

Human Hand in Nature - Group Blue

Returns: May 17, 2023

Judge: Becky Jaffe



Note: The comments shown here have been transcribed from the video recording of our May 17th meeting. Every effort has been made to present the essence of our judge's thoughts about the images.



A Very Wet Loggerhead Shrike

By Chris Johnson

It's so good to see a shrike. What a clever animal, and look at the detail on it. Look how raggedy those wings are. It's amazing the level of detail on this shrike. I want to just keep going around and around and looking at each of the details on the feather. Wow. I love it. It's small and cute, but also serious business and formidable. You can see the detail on the talons – it's lovely and wonderful use of negative space. I don't want to see anything but this wet bird.



Alps Mountain with Snow Cap

By Margret Cordts

I like the cross hatching, curves going across each other that stitches the image together and helps you navigate up it. It might be missing a focal point. It needs a protagonist. There might be a very small element in the bottom there which I can't quite read – maybe it's a fence, a rock, people? It's too small to make it out, so it's not a great focal point. The color is working, but mostly it needs a focal point.



Big Sur Coast - Day of the Marathon

By Chris Johnson

I find this charming. I judge at maybe a dozen camera clubs and would say most are good at rocks, water, birds, leaves, and not very good at people. I think we tend to be an introverted group. But this is a counterpoint to that, a very connected image. We're not stalking them, taking their pic without consent – these people are collaborating with the photographer to offer up this image. There's a feeling of warmth and connectedness that we get to experience as viewers, and there's humor here too. She's the protagonist and you're pleased for her, and everyone's in sync – the people and the photographer. We get to experience that connection through this image, so very well done.



Black Phoebe Resting Unafraid on a Scarecrow

Carol Silveira

This is so good, given the theme of this competition, this could really be the cover image for that theme. It captured the human hand so well. It gives us the expected, but also a surprise, and you get the sense the phoebe has outsmarted humans because it's not afraid to perch on the scarecrow. I like the fun story. The light on the fabric is just right, the texture is just right, the cobwebs between the fingers, the catch light in the bird's eye, and this really could be the cover for this theme. The photographer is tight with this theme, and is playing a "jury" situation well (being tight with the theme).



A Day at the Beach

Bill Brown

Such a mundane title for such a spectacular space. The humans add so much here with their scale, and I wouldn't have had a sense of the extraordinary scale if it weren't for those humans. They are key here. That moody, moody fog coming in is the stuff of poetry here. I love the wide aspect ratio to make it a nice panorama, and it raises all kinds of questions for me – what the formations are, where is this, etc. Fascinating



Gear and Axle Accepted by Nature

Brian Spiegel

I think this is an image that invites us toward the human tendency to see faces in places where they are not. Some of us have that stronger than others. In this case, I see a couple of eyes, and once that happens the ferns become hair, and it becomes animated. Maybe it has to be because I don't understand the gear part – I'm not seeing enough of the gear to get a sense of what this machinery might be and thus going in the other direction with the face. Maybe that's what the artist intended here.



Male Red Backed Jumping Spider

Margret Cordts

N/A

In a lot of our nature images, we don't see a lot of insects and I'm happy to see it. I think this is an extraordinary portrait of the spider and what a worthy subject! The little dance it's doing, the hairs on it, the detail, the catch light in one of the eight eyes, the warning or the mating coloration on the back, the dance Wow. This will make you fall in love with the planet all over again. This is the best photography can do. In terms of the theme – Human in Nature – I hate to say that as much as I love this image I don't see the Hand of Man and that's complicated because a macro like this will blur out the setting so I don't want to disqualify it but do wonder if it matches the theme.



Red-shouldered Hawk on Pole

Dennis Giuffre

Wow! Hawks win tonight overall – lots of strong hawk images! This one is fearsome and impressive and you can really see the focus of intelligence in the eyes and I like the sense of motion, and a sense of wind, and that we're looking up at it. It's such a powerful creature, and beautifully photographed. It might be slightly blurry but that doesn't bother me because it's capturing the moment when it's about to pounce, which is exciting. There's a little bit of a thrill here.



Red-shouldered Hawks Mating on Utility Pole

Dennis Giuffre

Ok, talk about a thrill – that's a thrill! We are as a group voyeurs, and we do want to see animals mating. It is so hard to capture this moment because it happens so fast and they don't linger – you have 20 seconds at best and this person seized the moment, being there at the right time, caught it and are sharing it with the rest of us. Both of them look fearsome, and the wings are all higgeldy piggeldy – this is fabulous. More of this please.



Stairs to Asilomar Beach

Carol Silveira

Lovely. I like the leading curves, the chain, the way the chain is just touched with light. I like that the sun is off the frame, and that's a radical move, to put the sun on the outside of the edge. I said earlier I didn't like light in the corner, but this image breaks that rule and does it well. If you break a rule well enough it becomes interesting and compelling like E.E. Cummings, right? Breaking grammar rules. So do playfully break rules and see if it works – and this does work. There is a sense of invitation to go to the ocean and marvel.



