina. This year’s field totaled 8,802 photographs—our largest number of entries ever. In the competition’s fourth year, 1,889 photographers took part, including 216 junior shutterbugs in the two youth categories.

The most popular subject was Birds (1,532 entries), followed closely by the landscape category, Peaks, Valleys & Plains (1,472) and Invertebrates (1,305). Wild Plants received 1,172 entries and Reptiles & Amphibians 868, Animal Behavior 769, Outdoor Recreation 692, Mammals 572, Youth 13–17 227 and Youth 12 & Under 193.

We thank our corporate sponsor, Great Outdoor Provision Co., for its generous participation in this year’s competition. Valuable support was provided by our co-sponsors, the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences, the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation, and our new partner, UNC-TV and its broadcast of “Nature,” the iconic natural history public television program.

Our judges included *Wildlife in North Carolina* art director Vickie Cumbee; WINC graphic designers Marsha Tillett and Kristie Rhodes; Mike Dunn, coordinator of teacher education for the museum; and Charlie Peek, public information officer for Parks and Recreation and a former photojournalist.

All winning photographs may be seen on exhibit through March at the museum thanks to our exhibition sponsor, JW Photo of Raleigh. Various North Carolina state parks will exhibit selected photos from the competition throughout the year. Details and rules for the 2010 competition will be posted on www.ncwildlife.org in May, and entries will open on June 1. To see technical specs for many of the winning photos, visit the gallery on our web site.

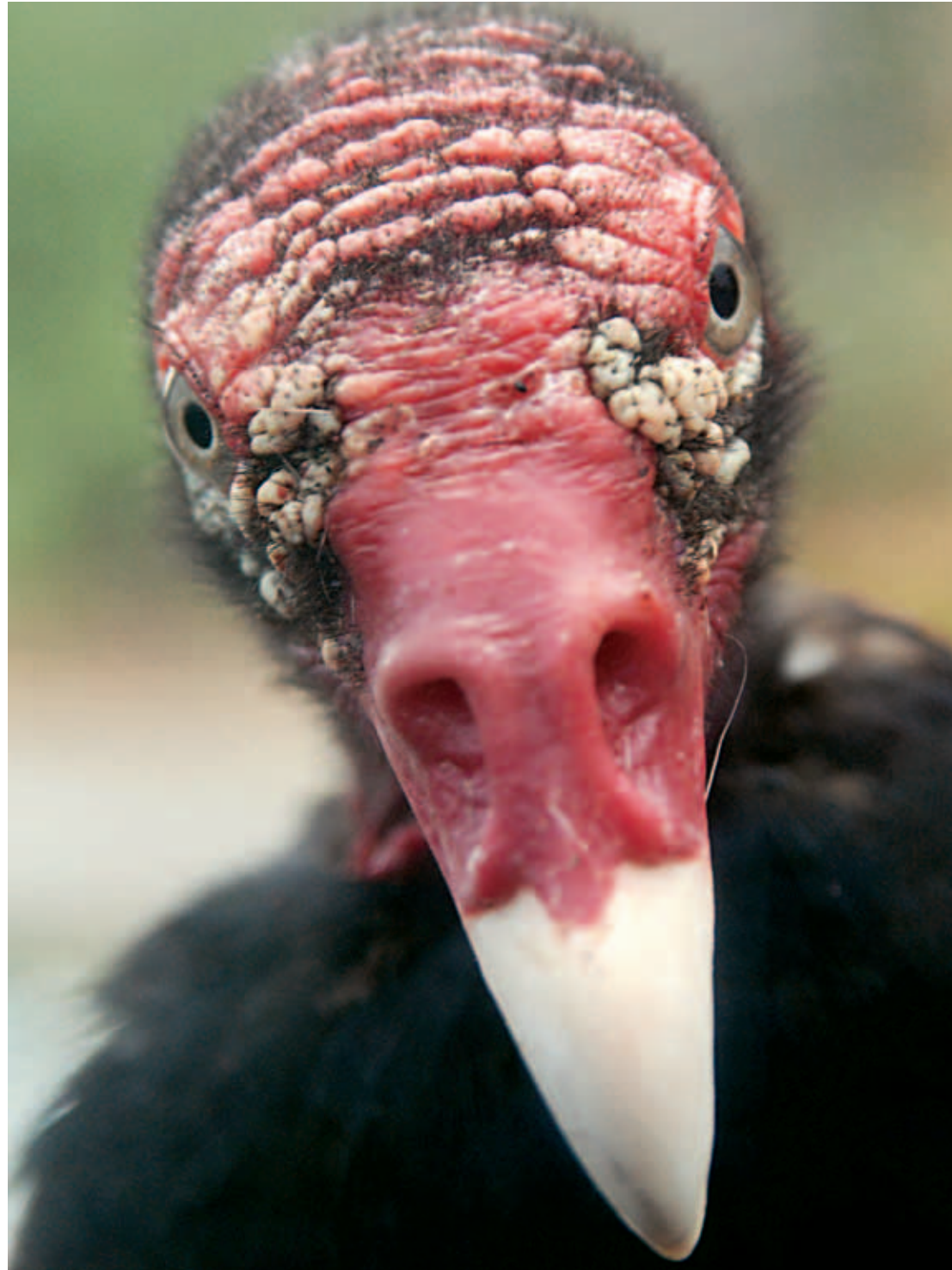
—Greg Jenkins

GRAND PRIZE WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2009 PHOTO COMPETITION



Kaylyn J. Gruber, Belmont
Brown-headed cowbird chick, Gastonia

Gruber had to take this photo quickly. The cowbird chick acted injured and did not seem able to fly, but Gruber was between high school classes and had only a few minutes to get the shot. “I think that settings were probably on something automatic,” she said. “I didn’t have any time to make adjustments on the camera. I just ran to get the camera, turned it on, and started snapping.” Gruber chose to convert the image to black-and-white to convey a serious tone. “Instead of saying, ‘Oh, what a cute bird,’” she said, “someone might consider its pain and its story.”



