



WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2016 PHOTO COMPETITION

When Frank Ellison won the 2015 *Wildlife in North Carolina Photo Competition*, he considered skipping the 2016 contest. After all, nobody has won it twice—until now. “Wow is my first reaction,” Ellison said upon learning of his repeat victory. “I was going to sit this out because there is no way for me to top last year’s win. I decided ‘What the heck? You never know ‘til you try.’”

Ellison, who won the Grand Prize last year with his detailed photograph of an assassin fly, took the top spot again this year with a portrait of young “One Eye,” an American alligator he discovered at Calabash Lakes in Carolina Shores.

“I’m thinking he lost that eye in a fight over territory,” Ellison said of the alligator that, as the name he gave it suggests, has only one eye. “There used to be two gators in that [lake] when I first started going there. Now there’s just him. I think I got his good side.”

Ellison, who prefers to photograph wildlife over people, said he is careful not to get too close to the alligator and have it become accustomed to human contact. He also had a caveat for would-be alligator photographers: “When shooting the baby gators, beware, the mother will come after you.”

As for shooting contest-winning photos, Ellison said, “There’s some skill in it, but there’s also a lot of luck in it. I bet I’ve shot (“One Eye”) 1,000 times and maybe gotten 10 crystal-clear frames.”

An uptick in entries resulted in over 1,500 images submitted by *Wildlife in North Carolina* readers. Narrowing the field to select fewer than 40 winning photos is not an easy task.

“Every year we are fortunate to have so many photographers submit great images to our competition,” said *Wildlife in North Carolina* Art Director Marsha Tillett, who serves as one of the judges. “It is with excitement and joy that we pored through more than 1,500 entries to find the best of the best. This year’s winning photograph was a stunning portrait of an American alligator. The power and beauty in this image are exceptional. It’s photographs like this one, and the others featured in this issue, that give voice to the natural wonders of North Carolina.”

The other judges for this year’s contest included staff graphic designers Bryant Cole and Amy Friend, staff photographer Melissa McGaw, and Wildlife Resources Commission Social Media and Video Manager Thomas Harvey. Also serving as a judge was Mike Dunn, a retired senior manager of outreach at the N.C. Museum of Natural History and a veteran wildlife photographer in his own right.

Four entrants in this year’s competition had at least three photographs finish in the top six spots of various categories. (Each judge picked a personal top 10 list for each category before the group settled on a mutual top six. Places 4 through 6 were selected as alternates in case any of the top three photographs were disqualified for a rules violation.) Neil Jernigan had five photos place in four different categories, Eric Abernethy had five in five categories, Timothy Faulkner had four in three categories, and Daniel Pullen had three in three categories.

All winning photographs may be seen on exhibit through March 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 2016 PHOTO COMPETITION



Frank Ellison, Clemmons
Alligator close up

This is a picture of young One Eye. I call this alligator that because it only has one eye (it lost the other one as a baby). One Eye lives in the very small pond in front of Calabash Lakes in Carolina Shores. I visit the alligator often to shoot its picture and it is always calm and cooperative. I think it even enjoys having its picture taken.

(Nikon D700, Nikon 70–200mm/2.8 with teleconverter at 400mm, f/10, 1/60 of a second, ASA 200)



BIRDS FIRST PLACE

Jim Parnell, Wilmington

Turkey in wheat

I do a lot of my photography from the window of my vehicle. On this June morning, I was cruising slowly along a farm road on the Shaw farm near Clarkton. As I slowly rolled past a wheat field with camera and mounted telephoto lens extending from the window, I saw a hen turkey's head pop up among the ripening wheat heads. This photo is the result.

(Nikon D4, Nikon 600 mm /f4, f/5.6, 1/6,400 of a second, ISO 1,600)

BIRDS SECOND PLACE

James Allen, Zebulon

Geese in flight

I took this on a brisk November morning at Shelley Lake in Raleigh as dawn illuminated a heavy mist over the water. On this particular morning, I was watching a lone kingfisher when I heard Canada geese calling as they approached from across the lake. With the limited light, I thought I'd try some slow shutter-speed pans. The mist created a dreamy, abstract background, and the slow shutter preserved a sense of movement in the geese.

