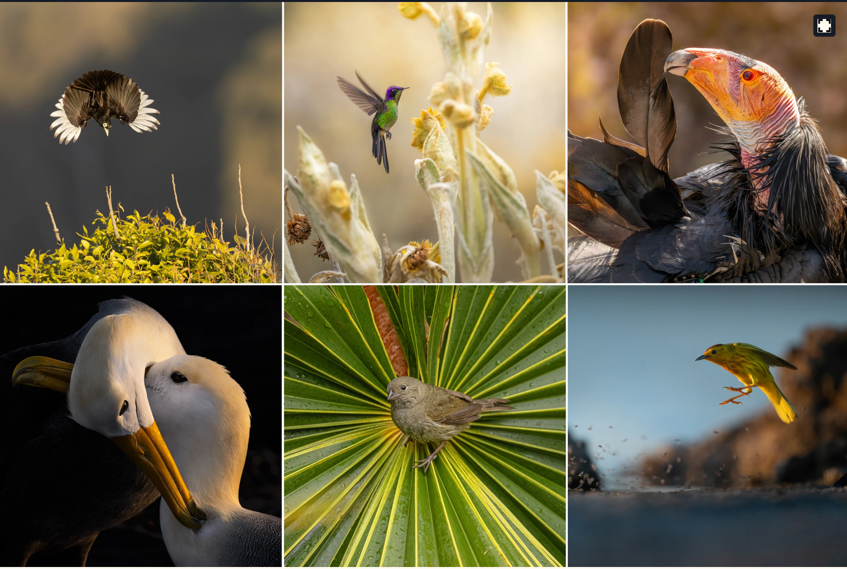
The 2026 Audubon Photography Awards: The Top 100

These jaw-dropping images and behind-the-scenes stories showcase the photographers’ artistry and the beauty of birdlife from Canada to Chile.

Disponible en Español



By **The Editors**
Audubon magazine

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Latest Issue

It’s one of the most exciting moments of the year at *Audubon* magazine, and not only because fall migrants are on the move toward non-breeding grounds. This month we are also celebrating the 2026 Audubon Photography Awards and our second year of holding two parallel contests: one for photographers in the United States and Canada, and one for photographers in Chile and Colombia. After careful and anonymous review, our panel of expert judges selected 17 fabulous winners and 15 honorable mentions—but, as usual, we couldn’t stop there.

Here are 100 more of our favorite photos from this year’s entries from both contests, displayed in no particular order. Scroll through to admire both the beauty of the birds and the skill of the photographers. You’ll find technical specifications for every image as well as the stories “Behind the Shot.” If you get inspired to pick up a camera yourself, our photography section is a good place to get started, which includes Audubon’s ethical guidelines for wildlife photography, gear recommendations, plus tips and how-to’s.

Now, enjoy the photos—and consider entering next year’s contest!

2026 AUDUBON PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS SPONSOR

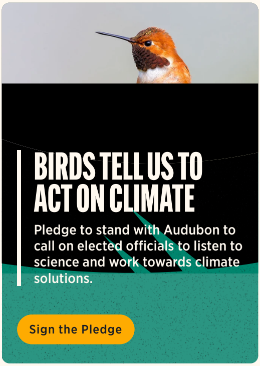
HX EXPEDITIONS

1. Spectacled Tyrant by Veronica Donoso B.

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Cabo Blanco, Los Ríos, Chile

Camera: Canon EOS R6 Mark II with a Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 L IS USM lens at 500mm; 1/2500 sec at f/8; ISO 800


BIRDS TELL US TO ACT ON CLIMATE

Pledge to stand with Audubon to call on elected officials to listen to science and work towards climate solutions.

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Behind the shot: Spring is the best time to observe the Spectacled Tyrant in Chile, when they migrate from farther north in South America. The males arrive first, followed a few weeks later by the females, who come to watch the magnificent acrobatic leaps the males perform to capture their attention. The females hop from bush to bush, searching for the best vantage point from which to observe and select a mate. Paying close attention to this behavior can yield unique moments like this one: a female Spectacled Tyrant at the exact moment of takeoff from a bush, spreading her wings and displaying her intense rust-colored plumage.

2. Northern Pygmy-Owl by Fei Cheng

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Chilliwack, British Columbia, Canada

Camera: Nikon Z8 with a Nikon NIKKOR Z 400mm f/2.8 TC VR S lens; 1/640 sec at f/4; ISO 400

Behind the Shot: Barely the size of a tennis ball, the Northern Pygmy-Owl is one of the smallest owls in the world and notoriously hard to spot. My friend and I spent the day along the edge of a clear-cut forest—good hunting grounds for the owls. We carefully scanned the tree line without much success. As sunset approached and we prepared to leave, my friend noticed a small silhouette perched on a thin twig against a large trunk, briefly lit by the last golden light of the day. Tiny fungi dotted the bark, adding texture to the scene. I managed to set up my telephoto gear just in time to capture the moment, with rim light outlining the owl and the textured bark fading into forest shadow. It was a fleeting encounter, one of those moments where everything aligns briefly and unexpectedly.

3. Sanderling by Sandeep Dhar

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: San Diego, California, United States

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Canon RF 600mm f/4L IS II USM lens; 1/6400 sec at f/4; ISO 100

Behind the Shot: I shot this image at dawn using a ground pod to achieve an intimate, eye-level perspective of a foraging Sanderling flock. Rather than freeze a single moment, I wanted to represent the continuous, rapid movement of the flock as it tracked incoming waves. I used an in-camera multiple exposure technique, layering nine sequential frames into a single image. To get what I wanted, I had to wait for the moment the front row lined up in a uniform direction and catch the first direct rays of light in parallel to the camera sensor plane. I hope to convey the fragile beauty of our coastal ecosystems and inspire the public to protect these shorebirds. By showcasing a common species with a creative perspective, I want viewers to feel the pulse of the coast just as I did.

4. Mangrove Yellow Warbler by Cody Cianfrance

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Washington-Slagbaai National Park, Bonaire

Camera: Nikon Z8 with a Nikon NIKKOR Z 600mm f/6.3 VR S lens; 1/4000 sec at f/6.3; ISO 5600

Behind the Shot: I had never seen this many warblers in my life. Hundreds of them gathered to feast on the abundant flies living amongst the mudflats. It is not often that you see a subject smaller than a warbler, so making this one seem like a giant among the flies was my goal. The hardest part was to predict when the warblers would leap from the ground into the air. Unlike large birds of prey or a wading bird that gives some indication before they take off, these warblers gave none, nor was there any pattern I could recognize before they jumped. I took thousands of shots and waited hours before finally achieving the shot that I thought portrayed this warbler like a large predator.

5. Waved Albatross by Liron Gertsman

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Galápagos, Ecuador

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 IS USM lens; 1/1600 sec at f/9; ISO 1600

Behind the Shot: Española Island is the primary breeding site for the beautiful Waved Albatross. These majestic birds return to the island each spring to find their mate and bring life to the next generation. While visiting the island during courtship season, I witnessed this pair allopreening and mating in the sunset light. Composing the image with dark-shaded lava rocks in the background and exposing for the highlights, I aimed to minimize distraction and bring the focus of the image onto these beautiful and affectionate birds. Waved Albatrosses are critically endangered, having undergone population decline that may be due to fishing impacts, including bycatch, disturbance, and disease.

6. Snowy Plover by Nan Li

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Huntington Beach, California, United States

Camera: Sony Alpha 1 with a Sony FE 300mm f/2.8 GM OSS lens and a Sony FE 1.4x Teleconverter; 1/2500 sec at f/4; ISO 640

Behind the Shot: I spent many summer evenings scanning the sand for these small, round creatures. I would lie low and stay perfectly still while waiting for action. On one late afternoon, I was about to pack up my gear when I noticed a pair begin their courtship ritual. Witnessing their mating dance for the first time—with its rhythmic kicking and playful gestures—made me smile as I quietly dropped down and raised my camera. Seeing this threatened species engage in such a delicate, choreographed ritual was both rare and deeply moving. I never tire of observing Snowy Plovers, and I feel incredibly fortunate to have captured this intimate glimpse into their lives. With this image, I hope to spark curiosity, encourage beachgoers to notice these fragile birds, and inspire people to protect their vulnerable coastal habitat.

7. White-crested Elaenia by Francisco Castro Carmona

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Ensenada, Los Lagos, Chile

Camera: Nikon D3200 with a Sigma 150-600mm f/5-6.3 DG OS HSM Contemporary lens at 600mm; 1/1000 sec at f/6.3; ISO 800

Behind the shot: Each spring, White-crested Elaenias arrive from the Amazon to the area where I live. This spring in particular I noticed that they were constantly visiting a notro, a tree native to southern Chile, right in front of my terrace to feed on its flowers. I immediately thought how beautiful a photograph would be of one of them next to these red flowers, which they eat to replenish the calories lost on their long journey. Since my camera doesn't have a good autofocus system, I pre-focused on this particular branch and settled in with plenty of patience. Finally, after a couple afternoons of waiting, a bird perched for a moment there, and I got my shot. After taking it, I noticed that one of the bird's cheeks was stained red by pollen, an unexpected detail that I think makes the photo even more special.

8. White-throated Toucan by Sebastián Di Domenico

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Palmarí Natural Reserve, Amazonas, Brazil

Camera: Nikon D500 with a Sigma 150-600mm f/5-6.3 DG DN OS Sports lens; 1/400 sec at f/6; ISO 1600

Behind the shot: This was my second time at the Palmarí

Nature Reserve, where I was working as a volunteer. Since we didn't have any visitors, I decided to have lunch in the office at the back of the house, which is somewhat open. While I was eating, this toucan landed on a nearby branch with the bat still alive and making a lot of noise. I had heard about these birds' predatory behavior, but I had never seen it in person, and it struck me. For several minutes, the toucan bashed the bat against the branches. So I ran to get my camera, and the rest is history!

9. Ring-necked Pheasant by Benjamin Neff

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Marshall County, Iowa, United States

Camera: Canon EOS R7 with a Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 L IS USM lens; 1/500 sec at f/7.1; ISO 400

Behind the Shot: A few years ago, when I first started out in photography, I took a photo of a turkey between rows of corn. It wasn't great, but I liked the idea of photographing wildlife between crop rows to highlight Iowa's wildlife having to adapt to a farming landscape. Two years later, I got another chance and snapped this shot of a Ring-necked Pheasant. After spending hours every day going up and down the rows, I spotted three pheasants. This male paused for a split second and gave me the chance to take his photo before he continued walking into the corn looking for food. While not native to the area, the birds have become a symbol of the Midwest since their introduction in the 1900s. Efforts to support this gamebird benefit all wildlife.