BIRDS FIRST PLACE

Jonathan Page, Raleigh
Turkey vulture, Raleigh

Page credits his habits of having a camera handy and being ready for anything for allowing him to capture this winning image from his Raleigh office building. When he was told that a turkey vulture was sitting outside a co-worker's window, Page swapped his primary lens for a macro. Page had his lens pressed against the window glass when the vulture turned to face him, resulting in this shot.

BIRDS SECOND PLACE

Jared Lloyd, Kill Devil Hills
Black-crowned night heron, Outer Banks

On one of his many kayak expeditions to photograph birds, Lloyd, the 2008 Grand Prize winner, spotted this night heron. Perched in the sunlight in the midst of the shade of live oak limbs, it was a perfect photo subject. He was able to approach closely in his boat without disturbing the bird.

BIRDS THIRD PLACE

Ed Erkes, Goldsboro
Belted kingfisher, Johnston County

This shot turned out to be a lot of work for Erkes, who spent parts of several days simply observing nesting belted kingfishers at a sand and gravel pit at Howell Woods. After seeing how frequently the birds returned to their nest, Erkes set up a couple of perches which the birds took to using. He tried without much success to photograph the birds for two mornings, but was successful on his third attempt.





BIRDS HONORABLE MENTION

Dana Henderson, Beaufort

Juvenile great horned owls, Newport

Henderson captured this image of a pair of juvenile great horned owls before the birds were released in September from the Outer Banks Wildlife Shelter. Henderson had entered the birds' enclosure to feed and clean them and took her camera along for a quick photo session.



BIRDS HONORABLE MENTION

Jesse Ivan, Zirconia

Killdeer in snow, Cataloochee Valley

Most people associate killdeer, a year-round resident of our state, with spring and summer grasslands. Ivan found this bird in the mountains in early December of 2008. Using his car as a blind, Ivan spent several hours working to capture this gelid image.

MAMMALS WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2009 PHOTO COMPETITION



MAMMALS FIRST PLACE

Andy Walker, Asheville

Eastern chipmunk, McLeansville

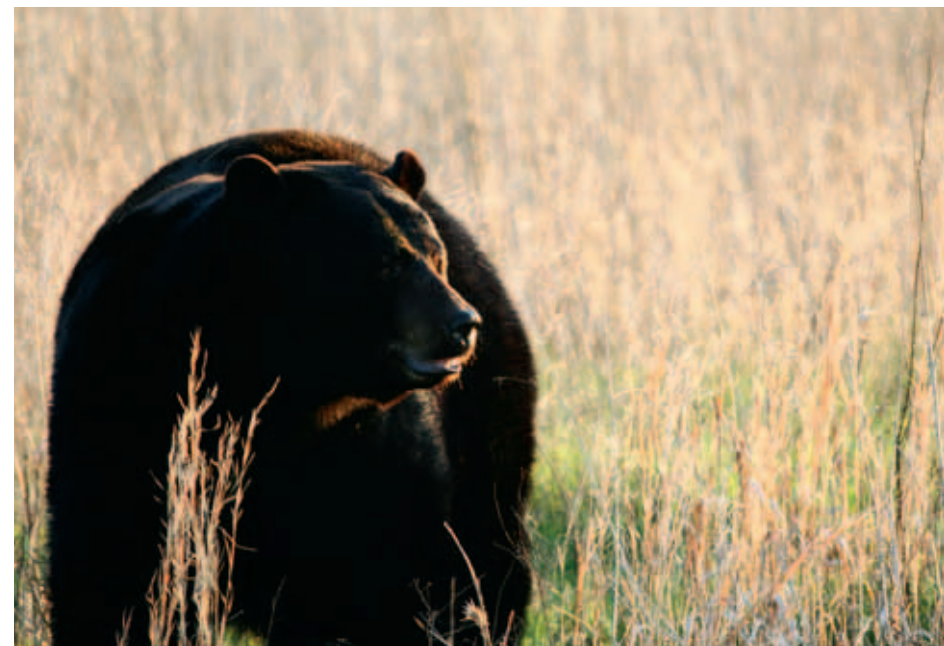
Walker was attending a photo workshop led by Jividen's Naturally Wild Photo Adventures, held in the back yard of 2007 Mammals category winner Gary Carter. This picture was taken from Carter's permanent photo blind with Walker's camera mounted on a tripod and using a flash off the camera.



MAMMALS SECOND PLACE

Wes Gubitz, Wilmington
Red fox, Hertford County

Gubitz, a past winner in the Mammals category, captured this photo on one of his many photo outings near a friend's farm. The fox had been seen a number of times near the forest edge, but for this photo taken early in the morning, it paused in exactly the right place. The fox's thick coat echoes the autumn colors of the November woods.



