



HOW TO WIN: AN INSIDER'S GUIDE



Welcome to the Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition 2008. I hope you'll be entering this year – it's the greatest showcase in the world for natural history photographers, and even better, everyone has a chance of winning.

BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE JUDGES **MARK CARWARDINE**

THIS COMPETITION PLAYS a crucial role in raising the profile of wildlife photography and stimulating an awareness of nature conservation. Nothing speaks louder than an evocative photograph that stirs the imagination, tugs at the heartstrings and engages the mind. And as a profound source of beauty, wonder and joy, the winning entries give enormous pleasure to hundreds of thousands of people through books, magazines and the international exhibition.

With an incredible 32,318 entries from no fewer than 78 countries, 2007 was a record-breaking year. So how do you make your image stand out from the crowd? Well, there are no hard and fast rules to explain why one photograph wins a competition and another doesn't, but there is one key ingredient – originality. The judges are looking for

something that stops them in their tracks.

Imagine you're a judge looking at thousands upon thousands of photographs. Many of the images are technically flawless – well-exposed, perfectly sharp and pleasantly composed – and, after a while, you take these key ingredients for granted. You become desperate for something really creative, fresh and surprising to leap out from the screen. The pictures that do are the ones that win. So it's not what you photograph – it's the way that you do it.

Despite some people's worries, pictures of common and familiar species close to home stand just as much chance of winning as images of more exotic, rare and unfamiliar ones. In fact, I would go so far as to argue that they have a ▶

▲ Ben Osborne's vision of an elephant charging through a muddy watering hole won him the title Shell Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2007. Judge Jim Brandenburg said, "The temptation to use the camera in the most literal and 'accurate' way is strong and proper, but in the hands of a daring and skilled photographer, magic like this can be created."

1996 PATRICK BAKER ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR: ALL OTHER ANIMALS



This picture works because of the shapes formed by all those anchovies escaping the sharks. It's the result of patient observation – waiting for the shoal to thin out to get the effect. Waiting and watching, then picking your moment, is better than snapping away haphazardly.

1997 KEVIN SCHAFER GERALD DURRELL AWARD



It's good to pull back sometimes and reveal more of the environment. Showing this tapir standing in a fast-flowing river – and adding drama with a slow shutter speed – is what gives the shot impact. A tight crop of the tapir itself wouldn't have worked nearly as well.

1998 MANFRED DANEGGER OVERALL WINNER



This was the culmination of 20 years spent photographing hares, and it captures the action perfectly – with the added bonus of a halo of water droplets frozen in mid-air. The rim-lighting and clean, relatively dark and unobtrusive background make the hares leap out of the picture.

1999 JAMIE THOM OVERALL WINNER



How many pictures of leopards are taken every year? And how many come close to this one? Not many. It's all about light and composition. The rising moon is just beautiful. The leopard even looks relaxed, and the gentle glow of the spotlight sustains a sense of calm.

2000 JIM PETEK COMPOSITION AND FORM



More like a painting than a photo, this intriguing picture is unusual and imaginative. The temptation must have been to freeze the movement and crop in tight. But the slow shutter speed gives it an ethereal feel and the loose crop achieves the right balance of detail and drama.

2001 MERVIN D COLEMAN ANIMAL PORTRAITS



Bison are unmistakable: they are large animals with a very distinctive shape. This portrait captures both characteristics perfectly. Shooting against the sun has exaggerated the bison's outline, and shooting from below has boosted its size. But it's the frosty breath that makes it.

2002 DUNCAN MURRELL ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR: MAMMALS



Sometimes you have to push the boundaries to get something really different. The photographer kayaked into the heart of the action to capture this dramatic moment. The unusually low angle and the closeness of the gargantuan whale make it stand out from the crowd.

2003 JOSE B RUIZ FROM DUSK TO DAWN



Some photographs take months of planning and preparation. This extraordinary picture, shot with a six-minute exposure (in the days of film) is an outstanding example. The result is unique. Emphasising the drama of the night landscape, it is unlike any other image of a stork.

2004 RÉGIS CAVIGNAUX WILD PLACES



Most of us imagine huge vistas when we think of wild places – and we would have missed this shot. But Cavignaux has captured wildness in the detail of an Icelandic cliff – not just white surf against black sand, but the ruggedly diagonal line of those basalt rock columns.

