

Wildlife Photographer of the Year

Descriptive Audio Tour - Transcript

Stop 01 -- Welcome

It's my pleasure to welcome you to the 2020 *Wildlife Photographer of the Year* exhibition at the ROM! My name is Burton Lim, assistant curator of mammalogy at the Royal Ontario Museum. I'm thrilled to be able to curate again this popular exhibition from the Natural History Museum in London, England. The stunning images you will see during your visit capture unique moments in time and showcase the diversity of nature.

Affectionately known as WPY, this is the 56th year of what has become the longest running and most prestigious photography competition on wildlife in the world. We're honoured at the ROM to present this spectacular exhibition of exquisitely displayed back-lit images for the 8th year in a row.

Almost 50,000 pictures were submitted this year from photographers in 86 countries, who come from throughout the world. An eminent panel of 6 international judges chose the best 100 photos for the show. These include the highly commended and winning images in 17 categories, and 2 overall grand title winners. All are exceptional photographs that also tell compelling stories about the beauty of the natural world and the challenges we face on planet Earth — including current climate change issues.

The 17 categories are grouped into several sections with diverse themes. For example, the photojournalism section has 3 categories dealing with wildlife stories on themes of sustainably restoring nature and the consequences of using wild animals. My favourite section is the young photographers — with age categories ranging from 10-years and under, 11-14 years, 15-17 years, and the rising star for 18-26 years old. This is how WPY has nurtured talent for over 2 generations of photographers and launched the careers of visual communicators in the art of environmental story-telling.

In this descriptive audio tour of the exhibition, we highlight 12 photographs with strong messages, and dive a bit deeper into their details. You'll hear my voice to

begin with, but then there's also Tina Weltz – ROM photographer *and* Mark Peck – manager of the ROM's Schad Gallery of Biodiversity.

Note that the tour stops are identified by a QR code next to each image. We give a verbal description of the photograph, including subtle details that may not be obvious at first glance – plus interesting biological aspects related to the image, and technical specifications giving insight into how the photographer captured their moment in time.

We hope you enjoy this guided tour, and that the photos give you a new appreciation of our natural world. The images convey the power of visual communication to inspire and stimulate public discourse on environmental concerns.

Before we begin, a quick reminder to please practice physical distancing, and keep a safe distance of two metres from other visitors when you explore this exhibition.

Stop 02: Night Hunter

[Animal Portraits category](#) / [Jonas Classen, Sweden](#)



"Night Hunter" is the first photo on the audio tour. It's a Highly Commended image in the Animal Portraits category. It was taken at Örebro, Närke, Sweden by Jonas Classen.

This photograph is beautiful in its simplicity and shapes. On the left third of the image, the trunk of a birch tree stretches into the sky. In the top right corner is

the white orb of the moon, out of focus, but identifiable. To the right of the tree is a great gray owl perched on a branch. The bird leans forward, with its strikingly round head, and its yellow eyes gazing straight ahead. The right foot is lifted directly under its chin, facing outward, its claws clenched together. The scene is bathed in the dark blue of late evening.

The great gray owl is a species found throughout the boreal forests of northern Europe, Asia, and North America. They live in northern Ontario – but about every 10 years, large numbers move into southern Ontario. This happens when food resources or snow conditions become too challenging in the north.

Cars may serve as an effective tool in the wildlife photographer's arsenal. Wild animals that live near roads often become comfortable with vehicles and don't see them as a threat. Photographers can use them as blinds (so they won't be seen) – they'll stick their cameras out of the car's window to take pictures without disturbing the animal.

In this picture, Jonas went a step further, using the car's headlights as his primary light source. He combined this with very high film speed of ISO 3200, which allowed the camera's sensor to capture more light. The result? He was able to get the details in the owl's face and body – despite it being backlit from the moonlight

Stop 03: The Perfect Catch

Young Photographers: 15 – 17 years old category / Hannah Vijayan, Canada



This photo is a Highly Commended image in the Young Photographers: 15-17 Year-Old category. Called “The perfect catch”, it was taken by Hannah Vijayan from Canada on Brooks River in Katmai National Park and Preserve, in Alaska.