MAMMALS HONORABLE MENTION

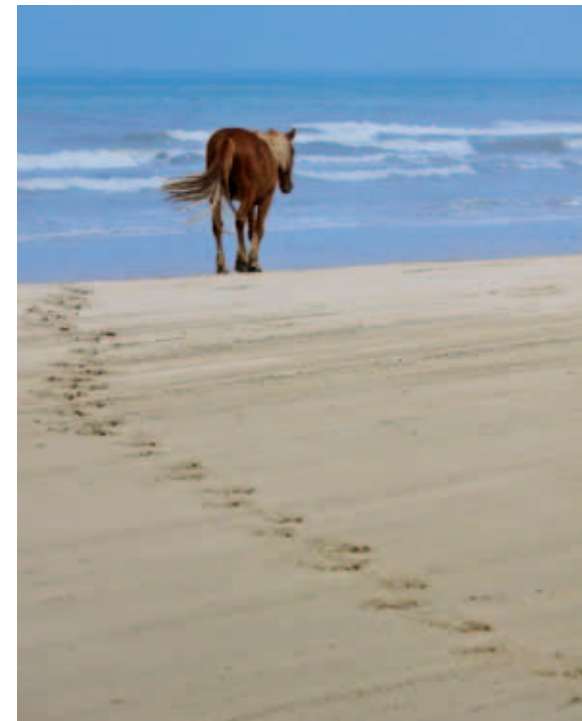
Jackie Orsulak, Duck
Black bear, Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge

Orsulak has spent so much time photographing animals at the refuge, she recognizes certain individuals. This bruin is one of many she has photographed multiple times. "It is a wonderful, magical wildlife world," Orsulak says of the refuge and its residents. "We must view them from a distance with respect."

MAMMALS HONORABLE MENTION

Jay Wickens, Powells Point
Wild horse, Corolla

A frequent photographer of the horses of the northern Currituck banks, Wickens was a bit wary of taking pictures of a horse's rear end. But as the animal continued to walk away, he liked the composition with the horse's hoof prints trailing behind and captured this photo.



MAMMALS THIRD PLACE

Bill Edmonds, Williamston
White-tailed deer, Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

Edmonds had scouted the refuge for weeks in his search for deer and bears to photograph. This young buck, with antlers still covered in velvet, gradually became familiar with the photographer and allowed him to approach and take photos for 15 minutes just before sunset.





REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS FIRST PLACE

Jared Lloyd, Kill Devil Hills
American alligator, Merchants Millpond State Park

Lloyd visited Merchants Millpond last May when he saw this alligator, the only one he had seen thus far. Lloyd followed the alligator about half a mile through the swamp until the animal crawled onto an old log. With the water temperature still fairly chilly and the alligator perhaps a bit slower because of it, Lloyd was able to move and take a shot from a position lower than the animal.

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS SECOND PLACE

Gene Furr, Raleigh
American alligator, Southport

On a day trip to some wetlands near Southport, Furr spied this alligator sunning itself. "The autumn leaves were at their peak and reflecting in the water," Furr said. "To get the angle I wanted, I had to lie on the ground to be on the same level as the alligator. I waited for almost an hour for the alligator to float into the reflections of color leaves."



REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS THIRD PLACE

Guy Livesay, Williamston
Green treefrog, Martin County

Like many of the better shots he's taken, said Livesay, this photograph came about unexpectedly. As he was working among some canna lilies, Livesay spied this little green treefrog and retrieved his camera and tripod. Eventually he was able to stick the lens of the camera into the canna funnel to snap this photograph.





REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS
HONORABLE MENTION

Guy Fortier, Apex
Snapping turtle, New Hill

While hiking the trails of Harris Lake County Park, Fortier spotted what looked like a rock covered with moss at the top of a steep pond bank. Realizing that it was a snapping turtle covered in duckweed, he lay down on the ground and inched closer until the turtle's image filled the frame at 400 mm.



REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS
HONORABLE MENTION

LeeAnne Emrick, Bridgeport, W. Va.
American alligator, Winnabow

On the last day of her vacation, Emrick visited Orton Plantation before heading back home to West Virginia. After waiting out a thunderstorm in the chapel on the plantation grounds, Emrick came upon this alligator in a lagoon.



INVERTEBRATES **FIRST PLACE**

Nicholas D'Amato, Durham
Water strider, McDowell County

D'Amato took this shot while exploring around Andrews Geysers and Mill Creek on a fall weekend trip to Asheville. He noticed the bright highlights created by the sun reflecting in the tiny indentations made by the water strider's legs on the surface of the water, and had time to fire off only two exposures before the insect moved on. The leaves at the bottom of the creek paired with the low warm sunlight give a great autumn feel to the picture.



INVERTEBRATES SECOND PLACE

Robert W. Stewart, Thomasville
Housefly, Thomasville

Stewart captured this image while shooting butterflies in his back yard. The interloping fly landed in the field of view, and Stewart fired off this razor-sharp shot with his camera in one hand and his flash in the other.