(Canon 7D, Tokina 300mm F2.8 AF II SD model, gold ring, with a 2x Kenko MC4 teleconverter at 600mm, f/6.3, 1/15 of a second, ISO 400)



BIRDS THIRD PLACE

Adam Berry, Winston-Salem

Green heron

I took this image on High Rock Lake in Davidson County while photographing bird activity in a small rookery. This beautiful green heron was perched on a low stump as it watched the water. I was able to capture this image just as it leaned forward to dive for a fish.

(Nikon D4, Nikon 600mm /f4, 1/1,250, ISO 2,800)





MAMMALS FIRST PLACE

Bobby Nicks, Cary

Feeding elk

This photo was shot in the Cataloochee Valley in the Smoky Mountains. I took some shots of elk in the distance, but nothing great. Then this elk started walking toward me, so I stayed out of sight behind an old barn. He stopped about 70 feet away on the other side of the barn, and I stepped out from behind the barn and started shooting. He didn't seem bothered by me as he just kept eating. After a few minutes he slowly walked away. I picked out the photo that I liked the best and decided to name the elk Bubba. He just looks like a Bubba to me, standing there with grass sticking out of the side of his mouth.

(Canon 5D Mark III, Canon 500/f4 with a 1.4X extender, f/7, 1/500 of a second, ISO 3,200, spot metering)

MAMMALS SECOND PLACE

Adam Berry, Winston-Salem

Doe in mist

This photo was taken along the Yadkin River in Clemmons. I was searching the trees for barred owls on a very foggy morning when I came across this curious young doe. She watched me attentively for a few minutes until she went quietly on her way, disappearing into the fog.

(Nikon D4, Nikon 600mm, f/4, 1/1,250 of a second, ISO 3,200)



MAMMALS THIRD PLACE

Mark Gallerani, Greensboro

Weasel with prey

I took this picture at Haw River State Park. I was actually trying to photograph Baltimore orioles, which I had never seen before in Greensboro. I saw something strange that was half-hopping, half-running near the small lake. When it finally stopped I got a few pictures through the tall, wet grass. It was a weasel and it had a young rabbit (best guess) in its mouth. It was really struggling to run, as it looks like the rabbit was at least its equal in size. The weasel then quickly disappeared into some brush. I got lucky with this one.

(Canon 5D Mark III, Canon 500mm, f/4 with 1.4 teleconverter at 700mm, f/5.6, 1/200, ISO 250)





REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS FIRST PLACE

Eric Abernethy, Asheboro
Pregnant rattlesnake

This is a gravid timber rattlesnake photographed last May after she emerged from hibernation in Randolph County. She sat at this spot for five days before I took some fisheye shots of her. Little did I know she would be gone the next day. I chose to shoot her with a fisheye lens because of the perspective, giving the viewer the feeling of actually being on the ground with her.

(Nikon D7000, Nikon 10.5mm Fisheye, f/10, 1/200 of a second, ISO 500)

**REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS
SECOND PLACE**

Timothy Faulkner, Kinston
Toad in the rain

My friend Neil Jernigan and I were out looking for animals one rainy evening when we came across this toad and decided to use some creative lighting while photographing it. I placed the flash in front of the frog and was able to catch the water that was in the air.

(Canon 5D MkII, Canon 100mm macro lens, f/11, 1/160 of a second, ISO 200, Canon flash off camera)



**REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS
THIRD PLACE**

Timothy Faulkner, Kinston
Black Racer

Neil Jernigan and I were in Goose Creek State Park one Saturday afternoon when we decided to stop and lift some metal that was laying on the ground and discovered this young black racer. I got low and shot him with my 70–200 at f/2.8, which gave a great view and depth to the snake.