In the centre of the frame, a brown bear stares right at you, while holding a silver salmon in its mouth. It wades in a shallow river in front of a bank of tall green grass. Instead of catching fish jumping up waterfalls, this female had simply dunked her head in the water to get this meal. The bear and its catch are reflected in the flat surface of the calm waters. The grass in the background nicely frames the subject, with its reflection.

The Alaskan brown bear is one of the largest of this species. Males weigh up to 450 kilograms or 990 pounds. Females are about one-third less in weight. These bears have an omnivorous diet (meaning they eat all sorts of things) – feeding on grasses, berries, and small animals. In the summer, they gorge on spawning salmon caught swimming upstream. Their daily feast of about 30 fish fattens them for the winter hibernation, which lasts from late autumn to early spring.

To take the photo, Hannah sought out a quieter place away from the waterfall, where many others were busy taking pictures of brown bears catching sockeye salmon. She found a spot on the river that was much calmer, where she captured this tranquil scene. A fast shutter speed of 1/2000th of a second and a high sensitivity film speed-setting of ISO 2200 allowed her to hand-hold the camera. A 300 millimetre telephoto lens also helped her to freeze this perfect catch.

Stop 04: Snow Moose

Young Photographers: 15 – 17 years old category / Matthew Henry, Canada



Matthew Henry from Canada took this photo titled “Snow Moose” at Riding Mountain National Park in Manitoba. It was Highly Commended in the Young Photographers: 15-17 Years category.

The left side of the photo features a close-up profile of a moose’s head looking to the right over its left shoulder. Blurry snow is falling, but a few flakes on the moose’s forehead stand out in crisp detail. At the upper left of the image is the moose’s dark eye; its distinctly robust snout angles down towards the lower middle of the frame. In the background is the darker brown fur of its body, wet and spotted with snow.

Moose are the largest living species of deer. They weigh up to 700 kilograms or 1,540 pounds and reach about 2 metres or 6 feet high at the shoulders. As with most deer, only males have antlers – these grow in the spring for the mating rituals of the autumn, then fall off for the winter.

Moose are herbaceous browsers... aquatic plants and leaves form the bulk of their summer diet. During winter, moose forage primarily on bark and twigs, with willow being a main food resource.

The moose seen here became an ideal photographic subject when it began to walk towards the car with Matthew inside. The moose stopped to drink water from a puddle, surveying its surroundings from time to time. This gave Matthew the opportunity to try different camera settings and find interesting angles. He used a 70-200 millimetre zoom lens to capture this full frame close-up picture.

Stop 05: Kid's Game

Behaviour: Mammals category / Yossi Eshbol, Israel



Hi, I'm Tina Weltz, photographer at the ROM.

Titled "Kid's Game", this photograph was taken in the Negev Mountains, Israel, by Yossi Eshbol from Israel. His entry was Highly Commended in the Behaviour: Mammals category.

Here we find ourselves in the soft light of early morning. In the foreground are two rocky cliff faces separated by a narrow ravine. In the background, far below the cliffs, the valley stretches up into the horizon at the top of the frame. In this photo are two young ibex -- a type of wild goat. One of the ibex stands at the edge of the cliff on the right, facing the ravine. And, high, frozen in mid-leap between two cliff faces, is our subject -- another young ibex, caught in the decisive moment of success or failure.

Nubian ibex are found in desert areas of northern Africa and the Middle East. Adult males have long, thin horns that sweep up and back behind the head. These may be over a metre or 3 feet long. Adult males are solitary for most of the year, but will join up with small herds of females and young, immature males during the breeding season.

For the photograph, Yossi had positioned himself perfectly. The light was still low, so he set the film speed of the camera a little higher than normal, allowing for more light to reach the sensor. In turn, this allowed him to use a faster shutter speed to stop the action of the young ibex, while still maintaining focus.

The view through the camera is similar to what the human eye would see from the same distance. The biggest challenge for Yossi was to capture the “decisive moment” – when the viewer can’t help but ask: Is the young ibex going to make it?

