

Padre Trails Camera Club Nature #2 “Backyard” Competition - August 21, 2019 Group AAA Comments



01-Acorn woodpecker.jpg

Gina Gianfala

What a great image! And congratulations on your honorable mention placement—I really loved looking at this image and loved the moment you were able to catch with what I’m sure was a lot of patience and practice. You captured such an earnest and beautiful moment of this bird’s day. You have some lovely things going on in this image—the shallow depth of field sets the bird off in such an effective way, the diagonal of the tree branch and the position of the bird are all working together to make this image really work on many levels. I love the soft lighting that is present in this image and the pop of red on the bird’s head is just the “icing on the top” of the whole image. Well done!! ****



02-Anna’s Hummingbird in Garden.jpg

Dennis Giuffre

This is an absolutely stunning image (congratulations on your first place award—well deserved!!) and I’m so glad to get the chance to see it and enjoy its beauty. Your strong focus, usage of appropriate depth of field and excellent lighting are all working to make this image extremely strong and visually compelling. I applaud your efforts as I’m sure this image took a lot of patient waiting over perhaps many, many days. Being prepared and being present at the right moment are both key... but those two things work together for you only because you were prepared with the correct technical skills to allow the image to come to fruition. I love the glistening quality of the bird’s feathers, how the light accentuates the wing tips and how the profile of the bird’s head is “just so” and very right for this image. This is truly a publication worthy image (and one I wish I had shot!). *****



03-Anna’s hummingbird.jpg

Gina Gianfala

This is a very sweet and contemplative image. You managed to show such an interesting display of scale in how the smallness of the bird is contrasted with the branches on which it is perching. The slight open mouth of the bird in profile is a lovely addition to the image and I’m sure a moment you were extremely excited to capture. This little bird has a lot of personality! Along with proper focus, great usage of depth of field and white balance, this image sings with a beautiful composition—placing your subject within the rule of thirds allows the eye to move around the image and create a dynamic visual journey. Well done ***



04-Baja Owl.jpg

Dick Light

This image shows off the camouflaged quality that the Baja Owl possesses and mimics what would be present if this owl were seen in the wild. The slight cock of the owl's head gives it a boost of personality and the piercing yellow eyes allow the viewer to connect on a few levels with the subject. Excellent use of shallow depth of field, proper white balance (which can be hard in a shaded area), and focus. I go back and forth on whether or not the green bar in the image is distracting... On the one hand, this owl is photographed in captivity, so there will be some element of human interaction in the image, but the green bar and chain link fencing do take me straight out of the moment and bring me right back to reality. It's also something that might not be able to be helped depending on where this image was taken. I can also see the image as a comment on captivity by including the human elements in it... In that case, it's a positive addition. It really depends on the message you are trying to say with your image. Think about a title that might be a little more descriptive as to give the viewer a hint to your intention (diminishing the human element or highlighting it). All in all, this is a lovely image of a lovely, magical creature. ***



05-Before Thanksgiving.jpg

Dick Light

Wow, what an elusive moment you were able to capture! This past Thanksgiving we saw some turkeys on our street on Thanksgiving day and it was so ironic... and also made me feel a little bad about that delicious turkey I had roasting in the oven! I love how close you were able to get to the turkeys and how focused you are on that beautiful foreground turkey... almost as if that one is the alpha of the rafter or flock. The fact that the red of the gullet is seen and in focus is a really nice addition. The fall off of depth of field helps to emphasize the main foreground turkey while also showing the massive amount of them you were able to capture. I think a change of vantage point (perhaps getting down further to photograph them from a lower level) would take this image to the next level. It would help to add a monumental feeling to the image and may allow for a more dynamic quality of light to be incorporated into the image. **



06-Bewick Wren Hunting Back Yard.jpg

Dennis Giuffre

This is such a whimsical, interesting way to view a series of images! I love the sequential aspect of the image and congratulations on your second placement in this contest! Well done! I love to watch birds and one thing that I notice is the almost stop motion, animated quality of their movements and this sequencing of imagery calls this aspect of their movement to mind. It also allows the image to become alive and give the viewer a sense of motion as if one were watching a movie! Each image is such a joy to look at and has its own artistic merit—the moments you were able to capture are fascinating! I'm sure a lot of work, patience and craft went into this image. You truly have a gift for capturing nature and wildlife (in your own backyard, nonetheless!). *****