(Canon 7D MkII, Tamron 70–200, f/2.8, 1/640 of a second, ISO 100)





INVERTEBRATES FIRST PLACE

Alan Clark, Raleigh
Spider spinning

I encountered this spider on a September morning while shooting nature photographs at the Brickhouse Road waterfowl impoundment in the Upper Falls Lake Watershed in Durham County. I watched it spinning its beautiful web above the trail for over an hour, photographing its progress in dappled light under a canopy of trees.

(Nikon D800, Nikon 300mm f/4 lens and 1.7x teleconverter at 500mm, f/11, 1/160 of a second, ISO 3,200, Gitzo tripod and Wimberly Sidekick)

INVERTEBRATES SECOND PLACE

Eric Abernethy, Asheboro
Carpenter bee on the wing

A carpenter bee hovers above the shores of Lake Lucas in Asheboro. Whenever I'm kayaking at Lake Lucas I always keep an eye out for flying dragonflies and butterflies to catch them in flight, and this carpenter bee was no different. Sometimes you get lucky.

(Nikon, D7000, Nikon 85–400mm, f/8, 1/250 of a second, ISO 100, Nikon SB 800 flash)



INVERTEBRATES THIRD PLACE

Daniel Pullen, Buxton
Cannonball jellyfish

During the summer months, we get a handful of days when the water is "gin clear." This was one of those days. I went out to get photos of cannonball jellyfish. It's really cool because each jellyfish has a little posse of fish hanging around. Just don't get too close, because they can sting you.

(Nikon D4s, Nikon 35mm/1.4, f/5.6, 1/250th, ISO 100, AquaTech Delphin water housing)





WILD PLANTS FIRST PLACE

Eric Abernethy, Asheboro

Late-day lily pads

This is one of the most stunning displays of natural light that I have ever encountered. Late day thunderstorms had just moved through, and golden setting sunlight began penetrating through raindrops that had collected on the lily pads of varying colors in a pond near my Randolph County home. The water drop colors were altered by adding late-day golden sunlight color to them. I had always wanted to photograph raindrops on lily pads. I never imagined it would look like this when my opportunity arrived.

(Nikon, D7000, 105mm Macro, f/14, 1/400 of a second, ISO 320)

**WILD PLANTS
SECOND PLACE**

Alan Clark, Raleigh

Milkweed seeds

I've been fascinated by milkweed plants since childhood, and my appreciation has only grown as an experienced photographer. Seeing these plants release their seeds in late summer and fall is always a treat. My goal with this image was to capture the beauty of their spreading silky parachutes as they prepare to be freed into the wind.

(Nikon D810, Nikon 105mm f/2.8 lens, f/14, 1/400 second, ISO 800)



**WILD PLANTS
THIRD PLACE**

Ginny Williams, Raleigh

Fall colors

Last Halloween, my husband and I took an afternoon hike in Durant Nature Park in Raleigh to take fall photos. It was my first time visiting the park. Right after we arrived at the lake, a rainbow leaf caught my eye. I knew it was something special because it had all of the fall colors in one little leaf. I started taking pictures right away so I wouldn't lose all of that beautiful light and made sure to capture the fall foliage reflection in the background. I think this colorful leaf is a perfect representation of the changes we see throughout the fall season.

(Nikon D90, Nikon 105mm, f/5.6, 1/320 of a second, ISO 200)





OUTDOOR RECREATION FIRST PLACE

Daniel Pullen, Buxton
Sunset surfer

I had pulled up in the parking lot at the Frisco Pier and saw the sunset going nuclear. I couldn't get my hooded full wetsuit and boots on quickly enough. The water temperature was in the upper 50s. I was able to swim out and capture a handful of images before the colors faded. I got lucky when this surfer decided to paddle back out for one more wave.