2005 MANUEL PRESTI OVERALL WINNER



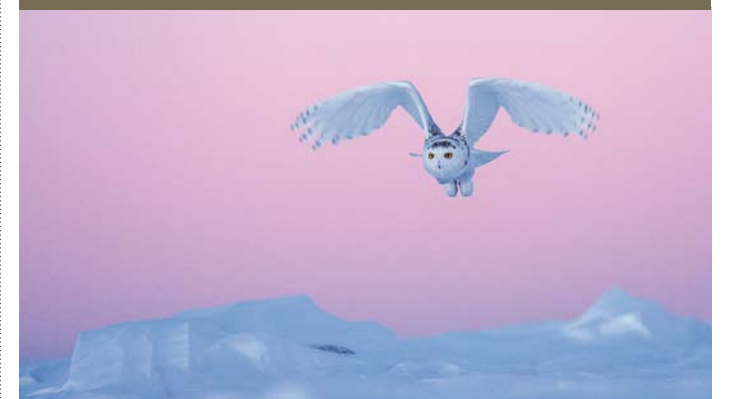
This cracking shot is one you will never forget. Its graphic simplicity, combined with the starkness of black against white, is really powerful. But it works on another level, too, because it is full of energy and movement and captures an absolutely perfect wildlife moment.

2006 JOCKE BERGLUND THE WORLD IN OUR HANDS



This once-in-a-lifetime picture (described by the photographer as “a heaven-sent message to the forest industry”) is undeniably different and thought-provoking. It conveys a strong sense of our impact on the environment. It's intriguing, too – the more you look, the more you see.

2007 LOUIS-MARIE PRÉAU ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR: BIRDS



A breathtaking image. It's all about colour and light – the delicate pink of the sky against the cool blue snow almost makes it vibrate. The owl is perfectly positioned, flying across the frame while still showing its eyes, and its angel-like wings are the icing on the cake.

THE JUDGES, CATEGORIES & PRIZES

THE JUDGES

Pre-select judges

Phil Hurst Photographer, Natural History Museum
Paul Lund Photographer, Natural History Museum
Tor MacIntosh Freelance picture researcher
Wanda Sowry Picture researcher, BBC Wildlife Magazine
Kevin Webb Photographer, Natural History Museum

Judges

Tom Ang Photographer and writer
Mark Carwardine (chair) Zoologist, writer and photographer
Ross Hoddinott Natural history photographer
Phil Keevill Creative director, KNAS
Rosamund Kidman Cox Editor and writer
Jouni Klinga Nature photographer
Tom Mangelsen Wildlife photographer
Cristina Mittermeier Executive director, ILCP
Flip Nicklin Photographer
Norbert Rosing Wildlife photographer
José Ruiz Nature photographer and author
Sophie Stafford Editor, BBC Wildlife

WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR 2008 CATEGORIES

» **Eric Hosking Award**
 This award rewards the talents of photographers aged 18 to 26. You must submit a portfolio of 10 images representing your best work.
Prize: £1,000

» **Gerald Durrell Award for Endangered Wildlife**
 This award celebrates photographic excellence that raises awareness of endangered species on the 2007 IUCN Red List. The images must be memorable and capture the spirit of the subject.
Prize: £1,000

» **One Earth Award**
 This award highlights the interaction between humans and the natural world. Images should demonstrate the power and resilience of our

planet and its impact on us. They can also show our connection with or dependence or effect on nature. Images can be graphic or symbolic, but must be thought-provoking, memorable and encourage respect for our world.
Prize: £1,000

NEW FOR 2008

» **Photographers' Award for Lifetime Commitment to Wildlife Photography**
 This award will be given to a photographer whose commitment to wildlife photography is considered worthy of commendation. This can be through either the sheer power and beauty of the imagery or the demonstrable positive impact the imagery has made. *All online entrants will be able to nominate candidates for this award.*

» **Animals in their Environment**
 Images must be powerful and memorable and show the relationship between the animal and its environment.

» **Behaviour: Birds**

» **Behaviour: Mammals**

» **Behaviour: All Other Animals**
 Images must show memorable, unusual or striking behaviour.

» **The Underwater World**
 Images must feature marine or freshwater life.

» **Animal Portraits**
 Images must capture the character or spirit of the subject and focus on it.

» **In Praise of Plants**
 Images must highlight the beauty, diversity and importance of all forms of plantlife.

» **Urban & Garden Wildlife**
 Images must show wild animals or plants in urban settings.

» **Nature in Black and White**
 Images can be submitted digitally, as slides or prints, and must show any wild landscape, animal, plant or other living organism. The judges are looking for skilful use of the black and white medium.

» **Creative Visions of Nature**
 Images should reveal new

ways of seeing natural subjects or scenes, representing them in imaginative or abstract ways. Judges will be looking for originality and artistic vision.

» Wild Places

Images must show scenes that are truly wild and awesome, and convey a sense of wonder and wildness.