INVERTEBRATES HONORABLE MENTION

Leann Greene, Morganton
Spider on web, Morganton

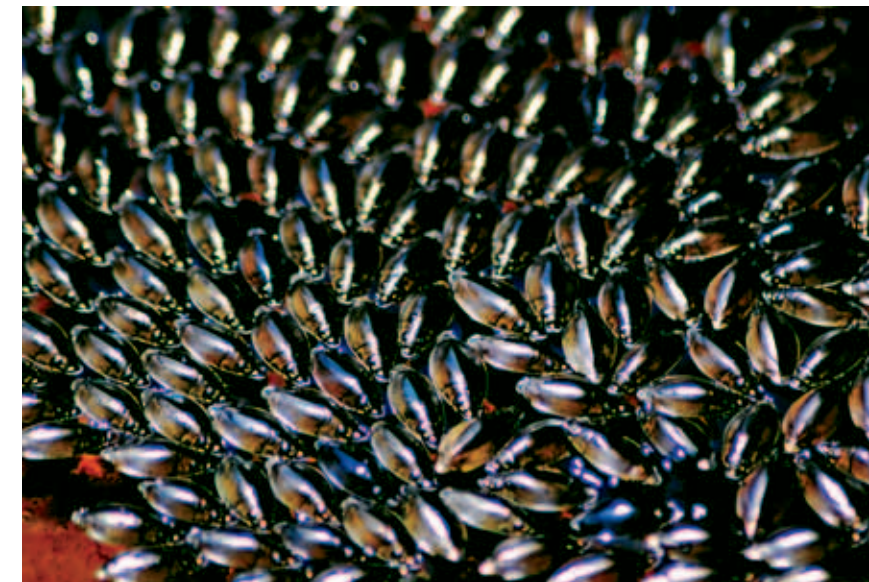
Greene, the 2008 Invertebrates category winner, lay in a wet horse pasture resting on her elbows to get this image. Because she used extension tubes for shallow depth of field, she had to get very close to the spider. "It takes a few tries to find a spider that doesn't jump out of the web when you get close to it," Greene said.



INVERTEBRATES HONORABLE MENTION

Joshua Doby, Zebulon
Whirligig beetles, Zebulon

Doby captured the interesting grouping behavior of whirligig beetles in this photo. The shiny, metallic-looking aquatic beetles live on the water's surface, where they huddle together to avoid predation.



INVERTEBRATES THIRD PLACE

Bradley Lewis, Durham
Honeybees, Raleigh

Lewis visits J.C. Raulston Arboretum on the N.C. State University campus frequently and had been working up the nerve to get macro shots of single honeybees entering and exiting a hive. He got a little too close and was stung, at which point he decided to take group shots with a zoom lens. He liked the way this photo represents the bees functioning as a colony rather than as individual workers.





WILD PLANTS FIRST PLACE

L. Branson Phillips, Durham
Dew on dandelion, Durham

Phillips was familiarizing himself with a new 100mm macro lens when he took this winning photograph of a common dandelion with dew on the seed head. "I was playing around with depth of field during the time I took it," Phillips said. "I was just seeing what the lens would do."

**WILD PLANTS
SECOND PLACE**

Leslie Bilbrey, Sylva
Water droplets on poplar leaf,
Great Smoky Mountains National Park

During a walk in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in October 2008, Bilbrey's eye was attracted by this poplar leaf lying on the ground and adorned with raindrops.

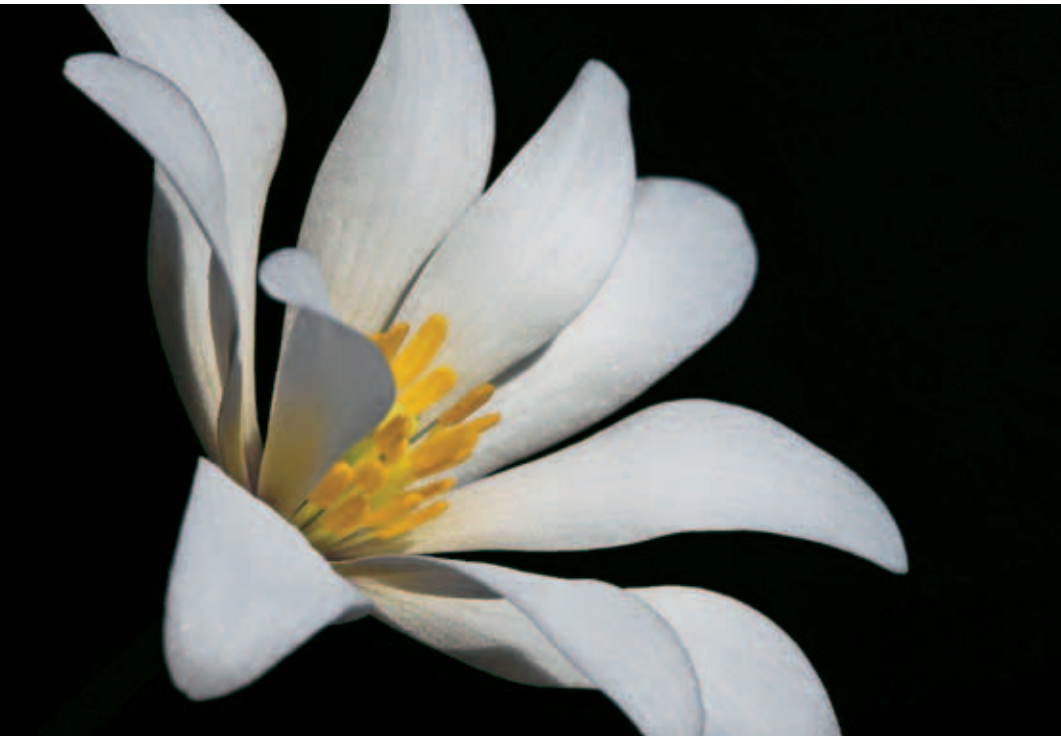


**WILD PLANTS
THIRD PLACE**

Wendy Gem, Wake Forest
Moss close-up, Wake Forest

Gem used a field scope with her camera for magnification in natural light to capture this unique photograph of moss. "I enjoy photographing the plants that many people overlook, and I think that mosses have such unique form," Gem said. "They are in the division of bryophytes, or early terrestrial plants, which explains why they prefer moist places."