(Nikon D4s, Nikon 35mm/1.4, f2.8, 1/125 of a second, ISO 200, AquaTech Delphin water housing)



**OUTDOOR RECREATION
SECOND PLACE**

Brendan Gartner, Swansboro
Crab pot

I took this picture in late winter canoeing back from Bear Island in Hammocks Beach State Park. The wind was kind enough to go completely calm for my paddle home. I had passed this crab pot a number of times on other trips and never paid much attention to it. On this day, however, I thought that the combination of thick clouds, a crab pot just below the surface and the tide gently pulling at the buoy created a powerful yet serene image of the Bogue Sound waters.

(Galaxy s5, 4.8mm, f/2.2, 1/270 of a second, ISO 40)

**OUTDOOR RECREATION
THIRD PLACE**

Charles English, Wilmington
Tide pool

As I was walking the beach I noticed all of the clouds and pools and reflections. I wanted to get my DSLR but I knew everything would change if I went back to my house. So I got my iPhone and waited for this woman picking up seashells to walk into the frame. I changed it to black-and-white for drama.

(iPhone 5S, 29mm, f/2.2 1/5,882, ISO 32)





WILD LANDSCAPES FIRST PLACE

Carey Plemmons, South Mills

Pier in the storm

Winter Storm Jonas produced high winds and surf at Frisco Pier last January. The winds kicked up so much sand and sea spray that it was challenging to photograph. I slowed the shutter speed down to catch all the spray coming off the top of the waves that gave it a dreamy effect. Since this photograph was taken, Hurricane Matthew has destroyed even more of the storm-battered pier, which was expected to be torn down at the end of 2016.

(Canon 5D MKII, Canon 70–200mm f/2.8L, f/11, 0.6 of a second, ISO 50, manual mode)

WILD LANDSCAPES SECOND PLACE

Daniel Pullen, Buxton

Unfriendly wave

Brisk offshore winds groom waves marching toward the shore of Hatteras Island last fall. Looks can be deceiving, because even though there's not a drop of water out of place, these are not friendly waves. I wore this one on the head and got slammed, then pinned on the bottom.

(Nikon D4s Sigma 85mm/1.4, f/5, 1/1,000 of a second, ISO 100, AquaTech Delphin water housing)



WILD LANDSCAPES THIRD PLACE

Kathryn Greven, Winston-Salem

On Grandfather Mountain

I love the ruggedness and beauty of the Grandfather Mountain area. I had gotten up early one morning with the vision of a sunrise image with rhododendrons that were still in full bloom. I positioned myself on top of a boulder that overlooks Grandfather Mountain. I captured some sunrise photos then turned away from the sun because it was too bright. I noticed the clouds, the reflection of the clouds in the puddle on the boulder, the light hitting the plants as well as Grandmother Lake. I arranged myself in order to create a composition that provided depth and might draw the viewer into the image.

(Nikon D810, Nikon 14–24mm/2.8 lens with polarizer at 14mm, f/16, 1/8 of a second, ISO 100, Really Right Stuff tripod and ball head)





ANIMAL BEHAVIOR FIRST PLACE

Frank Clemmensen, Durham

Grasshopper interplay

My wife and I have a 15-acre property near Falls Lake that I plant with wildflower patches and wildlife feed plots, so I usually have good photo opportunities right outside my backdoor. I had just received a new macro lens and was anxious to try it out. I was planning on taking pictures of the flowers when I found these two grasshoppers. Normally grasshoppers are quick to flee. But as you can see, they were very cooperative, and even let me set up the tripod.

(Nikon D7200, 90mm Tamron macro lens, f/8, 1/160 of a second, ISO 400, Sirui tripod)

**ANIMAL BEHAVIOR
SECOND PLACE**

Charles English, Wilmington

Barred owl

I have been photographing these barred owls in Burnt Mill Creek in Wilmington for the last three years during the spring when they are feeding their young. I have hundreds of shots of them feeding, flying and catching crayfish. This day I was focused on one that seemed to fly down every five or 10 minutes to catch one. I got in position with the light so I would have a fast shutter speed and waited for him to dive. When he came down, I fired off 10 shots and got this one just as he entered the water.