10. Sanderling by Kevin Lohman

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Moss Landing State Beach, Moss Landing, California, United States

Camera: Nikon Z9 with a Nikon NIKKOR Z 400mm f/2.8 TC

VR S lens; 1/20 sec at f/7.1; ISO 90

Behind the Shot: Sanderlings are constantly in motion along the shoreline, running and flying in coordinated groups as they follow the changing rhythm of the surf. I watched this flock moving back and forth in a mesmerizing pattern, repeatedly sweeping over the beach and then turning back over the water. I wanted to capture that feeling of motion rather than freeze it, so I intentionally slowed my shutter speed to 1/20 sec and hand-held a long lens while panning with the flock. When I reviewed the images, this one brought back the feeling I experienced while standing on the beach. The blurred wings and softened waves convey movement and energy, while the blue water contrasts with the birds. I hope the image encourages people to pause and appreciate the beauty and coordination of even the small shorebirds that often race past unnoticed.

11. Great Egret by Briar Richard

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Napoleonville, Louisiana, United States

Camera: Nikon Z9 with a Nikon NIKKOR Z 800mm f/6.3 VR S lens; 1/1800 sec at f/8; ISO 560

Behind the Shot: Roughly an hour before sunset, as I paddled toward the Attakapas Landing on the southern bank of Lake Verret, I spotted a Great Egret preening in bald cypress trees. Golden hour light shone perpendicular to the shoreline, creating a scene of light and shadow. Using the paddles to slow down the kayak and aim myself toward the egret, I took a series of pictures until momentum turned me away. It’s always special to experience sunsets at Lake Verret, which is a beautiful Atchafalaya Basin Lake in south central Louisiana. Photographing wildlife there provides a beautiful backdrop of bald cypress trees draped in thick Spanish moss in every direction.

12. White-capped Dipper by Julián Felipe Arbeláez Aristizábal

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Near Rio Blanco Natural Reserve, Caldas, Colombia

Camera: Sony Alpha 6600 with a Sony FE 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 G OSS lens at 600mm; 1/5000 sec at f/7.1; ISO 6400

Behind the shot: This photo is part of a personal challenge: I wanted to capture images that showcase the unique habitats of certain species without making the birds the sole focal point, while also keeping them from fading into the background. In the case of this White-capped Dipper, I wanted to highlight the riverbed and surrounding rocks where the bird makes its home. Not only does the species nest there, it also feeds and moves about with ease, searching for small prey among the rocks and beneath the water's surface. This was a difficult shot not only because capturing the dipper's black-and-white tones is a challenge, but because the bird's movement and speed aren't predictable. But since I'm familiar with the species' behavior, I positioned myself strategically to get the right angle and finally managed to photograph the dipper in its dynamic environment.

13. Black-faced Grassquit
Lorraine Minns

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Hartswell, Exuma, Bahamas

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Canon RF 100-500mm F/4.5-7.1 L IS USM lens; 1/320 sec at f/7.1; ISO 2500

Behind the Shot: I had a sprinkler running in my backyard in the Bahamas, and the fine mist settled over the surrounding plants. It was an especially dry time of year, and a variety of birds came to drink and bathe among the wet leaves. The bird that truly captured my attention was this female Black-faced Grassquit bathing in a palmetto palm leaf. I ran inside to grab my camera, and when I returned, she was sitting perfectly in the middle of the leaf. Every spring, a pair of grassquits visits my garden, and I was thrilled to see her splashing away that day. A few days later, the male appeared as well, and that year they nested in the garden. It made the moment even more special to know that my backyard had become a safe and welcoming place.

14. Many-colored Rush Tyrant by Ximena Vilches

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Batuco Wetlands, Santiago’s Metropolitan Region, Chile

Camera: Canon EOS R7 with a Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 L IS USM lens; 1/1250 sec at f/7.1; ISO 4000

Behind the shot: I was visiting the Batuco Wetlands in the spring, near the walkways that extend over the water. On both sides of this structure stretch dense beds of reeds. This is where Many-colored Rush Tyrants put on a real show: They dart back and forth among the plants, revealing themselves for just a few seconds at a time. The main challenge for a photographer is to precisely follow the birds' erratic movements. After watching this particular bird closely, I noticed it kept to a relatively small area, so I decided to sit and wait. Finally, it paused for just a few moments in an unobstructed spot. With this image, I hope to convey the energy and vitality of the wetlands in spring, and to highlight this species' close relationship with the reed beds, a habitat essential for its feeding, shelter, reproduction, and nesting.

15. Purple Sandpiper by Rachel Malone

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Barnegat Light, New Jersey, United States

Camera: Nikon Z8 with a Nikon NIKKOR Z 180-600mm f/5.6-6.3 VR lens; 1/1250 sec at f/6.3; ISO 800

Behind the Shot: I like to visit Barnegat Lighthouse to see the various sea ducks that winter there. On this day, I decided to walk out to the end of the slippery jetty and spend some time with the shorebirds. I found the Purple Sandpipers very photogenic as they stood strong and unbothered against the frigid ocean water crashing over the rocks. I think this photograph illustrates how tough this species is.

16. California Condor by Rebecca Whittaker

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Pinnacles National Park, Paicines, California, United States

Camera: Nikon Z8 with a Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 200-500mm f/5.6E ED VR lens and Nikon FTZ II Mount Adapter; 1/2500 sec at f/7.1; ISO 7200

Behind the Shot: Hoping to photograph a California Condor, I carried my gear up the High Peaks trail. I spotted a condor pair atop a pinnacle, necks entwined, distant green mountains behind them. Later I watched them soar. On my way down, I witnessed the gift of a lifetime. Partly hidden, in a small pool of water, the very pair I saw earlier took turns bathing, exchanging quiet looks and gentle touches. When they finished, the female preened. Through my lens I could see the deep orange, purple, yellow, and white of her face clearly. This image is my way of sharing a window into their lives in the hopes that more people can see how lucky we are to live among them. Thank you to everyone who has worked, or is working, to protect these magnificent birds. I cannot imagine a world without them.

17. Andean Cock-of-the-Rock by Juan Daniel Mejía Arango

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Jardín, Antioquia, Colombia

Camera: Canon EOS R6 Mark II with a Sigma 150-600mm f/5-6.3 DG OS HSM Contemporary lens; 1/1600 sec at f/7; ISO 1600

Behind the shot: There are several sites where Andean Cocks-of-the-Rock gather during the breeding season in Antioquia. The Jardín de Rocas (literally: rock garden) Nature Reserve, near the town of Jardín, is one of them. One afternoon this January I arrived there to photograph the species. I knew there was a rocky canyon with a ravine and a completely overgrown area with dense vegetation that blocks out the light, especially in the late afternoon. I was there when a ray of light began to shine through the tree branches, and from my vantage point, I saw the silhouette of an adult male. For just a few moments, the bird's position, my position, and the direction of the sunbeam all aligned, allowing me to capture a photograph I had dreamed of for years.

18. Red-headed

Woodpecker by Zachary Raymond Vaughan

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: North Park, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, United States

Camera: Sony Alpha 1 II with a Sony FE 600mm F/4 GM OSS lens; 1/640 sec at f/4; ISO 800

Behind the Shot: About a year and a half ago, Red-headed Woodpeckers arrived in a park in my county. I frequented the park for several days, waiting for a chance to photograph these amazing birds. One day, one of the adults flew into a nearby tree. I took a few steps forward when suddenly the bird flew down and landed directly in front of me. I bent down, raised my camera, and began shooting. The woodpecker then hopped forward a few more feet and plucked a juicy earthworm out of the leaf litter exposed by melting snow. I didn't know this species foraged in this way, but this clearly wasn't its first worm! It smacked the worm on the ground a few times then flew into a nearby tree to enjoy its meal. This photograph captures an intriguing behavior of a bird in steep decline.

19. Least Sandpiper by Jameson Hawkins-Kimmel

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Kalispell, Montana, United States

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 L IS USM lens and a UV filter; 1/2000 sec at f/7.1; ISO 640

Behind the Shot: I captured this image at golden hour along the muddy shoreline of a small wetland. During migration, it becomes a temporary refuge for shorebirds, and this Least Sandpiper was carefully feeding at the water's edge. To get the low, intimate perspective, I crawled through thick mud and shallow water as mosquitoes swarmed, keeping myself nearly eye-level with the bird while not disturbing it.

Eventually, the sandpiper relaxed and continued to feed only a few feet away. In that brief window, the soft golden light, still water, and low angle aligned to create the image. What makes this photograph especially meaningful is that it was taken in a wetland restoration area that our family has worked hard to protect and improve for wildlife. Seeing migrating birds like this Least Sandpiper stop and thrive there has made every muddy afternoon worth it.

20. Andean Condor by Timothy Dhalleine

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Cerro Benítez, Magallanes and the Chilean Antarctic, Chile

Camera: Nikon Z6 with a Nikon NIKKOR Z 24-200mm f/4-6.3 VR lens; 1/1250 sec at f/6.3; ISO 100

Behind the Shot: Behind this photograph lies a quiet winter day in 2022, high up in the Chilean mountains. Dozens of condors flew overhead as the wind whistled through their wings, and in my 3-year-old daughter's eyes, I saw nothing but wonder. With a wingspan of nearly 10 feet, the Andean Condor is one of the largest flying birds on the planet. And although it still flies freely in Patagonia, it has already disappeared from some parts of South America due to habitat fragmentation.

21. Buller's Albatross by Sergio Trucco

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Salas y Gómez Ridge, Valparaíso, Chile

Camera: Nikon D850 with a Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 180-400mm f/4E TC1.4 FL ED VR lens; 1/2500 sec at f/4.5; ISO 800

Behind the shot: We set sail from Valparaíso aboard the Chilean Navy's research vessel Cabo de Hornos on a 31-day expedition along the Salas y Gómez Ridge. It is a unique ecological corridor stretching nearly 1,800 miles that connects the mainland coast with Rapa Nui and Motu Motiro Hiva, formed by more than 110 volcanic seamounts. At the time I took this photograph, we had been sailing for 10 days and had just weathered a storm. Albatrosses were soaring through the air at great speed, and fleeting rainbows appeared between gusts, rising and fading to the rhythm of the sea. For a brief moment, birds, ocean, and rainbow came together in perfect harmony. What remains of that instant is this photograph.

22. Steely-vented Hummingbird by Kristhian Castro

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Near Cali, Valle del Cauca, Colombia

Camera: Sony Alpha 6600 with a Sony FE 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 G OSS lens at 600mm; 1/5000 sec at f/7.1; ISO 6400

Behind the shot: Ever since I planted many hummingbird-friendly flowering plants, my balcony has become the territory of a Steely-vented Hummingbird. During the off-season, when few flowers are blooming, I use a small feeder I built to make up for the lack of food. For some time now, I've noticed that during heavy rains this hummingbird will perch on one of its lookout branches, seeming to enjoy the water. I was fascinated by the grace of its bathing ritual and decided to photograph it. I devoted as much time as I could to this project over the course of a year and, in the process, I learned to anticipate its movements in an attempt to capture the exact moment when the hummingbird shook off the water clinging to its feathers. In this photo, I was lucky enough to capture that instant.