YOUNG CATEGORIES

» Young Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2008

If you're 17 or under, this is the competition for you. You can enter pictures of any wild animals, plants or landscapes.

The judges will be looking for original, beautiful or striking shots rather than rare or exotic species. Creatures or places close to home may be your best subjects.

The way you frame and crop your subject is as important as getting the focus right, and the level and type of light is a vital ingredient. There are three age categories:

- A** 10 years and under
- B** 11–14 years old
- C** 15–17 years old

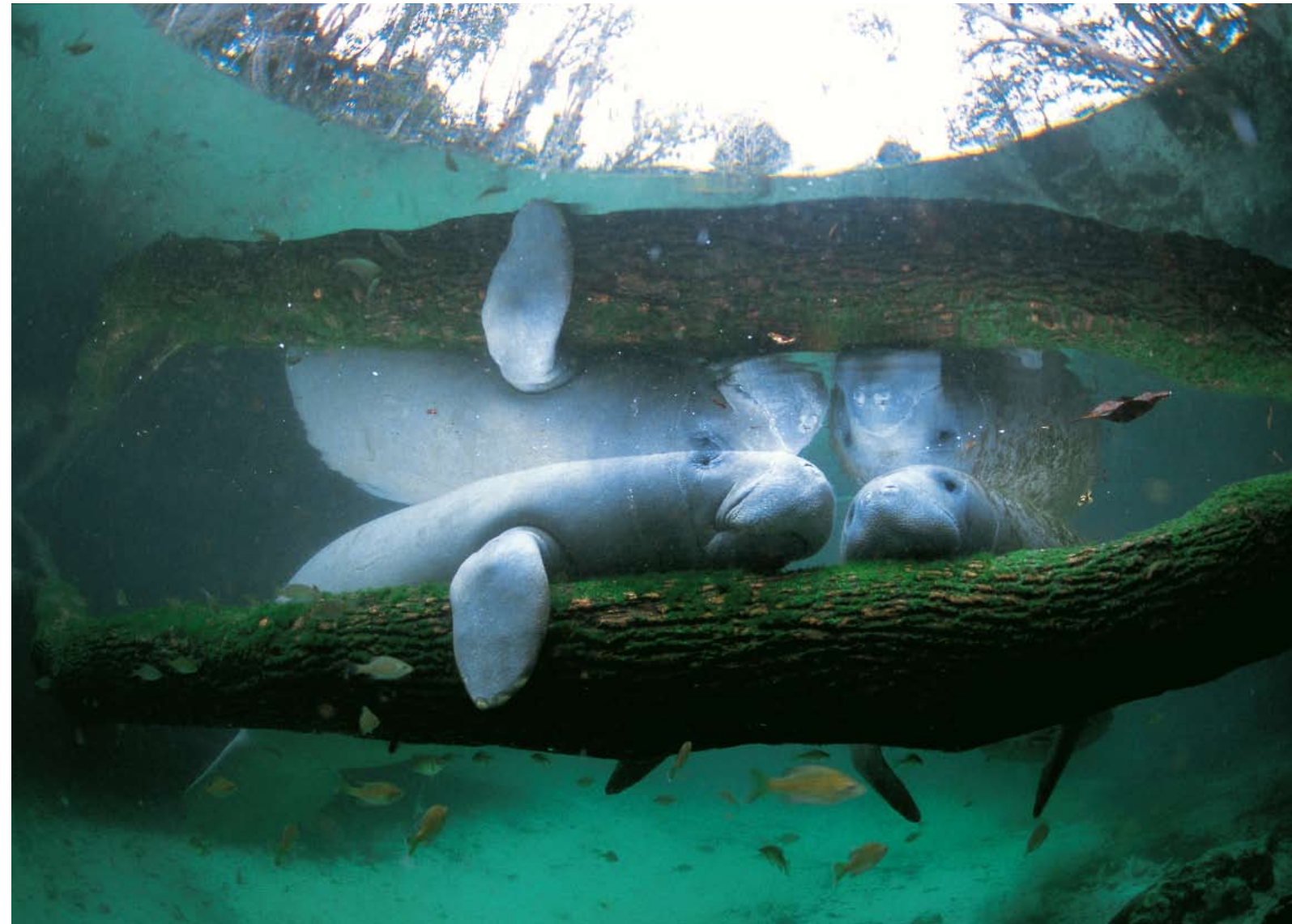
THE PRIZES

» The title Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2008 will be awarded to the photographer judged to have taken the single most striking and memorable of all the entries. He/she will receive a cheque for £10,000, which will be presented at an awards ceremony at the Natural History Museum, London, in October 2008.