(Canon 1DX, Canon 100–400 II, f/5.6, 1/2,000 of a second, ISO 3,200)



**ANIMAL BEHAVIOR
THIRD PLACE**

Kirk Pullen, Warsaw

Carpenter ants on the move

Every summer I stay at my parents' home in Buxton. They live about as deep in the woods as you can get on Hatteras Island, and I have always been amazed at how large the carpenter ants are in their front yard. On this day, I noticed a steady stream of carpenter ants walking on the wooden fence next to the driveway, so I got out my macro lens. One of the ants was injured and the other ants stopped what they were doing, picked it up, and started moving it. I am not certain whether they were taking it for healing or for their next meal, but it would be interesting to find out.

(Nikon D750, Tokina 100mm f/2.8, f/16, 1/500 of a second, ISO 2,500 Manfrotto tripod)





YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17 FIRST PLACE

Josh Hunter, Salisbury
Silver-spotted skipper

I was walking around my house looking at our butterfly bush and saw many butterflies all over it. With my macro setup in my pocket, I quickly assembled my camera and took multiple exposures of all the different species, with this one shot really pointing to me as my favorite. After some quick post production, my feelings for this picture remained the same.

(Canon EOS Rebel T4i, Canon 70-200mm f4L, 70mm, MOVO Extension Tubes, f/4, 1/1,000th of a second, ISO 1,000)

**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17
SECOND PLACE**

Dylan Mintz, Wilmington
Burrowing owl

I went for a cruise down the Intracoastal Waterway on a warm, clear day in February. I got out of my little scout boat and began walking down the sand path to the ocean side of Masonboro Island. I noticed a strange bird flying low to the ground, land about 20 feet from me, and scurry into some dry grasses. Armed with my camera, I crept to it. It flew forth from the grass onto the rock wall of the jetty some 30 feet behind me. I was shocked because I immediately recognized it as a burrowing owl, as seen in the novel, and its screen adaption, "Hoot." I knew this owl was very far from its home turf, its closest habitat, Florida. This was an awesome opportunity to capture a rare encounter.

(Nikon D3300, AF-S Nikkor 55-200mm, f/8, 1/1,000 of a second, ISO 200)



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13-17
THIRD PLACE**

Elizabeth Simmerson, Salisbury
Gray hairstreak

My mother and I were walking to a pond near our house to see if I could get a picture of a crane that I had seen there a few times. We walked by a beautiful patch of flowers with colors ranging from blue to purple to yellow, and there were butterflies and moths everywhere! One little butterfly caught my eye. It had striped antennae, which were fascinating! I crouched down carefully, so not to scare it off. I snapped a million pictures, knowing that one of them would be great!

(Canon EOS Rebel T3i, Canon EF-S 55-250mm at 74mm, f/4, 1/800 of a second, ISO 640)





**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13–17
HONORABLE MENTION**

Jacob Thomas, Waxhaw
Snowberry clearwing moth

This snowberry clearwing moth frequents my garden regularly during the summer months. On this particular occasion I found it hovering around my pond, which has many stalks of wild Queen Anne’s lace growing nearby. The excitement of being able to spot this unique moth along with the beautiful wild flowers growing nearby made me run inside and grab my camera. After many shots, most of which were trial and error, I was finally able to get a composition that I really liked. It was simply stunning to see how this moth and beetle seemed to share the bloom in symbiosis.

(Nikon D5500, 270mm lens, f/5.6, 1/4,000, ISO 1,000)



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13–17
HONORABLE MENTION**

Emma Barnhill, Harrisburg
Hiding anole

Ever since my sister and I were little, we used to run around outside catching lizards. The outdoors has always been a point of fascination for me. As I’ve gotten older the thrill of physically chasing and catching little lizards doesn’t appeal to me like it used to, but I’ve found another way to capture them—with my camera! I’ll sit outside for hours, captivated by our butterfly bush and all the beautiful creatures it attracts. The anole caught my eye just as I was heading inside. He peered out at me as if to say, “Take my picture!”