23. King Vulture by Gilder Esteban González-Montenegro

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Alto Amurrupá Special Ethnic Management Area, Risaralda, Colombia

Camera: Nikon D7500 with a Sigma 150-600mm f/5-6.3 DG OS HSM Contemporary lens at 600mm; 1/1600 sec at f/6.3; ISO 2000

Behind the shot: A dead horse attracted a large number of vultures, most of which perched on a nearby tree. When I arrived, the carcass had already been almost entirely devoured, so all the King Vultures—which assert priority when feeding—were in the tree, while about 20 Black Vultures were still feeding on the ground. Getting this photograph was very meaningful to me because despite having visited this location many times, I had not been able to document the species. Being able to see so many of them in their regal stance was very rewarding, as was capturing their magnificence as they landed.

24. Andean Emerald by David Broner

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Cuchilla de los Santa, Caldas, Colombia

Camera: Sony Alpha 7C with a Sony FE 70-200mm f/2.8 GM OSS lens and Sony FE 2x Teleconverter at 400mm; 1/1600 sec at f/6.3; ISO 2500

Behind the shot: I was trying to capture the perfect geometry of a tree fern in Colombia's Andean rainforest. From my vantage point, its fronds ceased to be leaves and transformed into green mountains, with ridges, depth, and a texture that seemed sculpted by time. The light was soft, filtered through the mist, and maintaining the sharpness of the scene in such low light was challenging. I had been fine-tuning the composition for several minutes when, without a sound, a blue-violet flash appeared at the top of the "landscape." The hummingbird arrived so quickly that it seemed to materialize out of nowhere. It remained motionless for just a few seconds, but that was enough to capture its presence in an image. This photograph invites us to recognize that, in nature, the small can take on an immense dimension when we look closely.

25. Red-crowned Woodpecker by Camilo Sanabria Grajales

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Jamundí, Valle del Cauca, Colombia

Camera: Canon EOS R7 with a Sigma 150-600mm f/5-6.3 DG OS HSM Contemporary lens at 484mm; 1/4000 sec at f/6.3; ISO 3200

Behind the shot: We were near the highway connecting Jamundí to the city of Cali, on a birdwatching outing as part of the Colombia Birdfair, an event that brings together birders from all over the country. At one point the group I was with walked ahead because they wanted to look for certain bird species in a nearby wetland. I stayed behind, intrigued by a movement in a tree that I couldn't quite make out. When I got closer, I finally saw what was happening: a Red-crowned Woodpecker was working tirelessly to hollow out a hole in the tree to build its nest. With this image, I wanted to capture the perseverance of this bird in a scene that feels natural and wild.

26. Lesser Horned Owl by Omar Barroso Putare

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Navarino Island, Magallanes and the Chilean Antarctic, Chile

Camera: Nikon D750 with a Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 200-500mm f/5.6E ED VR lens at 500mm; 1/640 sec at f/7.1; ISO 800

Behind the shot: For weeks my routine consisted of grabbing my camera and venturing into a patch of forest with a single goal: to find these Lesser Horned Owl siblings. Since this species blends in perfectly with its surroundings, most days I returned home empty-handed. But I was learning, little by little, to see the forest through different eyes. Eventually my patience paid off. I had the privilege of watching them grow from the moment they left their nest, observing how they waited together for their parents to return with food. On the day I captured this image, witnessing the pair pressed so close together moved me deeply. These two feathered creatures were seeking affection and caring for one another, and this moment of wild tenderness remains etched in my memory.

27. Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager by Camilo Escobar Carbonari

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Cortaderal Farm, Risaralda, Colombia

Camera: Nikon D500 with a Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 500mm f/5.6E PF ED VR lens; 1/2500 sec at f/5.6; ISO 2000

Behind the shot: I came across this Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager in a mixed flock in the high Andean forest—one of the most threatened ecosystems in the Colombian mountains—while on a group birding outing. It perched on the dry leaf of a tree at the edge of a ravine to survey its surroundings and plan the next moves in its feeding frenzy. It was around noon, so photographing it was a challenge due to the intense light. Although this relatively common bird may appear dark, from a certain angle and with enough light, its red belly and blue wing feathers become visible. I was able to capture that angle. I want this photo to draw attention to the importance of the high Andean forest, a key ecosystem for climate regulation and the birthplace of rivers and creeks.

28. Common Tern by Daniel Cherel

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Point Pleasant Beach, New Jersey

Camera: Nikon D810 with Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 200-

500mm f/5.6E ED VR lens; 1/2000 sec at f/7.1; ISO 640

Behind the Shot: Common Terns are very territorial and will get into quick skirmishes in the sky over beach real estate. We are lucky here on the Jersey Shore, where terns stop for the summer to nest, their beach fenced off for protection. To get this image, I climbed the jetty rocks and walked out to a point far from the protected zone where I could photograph the birds as they left the sand to dive into the ocean for food for their young. I love getting action shots of their air battles.

29. Whooper Swan by Yoshiki Nakamura

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Kushiro, Hokkaido, Japan

Camera: Nikon Z9 with a Nikon NIKKOR Z 400mm f/2.8 TC VR S lens; 1/4 sec at f/32; ISO 50

Behind the Shot: On a still February morning, I photographed a small flock of Whooper Swans flying across a shadowed hillside shortly after sunrise. To convey not only the appearance of the swans but also the feeling of their movement, I used a slow shutter speed of 1/4 second and panned with the flock as they crossed the frame. The birds constantly changed their speed and spacing, so precise synchronization was nearly impossible. Rather than fighting that unpredictability, I embraced it. The long exposure transformed their wingbeats into flowing ribbons of white, layering motion and rhythm into the image. The photograph became less about documentation and more about sensation, flight dissolving into light and gesture. I hoped to create an image that feels closer to music or choreography than to a literal record of wildlife, while staying rooted in the natural beauty of the swans and their winter habitat.

30. Snow Petrel by Nadia Haq

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Fournier Bay, Antarctica

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 L IS USM lens; 1/800 sec at f/16; ISO 640

Behind the Shot: During an inflatable boat ride in Fournier Bay, my family and I marveled at the size of the giant icebergs floating around us. Snow Petrels hang around these icebergs because the cold surfaces serve as resting platforms and the surrounding water is rich in krill, fish, and squid. I was really excited when a Snow Petrel made a brief appearance as it flew by one of the massive icebergs, catching the light in its pale feathers. The bird appears small beside the iceberg’s sculpted face, mostly dark but catching faint light along the ridge. The strong contrast between the illuminated snow and deep shadows captures the dramatic, minimalist atmosphere of Antarctica. I was fortunate to catch an image of this coveted bird in its icy environment.

31. Coscoroba Swan by Cristián Larrere Wörner

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Talcahuano, Bío Bío, Chile

Camera: Sony Alpha 7R IV with a Sony FE 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 G OSS lens at 600mm; 1/800 sec at f/8; ISO 2000

Behind the shot: This photograph was taken during one of my regular outings to watch and document wildlife near my home, the city of Talcahuano. As I was walking along the coast I came across a group of Coscoroba Swans resting on a drainage pipe that discharges industrial waste from fishing operations directly into the sea. The scene immediately struck me because of the stark visual and symbolic contrast: the elegance and purity of these birds set against a structure associated with the pollution generated by human activity. As I observed the swans' arrangement, I realized that if I carefully positioned myself, I could visually reinforce this juxtaposition between nature and environmental degradation. I moved closer slowly until I found the exact perspective and took the shot.

32. White-tailed Kite and Chimango Caracara by Cristián Larrere Wörner

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Talcahuano–Penco Interport Route, Bío Bío, Chile

Camera: Sony Alpha 7R IV with a Sony FE 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 G OSS lens at 600mm; 1/1000 sec at f/6.3; ISO 1600

Behind the shot: I was birding near my house when I spotted a White-tailed Kite perched in the distance and decided to get closer to photograph the elegant bird of prey. While I was still quite far away, the bird took flight directly toward me, and only then did I realize that its intention was to harass a Chimango Caracara perched on a shrub. I managed to frame the shot and start a burst of photos just as the birds clashed mid-air. At the decisive moment—which lasted only a second —the caracara twisted its body, hanging upside down and spreading its legs to fend off the kite. It was a stroke of luck to capture this tense composition, which reflects both the strength and elegance of nature.

33. Peruvian Pelican by Álvaro Mancilla

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Caleta Pichidangui, Coquimbo, Chile

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Canon RF 600mm f/4L IS II USM lens; 1/200 sec at f/11; ISO 100

Behind the shot: This photograph was taken on the central coast of Chile, where the cold, nutrient-rich waters of the Humboldt Current sustain large populations of pelagic fish, like anchovies, sardines, and jurel, the basis of Peruvian Pelicans' diet. From a distance, I watched the birds gather tightly together along the shore. What caught my attention was the social architecture of the group: dozens of individuals stacked into a single living form, their long bills crossing in every direction, like a sculptural lattice. I used a lens that allowed me to emphasize how each bird is a distinct individual, yet inseparable from the others around it. For me, the image reflects the gregarious nature of Peruvian Pelicans, expressed through an almost sculptural composition of feathers, textures, and patterns.

34. Red-winged Blackbird by Dotty Doherty

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, San Antonio, New Mexico, United States

Camera: Nikon Z9 with a Nikon NIKKOR Z 800mm f/6.3 VR S lens; 1/2000 sec at f/8; ISO 10000

Behind the Shot: I went to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge to see the Sandhill Cranes. We birded there for three days, and on our last afternoon, we noticed a huge flock of blackbirds in the distance, but my photos showed only black silhouettes against the overcast sky. We stopped to look at cranes and ducks, and the blackbirds settled into the grasses. Two minutes later, the whole flock launched into the air, and I lay on the shutter. They rose and dipped in a thrilling murmuration. Then they were gone. I hoped I got some photos worthy of the spectacle. I nailed it. Every Red-winged Blackbird was not only in focus, their outstretched wings and tails created a mesmerizing pattern. I'd come to photograph the cranes, but it was this flock of common birds that earned a place on the wall.

35. Kelp Gull by Marcelo Cuevas Ormazábal

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Choros Island, Coquimbo, Chile

Camera: Canon EOS Rebel T6 with a Canon EF-S 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 IS STM lens at 53mm; 1/200 sec at f/9; ISO 100

Behind the shot: This photograph was taken on vacation at the Humboldt Penguin National Reserve. As part of the trip, we took a boat to the reserve and hiked along the trails on Choros Island, with very limited time to explore and photograph the area. As we made our way along the trail, I spotted this Kelp Gull perched quietly among the cacti, a scene that immediately caught my attention. I managed to frame the gull in a way that conveys a sense of isolation and adaptation to the island's arid coastal environment. For me, this image represents wildlife's ability to inhabit extreme environments—and the beauty, resilience, and uniqueness that characterizes the ecosystems of northern Chile.