07-Carmel Coast line south.jpg

Rick Thau

What a joy it must be to live so close to such amazing and visually powerful shorelines and beaches! I appreciate this image (great depth of field, white balance, focus, etc.), but do feel that there could be some things you may want to consider when shooting landscapes. I struggle with landscape photography...I love looking at it, but find it very hard to accomplish myself, but continually try! What I've found is that the time of day is so very important. I think, in this case, a change of time of day would allow this image to travel to the next level. While you do have some lovely light reflecting off of the water, the harshness of the light can be seen in the foreground (the shadows on the ground). A landscape photographer sometimes has to be just as patient as a bird watcher to wait for just the right moment when the light is playing on the landscape just the right way. The branches on the right side of the image are a little distracting—my eye keeps going there instead of staying on the water which I think is where the viewer's eye is probably intended to go. Framing the image with foliage can be effective, but there's a very thin line between effective and distracting. Varying up vantage points can also help remove any distracting elements that are on the side of the frame. ***



08-Cloudy Morning.jpg

Jean Wells

Wow, what a breathtaking time of day you captured! The intense colors are incredible and I love the play of the warm colors contrasting with the cool colors. I also like how the image is divided almost into thirds and plays well compositionally. Well done. The constructive criticism I have is regarding the foreground flora elements...I think that cropping some of the bottom of the photo would allow the flora that is in the foreground to really become a key player in the image. On first look, I felt that it was a bit distracting, then when I sat with the image, I felt that I really liked that aspect of the image, it was just that there could be some of the bottom cropped to help that part of the image be more of a key player. It would also create more of a panoramic effect, too, which could be a nice addition to the image. ***



09-Flower Closeup.jpg

Rick Thau

The emphasis of purple, especially how it plays off of the green in the image, is quite nice. I also like the shallow depth of field that you used—any more depth of field and it could be seen as very distracting. I can see where you were trying to go with this image and I have some comments that I hope will help. It helps to create visual interest in an image when the subject is placed off of center. I think in this case, placing the subject off to one side would add some visual interest. If you are familiar with the rule of thirds, that would be a great place to start. You are effectively imagining a tic tac toe board over your composition and placing the subject where one of those lines intersect. Some cameras have a tic tac toe style grid on their viewfinder making it easy to place the subject. I would also consider getting closer to your subject—this will allow you to omit distracting backgrounds that can interfere with your image. You may have been as close as you can get depending on your particular lens. If that's the case, think about purchasing a set of close up filters (they are super affordable on Amazon—about \$20 for a set). These allow you to get closer and examine your subjects in a new way. The background of this image does become distracting and using the close up filters will allow you to take the background out entirely. I would also investigate different times of day to photograph nature—a softer light may make for an interesting effect on the subject. *



10-GERANIUM FRONT YARD.jpg

Dennis Giuffre

I love how close up you were able to get—this doesn't even look like a geranium anymore! You've played with scale in allowing such an up close and personal shot. I love the usage of color and the fact that I can see the individual veins of the flower. The diagonal placement of the flower in the frame adds a lot of visual dimension and depth. Your depth of field has allowed the subject to separate quite nicely from the background. The two flowers that are pointing down are almost seeming to bow to the beauty of the foreground flower. That's such a lovely, intimate and subtle detail that I appreciate. I also love how the warmth and coolness of the colors contrast. Well done! ****



11-Have a seat in the sunlight.jpg

Florian Brennenstuhl

I do love the strong usage of shadow in this image, the distortion caused by the wide angle lens as well as the unique perspective. Your white balance and focus are great. I feel as if you are trying to emphasize the sun and allow the viewer to feel the warmth of the sunlight in relation to the bench. The sunlight at the top of the image does become distracting—my eye goes right to the top of the picture instead of the bench. I have to pull my eye back down to see the loveliness of the shadows. Typically, our eyes go to the brightest point in an image first, then meander around the image in a path. My eye goes right to the bright sun in the upper right and then stays there, creating a static effect in the image. If the vantage point were changed just a bit so that the sun played more behind the trees, you'd have some lovely, soft backlight without a bright spot that can distract the viewer . *



