



Wildlife in North Carolina 2023–2024 PHOTO COMPETITION

Bryan Barnes had an unusual start to his photography hobby. “We had eight weeks of rain one fall in Maryland when I was a teenager, and I spent them all photographing mushrooms in the woods,” said Barnes, who grew up in Mount Airy, Md. “It was years later that I realized it was a once-in-a-lifetime mushroom season, but it sowed the seed for my interest in macro photography.”

Fast forward about 16 years and Barnes’ fabulous macro photograph of a momma rabid wolf spider and her babies is the Grand Prize winner of *Wildlife in North Carolina’s* 2023–24 Photo Competition.

Barnes, 32, who makes his living as a land surveyor, first used a Nikon Coolpix 8400 when he started in photography. Astrophotography and wildlife are his favorite fields, with bugs as his favorite subject, particularly wasps and spiders. He was excited to be voted this year’s winner.

“Placing in this competition has been one of my biggest goals since I started to seriously pursue macro photography, and I am extremely happy and thankful to have made it here,” he said.

Despite their scary-sounding name, rabid wolf spiders (*Rabidosa rabido*) are neither rabid nor considered a threat to humans. They can be found throughout the state and earned their name due to their fast, erratic movements and aggressive behavior toward prey like flies or other small insects. They are tan or light brown in color with two dark stripes on the cephalothorax and one on the abdomen. They can grow to about eight-tenths of an inch in length.

Barnes’ picture bested 1,560 photos. The two most popular categories were Birds with 292 entries and Animal Behavior with 240.

“The winning image for this year’s Photo Competition really spun its way into capturing the judges’ attention,” Art Director Marsha Tillett said. “All of the judges and other Commission staff loved this image. The details, composition and color are outstanding.”

“What sets this image apart is its ability to evoke a range of emotions. For some, it creates a sense of wonder and awe, and leaves them marveling at the intricacy and detail of the spider and of all of the many baby spiders. For others, it may spark a mix of nervousness and fear as they come so close to the beauty of one of nature’s most remarkable creatures.”

In addition to Tillett, judges for this year’s competition were Commission Graphic Designer Bryant Cole, Photographer Jonathon Gruenke and Web and Graphic Designer Jodie Owen.

To learn more about the Photo Competition, including rules information, visit ncwildlife.org/connect/wildlife-north-carolina-magazine and click on the Photo Competition link.

–Mike Zlotnicki

GRAND PRIZE WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA 2023–2024 PHOTO COMPETITION



Bryan Barnes, Jarvisburg

Rabid wolf spider

Wolf spiders are one of the only bugs that are easy to find year-round in the Outer Banks. I came across this rabid wolf spider in the woods near my house one night last fall. She was hunting in the pine straw and carrying hundreds of babies on her back. I had to dig a shallow hole to get the camera low enough to be level with her eyes and I lay down for this shot. This is shot with a 90mm lens and a 2x teleconverter on a MFT for a 360mm full-frame equivalence, giving me a large working distance for a greater depth of field. I cropped it in close.

(Olympus OM1, Olympus 90mm macro, Olympus 2x teleconverter, f/13, 1/250 of a second, ISO 1600, Godox V350 flash, AK diffuser)