Western Gull Chicks

Chris Johnson

I love this so much. I have never seen Western Gull Chicks before; I had no idea they were speckled like this. The texture on them, the detail is wonderful, those awkwardly large feet that we assume they'll grow into; the texture on the background, all those blues and the grit on that nest – wow! That's amazing. Even the streaks of poop on there are kind of Jackson Pollack. I haven't seen this with my own eyes and I'm so delighted – thank you for offering this up.

Leopard Crosses Safari Tracks, Botswana

Joni Zabala



To me, what's beautiful about this is the gesture of the tail - the curly cue and that spiral are so graceful and I don't expect an animal that I'm afraid of to be that graceful. So it upends my expectations and it has this nonchalance to its expression that's wonderful. And I like the tire tracks - it catches the theme well and the sand matches the color of the fur. Wow. It's exciting to get to see this - and even the ears are surprising - we're getting a lot of detail here. I kind of wish we were looking straight at the animal, or maybe up at the animal, which is limited by having to take the shot from a jeep, but nonetheless how amazing to see the gesture of that animal - especially the tail.



Wet Wild Boars Race to the Vineyard

Joni Zabala

This is also something I have not seen, and it's so cool. To see their behavior here, they've been in the water so it makes me wonder where they were before that - a drainage ditch? What's going on here. I think it's a very smart move for this person to have made it a very wide panorama because you have all these verticals in it, and if you have that many verticals in an image, changing the aspect ratio to a panorama is a nice way to offset those verticals. It's a little blurry, but I don't mind as I'm so interested in the fact that we have wild boars here in a vineyard.

Burrowing Owl

Bill Shewchuk

Yeah, this is just about perfect. The selective focus, the detail in the feathers, the look in the eyes. Whew. You really get the sense of proximity to this animal; one of the existential questions we have is what are the inner lives of others like? What is that otherness - is it more alike or more unlike ourselves, and here we're getting a close up connection with an animal where we get to ponder those things. The immediacy of the gaze, and the close up proximity that we get gives us a sense of knowing the inner life of this animal, which is tantalizing. On a nit-picky note, they're not burrowing owls, they steal other animals nest rather than burrowing their own. But, an extraordinary image.





Yellow-crowned Night-Heron

Bill Shewchuk

Fabulous. They have a stork like quality. You guys are really rocking the selective focus as a group, you really have that technique down, where you give the science of the animal and all that dreamy impressionism of the background. And the banding is nice here too; you have that horizontal balanced off by the verticals, the sense of the fence in the background without having to focus on it, and then you really get the sense of those courting feathers on the back there which make you want to mate with this little flirtatious beast. It's wonderful.

No Place to Land

Julie Chen



To my eye, one of the best images of tonight; the light is amazing the way the light outlines every single sand hill crane, outlining it. I really like rim lighting – not that we can really rank lighting because all lighting is beautiful, but if we were going to sort light rim lighting is one of my favorites because it gives you the outline of the animal and to see it on any one of the cranes feels like it's caressing the animal, and defines its shape so beautifully. And then to have this focal point – wow! – with the wing tips like that and the field in the background. This is amazing. I've seen a lot of photographs of sand hill cranes; this is really one of the better ones. I would be pleased if I had taken one this strong. This is wonderful.



Orphaned Meerkat

Julie Chen

Such an emotional relationship here, the way it's craning its neck like a human child that you can't deny it; whatever it's asking for you want to give it. That's a strange, surprising relationship between a human and a meerkat. There's a catch light in the eye and one on the nose, which is adorable. It's all about the gesture here. It's so well done. I'll also note there are a lot of diagonals running through this image that you may not notice but that keeps the energy moving upward. And the light is exactly where it should be. Wonderful.



As Beautiful As A Parking Lot, Hollister Hills SVRA

Kent Van Vuren

What a great title! What a commentary! Makes me laugh. The B&W is an interesting choice; I'm not sure about it honestly because the zone system (1 is the whitest white and 10 is the blackest black) reads a lot of mid tones, a lot of 4s, 5s, and 6s, a lot of gray tones in the middle and not a lot of contrast. Not sure it's doing the work a B&W image needs to do, which is give a lot of structural emphasis to the image. Maybe try it in color ... or up the tonal range to avoid the cluster in the middle. But I do like the undulating curves and the sense of the continuous movement into the background, implying infinite space.



Covid Glove in Monterey Harbor

Kent Van Vuren

Such a strong image. When I first saw it it automatically referenced jelly fish, and that's really clever. There's a way you see this as an ancient animal swimming, and yet it's so contemporary and human and on the theme of Human Hand in Nature. Wow. Spot on. It says so much about what we've been through collectively with Covid and the way we have trashed into our environment. There are a lot of ideas packed into this one frame. Very successful.

Winning Images Honorable Mentions



Covid Glove in Monterey Harbor
Kent Van Vuren



Western Gull Chicks
Chris Johnson



Orphaned Meerkat
Julie Chen

Winning Images - Group Blue



1st Place

No Place to Land
Julie Chen



2nd Place

Red-shouldered Hawks Mating on Utility Pole
Dennis Giuffre



3rd Place

Black Phoebe Resting Unafraid on a Scarecrow
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