36. Short-eared Owl by Devon Pradhuman

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Skagit Valley, Washington, United States

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Canon RF 600mm F/4L IS USM lens; 1/3200 sec at f/4; ISO 1600

Behind the Shot: Growing up in New York, I devoted countless hours to watching Short-eared Owls skim over winter fields and dreamt of photographing their sudden collisions. After moving to Seattle, I felt compelled to seek out West Coast “shorties” and document the behaviors common to the species across its wide range. These owls swooped down and clashed with one another so quickly that it took a lot of concentration to keep them in the viewfinder. Skagit Valley remains one of the region’s critical wintering grounds for Short-eared Owls, offering the open space and prey-rich habitat that these nomadic birds rely on. Yet the grasslands where these birds perform their aerial duels are shrinking, and Short-eared Owls are in decline across North America. In every wingbeat, these owls tell us that safeguarding open spaces is not just about conserving habitat—it’s about preserving the stories and spectacles that define the natural world.

37. Andean Condor by Hernan Jaramillo Ramírez

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Cócora Valley, Quindío, Colombia

Camera: Canon EOS R6 with a Canon EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS II USM lens at 400mm; 1/2000 sec at f/8.0; ISO 400

Behind the shot: I arrived in the valley on a cold, gray, and very foggy day. The wax palm, one of Colombia’s most endangered species, grows in this valley. Out of the blue, I saw this condor approaching, and I immediately switched my lens to a telephoto. It was a brief sighting; the bird circled about three times before disappearing again into the dense mountain fog. It was a wonderful experience, as it’s not easy to see condors flying overhead. I managed to capture the exact moment when two of Colombia's most iconic national symbols—the Andean condor and the wax palm—came together in a scene filled with mystery and serenity.

38. Giant Hummingbird by Eduardo Muñoz Orellana

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Santo Domingo, Valparaíso, Chile

Camera: Nikon D7500 with a Sigma 150-600mm f/5-6.3 DG OS HSM Contemporary lens at 600mm; 1/1250 sec at f/7.1; ISO 800

Behind the shot: The day I took this photograph, I was out for a walk with my partner in a coastal region that is home to a system of 13 bodies of water. We were birding along some ravines when we passed by native shrubs, where I heard the call of a Giant Hummingbird. I looked around and found it perched on the tip of a branch, resting and observing its surroundings. I approached it cautiously, and from its feathers, I could tell it was still a juvenile. After I took a couple of photos, the hummingbird began to stretch before taking flight, and that's when I took this picture. The resulting image conveys a sense of peace and vulnerability to me, as the bird's delicate posture contrasts with the energy that typically characterizes this species, revealing the serene beauty of the world's largest hummingbird.

39. Green Heron by Joshua Zhou

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Mills Pond at Wells Branch, Austin, Texas, United States

Camera: Canon EOS R6 with a Canon EF 100-400 mm f/4.5-5.6L IS II USM lens and a Canon Mount Adapter EF-EOS R; 1/400 sec at f/6.3; ISO 1250

Behind the Shot: It was a bright, sunny morning at this neighborhood pond, and humans and birds alike came out to enjoy the beautiful spring day. This Green Heron was foraging along the perimeter of the pond, pausing briefly ever so often to gaze out towards the water in search of potential prey. I was also standing on the pond's edge admiring the view when I noticed the stealthy bird slowly creeping towards me. Acting quickly, I got into a prone position to get eye-level with the heron and pointed my camera at a small patch of rocks a couple paces in front of the bird with a beautiful spiderweb hanging above. When the bird finally turned its gaze from the water, I got this shot of it peering through the gap, as if posing intensely for the camera.

40. Rufous Hummingbird by Claire Beiser

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Scudder Pond Preserve, Bellingham, Washington, United States

Camera: Sony Alpha 1 with a Sony FE 600mm f/4 GM OSS lens; 1/2000 sec at f/4; ISO 3200

Behind the Shot: Every spring I look forward to the return of the Rufous Hummingbirds that travel all the way from Mexico to the northern Pacific Northwest. One day in May, I took my camera and long lens to a nearby nature preserve where this male perched on some small branches in the shade near a pond. I had to use a slow shutter speed because of the low light. When he flew to a branch with a pleasing green background, I took this one lucky shot where I captured his head and most of his tail sharply. I have taken many photos of hummingbirds perched or hovering at flowers, but this was the only time I have been able to get a shot of one in such an interesting position. The shiny gorget was a bonus.

41. American Barn Owl by Mylthon Jiménez-Castillo

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Cabo Blanco Area, Los Ríos, Chile

Camera: Nikon D500 with a Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 200-500mm f/5.6E ED VR lens; 1/640 sec at f/5.6; ISO 5000

Behind the shot: My wife and I were birding at our favorite spot. We spent hours taking pictures of various species, including our “friend” Nuco, a Short-eared Owl that frequents the area. Just as we were about to head home, Carolina said to me, “There’s Nuco again!” But our hearts skipped a beat when it flew right in front of us and we realized it was an American Barn Owl. It hunted above the bushes for a while and disappeared into the grove. We waited quite a while until it reappeared, hunting again. We enjoyed the show until it headed toward a large oak tree. There, the scene was like something out of a fairy tale, so I leaned against a fencepost to steady my lens. I held my breath, and after several shots, I managed to get this beautiful photo.

42. Sooty Grouse by Sean Neilson

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Gustavus, Alaska

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 L IS USM lens; 1/2000 sec at f/8; ISO 640

Behind the Shot: I was driving down a quiet road when a flash of movement caught my eye: a female grouse herding her brood across the pavement. I pulled over, grabbed my camera, and hustled back, dropping flat onto the asphalt in the middle of the road to get down to chick level. The perspective was everything; I wanted the viewer to feel the vast expanse of pavement the way this tiny bird must experience it. One by one the chicks scurried across on legs no bigger than toothpicks. I caught the final chick mid-stride once it hit the centerline. These birds must run this gauntlet multiple times a day. Fortunately for me, and more importantly, these birds, Gustavus is a small town with relatively little traffic. Sadly, this is not the case in so many other places.

43. Magnificent Frigatebird by Liron Gertsman

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: San Blas, Nayarit, Mexico

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Sigma 14mm f/1.8 DG HSM lens with Canon Mount Adapter EF-EOS R; 5 sec at f/1.8; ISO 10000

Behind the Shot: I spent a few nights camping on a remote island that is home to tens of thousands of Magnificent Frigatebirds. I timed my trip for when there would be little to no moonlight in the night sky, allowing the stars to shine at their brightest. The Milky Way would be most visible in the early morning hours, so I got out of my tent at 2:30 a.m. on a clear night. Spotting a frigatebird that was awake and preening its feathers, I framed a composition with the Milky Way in the background. After I had sat quietly and motionless behind my camera for quite a while, the frigatebird took off and I managed to capture it during a five-second-long exposure, producing a ghostly effect on the bird, its spread wings framed nicely by roosting frigatebirds in front of the starry night sky.

44. Willet by William Nicholas Edwards

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Virginia Beach, Virginia, United States

Camera: Fujifilm X-H2S with a Fujifilm XF 150-600mm f/5.6-8 R LM OIS WR lens; 1/250 sec at f/10; ISO 2500

Behind the Shot: Early one morning while on vacation, I stepped onto my hotel balcony to check the weather and noticed two Willets moving along the shoreline. The wet sand reflected the sunrise light while waves rolled in. I grabbed my camera, and for a moment the birds, shadows, surf, and light all aligned. What drew me to the moment was the contrast between the energy of the ocean and the calm, steady movement of the birds as they foraged along the water's edge. From above, their shadows became part of the composition and helped emphasize the scale and stillness of the scene. I enjoy images that show birds as part of a larger environment rather than as isolated subjects. For me, this photograph reflects a quiet moment that many people might overlook while walking the beach in the early morning.

45. Kelp Gull by Jean Paul De la Harpe Z.

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Cachagua Beach, Valparaíso, Chile

Camera: Sony Alpha 1 with a Sony FE 600mm f/4 GM OSS lens; 1/4000 sec at f/4; ISO 640

Behind the shot: One day in May 2025 I visited this beach, which is well known for being home to a large colony of Humboldt Penguins. Although my intention was to photograph that species, as I walked along the beach, I passed by a large group of birds feeding among the sedimentary rocks and intertidal pools that appear at low tide. I spent quite a while photographing this spectacle until a Kelp Gull appeared just behind a rock, holding a starfish in its beak. The bird spent some time smashing the starfish against the rocks until it dislodged and quickly swallowed one of its arms. All of this caught the attention of other gulls, which began to approach, probably to snatch the prey away. The bird, without hesitation, took flight to finish its meal elsewhere.

46. Buffy Helmetcrest by Sergio Andrés Dueñas Trejo

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Los Nevados National Natural Park, Colombia

Camera: Nikon D850 with a Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 180-400mm f/4E TC1.4 FL ED VR lens; 1/2500 sec at f/4.5; ISO 800

Behind the shot: I woke up early, looking forward to taking photos and birding in the alpine grasslands of the páramo, one of Colombia’s most vital—and most threatened—ecosystems. The weather conditions, the high altitude, and thick clouds blanketing the landscape made for challenging conditions, but for hours, along with two other birders, I held out for the Buffy Helmetcrests. We knew that the species usually fed in the area we were visiting, but it wasn’t until the weather improved that we could hear them approaching. Two of the hummingbirds arrived, and while the other two photographers focused on the male, I devoted myself to the female, captivated by her flight between high-Andean wildflowers and her unwavering composure. These are birds that possess more than just striking colors, they have a history and a purpose within the ecosystem. To have a history and a purpose within the ecosystem." To witness them was a true gift from nature after months of planning.

47. Wild Turkey by Parham Pourahmad

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Stanford, California, United States

Camera: Nikon Z8 with a Nikon NIKKOR Z 180-600mm f/5.6-6.3 VR lens; 1/1250 sec at f/9; ISO 1400

Behind the Shot: I noticed a female Wild Turkey walking in the grass while I was hiking, a pretty typical scene to see in the area. I soon noticed, however, that there was movement in the grass below her: a bunch of chicks. I immediately recognized the photo opportunity, as the chicks were very cute and would soon cross the trail in front of me. While planning my composition, I thought of a previous Audubon Photography Award-winning photo showing a Sandhill Crane colt walking with its mother, with only the feet of the mother visible. I decided to try the same thing with the turkeys. As this young turkey ran by its mother, I framed it with the mother's legs.

48. Common Raven by Liron Gertsman

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Banff National Park, Alberta, Canada

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Canon EF 17-40mm f/4L USM lens with Canon Mount Adapter EF-EOS R; 1/2500 sec at f/4; ISO 100

Behind the Shot: I spent a week hiking in the mountains of western Canada trying to find and photograph an elusive mountain bird, the White-tailed Ptarmigan. While I did not have any success with ptarmigan, I did see Common Ravens, another of the few bird species that can survive winter in the high alpine environment. Ravens are impressive birds, as are the environments they live in. Towards the end of my trip, I still hadn't captured any images I was happy with. That changed when I spotted a raven sitting in the middle of the snow with a beautiful mountain backdrop. I put on a wide-angle lens and began photographing in the freezing temperatures. As I watched, I spotted a second raven flying in and took a series of images. This was my favorite.