Stop 06: Big Bat Bloodsucker

Behaviour: Invertebrates category / Piotr Naskrecki, USA



With the aptly alliterative title “Big bat bloodsucker”, this photograph was taken at Bunga Inselbergs, Gorongosa National Park in Mozambique. The photographer, Piotr Naskrecki, is a Polish-born American. His entry was Highly Commended in the Behaviour: Invertebrates category.

This is one of the few portrait-oriented photos in the exhibition. It’s a close-up shot of the head of a small bat with a large, orange-red, six-legged, spider-like creature clamped over its eyes. The creature is an ectoparasite – an organism that lives, and feeds, on the skin of its host.

The bat’s head is about half the width of a finger, and covered in greyish brown fur. Its forehead and eyes are fully covered by the “hitchhiking” ectoparasite. The bat’s mouth is slightly ajar, revealing its tongue, ridged palate, and pointed white teeth.

The ectoparasite feeds on its host’s blood. Many bats have these parasitic batflies – this one looks similar to a spider. It has a primarily white body, with orange markings. Six long, orange-red legs end in claws gripping its host. The creature is covered with dark, bristly hairs. This species belongs to a family of flies characterized by several features – no wings, tiny eyes, a head on top of its back, and legs that fold backwards.

Most bat ectoparasites are host specific, which means they latch onto only one species and rarely leave their home. The host in this case is the Mozambique long-fingered bat, recently described as a species new to science in 2013.

The photographer is a trained entomologist who specializes in grasshopper-like katydids. But when he noticed an ectoparasite on a bat during a larger biodiversity survey, his avocation for photography kicked into gear. He grabbed his camera with a 100 millimetre macro lens to photograph this large tiny blood sucker. To get in focus all of the fine details, he used a small aperture opening of f16.

Stop 07: Father Protector

Behaviour: Amphibians and Reptiles category / Jaime Calubras, Spain



Jaime Calubras of Spain took his photograph, titled “Father Protector,” at El Jardín de los Sueños, Cotopaxi, in Ecuador. It was Highly Commended in the category of Behaviour: Amphibians and Reptiles.

This is a photograph of echoing translucence. The head of a male Atrato glass frog is positioned just above the centre of the photograph. The frog’s gold and brown speckled eyes face forward. The top of the frog’s head is a light green and yellow, blending in beautifully with the green, out-of-focus background. Below the translucent underside of the frog are 9 transparent eggs. Each one contains a semi-translucent tadpole with body speckles echoing the eyes of the adult frog.

More than 120 species of glass frogs are found throughout the lowland forests of Central and South America. Glass frogs are small, less than 7 cm or 3 inches in length. Most are a lime green colour on the back, with the underside of many species being white and almost transparent. This allows the heart and other organs to be seen through the skin.

Atrato glass frogs lay as many as 25 eggs each on leaves hanging over streams. Males then cling on to protect their developing offspring from predators and dehydration. Once hatched, the tadpoles drop into the water below.

Photographing small amphibians can be challenging – it requires some special camera gear and several steps. Step One: A good macro lens allows you to get close to your subject and still maintain focus.

Step Two: Using 2 flash units rather than one gives lighting on both sides of the subject, then a softbox helps dilute and spread out the light from the flashes, so it's not too harsh. Step Three: Getting to eye level with your subject gives the viewer a stronger connection and the subject a stronger personality.

The end result? ... Beautiful!

Stop 08: Wolf Mountain

Animals in their Environment category / Lorenzo Shoubridge, Italy



This photograph was Highly Commended in the Animals in their Environment category. It is titled “Wolf Mountain” and was taken by Italian Lorenzo Shoubridge at Apuan Alps Regional Park in Tuscany, Italy.

This photo features a clear, starry night with a mountain in the background. In the lower left of the photo are two grey wolves walking along a rocky path. They are caught mid-stride, their heads down, mouths agape, and tails pointed skyward. They are nicely illuminated, emerging from the darkness of their alpine setting. The landscape appears to be mostly barren rock, except for a few bunches of grass and low-lying vegetation on either side of the path.