12-HawkSearching.jpg

Chris Parsons

Wow, what an interesting moment you were able to capture! I love the personality of the hawk I am able to see when peering into the image. The fact that it's looking down on something I cannot see adds to the mystery of the image. I also love the contrast of the man made objects the hawk is using to perch for its hunt. This contrast is not only eye catching, but metaphorically interesting to contemplate. There is a menacing aspect to the wires that surround the hawk which adds to the overall impact of the image. The only advice I might give is to brighten the image up a bit (this could also be my own screen which could be darker than yours causing a dullness to the image). Your focus, white balance and usage of depth of field all play nicely together to create a dynamic and visually compelling image. ****



13-Heading Home.jpg

Chyrl Light

I love the play of the subject with its reflection in this image—I think it's what makes the image visually compelling. You are also able to capture some lovely soft textural accents with the smoothness of the water. Your focus, white balance and exposure are all effective and appropriate for the image. I also think the movement that is evident in the image that can be seen with the displacement of the water around the subject is a nice touch. To take the image to the next level and pull it ahead of the pack, a clear vision needs to be established to create an image that is different than others of the same kind. I think playing up the reflection aspect of the image could be key—perhaps consider adjusting composition when shooting that would allow this aspect to drive the image. While it's a lovely image, a different perspective that allows the image to have more intent could take this in a great direction. ***



14-Into the Light.jpg

Jean Wells

I love that you converted this image to black and white! Calla lilies are wonderful subjects to explore and lots of precedent has been set to explore this subject in black and white. I do have some constructive comments that I hope will help you as you move forward with your visual explorations. I have a few suggestions for formal aspects and a few for post production. I'll start with the post production...don't be afraid of contrast! Consider giving this image more contrast—darken the shadows a bit and open up the highlight areas. I think you'll be nicely surprised at how much folks visually respond to images with a bit of contrast. I would also give this image a little bit of a vignette. Upon viewing it, it has a slightly brightened effect that is on each corner of the image. I'm not sure if this your intention or just oversight, but a burn on your edges and corners will help keep the viewer's eyes in the center of the image. For formal aspects, I do like that there are some diagonals in the picture with the ivy that is in the foreground and the background. Each element in an image should interact to create a whole that is compelling. In this image, the ivy doesn't seem to connect to the cala lily, and thus becomes a little distracting. I would play more on the diagonal aspects of the ivy... maybe let the shadows of the ivy fall on the flower by taking the photo at a different time of day. You could also introduce more ivy, or take it away completely...I think the thing to keep in mind is why an element is in the photograph and does it help to enhance the subject? *



15-Knotholes and tree texture.jpg

Rick Thau

Wow, the texture in this image is lovely! The monochromatic color scheme is also pleasing. Your exposure, white balance and depth of field are all correct. I think however lovely the texture is, it is the abundance of texture that is causing some visual discord. As the image stands, I'm not quite sure what is the focal point of the image...the holes or the texture. I do like that you placed the holes above the center of the photograph which does help with the formal aspects of the image. I may think about cropping out the right side of the photograph and the little bit of light coming in on the upper left side (eyes tend to go to the brightest spot of an image and having a bright spot in a corner can take the viewer out of the image) or even making it into a square by cropping both the right side and the bottom of the image. The texture of the bark looks almost like an abstract painting with the bark being brushstrokes. I've included a crop of the image as an almost square that may emphasize the holes a bit more (I hope this is ok). **



16-Mom and Baby.jpg

Chyrl Light

This is such a magical moment that you were able to catch...you must have been so patient and what a pleasure to be ready when the right moment occurred! The focus of this image is quite lovely—I love the depth of field you used as well as the lovely play of color. The deer camouflage quite nicely into the background of the fence, which is interesting because when we think of deer, we usually think of them blending into a natural background. Blending into a manmade background is a unique twist on the concept of camouflage. The spots on the young deer mimic the blooms of the flowers in such a lovely way. The only bit of feedback I would give is to consider giving this image a little more contrast. I think if you were to pull the shadow areas down a bit, this image would just sing! ***



17-Moo, Moo.jpg

Chyrl Light

I grew up on a cattle farm and have such an affinity for cows—it was a pleasure to see a photograph of a cow! The background of this image is very interesting...I love the texture that is created by the branches and I also like the elements in the foreground (the patch of earth that has lost grass and the play of green around that patch). Where I think this image could rise above is if it had been taken during a time of day when the shadows wouldn't be such a distraction. We tend to not see the contrast of shadows with the naked eye (I fall prey to this from time to time STILL after photographing professionally for more than half of my life!), but the camera not only captures that contrast but it can also be exaggerated (or diminished) depending on exposure. The shadow on the left cow does become distracting. Searching and experimenting with light and how it's reacting and playing with your subjects will allow you to take your imagery to the next level. Also, I see a tag on the cow which leads me to believe this cow may be one that you can revisit, photograph again and develop a relationship with (if you haven't already)! **