49. Black-legged Kittiwake by Joey Johnson

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Glacier Bay, Alaska, United States

Camera: Sony Alpha 1 with a Tamron 70-180mm f/2.8 Di III VC VXD G2 lens; 1/320 sec at f/14; ISO 400

Behind the Shot: This image was made during a cruise through Alaska, where we spent much of one day traveling through Glacier Bay. As the ship passed through the bay, floating icebergs drifted by in striking shapes and colors. While I photographed them, I noticed one covered with birds. At the time I did not know that they were kittiwakes. What struck me most was how unbothered they were by the large ship passing nearby. They were not feeding or displaying mating behavior, they were just resting together on the ice on a beautiful spring day. This was my first time seeing these birds, and the experience led me to learn more about them after I zoomed in on the image and identified them.

50. Sanderling by Felipe Hurtado

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Marbella Beach, close to the mouth of the Maipo River, Valparaíso, Chile

Camera: Canon EOS R50 with a Canon EF 70-300 F/4-5.6L IS II USM lens with a Canon Mount Adapter EF-EOS R; 1/4000 sec at f/8; ISO 500

Behind the shot: I was walking along Marbella Beach in Santo Domingo, hoping to enjoy the scenery and the light of the sunset, in an area where hundreds or thousands of Sanderlings arrive from North America every summer. Suddenly, I saw a group flying toward me, so I took advantage of the fact that my camera was already set to a fast shutter speed and a relatively small aperture to take sunset photos—so the sun wouldn't overexpose the image—and snapped a burst of shots. Because of this luck, I was able to capture the shorebirds in mid-flight after they had traveled thousands of miles.

51. Great Egret by Hugo Portus Lazo

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Aconcagua River near Concón, Valparaíso, Chile

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Sigma 150-600mm f/5-6.3 DG OS HSM Contemporary lens at 531 mm; 1/3200 sec at f/6.3; ISO 1250

Behind the shot: I admire nature photographer Eduardo Blanco Mendizaval greatly. His project "1 km de biodiversidad" (1 km of biodiversity), which he carried out during the COVID-19 quarantine, left a lasting impression on me. The project, which invites us to photograph what is close to us, inspired me to photograph the birds that visit a river near my home. I took this photo in early April, when the water level was low. Lying among the rocks, I watched two egrets land to feed, and I crawled through the river until I was close enough to get a good shot. I waited for an hour, and after they had eaten and preened themselves, I captured the instant when one of them took flight. I hope this photo shows that beauty is closer than we think. We just have to look for it.

52. Sandhill Crane by Jeffrey Z. Carney

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Platte River, Nebraska

Camera: Sony Alpha 1 with a Sony FE 24-70mm f/2.8 lens at 35mm; 1/250 sec at f/8; ISO 2000

Behind the Shot: I host photography workshops along the Platte River, and last year my brother-in-law and sister-in-law asked if I would stay an extra day to guide them. They had never seen Nebraska's spring Sandhill Crane migration before, so we met at the Crane Trust headquarters, went to one of their photography blinds, set up, and waited. It was late in the season, and I was concerned with how many would come back to roost. Another hour passed, and light was running out when thousands of cranes began to return. The trip was special because my sister-in-law Judy is dealing with cancer, and the amazing spectacle of nature on full display made us all cry and hug.

53. American Oystercatcher by Cristóbal Muñoz V.

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: San Jerónimo Wetland, Valparaíso, Chile

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Tamron SP 150-600mm f/5-6.3 Di VC USD lens at 600mm; 1/2000 sec at f/6.3; ISO 640

Behind the shot: A long day I'd spent walking through the various wetlands in Algarrobo was nearing its end. I was just about to head home when I saw this oystercatcher taking a bath at the edge of the wetland. The bird seemed carefree, bathing with ease and freedom, spreading its wings as if it were dancing for my camera. Beyond the technical aspects, this image represents something personal—that unexpected moment that happens just when you think the day is over. For me, it's a reminder that nature always has something more to offer if we're willing to observe with patience and pause for just a few more seconds. I hope this photograph conveys that intimate connection we share with the simplicity of animal life, and that it invites others to pause, contemplate, and appreciate these fragile ecosystems.

54. Snowy Egret by Juan David Camacho Márquez

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Lago de las Garzas, Valle del Cauca, Colombia

Camera: Sony Alpha 6700 with a Sony FE 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 G OSS lens; 1/2000 sec at f/7.1; ISO 1250

Behind the shot: Last year a group of birdwatchers called the Club Amigos de la Herradura organized a series of field trips for kids who are usually unable to spend much time birding due to armed conflict in their region. The initiative was organized in partnership with Colombia Birdfair, the Valle de Cauca Ornithological Society (Dacnis), and Bosque de Niebla Birding and Nature. On one of these outings, we decided to visit a lake in the middle of the city of Cali, which is home to a wide variety of species. Partway through the day, we spotted a group of Snowy Egrets resting in a tree that stood in the middle of the water. This is one of the most beautiful moments I've ever captured on camera, but above all, it is a special reminder of that day.

55. Kea by Ryan Wilkes

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park, New Zealand

Camera: Sony Alpha 7 IV with a Sony FE 70-200mm f/2.8 GM OSS II lens; 1/3200 sec at f/9; ISO 400

Behind the Shot: My first experience encountering Kea was in 2016 while on a backcountry camping trip. At that time, I was mostly photographing landscapes as a hobby, but that experience was transformational and led me down the path of filmmaking and photography with a focus on birds. Since then, I have returned to the location 10 times to spend more time with my favorite bird, whose numbers are trending downward, with the goal of making images that spark renewed interest in the species. I took this photo during a four-day camping trip on a ridge in the Mueller Valley. This was enough time to have several encounters with a rather large “circus” of Kea. I watched them interact and forage. Occasionally they would become curious about me and my camera and perch somewhere to observe me briefly before continuing on.

56. Surfbird by Felipe Esteban Toledo Alarcón

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Pilolcura Beach, Los Ríos, Chile

Camera: Sony Alpha 7 IV with a Sony FE 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 G OSS lens at 600mm; 1/2000 sec at f/6.3; ISO 1600

Behind the shot: During a friend’s visit, we managed to carve out a day to explore different landscapes around the town where I live. We planned to visit one of my favorite beaches, Pilolcura, in the afternoon. Throughout the day, intermittent rain forced us to take shelter inside the car. It was during one of those waits that we spotted a group of Surfbirds—a lifer for me. Prepared to face the rain, I headed out with my camera. Lying on the sand, I was able to witness the reason behind the bird’s name: They patiently wait for the breaking waves to catch their food. In burst mode, my first attempts didn’t capture the bird’s stoic serenity, contrasting with the explosive force of the sea. After a few minutes, one bird came close enough, and with a spectacular burst of foam, I captured my lifer.

57. Upland Goose by Gaspar Ramírez B.

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Puerto Natales, Magallanes and Chilean Antarctica, Chile

Camera: Sony Alpha 7 IV with a Sony FE 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 G OSS lens at 600mm; 1/2000 sec at f/5.6; ISO 500

Behind the shot: Although Puerto Natales is known as the gateway to Torres del Paine National Park, it's also possible to spot a wide variety of birdlife in the surrounding area, especially along the coastline. On an early morning outing to photograph birds, I saw several flocks of Upland Geese, a species quite common in Patagonia. Mid-morning on that cloudy day, a small flock flew near the horizon, crossing the mountain range. That's when I took this photo, capturing the sunlight filtering through dense clouds against the backdrop of snow-capped peaks. The photo is special because of the sun's ochre hues contrasting with the cool, snowy colors of winter.

58. Peregrine Falcon by Jesse Gordon

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: New Haven, Connecticut, United States

Camera: Nikon Z8 with a Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 500mm f/5.6E PF ED VR lens; 1/50 sec at f/5.6; ISO 4000

Behind the Shot: In recent years I've taken up cycling to stay in shape. One of my regular rides is to the top of East Rock Park. It's a tough climb, but the reward at the top is a spectacular view of the city. I started to see a pair of Peregrine Falcons who frequent the cliffs alongside the trail. After spotting one perched near the bike path, I decided to bike up with the extra weight of my camera on my back. On the evening I arrived, huffing and puffing, I was treated to this view of the female just after sunset, the lights of the city and I-95 behind her. She looked so powerful in this moment, perched over her city. I feel it represents how these birds have managed to thrive in urban environments through adaptability and sheer hunting prowess.

59. Lazuli Bunting by Steve McKerrall

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Ed R. Levin County Park, Milpitas, California, United States

Camera: OM Systems OM-1 Mark II with an OM Systems M.Zuiko 150-400mm F4.5 TC1.25X IS PRO; 1/2000 sec at f/5.6; ISO 200

Behind the Shot: I found this male Lazuli Bunting singing from the top of a tall tree on a bright, sunny morning with his mate foraging nearby. I continued following him as he descended into the brush and chose this moment to highlight the contrast between his bright turquoise head and the straw-colored grass.

60. Common Potoo by Milton Florez

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: La Florida, Valle del Cauca, Colombia

Camera: Canon EOS R8 with a Canon RF 200-800mm f/6.3-9 IS USM lens at 637mm; 1/4000 sec at f/9; ISO 8000

Behind the shot: Last September I was in Cali with my family and decided to invite my mom, aunt, sister, and two cousins to join me on a birding trip to La Florida, a farm outside the city. While we were photographing other species, a farm worker quietly approached and told us there was a Common Potoo on a nearby trail. He took us there without rushing, and we arrived as quietly as possible. The bird, as he'd told us, was perched on a dry log, perfectly camouflaged, as only this species can. What we didn't expect was to spot her little chick, watching its mother attentively, as if learning about the world from the safety of her embrace. I kept my distance and took the shot with an 800mm lens to avoid disturbing the pair. That afternoon, nature gave us a gift that none of us will ever forget.

61. Sooty Grouse by Parham Pourahmad

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Yosemite National Park, California, United States

Camera: Nikon Z8 with a Nikon 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6G ED AF-S DX lens; 1/200 sec at f/6.3; ISO 400

Behind the Shot: I arrived at an overlook of Yosemite Valley to enjoy the sunset. I had no real hopes of getting any good wildlife photos—but then a flock of Sooty Grouse walked across the trail right in front of me. I quickly realized the opportunity to frame them with Yosemite Valley below. More specifically, I wanted to frame them with Half Dome in the background. One of the females perched on a rock out in the open, and I took the opportunity to pull out my wide-angle lens and frame the bird with the landscape. I was able to get quite close because the grouse had walked right up to me without showing fear. The sunset lit up Half Dome, making for a beautiful landscape with a beautiful bird.