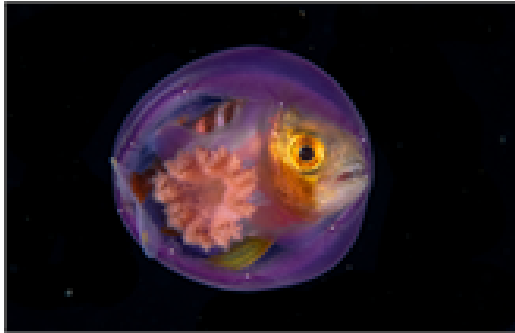
Based on their morphology and genetics, grey wolves in Italy are considered by some scientists to be a distinct population. Their numbers plummeted to less than 100 individuals in the 1970s, when they were given protected status. The population has since rebounded to about 700 wolves and they have spread to neighbouring France and Switzerland. Now they are being hunted over concerns about them killing livestock – but wolves actually play an important role in keeping the ecosystem balanced. They prey on herbivores such as deer, which helps maintain the abundance of natural vegetation.

To photograph wolves at night, Lorenzo set a camera-trap triggered by an infrared motion sensor detector along a trail used by these predators. He painstakingly took several hours adjusting the camera – mounting it on a tree to include not only the trail in the image, but also the mountains and sky as a backdrop. He set

his zoom lens to a wide angle of 25 millimetres to get as close to the wolves as possible while capturing the scenic vista.

Stop 09: Jelly Nanny

Under Water category / Songda Cai, China



Hi, my name is Mark Peck and I'm the Manager of the Schad Gallery of Biodiversity at the Royal Ontario Museum

This photograph was Highly Commended in the Under Water category. It is titled "Jelly Nanny" and was taken at Anilao, Calabarzon, in the Philippines, by Songda Cai, from China.

The image seems a bit confusing at first glance. The background is black and there is a purplish bubble in the middle. But look more closely... within the bubble is – a silver fish with a bright yellow eye, and what looks like a pink flower on its side.

Well, now we are closer to the answer, but still not quite right. It turns out what we have here is a small fish inside a jellyfish! The fish, known as a trevally, is not trapped at all, but is actually seeking refuge from predators, using the belly of the jellyfish for protection.

In fact, at least 80 species of fish turn to jellyfish for protection – and the jellyfish usually do not suffer nor benefit from this practice. However, if seawater grows more acidic, as predicted with climate change, it could affect the senses of the fish, causing them to become less attracted to their hosts. They may then spend more time in the open, exposed to predators.

The photographer, Songda Cai, is well known as a “black water photographer”. If you are unfamiliar with the phrase, it refers to photographing at night far from the shore and in the deep ocean. Black water photographers are tethered to the boat for safety, as the bottom is often thousands of feet deep, and it’s easy to get disoriented about the way back to the surface. It’s not for the faint of heart!

Whether done in black water or shallower depths, whether done during the day or at night, underwater photography relies on special equipment. The cameras are the same as those used above water, but underwater, protective, water-proof housing is essential. Flash is regularly used to illuminate the subject, and wide angle lenses ensure the lighting is strong enough to reach the subject.

Stop 10: The Price of Oil

[Wildlife Photojournalism category / Andrew S Wright, Canada](#)



Titled “The Price of Oil”, this is a Highly Commended photo in the Wildlife Photojournalism category. It was taken at Kern River Oil Field in California, by Andrew S. Wright of Canada. He is an Associate Professor in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Ottawa.

Here is another image where, on first inspection, it is hard to determine exactly what’s happening. Although not completely devoid of colour, there *is* something colourless about it. It features a pale brown landscape with dead, yellowing vegetation, black hydro poles, and a colony of black pump jacks going about their lifeless, never-ending work – bringing oil to the surface, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The graphic scene has an otherworldly, disturbing feel to it.

A pump jack is the above-ground portion of an oil well's piston pump, used to bring oil to the surface when there is insufficient underground pressure. Pump jacks are common in oil-rich areas where oil is difficult to extract. They look a little like an alien animal moving slowly in the landscape, and are also known as nodding donkeys.