WILD PLANTS
HONORABLE MENTION

Ronnie Hodge, West Union, S.C.
Bloodroot, Pisgah National Forest

Hodge, his wife and some friends were hiking along Avery Creek in Pisgah National Forest looking for early wildflowers. They had seen few until they reached Twin Falls, where they found a hillside covered in bloodroot. "There was one bloom that stood out to me," Hodge said, "and I loved the way the light was hitting it."

WILD PLANTS
HONORABLE MENTION

Noah Boyd, Willow Spring
Dew on grass, Willow Spring

After photographing a sunrise, Boyd noticed this patch of dew-soaked grass. "I laid on the wet ground, turned on the macro and snapped the shot," he said. The judges agreed that the scene was eye-catching.



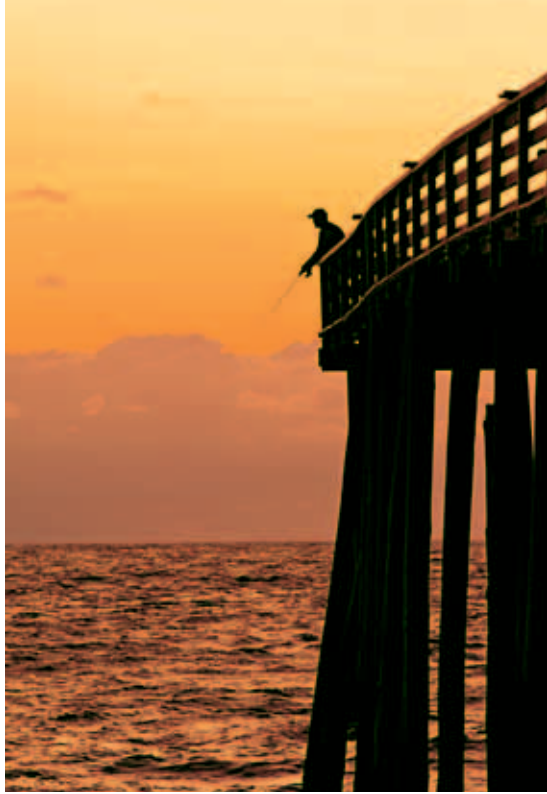
OUTDOOR RECREATION WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2009 PHOTO COMPETITION



OUTDOOR RECREATION FIRST PLACE

Nicholas D'Amato, Durham
Surf fisherman, Southern Shores

D'Amato was vacationing on the same street as this angler and struck up a conversation with him, after which D'Amato headed in for breakfast and the fisherman settled in for a pleasant morning. "His pose, holding his pipe while staring at his fishing rod hopefully, yet not impatiently, reminds me of the slower pace of life and the calm I feel while on the Outer Banks," D'Amato said.



OUTDOOR RECREATION
SECOND PLACE

Daniel Waters, Point Harbor
Pier fisherman, Kitty Hawk

Waters initially went out on Kitty Hawk Pier to take photos, but the angler kept getting in his way. Discouraged, he set up his tripod on the beach and realized that the same fisherman was now the subject of the photo. Early morning light and choppy seas completed the pleasing composition.



OUTDOOR RECREATION
THIRD PLACE

Robert Daniel Swords, Raleigh
Skimboarder, Cape Lookout

Swords was vacationing with family last June on the ocean side of Cape Lookout when he took this photo of his younger brother preparing to skimboard in the surf. The unique perspective illustrates what is about to happen in a simple, graphically pleasing way.



OUTDOOR RECREATION
HONORABLE MENTION

Martha Bennett Metzler, Winston-Salem
Pointer, Clemmons

Metzler, a quail hunter, was enjoying a day at her father's house on the Yadkin River when her pointer, Roy, locked on point. Because it was March and quail season was over, Metzler captured Roy in action. Her photograph brims with late-winter sunlight and the colors of the season.



PEAKS, VALLEYS & PLAINS **FIRST PLACE**

Scott Hotaling, Raleigh
Sunrise at Max Patch, Madison County

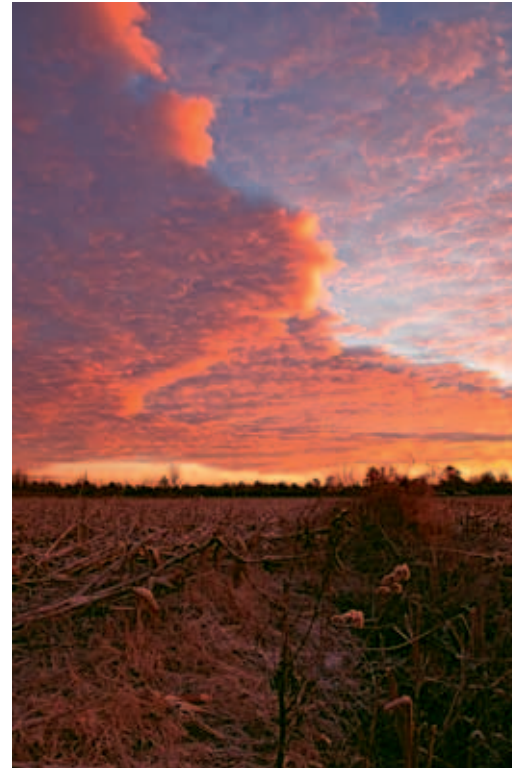
After watching many winter sunrises at Max Patch in Madison County, Hotaling had a shot in mind that he wanted. "I know how the light falls on the surrounding peaks," he said, "but clouds and fog hadn't cooperated until this particular day." This is the third straight winning photo in Peaks, Valleys & Plains for Hotaling.