» The category winners and runners-up will share the £23,550 prize pool.

» The title Young Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2008 will be awarded to the young photographer judged to have taken the single most striking and memorable of all the three age categories. He/she will receive a prize of £500 and a day out with a well-known wildlife photographer.

► *Napping Manatees by Jun Kezuka. "This is a wonderfully fresh interpretation of a much-photographed species," says Mark. "It's mystical and slightly surreal, and the reflections work beautifully."*



better chance, simply because common and familiar species tend to be taken for granted, so there is more opportunity to surprise.

With this in mind, successful photographers work hard at their craft. They get down low, climb high, move backwards, crawl forwards, creep from side to side, think laterally, get up early and stay out late. They wait patiently for hours, days or even weeks for exactly the right light or the magic moment when the animal they are photographing yawns, stretches, sneezes, runs or jumps. They are passionate people, determined to get something different.

So just repeat the mantra 'originality, originality, originality' first thing every morning and last thing at night and you'll be on the road to success.

MAKING THE FINAL SELECTION

One of the biggest challenges is choosing what to enter. It's almost as important as taking the pictures in the first place.

Reading the rules – and following them – is an obvious first step (though perhaps not that obvious, given the number of entries that break the rules and, sadly, are deemed invalid). Reading the category descriptions (see box, left) is just as important.

Then you have to be honest with yourself and edit ruthlessly. It's all too easy to become emotionally attached to certain images, and this is when people tend to enter 'almost' shots. Resist this temptation. Just because a picture shows an endangered species that was taken on your once-in-a-lifetime holiday to the other side of the world, in the first light at 4am, while you were waist-deep in mud and being bitten by malaria-carrying mosquitos, doesn't necessarily mean it's any good. The fact is that mediocre shots won't win.

Be hard on yourself. Is the image pin-sharp or is it slightly soft? Is the light subtle and beautiful or harsh and contrasty? Have you captured a perfect moment or have you just missed it? Is the background clean and simple

or is it spoilt by unwanted branches and other distractions? Is there an interesting symmetry to the picture or does it feel uncomfortable? These are some of the probing questions you must ask yourself. Be a tough editor.

Once you've done that, the trick is to make

There is one key ingredient – originality. The judges are looking for something that stops them in their tracks.

an initial selection – ideally two or three times as many photos as you are allowed to enter – and then get other people to have a look, comment and even make the final selection for you. They don't have the emotional attachment that may make it difficult for you to separate the fun and challenging shots from the really good ones. When you have made your final selection,

HOW TO ENTER

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR IMAGES

» Calibrate your monitor – this is essential if your images are going to look the same on your computer as we see them on-screen during the judging process. Use the Adobe RGB (1998) colour space.

» Don't be tempted to over-sharpen – you are allowed to sharpen images entered in the competition, but you should try to avoid sharpening or apply it minimally.

» Avoid over-saturation – adding a little vibrancy or saturation can enhance an image, but just because there is a control to pump up the saturation doesn't mean you should use it (many images fail to win simply because they are 'over-cooked' – the aim should always be to represent natural colours faithfully).

» Cropping is allowed, but don't overdo it (remember that all winning pictures will need to be reproduced at A2 size) and do not interpolate your images to bring them back up to a sensible size.

» Save your images as size 12 jpegs.

HOW TO ENTER

» Visit www.nhm.ac.uk/wildphoto to read the full rules and category descriptions, enter online or download a postal entry form.

» Please note, it costs £20 to enter online but £27 to enter by post, due to the increased administration this involves.

» Translated rules are available in French, German, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese.

» Closing date for postal entries: **Mon 24 Mar 2008**

» Closing date for online entries: **Mon 31 Mar 2008**

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2008
 The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD, UK
tel +44 (0) 20 7942 5015; **fax** +44 (0) 20 7942 5084
email wildphoto@nhm.ac.uk
website www.nhm.ac.uk/wildphoto

the images need to be processed to enter the competition. For many newcomers to digital photography, this can be a stumbling block. A surprising number of imaginative and well-composed shots do not make the finals simply because they have been badly processed. We've provided some practical tips to help you get it right (see box, above).

BE ORGANISED

Finally, this may seem like stating the obvious, but you've got to be in it to win it. Many people never get round to entering, or panic the night before the deadline and spend the early hours rummaging through their images. Plan enough time to select your entries.

And next time you wander round the exhibition of all the winning pictures and catch yourself proclaiming, "I could have taken a better picture than that," why don't you go out and do it? Even if you don't actually win, your photography will undoubtedly benefit from the process. Good luck!