62. Savannah Sparrow by Nick Teague

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Lexington, Massachusetts, United States

Camera: Nikon Z8 with a Nikon NIKKOR Z 400mm f/2.8 TC VR S lens and Nikon AF-S Teleconverter TC-14E III; 1/640 sec at f/4; ISO 1000

Behind the Shot: I was home from college for just one weekend, and I knew I would have very little time to do any photography. To take advantage of the time I did have, I left home early one cold fall morning to catch the tail end of sparrow migration. I arrived at a local farm before sunrise, watching for any movement among the rows of crops. After a little while, I noticed a small flock of sparrows moving through the fields. After observing them for a few minutes, I carefully approached the flower patch they were feeding in. Soon after, this Savannah Sparrow perched atop one of the blooms, giving me the opportunity to capture this image.

63. White-collared Swift by Daniel Avendaño

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Norcasia, Caldas, Colombia

Camera: Canon EOS-1D X Mark II with a Canon EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS II USM lens at 400mm; 1/500 sec at f/8; ISO 640

Behind the shot: Just as dawn broke on October Big Day 2024, I was on the balcony of a hotel in Norcasia. That particular spot was familiar to me, and I knew that around 6:00 a.m. the view of the Magdalena Medio Valley fills with a unique atmosphere, with layers of hills shrouded in mist and golden light that seem to stretch endlessly. However, golden light that seem to stretch endlessly. However, something unexpected happened that morning. As the valley awoke, hundreds of White-collared Swifts crossed the sky in all directions, probably using the day's first air currents for their insect-hunting forays. The light changed rapidly, and the birds' movement lasted only a few minutes. I was happy to achieve a photo that conveys the vastness and atmosphere of the Magdalena Medio with dozens of silhouettes scattered across the sky.

64. Yellow-bellied Seedeater by Sergio Andrés Dueñas Trejo

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Garzón, Huila, Colombia

Camera: Sony Alpha 6700 with a Sony FE 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6 GM OSS lens; 1/1250 sec at f/5.6; ISO 640

Behind the shot: In Huila's dry forest region, especially near farms, it is common to find dense pastures that are home to a variety of bird species. During a field trip, I noticed that in the middle of the grassland, some branches with seed heads were bending and swaying like whips. This pattern repeated in different areas, but it wasn't until I zoomed in with my camera that I found the explanation: It was a Yellow-bellied Seedeater holding onto the tips of the plants and using its weight to bend them until it was hidden among the vegetation, safe from birds of prey while foraging. Its quick, confident movements posed a challenge for my camera, but, in addition to a few photos, I left that day with new insights and the certainty that, just as this little bird seeks safe places in its habitat, I had found mine in photographing birds.

65. Rainbow-bearded Thornbill by Miguel Ángel Gómez Mesa

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Popayán, Cauca, Colombia

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Canon RF 70-200mm f/4L IS USM lens; 1/3200 sec at f/5.6; ISO 1000

Behind the shot: I was in the field with a group of young "bird guardians," all of us united by a common goal: to learn about and catch a glimpse of one of the region's most coveted species for birders, the Rainbow-bearded Thornbill. During our excursion, we were lucky enough to spot the elusive hummingbird, but it moved too fast to photograph well. But then, as the rain fell, it occurred to me that I could wait to see if it might perch somewhere—and it did. It came very close to where we were standing and then flew up to the branches in the photo. Amid the characteristic rainy weather of the high Andean forest, I managed to capture the bird with its wings spread, displaying the iridescent plumage it is named for at the exact moment it landed on a native tree.

66. Black Skimmer by Hugo Portus Lazo

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Mantagua Wetland, Valparaíso, Chile

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Sigma 150-600mm f/5-6.3 DG OS HSM Contemporary lens at 600mm; 1/2500 sec at f/6.3; ISO 3200

Behind the shot: Wetlands are magical places, not only because of their scenic beauty but also because of the wide variety of birds they host throughout the year. In the summer, water levels drop and dry areas expand, forcing the skimmers to come closer to the trails, which makes it easier to photograph them. While the classic image of this species is "skimming" the water in search of food, after spending entire afternoons with them, I became interested in capturing the sporadic aerial disputes in which they bite each other's tails—presumably to defend their territory. After a long wait on a cloudy day, two of the birds began fighting near me. It's one of the few times I've been able to document this behavior, and it shows me that even in conflict, nature reveals its beauty.

67. Great Blue Heron by Parham Pourahmad

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: San Francisco, California, United States

Camera: Nikon Z8 with a Nikon 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6G ED AF-S DX lens; 1/1250 sec at f/5.6; ISO 125

Behind the Shot: I found this Great Blue Heron hunting for gophers in a field in an urban San Francisco park. It was walking calmly, scanning the ground for any movement. I decided I wanted to try to frame the heron with the Golden Gate Bridge behind it. I got my wide-angle lens out of my backpack, got low, and waited for the heron to walk by. I crawled on the ground to put myself in the right position and got the shot. I liked how the bridge emphasizes the urban environment that this heron lives in.

68. Empress Brilliant by Juan David Camacho Márquez

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Doña Dora Birding, Valle del Cauca, Colombia

Camera: Sony Alpha 6700 with a Sony FE 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 G OSS lens; 1/320 sec at f/6.3; ISO 6400

Behind the shot: When it comes to bird photography, light is key, no matter what kind of photo you are looking for. Still, I managed to take this photo on a dark, cloudy, and rainy afternoon at Doña Dora's feeders. I sat there for a while, just to figure out what I could do with the setting and the species that were present. Amid the rain and fog, I noticed a young Empress Brilliant frequently visiting the feeders and the heliconia flower shown in the photo. After a few failed shots, I managed to get a photo I think is worthy of a contest, especially because it was shot on a day when most photographers would choose not to take pictures.

69. Hawaiian Goose by Liron Gertsman

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Hawai‘i Volcanoes National Park, Hawai‘i, United States

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 IS USM lens; 1/40 sec at f/22; ISO 8000

Behind the Shot: I've always been drawn to photographing birds in extraordinary environments. So when I learned that Hawaiian Geese, or "Nēnē," occasionally roost close to the active volcano, I traveled to Halema‘uma‘u Crater on Hawaii's Kīlauea Volcano to document them. I scouted and waited for the volcano to erupt for 10 days before it finally came alive. As darkness arrived, a few geese flew in and landed on the crater rim as a massive lava fountain glowed behind them. I captured this moment using an aperture of f/22 to maintain detail in both the birds and the dramatic backdrop, paired with a relatively slow shutter speed of 1/40 to handle the low-light conditions. The photograph tells a uniquely Hawaiian story: the threatened state bird outlined against the fiery eruption of Kīlauea, the volcano where they have lived for millennia.

70. Western Gull by Nathan McCall

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Shoreline along Tidelands Park, Coronado, California, United States

Camera: Nikon Z8 with a Nikon NIKKOR Z 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6 VR S lens; 1/2000 sec at f/5.6; ISO 800

Behind the Shot: I went to San Diego Bay at low tide hoping to see shorebird activity. I stayed among the eelgrass, watching for birds and experimenting with low-angle compositions. That's when a Western Gull landed almost beside me and grabbed something in the eelgrass. When I realized it was after an octopus, I spun around and started shooting immediately. The octopus anchored itself deep in the eelgrass, stretching and gripping. The gull leaned back and pulled, testing and repositioning. Most of the scene sat in soft shade until the gull stepped into a narrow patch of sunlight, illuminating the textures and tension in a way I couldn't have planned. I've seen similar encounters multiple times since. To me, this signals that eelgrass restoration supports a dynamic, resilient ecosystem. This image captures not just a dramatic moment, but a recovering system where unexpected interactions proliferate.

71. Common Raven by Parham Pourahmad

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Yosemite National Park, California, United States

Camera: Nikon Z8 with a Nikon NIKKOR Z 180-600mm f/5.6-6.3 VR lens; 1/1250 sec at f/9; ISO 1400

Behind the Shot: While looking up at the granite cliffs surrounding Yosemite Valley, I noticed a pair of ravens soaring effortlessly among the cliffs. They were extremely high up but still flying below the peaks of the cliffs. This amazed me, and I wanted to take a photo to show the scale of the cliffs and also emphasize how free the ravens seemed. I waited for them to fly by a section of the cliffs lit up by the sunset, and came away with this picture. The contrast between the rock in sun and shadow made the picture for me.

72. Spectacled Tyrant by Claudio Véliz

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Cabo Blanco, Los Ríos, Chile

Camera: Canon EOS R6 Mark II with a Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 L IS USM lens at 500mm; 1/2500 sec at f/8; ISO 800

Behind the Shot: Spring is the best time to observe the Spectacled Tyrant in Chile, when they migrate from farther north in South America. The males arrive first, followed a few weeks later by the females, who come to watch the magnificent acrobatic leaps the males perform to capture their attention. The females hop from bush to bush, searching for the best vantage point from which to observe and select a mate. Paying close attention to this behavior can yield unique moments like this one: a female Spectacled Tyrant at the exact moment of takeoff from a bush, spreading her wings and displaying her intense rust-colored plumage.

73. American Kestrel by Parham Pourahmad

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Santa Cruz, California, United States

Camera: Nikon Z8 with a Nikon NIKKOR Z 180-600mm f/5.6-6.3 VR lens; 1/250 sec at f/6.3; ISO 2800

Behind the Shot: I found an American Kestrel perched on a bush in a coastal savannah along the Monterey Bay coast. It was hunting for crickets in the grass below, taking off every few minutes to grab a snack. I wanted to emphasize how the kestrel depended on the coastal vegetation for survival, so I framed the distant falcon with another bush in front of it. I liked how the bush and the blurry foreground draws the viewer's focus exclusively to the kestrel.

74. Lesser Rhea by Giovanni Ahumada

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Torres del Paine National Park, Magallanes and the Chilean Antarctic, Chile

Camera: Canon EOS 90D with a Tamron SP 150-600mm f/5-6.3 Di VC USD G2 lens; 1/1000 sec at f/6.3; ISO 250

Behind the Shot: After a long day of fruitless searches for wild cats in the Torres del Paine Reserve, the light was fading when, in the middle of the road and amid a fierce wind, the silhouette of a rhea appeared, running away from us. We were lying on the ground, braving an icy wind and temperatures hovering around zero degrees Celsius, but as the bird slowed down, we managed to take a couple of photos before it took off again, disappearing into the vastness of the grassland.

75. Andean Condor by Joaquín René Lagos San Martín

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Puerto Natales, Magallanes and Chilean Antarctica, Chile

Camera: Nikon D800 with a Nikon AF-S DX VR Zoom-NIKKOR 55-200mm f/4-5.6G IF-ED lens at 120mm; 1/400 sec at f/4.8; ISO 100

Behind the shot: I didn’t plan for this moment: When I reached the summit of Cerro Benítez in Torres del Paine National Park, just as the first rays of sunlight reached the mountains, I found a couple of condors standing quietly on a rocky ridge. At one point, the male fully extended his wings toward the female in a brief display. Then I took the photo. This encounter was marked by silence and distance and allowed me to glimpse the subtle relationship that condors have with their landscape. As scavengers, they recycle organic matter and contribute to the health of the ecosystem. Although protected in Chile as a natural monument, the species continues to face threats such as poisoning and habitat loss. Its slow reproductive rate makes it particularly vulnerable to environmental change.

76. Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager by Juan David Camacho Márquez

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Termales del Ruiz Hotel, Caldas, Colombia

Camera: Sony Alpha 6700 with a Sony FE 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 G OSS lens; 1/800 sec at f/6.3; ISO 4000

Behind the Shot: During the Birdwatching Tourism Congress in Manizales, I accompanied a camp for young birders and spent three wonderful days with a group that made me feel like part of a family. Together we visited the Termales del Ruiz Hotel, where we observed many amazing species, including this Mountain Tanager. I was thrilled to finally photograph a few species I had never managed to take a picture of before, but I was even more moved to see the kids so engaged and fascinated by the birds we found. That memory is what I like most about this photograph.

77. Crimson-rumped Toucanet by Juan David Camacho Márquez

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Bosque de Niebla Birding and Nature, Valle del Cauca, Colombia

Camera: Sony Alpha 6700 with a Sony FE 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 G OSS lens; 1/800 sec at f/6.3; ISO 2000

Behind the Shot: Naming my favorite species is a very difficult task. However, my favorite bird family has to be toucans. With vivid colors and imposing beaks, they showcase unparalleled beauty. Yet beauty is not their only special quality. Beyond fruit, toucans eat smaller bird species, such as hummingbirds, and slightly larger ones, like thrushes. That’s nature at work. On the day I took this photo, a couple of Crimson-rumped Toucanets landed in a palm tree right in front of my house. At first I decided to simply enjoy the moment, but since the toucans lingered for longer than usual, I finally brought out my camera. A few days later, while reviewing the photographs, I stumbled upon this one and fell in love with it.

78. Anhinga by Ivey Kennedy

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Laguna de Cocodrilos, Bahía de Banderas, Nayarit, Mexico

Camera: Sony Alpha 7 IV with a Sony FE 200-600mm F/5.6-6.3 G OSS lens; 1/3200 sec at f/6.3; ISO 5000

Behind the Shot: While visiting this area for work, I decided to go birding. I walked along the shore and noticed a lagoon where signs warned of crocodiles. Behind the signage was this female Anhinga perched on an exposed branch over the water, her wings spread. When I shifted my angle, I noticed fish netting hanging from her bill. She attempted to groom herself and shake her head to dislodge the material but failed. Guilt and heartbreak overwhelmed me, and I entered the crocodile-infested water to reach her, but she flew away before I could. This was the first photograph I captured showing the negative impacts humans have on wildlife, specifically birds. Commercial fishing impacts seabirds through bycatch that hooks or entangles hundreds of thousands of birds annually. I hope this image brings attention to this issue and provokes action to protect our birds.

79. Black-legged Kittiwake by Trevor LaClair

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Resurrection Bay, Alaska, United States

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 L IS USM lens; 1/1250 sec at f/7.1; ISO 1600

Behind the Shot: While leading a week-long photography workshop in Alaska, I ventured out with my group into Resurrection Bay for eight hours each day. One of the places we visited along the coast was the nesting grounds of Black-legged Kittiwakes. These seabirds spend most of their time out at sea and return to breed along seaside cliffs. When I saw these birds nesting near a large sea cave, I wanted to capture an image that emphasized the size of the colony and the active behavior of the birds flying to and from the nests. As a photography guide, I notice that a lot of folks prefer shooting charismatic species. Species such as gulls are often overlooked, but through careful observation and proper techniques you can make a great image out of any subject. This photograph also highlights the natural history of these gulls and what it takes to survive in the northern seas.

80. Pine Grosbeak by Brook Burling

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Wausau, Wisconsin, United States

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 L IS USM lens; 1/1000 sec at f/7.1; ISO 3200

Behind the Shot: During a bitter cold snap when temperatures hovered near 10 degrees below zero, I photographed this female Pine Grosbeak. These birds are an irruptive species in Wisconsin, appearing only during winters when food sources farther north become scarce. After seeing reports of their arrival, I spent the early morning driving rural backroads scanning berry-laden trees in hopes of finding them. After about an hour I came across a flock of a dozen Pine Grosbeaks feeding quietly in a crabapple tree heavy with frost-covered fruit. This bird's soft gray feathers and warm golden tones blended perfectly into the muted winter landscape. To me, the image represents resilience and adaptation. Wildlife endures and thrives through one of the harshest seasons in the Northwoods. I hope the photograph encourages people to appreciate the fragile habitats and food sources that sustain winter birds during extreme conditions.

81. Black-necked Swan by Rene Sandoval Emparán

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Puerto Natales, Magallanes and the Chilean Antarctic, Chile

Camera: Sony Alpha 7 III with a Sony FE 70-200mm f/2.8 GM OSS II lens and Sony FE 2x Teleconverter at 250mm; 1/2000 sec at f/8; ISO 1000

Behind the Shot: After spending the whole day exploring Torres del Paine National Park, we returned to Puerto Natales and took a short walk along the waterfront before calling it a day. In the distance, I saw some Black-necked Swans making their way through the waves, but it wasn't until we got closer to the shore that we realized they were with their cygnets. The adults were feeding by submerging their heads underwater for a few seconds while simultaneously guiding their chicks, as if teaching them how to find food. I didn't have a tripod, so I improvised by propping my backpack on the ground to lower the camera angle and get as close as possible to the water's surface. What struck me most was the calm with which the adults guided their chicks in the midst of such a cold, wild environment.

82. Peregrine Falcon by John LeeWong

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Point Vicente, Rancho Palos Verdes, California, United States

Camera: Sony Alpha 1 with a Sony FE 600mm f/4 GM OSS; 1/1000 sec at f/6.3; ISO 1600

Behind the Shot: For the past six years I have attempted to capture images of Peregrine Falcons during nesting season. This year I had the rare opportunity to capture two fledglings feeding themselves. Until then their mother had fed them, morsel by morsel. On this day, when the birds called out from the cliff to let their parents know they were hungry, their mother swooped in, dropped off a small bird, and took off. I quickly attached my 1.4x teleconverter to my 600mm lens and moved back to get a clear view of them sharing their meal. Through my viewfinder, I saw them pull feathers and engage in a tug-of-war, lifting and stretching the prey's intestines. There are times like this when shooting with a teleconverter for extra reach allows me to capture the minute, critical detail that drives the story home.

83. Golden-collared Manakin by Esteban Gómez Tirado

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Tinamú Birding and Nature Lodge, Caldas, Colombia

Camera: Canon EOS R7 with a Sigma 150-600mm f/5-6.3 DG OS HSM Contemporary lens with an EF-EOS R Mount adapter; 1/200 sec at f/6.3; ISO 6400

Behind the Shot: In a small patch of lowland forest in the department of Caldas, the silence is broken by dry snaps and songs that signal an unusual spectacle. If you approach carefully, you may discover a Golden-collared Manakin lek—a small area of the forest meticulously maintained by the birds, free of leaf litter, with slender, upright stems that provide a clean, high-contrast backdrop for these tiny birds to perform their elaborate courtship ritual. During these displays, the males spread their chin feathers, perform acrobatic jumps, and flap their wings rapidly, producing the characteristic clicks that echo through the forest. This courtship display lasts less than a second and takes place in very low light, so capturing it required patience, observation, and multiple attempts to freeze.

84. Blue-naped Chlorophonia by Leah Turner

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Santa Marta, Magdalena, Colombia

Camera: Nikon D850 with a Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 500mm f/5.6E PF ED VR lens; 1/250 sec at f/5.6; ISO 280

Behind the Shot: While staying at the Bellavista Ecolodge, I noticed a pile of fruit sitting outside the hotel kitchen, waiting to be prepared for the guests' breakfast buffet. The food, however, attracted diners of a different kind. Tiny Blue-naped Chlorophonias darted from nearby trees to the bananas, grabbing bites before retreating to cover. I stood quietly on a balcony above the scene with my camera, watching the birds perform their tropical fruit stand heists. Some of the bananas were already open, evidence that the birds had been enjoying their breakfast well before sunrise. Then one bird paused mid-snack, looked up to me with a sheepish expression, and seemed torn between "caught red-handed" and "completely unapologetic." To me the photo captures the playful overlap between human spaces and wildlife, reminding us that nature is full of clever opportunists, and sometimes they are impossibly charming.

85. Brown Pelican by Nick Schwinghamer

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Bahia Principe Explore Akumal, Quintana Roo, Mexico

Camera: Sony Alpha 1 II with a Sony FE 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 G OSS lens; 1/3200 sec at f/6.3; ISO 320

Behind the Shot: I took this photograph while on a family vacation at a resort in Mexico, where a breakwater sheltered a small stretch of beach from the waves. The calm, shallow water drew large schools of fish, and with them, both tourists and a group of Brown Pelicans hunting alongside them. The pelicans flew low over people's heads, drifted past snorkelers, and repeatedly plunge-dived within arm's reach of wading beachgoers. I spent an afternoon kneeling in the shallows, long lens up, tracking the pelicans as they hunted. One bird spiraled upward and tucked into its dive, dropping behind a couple wading in front of me. I held the shutter down and kept following it. The resulting frame captured wild and human life moving together in parallel. That coexistence doesn't have to be dramatic or deliberate. Here, it was accidental and ordinary.

86. Lesser Horned Owl by Harold Gillibrand Guerra

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Panguilemu area, Aysen, Chile

Camera: Canon EOS R6 with a Tamron SP 150-600mm f/5-6.3 Di VC USD lens with a Canon Mount Adapter EF-EOS R at 600mm; 1/20 sec at f/6.3; ISO 6400

Behind the Shot: Near the city of Coyhaique, where I live, I've been closely observing a pair of Lesser Horned Owls for years. On this particular night, after waking up, the three juveniles began playing among the branches. At that moment their father flew over the area and perched on the tallest tree. With a call, he summoned his chicks. He came down with a hare he had cached there. It was fascinating to observe the hierarchy among the siblings: While the father fed the most dominant chick, the least assertive one waited patiently for its turn. It was around 10:00 p.m., and there was almost no light. Using a tripod, I sought out the precise angle so that the lights of the city would frame the scene, creating that contrast between nature and the civilization encroaching on its territory.

87. Austral Blackbird by Juan Meza Cid

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Malalcahuelo, Araucania, Chile

Camera: Sony Alpha 6600 with a Sony FE 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 G OSS lens at 600mm; 1/400 sec at f/6.3; ISO 640

Behind the Shot: I was driving on a stormy day on Route 181 near Malacahuello, in the Andean region of Araucana. From inside my vehicle, I spotted this Austral Blackbird perched on a thorny branch, resolutely braving the relentless wind and rain of the Chilean mountains. I was able to take this photo from inside my car. My hope with this photograph was to convey the remarkable resilience of birds in the most challenging landscapes and climates of the southern part of the continent.