PEAKS, VALLEYS & PLAINS
SECOND PLACE

Dale King, Sugar Mountain
Hebron Colony Falls, Boone

King went to Hebron Colony Falls early to avoid the crowds that visit this waterfall. "I also took advantage of the soft light that was available before the sun rose above the trees," King said. "I was lucky on this day to have the place to myself for about an hour."



PEAKS, VALLEYS & PLAINS
HONORABLE MENTION

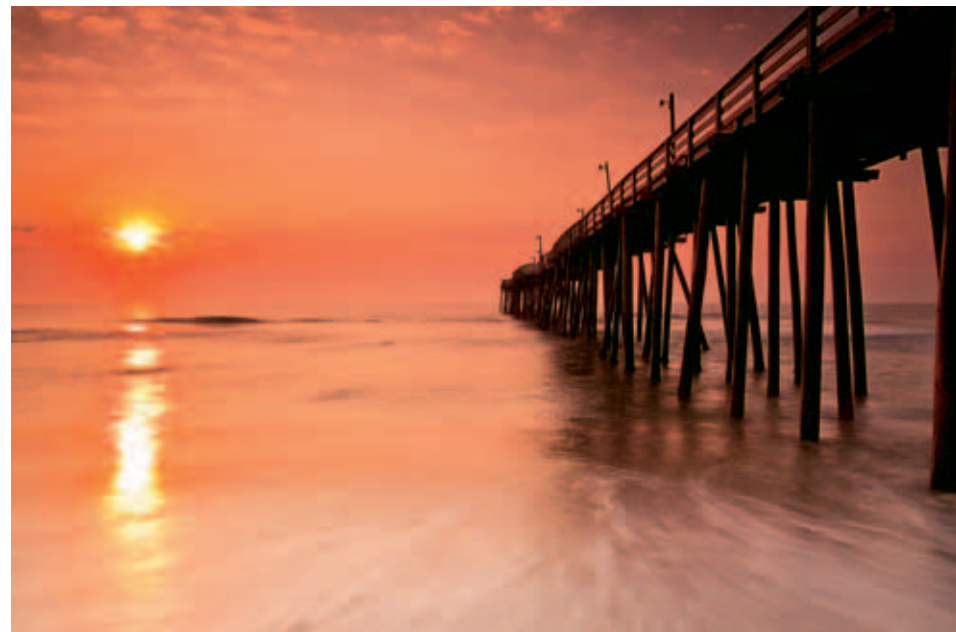
Chris Ogden, Durham
Sunrise, Pocosin Lakes National Refuge

While waiting in a drainage ditch to photograph thousands of snow geese descending on fields at Pocosin Lakes, Ogden was treated to this frigid sunrise on a winter morning and preserved the image with his camera. "It can be pretty cold squatting in the ditch in the darkness," Ogden said, explaining that one has to be in the ditch at least an hour before sunrise to be sure not to spook the wildlife, "but it was more than worth it to see the sky catch fire in the predawn."

PEAKS, VALLEYS & PLAINS
HONORABLE MENTION

Julian De La Rosa III, Apex
Sunrise at Hatteras Island Fishing Pier, Rodanthe

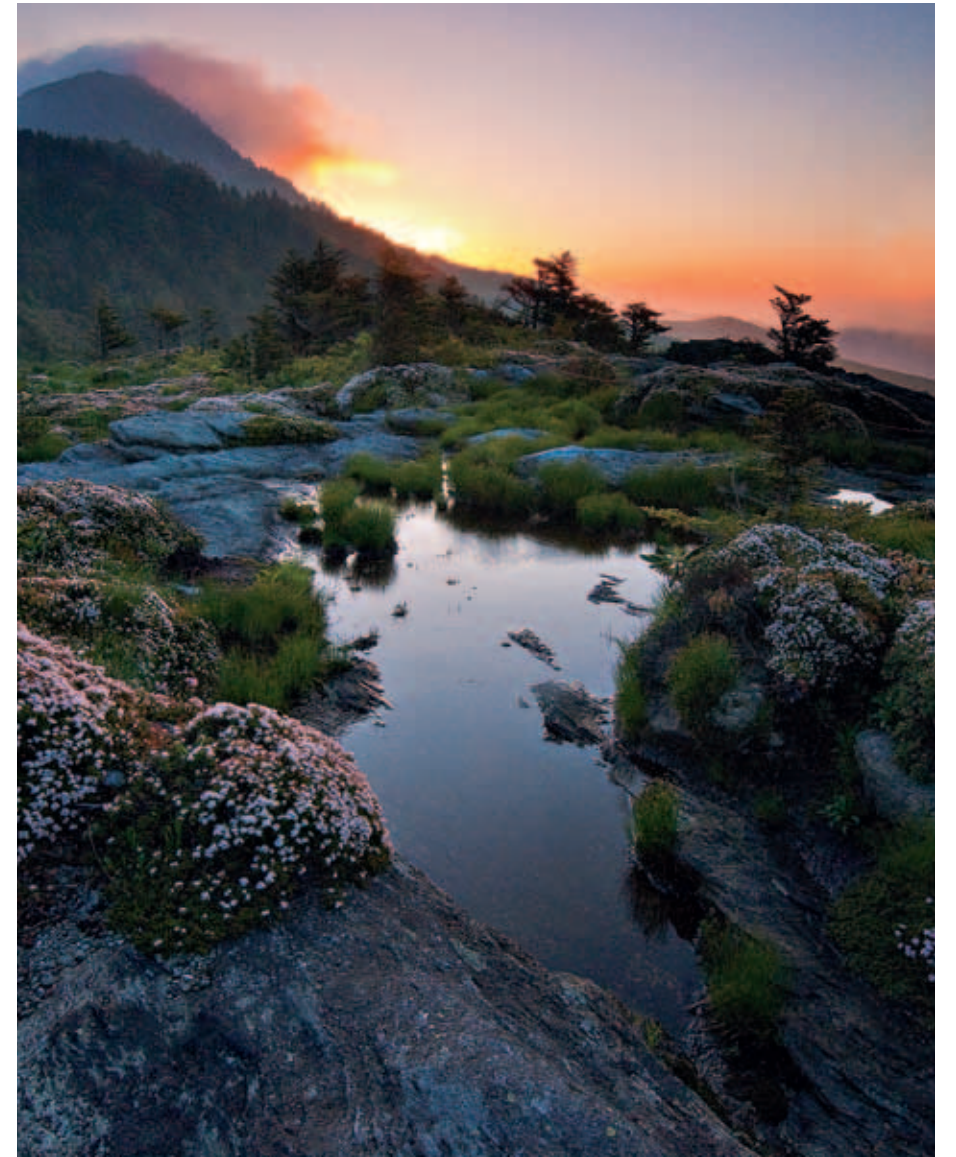
A pier at sunrise strikes something elemental in most anglers, with its promise of good fish and good times. De La Rosa captured the beauty and moodiness of piers with this shot at Rodanthe on the Outer Banks.