18-SensitiveCrow.jpg

Chris Parsons

First of all, I want to say how much I love this title and how much I appreciate the irony and “wink” that you've created with this image. Oh, how sensitive must this crow be!! And how much it's seen will remain a mystery... The formal aspects of this image are really quite nice... your focus is exactly where it needs to be, depth of field and white balance are on point, too. I also love how you patiently waited for the bird to give you the best pose. I think the profile of the crow just adds so much to the enjoyment of this image. I do love how naturally the crow falls into a contrapposto pose that is so striking—almost as if she knew a photo was being taken. The only comment I would say to consider would be to perhaps give the image the slightest bit of vignette to the edges to keep the viewer within the bounds of the image. ***



19-SwallowChick.jpg

Chris Parsons

Congratulations on your third place award! I absolutely love the whimsy and personality you've captured with this image. It just made me smile, chuckle a bit and want to know more about this little guy. The quality of light is pleasing and I love how I can see individual little feathers on this fella. I love how you've separated the bird from the background. Your composition is extremely strong—you've used the rule of thirds so effectively, it's impressive! The depth of field is lovely and effective and the color scheme that is at play is visually compelling. I love the punch of personality the bird has...he (or she?) seems a little miffed that his photo is being taken! Very well done (this is an image I wish I had taken myself!).

20-The small tropical bird.jpg

Florian Brennenstuhl

This is a lovely image and you've got so many wonderful things going on in the image...composition and depth of field are superb and give this image so much in terms of layered visuals. The diagonal of the branch moving through the photo is quite lovely and really add visual interest to the image as well as the softness of the depth of field. The lovely colors also create dimension and visual interest in this image. The pops of color in the tropical bird add a great visual kick as well. The brown feathers with white spots almost camouflage the bird allowing it to blend into the background in a way that doesn't take away from the image, but accents the bird's natural defenses. I would love to see the images that didn't make the cut! ****



21-Three Bucks.jpg

Dick Light

It's not often you get to see three bucks together like this—and with the velvet still on their antlers. What a treat! You must have been very patient to have this moment unfold in front of you! I like how you've divided this image into almost three separate viewing spaces—the sky, the farmland and the foreground with the bucks. They are composed well also, with one staggered against the other and this creates a nice path for the eye to travel in the photo. I think using triangles in a photo is a powerful compositional tool and the three bucks in this image work well to do this. I'm not sure how much post processing was done to this image, but it does look like the sky has some heavy processing on it. I would see what the image looks like with the sky toned down a bit. It does fight with the foreground and pulls your eye away from the three stars of the show. Just masking the sky out a bit and allowing the natural beauty of the tones to shine through may add to the image...something to consider. ***





22-Tropical paradise.jpg

Florian Brennenstuhl

The magenta and green complementary colors you use here sure do make a visual pop in this image. But with the image's emphasis on both magenta and green and such a deep depth of field, it becomes hard to tell which is supposed to be emphasized—the amazing flower or the gorgeous foliage...I suppose they are fighting a bit for the starring role in this photograph. I would urge you to get closer to your subject and play with more shallow depth of field to allow what you are wanting to emphasize come forward. In this image, the blooms that are not quite open are really the most interesting aspect of the flower. I would love to see an image where you are getting closer to that part of the flower and photographing it against the gorgeous backdrop of the green foliage. If you haven't found the powerful tool of using close up lenses, you may want to purchase a set. They are super reasonable and cost about \$20 on Amazon or other retailers. They make you get pretty close up but allow you to get closer than your actual lens can. This can take you out of your comfort zone and get you closer than you ever thought you could get. *

Winning Images:

Honorable Mention:

Acorn Woodpecker

Gina Gianfala



3rd Place:

Swallow Chick
Chris Parsons



2nd Place:

Bewick Wren Hunting Back Yard
Dennis Giuffre



1st Place:

Anna's Hummingbird in Garden
Dennis Giuffre