88. Andean Condor by Roberto Prat Arandeda

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Coyhaique, Aysén, Chile

Camera: Canon EOS R6 Mark II with a Canon RF 200-800mm f/6.3-9 IS USM lens at 400mm; 1/1250 sec at f/9; ISO 3200

Behind the Shot: One winter morning, I decided to go out to take photos near Coyhaique. The day had been quiet, with no bird-of-prey sightings and only a few birds typical of the season flying in flocks. Since I wasn't getting the results I'd hoped for, I kept driving until I reached a stretch of the road where the terrain reveals a backdrop of snow-covered mountains. I had gotten out of the car to photograph the landscape when a solitary condor began to approach from afar. The distance was considerable, the focus required precision, and a light mist in the air made taking the photograph even harder. Still, I managed to track its flight path long enough to get a few shots. It was a once-in-a-lifetime scene that transformed an ordinary outing into something special.

89. Pink-footed Shearwater by Matías Rivera Campos

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Offshore Bío Bío, Chile

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Canon EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS II USM lens at 400mm; 1/3200 sec at f/5.6; ISO 1000

Behind the Shot: On the day I took this photo, a friend had organized a boat trip and invited me to join. We initially set out in search of whales, but the journey had some surprises in store for us. During a stretch of our voyage, this Pink-footed Shearwater appeared. We watched it fly gracefully over the calm waters, which reflected its movements over the vast expanse of mirror-like sea. The conditions were perfect, and I tried to capture the bird just as it was about to skim the water with the tip of one wing. The cloudy sky provided a bright, white contrast to the shearwater's subdued tones.

90. Purple-backed Thornbill by Juan Jacobo Castillo

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Páramo de Guasca, Cundinamarca, Colombia

Camera: Canon EOS R7 with a Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 L IS USM lens; 1/1250 sec at f/7.1; ISO 1250

Behind the Shot: After waiting more than a year for the ideal moment to photograph this hummingbird, I traveled to a páramo, an alpine grassland, near Bogotá where I found several individuals feeding on a patch of flowering native frailejones (Espeletia grandiflora). Purple-backed Thornbills are most active during the flowering season of this plant, which is characteristic of the páramos, a unique highland ecosystem. After waiting patiently for the ideal lighting conditions, I captured the image I was looking for: one that freezes the hummingbird's movement in mid-air, immortalizing a moment that lasts a fraction of a second.

91. Hooded Oriole by Leah Turner

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Superior, Arizona, United States

Camera: Nikon D850 with a Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 500mm f/5.6E PF ED VR lens; 1/800 sec at f/5.6; ISO 560

Behind the Shot: On a warm spring morning, I spent several hours waiting beside blooming aloe plants at Boyce Thompson Arboretum where I noticed Hooded Orioles feeding on nectar. I hoped to highlight the camouflage and color harmony that can occur in nature. A male landed on the stem directly in front of me and took a deep drink of nectar. He heard the click of my shutter and turned to look directly toward me. I captured a single frame before he flew away. I love how the oriole seems suspended within the flowers, nearly becoming part of the plant itself. To me the photo reflects the importance of slowing down and observing the subtle relationships between birds and the habitats they depend on. Moments like this are brief and easily missed, but with patience, they can reveal extraordinary beauty hidden in plain sight.

92. Harris's Hawk and

Green-backed Firecrown by Gaspar Ramírez B.

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Ramsar Site Conchalí Lagoon Wetland, Coquimbo, Chile

Camera: Sony Alpha 7 IV with a Sony FE 300mm f/2.8 FM OSS lens and Sony FE 2x Teleconverter; 1/1250 sec at f/5.6; ISO 4000

Behind the Shot: Whenever I travel outside my city, I take my camera with me and look for places where I can find birds to photograph. I left early and was the only person at the Laguna Conchalí Wetland. Right at the start of my walk, I spotted this hawk hunting. After an unsuccessful attempt, it perched on this dried Chagual flower. After I'd taken a couple of photos, a curious hummingbird hovered just a few meters from the bird of prey. It turned out to be a striking and very beautiful photo.

93. Striated Caracara by Omar Barroso Putare

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Cabo de Hornos National Park, Magallanes and the Chilean Antarctic, Chile

Camera: Nikon D750 with a Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 200-500mm f/5.6E ED VR lens at 440mm; 1/400 sec at f/5.6; ISO 640

Behind the Shot: I took this photo at the southernmost tip of Chile. Reaching this archipelago was a major challenge that tested my endurance and my equipment, as we had to sail through stormy waters and hike across peat bogs exposed to constant strong winds. After hours of hiking, this Striated Caracara, an iconic yet near threatened species, landed nearby and remained still. As soon as I saw it, I threw myself to the ground to create a foreground blur using the native vegetation. Then the caracara opened its beak and let out a powerful call: a raw, direct cry against the constant whistle of the southern wind. It is a bird that has withstood human persecution and, on that day, in the midst of utter isolation, asserted its presence.

94. Snow Bunting by Ramesh Kodavatiganti

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Alberta, Canada

Camera: Nikon Z9 with a Nikon NIKKOR Z 180-600mm f/5.6-6.3 VR lens; 1/2000 sec at f/6.3; ISO 80

Behind the Shot: While driving around farmland on a cold and sunny morning in search of owls, I spotted a flock of Snow Buntings feeding in the corn fields. They flew in short bursts and landed in the middle of the road. The entire flock then crossed over to the opposite side of the road. Until this moment, I had only seen a few Snow Buntings scattered across the landscape. This was an entirely different, and stunning, experience. Using a zoom lens in the mid-range helped me capture the birds in flight as well as the scenic farmlands, with a gravel road cutting through the image.

95. Purple Sandpiper by Kerry Snyder

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Barnegat Light, New Jersey, United States

Camera: Sony Alpha 7 IV with a Sony FE 200-600 mm F/5.6-6.3 G OSS lens; 1/500 at f/6.3; ISO 3200

Behind the Shot: On a February trip to Barnegat Lighthouse State Park, my fellow birders and I walked down a long rock jetty. While marveling at birds that only spend the colder months in New Jersey flying above and swimming in the ocean current, we noticed a couple Purple Sandpipers periodically drop down between the large jetty rocks. I soon discovered the reason for the behavior: a feast of mussels attached below. I sat down on one of the rocks to get a better angle when one of the sandpipers got close. This bird ferociously probed for mussels, stopping every so often and looking up as I angled my camera into the crevice. I'm in awe of the subtle purple-gray coloration of these birds' nonbreeding plumage and take any opportunity to photograph them on the coast near home.

96. Magellanic Penguin by Aldo Scrivanti

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Islotes de Puñihuil Natural Monument, Los Lagos, Chile

Camera: Canon EOS R5 Mark II with a Canon RF 100-500mm

Camera: Canon EOS R5 Mark II with a Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 L IS USM lens at 500mm; 1/1250 sec at f/7.1; ISO 6400

Behind the Shot: My friends and I arrived on a boat at the Puñihuil islets at 7:30 in the morning, bathed in the cold, dim, and diffuse light typical of a south-polar dawn. But that was just one of the hurdles. The swell rocked the boat, we were far from this penguin, and the Patagonian cold numbed my hands, making every camera adjustment difficult. Even so, I kept the lens pointed at the algae-covered rocks, waiting, not quite sure what for. Suddenly, the penguin bowed toward me and, with its beak open, let out a loud, deep sound. I snapped the photo instinctively. I hope that whoever sees this photograph feels the same way I did that early morning: It's worth being present—with patience and attention—because nature always finds a way to speak.

97. Anhinga by Susan Oliver

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Lakeland, Florida, United States

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 L IS USM lens; 1/2000 sec at f/5; ISO 1600

Behind the Shot: Before Hurricane Ian changed much of the landscape at Florida's Circle B Bar Reserve, there was a stretch along Alligator Alley near Lake Hancock that I referred to as the "Bird Photography Studio." The light filtered beautifully through the cypress trees, and the draping Spanish moss created a soft backdrop for any bird that perched there. On this walk, it was a female Anhinga that stopped me. While the striking black plumage of the males often draws the attention, I was captivated by the subtle elegance of the female's buff-colored neck and the curve she formed against the moss. I have noticed that photographers frequently walk past Anhingas, especially the females. I wanted the image to show the quiet elegance of a bird that is often overlooked.

98. White Ibis by Ron van Velzen

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Sidney Lanier Bridge, Glynn County, Georgia

Camera: Sony DSC-RX10 Mark IV; 1/640 sec at f/5.6; ISO 100

Behind the Shot: I made this image on a fog-heavy morning along the Georgia coast, with the Sidney Lanier Bridge emerging and dissolving into layers of mist. I was drawn to the cables fading into nothing, the structure reduced to soft geometry and tone. The dense fog flattened contrast and made autofocus unreliable, so I switched to manual focus and carefully controlled exposure to preserve subtle gradations in the whites and grays. I hoped for a moment to bring scale and life into the frame. That came when a small group of White Ibises crossed the bridge line. Their spacing mirrored the suspension cables, connecting the organic and the engineered. The image speaks to coexistence—wildlife navigating through human-made environments with quiet persistence. I hope viewers feel the stillness of the moment and recognize how nature continues its patterns, even within the structures we build.

99. Greater Prairie-Chicken by Alex Becker

Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Mitchell County, Kansas, United States

Camera: Nikon Z9 with a Nikon NIKKOR Z 800mm f/6.3 VR S lens and a Nikon Z Teleconverter TC-1.4x; 1/2500 sec at f/9; ISO 12800

Behind the Shot: Photographing grouse displaying at leks in the spring is the highlight of my year. I love getting there before the sun is even on the horizon. Anticipation builds as the light gets brighter ever so slowly and the birds finally become visible. Male Greater Prairie-Chickens display by quickly tapping their feet, dropping their heads, and inflating the colorful air sacs on their necks. This lek, or courtship area, had very short grass, so when the birds danced, gravel and dirt flew into the air. I wanted to capture that dynamic up close, so I used an 800mm lens with a 1.4x teleconverter to focus on this individual. In my viewfinder, I could see another bird in the background, so I waited patiently to get both of them mid-display in the frame. Thankfully, both birds cooperated, and I was thrilled to capture a moment of their dance.

100. Stripe-backed Bittern by Franco Elgueta R.

Contest: Chile and Colombia

Image Location: Puchuncaví, Valparaíso, Chile

Camera: Sony Alpha 1 with a Sony FE 300mm f/2.8 GM OSS lens; 1/1000 sec at f/2.8; ISO 100

Behind the Shot: For years, I've visited this wetland on Chile's central coast. After decades of industrial pressure and human development, what was once a vast wetland has been reduced to small, scattered bodies of water nestled among rushes, cattails, and fences. One morning during my daily walk I sat quietly at the water's edge, watching the birds. Then I noticed a shape among the reeds: a motionless Stripe-backed Bittern, blending into the vertical pattern of the vegetation. I'd never seen one there before. Since it looked as if it might take flight, I set my camera to high-speed mode and waited. After a while, the bird emerged and flew over the golden reeds in front of a large willow tree. The image shows how even small pockets of wetland can still sustain life.

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