PEAKS, VALLEYS & PLAINS
THIRD PLACE

Steven Gold, Hickory
Sunrise, Grandfather Mountain

Grandfather Mountain is a frequent destination for photographers. Although Gold didn't catch the sunrise in this puddle as he had hoped, his photograph at sunrise after a rainy night turned out extremely well.





ANIMAL BEHAVIOR FIRST PLACE

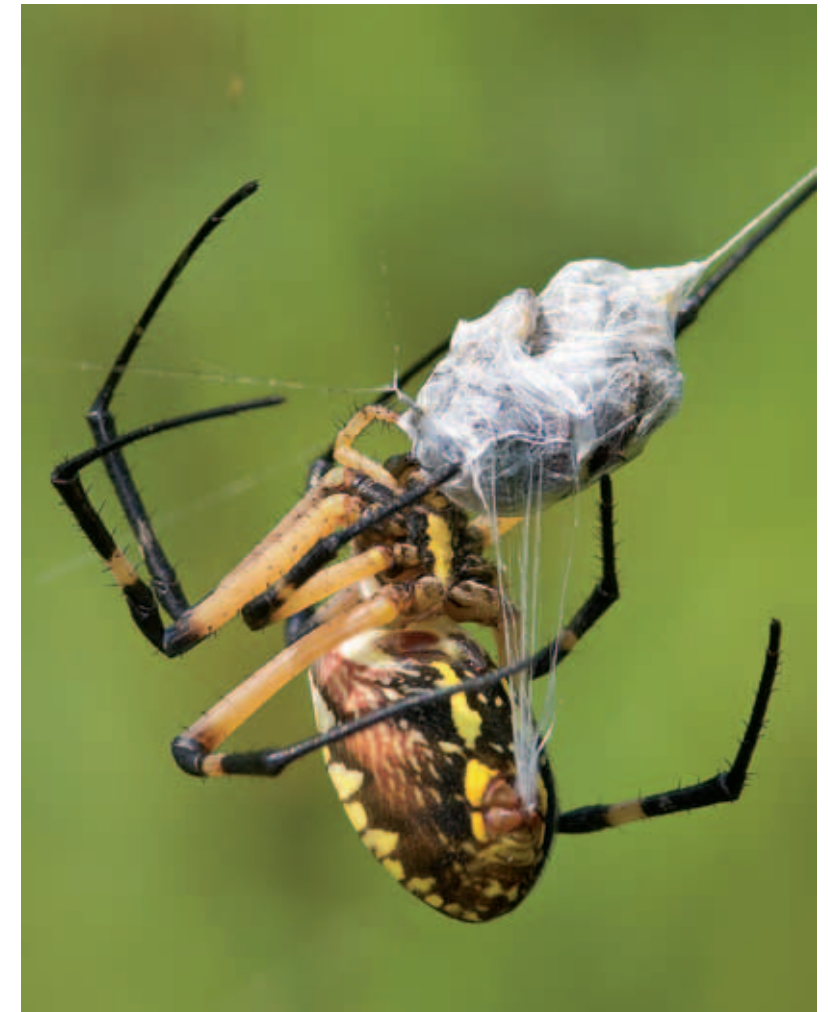
Chuck Carmack, Wilmington
Bathing robin, Wilmington

Carmack has bird feeders, a birdbath and a butterfly garden in his back yard to attract all kinds of avian photo subjects. While taking pictures in the butterfly garden last August, he noticed the bathing robin and was able to snap this image, freezing the bird in the midst of its grooming ritual.

**ANIMAL BEHAVIOR
SECOND PLACE**

Ed Ziegler, Raleigh
Orb spider with prey, Raleigh

While visiting the office of Durant Nature Park in August, Ziegler learned that a number of orb weaver spiders had constructed webs in the park's bog area. After several visits, he was able to capture this spider in the act of enveloping a prey insect in silk for a later meal.



**ANIMAL BEHAVIOR
THIRD PLACE**

Emmett Westbrook, Morehead City
Snapping turtle attacking cattle egret,
Harkers Island

Westbrook was visiting the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum when he saw a cattle egret thrashing around in the pond behind the museum. Thinking initially that the bird was tangled in discarded fishing line, he soon realized that something below the surface was moving with the egret. Westbrook took 200 photos over the course of a two-hour battle, after which the egret finally broke free but proved to be fatally wounded.