(Nikon D5200, 70–300mm f/4-5.6G at 250mm, f/5, 1/1,000 of a second, ASA 500)



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 13–17
HONORABLE MENTION**

Peyton Moore, Wake Forest
Tree frog

I was just walking and minding my own business while doing chores outside when I was surprised to realize our yard waste bucket had a large tree frog in it. It then proceeded to hop out of the bin and lay dormant in the pine straw near my house. I took a quick picture and posted it on my Instagram, and after a lot of acclaim, I decided to enter it here.

(Samsung galaxy s6 edge+, 4.3 mm, f/1.9, Auto Shutterspeed, ISO 800)



**YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
FIRST PLACE**

Tyler Jernigan, Snow Hill
Hognose snake

One afternoon my older brother found this Eastern hognose snake in his yard. He called me over so I could take photos of it. I started with a wide angle lens and to get closer I switched to his macro lens. I decided to lay down on the ground for a different angle. I was glad that the snake was very calm and let me get close.

(Canon Rebel XSi, Canon 100mm F/2.8 IS, f/4.5, 1/22 of a second, ISO 200)



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
SECOND PLACE

Minda McComas, Mill Spring

Frog on the door

Well, we were in bed, and Dad yelled out, “come downstairs.” And then we came down the stairs, and then we saw the frog. I told Dad I wanted to take a picture. Then he handed me the camera, and I took a picture of it. It was on the door and moving.

(Nikon D3300, AF-S Nikkor 18–55mm GII at 32mm, f/4.3, 1/60 of a second, ISO 800, auto flash mode)



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
THIRD PLACE

William Hilliard, Fuquay-Varina

Juvenile turtle

My dad found this baby turtle in our backyard. I wanted to take its picture, so I grabbed one of my dad’s cameras. He helped me with the camera settings and I took a few shots. This one was my favorite.

(Nikon D7100, Nikkor 60mm, f/8, 1/60 of a second, ISO 400)



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
HONORABLE MENTION

Austin Ellison, Clemmons

Box turtle crossing

I found this box turtle crossing the road on my way to go fishing. We were driving in our car toward Sunset Beach and I was looking down all the sides of the roads and I saw this big black lump in the middle of the road. I told my dad that I did not know what it was and he said that we could go find out. It turned out to be this box turtle and I got my camera out and took this picture. After I took this picture, I saw that the turtle was going to the other side of the road and I decided to give it some help across the road. You know what they say, the water is always clearer on the other side.

(Nikon D3X, Nikon 18–300 VR lens 3.5/5.6, f/8, 1/100 of a second, ISO 200)



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
HONORABLE MENTION

Kaitlyn Molnar, Cary

Forest view

My family loves going for walks on the local trails. I also love taking pictures of my family and friends, my dog and anything in nature. We found there was a photography hike with a ranger at Umstead State Park in Raleigh. On the walk, the ranger taught us to look all around us while in the woods. This picture looking up at the trees was one of my favorites from the hike. It was a new direction for me to look while on a hike and I thought the view was very spectacular!

(Nikon Coolpix L27 16.1 MP, Nikkor 5x Wide Optical Zoom, f/3.2, 1/125 of a second, ISO 80)



YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHER 12 & UNDER
HONORABLE MENTION

Sarah Sheets, Greensboro

Female cardinal

Birds have always seemed so graceful and beautiful to me. My dad had strongly encouraged me to do the *Wildlife in North Carolina* contest, so I decided to take a picture of a bird. I was off from school when it started to snow outside. I grabbed my camera and headed to my grandma’s house because she has a birdfeeder near there. I knew birds would be there so I waited patiently for one to come along, and this cardinal did.

(Camera Nikon D3200, Nikon DX 55–200mm at 145mm, f/5.3, 1/1,250 of a second, ISO 1,600)