**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17
FIRST PLACE**

Jake Orr, Topsail Beach
Jolly Roger Pier, Topsail Beach

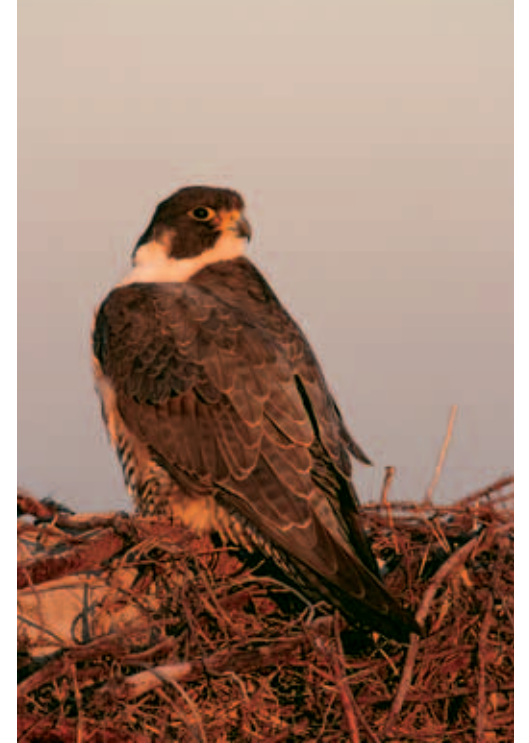
Jake, 15, was looking for a new twist on the typical pier photo when he took this picture. He set up his camera on a tripod under the pier and used a 30-second exposure to capture the effect of the pier lights dancing on the water and illuminating the structure.



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17
SECOND PLACE**

Lindsay Brooke Myers, Alexander
Lightning, Alexander

Lindsay, 17, has been fascinated with thunderstorms since she was small. She captured this June storm by setting up her tripod in a car parked at the end of a road overlooking the French Broad River and shooting out of an open window. This was her first attempt at photographing lightning.



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17
THIRD PLACE**

Jake Orr, Topsail Beach
Peregrine falcon, Topsail Beach

Jake was observing terns and sea gulls on the beach on an April morning, and was surprised when he turned around to see this peregrine perched 10 feet behind him. He immediately lay down and began taking photos in the golden light. "I assume it was taking a rest after hunting terns that morning," he said.



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17
HONORABLE MENTION**

Landon Carter, Cary
Ring-billed gull, Corolla

Landon, 13, was taking photos while walking on the beach with family last April. He was attempting to get a close-up of this gull when he captured it taking flight.



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17
HONORABLE MENTION**

Nathanael Gass, Durham
Carolina anole, Asheboro

Perennial competition winner Nathanael, 16, was visiting the N.C. Zoo in February 2008 when he captured this photo of an anole feasting on a cricket.



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17
HONORABLE MENTION**

Mark Tiffany, Cary
Bass angler, Lake Mattamuskeet

Mark, 16, was traveling to the Outer Banks with his father when they stopped to take photos of the sunset. An angler soon entered the area and caught a nice bass.



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
FIRST PLACE**

Hannah Ziegler, Raleigh
Hummingbird moth, Raleigh

Photographic skills apparently run in the Ziegler family. Hannah, 8, is the granddaughter of Ed Ziegler, the Grand Prize winner in 2007 and runner-up in the Invertebrates category this year. Ed took Hannah with him to Durant Nature Park where she borrowed his camera to take this winning image of a hummingbird moth.



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
SECOND PLACE**

Nicole Howren, Cary
Bee on coreopsis, Blue Ridge Parkway

Nicole, 10, used a 55–200 mm lens to take this photograph of coreopsis along the Blue Ridge Parkway. “The zoom kept me safe from the bees and the cliff,” she said.



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
THIRD PLACE**

Nancy Samantha Halstead, Walkertown
Treefrog, Walkertown

Nancy, 11, didn’t have to travel far to earn third place—she shot this image of a treefrog on a chain in her yard last summer.



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
HONORABLE MENTION**

Rachel Layko, Apex
Sunrise, Nags Head

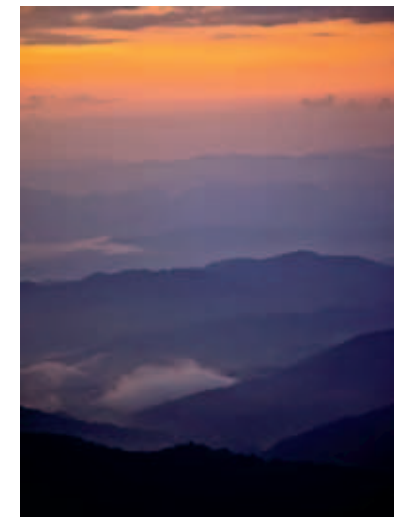
She was unable to see any hatching turtles as she had hoped, but Rachel, 12, did manage to shoot this lovely photograph of a sunrise at Nags Head last August.



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
HONORABLE MENTION**

Olivia Jordan Leigh, Pasadena, Md.
Hickory Nut Falls, Rutherford County

Precocious photographer Olivia, only 4, earned an honorable mention with this scenic photograph taken on a family camping trip near Saluda.



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
HONORABLE MENTION**

Nicole Howren, Cary
Sunset, Craggy Cove

On the same day as she took the photo of coreopsis (top left), Nicole captured this view of Craggy Cove from an overlook along the Blue Ridge Parkway.