The photograph was taken from 3 km (or almost 2 miles) away, with a zoom lens at 400 mm focal length, and a tripod to prevent camera shake, for sharp focus. Telephoto lenses compress depth of field, often giving images more of a two-dimensional feel. In this case, the choice of lens allows the viewer to see the entire field of action – similar to when you look down on the players from high up in a sports stadium.

Stop 11: World of Tar

Wildlife Photojournalism category / Garth Lenz, Canada



Garth Lenz from Canada took his photo “World of Tar” in the Alberta Oil Sands. This work was Highly Commended in the Wildlife Photojournalism category.

The image is shot from high above the tar sands as the light fades into the evening. Two roads, one on each side of the image, lead you into a desolate world – toward a factory belching out smoke into a grey, leaden sky far in the distance. The landscape is one of dead ponds... a land that has been scraped clean of life, leaving a vast oily emptiness in its place. Canadian photographer Garth Lenz, based in western Canada, has spent much of his career looking at the contrast between the industrial and natural landscapes there.

Consumption of fossil fuels by Canadians not only has a direct negative impact on climate change but, in the case of the tar sands, is destroying huge swaths of the boreal forest. This is an ecosystem that can store twice as much carbon per hectare as tropical rainforest. Consider... while it is easy to lay blame on the oil industry for this destruction, almost all of us willingly make use of oil products, which continue to be an important part of Canada’s economy.

Photographing the tar sands in the evening light emphasizes the greyness and the destruction of the landscape. The angle and the use of aerial photography for this image allows viewers to get a stronger feel for the vast scale of environmental damage caused by the oil sands.

Stop 12: When the rain came rolling in

Earth's Environments category / Zack Clothier, USA



“When the rain came rolling in” is a Highly Commended photo in the Earth’s Environments category. It was taken at Uncompahgre National Forest in Colorado by Zack Clothier from the United States.

The perspective of this photograph takes it from ground level to above a mountainous landscape. More than half of the lower frame is an extensive mudflat that has dried into large, fragmented, greyish chunks, and past that, a lake. Beyond this is a rolling terrain of dense, yellow-foliaged forest that reaches up the slope of a craggy-summit, shrouded by mist. At the top of the image is a pinkish sun-lit sky, with dark grey rain clouds hovering over the mountain peaks.

Recent droughts in the southwest United States are attributed to climate change and rising temperatures. After almost no rainfall for months, this lake had shrunk to create a daunting barrier for animals seeking water. The photograph suggests that some relief may finally be coming.

A wide angle 14-24 millimetre lens, in combination with the technique of “focus stacking”, were used to achieve this striking composition. The stacking technique uses several photos with varying depths of field – these are merged into one image using commercially available software. Although the individual photos have different parts in focus and others out of focus, the final image is sharp throughout.

Stop 13: The Last Bite

Wildlife Photographer Portfolio category / Ripan Biswas, India



Ripan Biswas from India is the Winner of the Wildlife Photographer Portfolio Award. This photo, one of 6 in his portfolio, is called “The Last Bite”. It was taken at Buxa Tiger Reserve in West Bengal, India.

A colourful long-legged tiger beetle fills the frame of this macrophotography shot. Macrophotography is a technique that takes close-ups of small things, such as insects, to depict them as larger than life.

The beetle is primarily bright aqua-blue with large splotches of orange throughout its body. Its underside is covered with extensive patches of white hairs. The beetle has large bulging black eyes, menacingly sharp pincher jaws, and 2 long antennae. The head faces the right side of the photo in profile. On closer examination, a small yellowish-brown weaver ant is biting the right hind leg of the 6-legged beetle. Ripan took this picture at the eye-level of the beetle as it walked on a dry sandy river bed.

This “David and Goliath” struggle involves two predatory insects. Weaver ant colonies may number in the hundreds of thousands. The larger worker ants fan out to scour the area for small invertebrate prey. Tiger beetles are more solitary hunters – and the photographed individual began feasting on the smaller species. This weaver ant wasn’t going down without a fight! It glommed onto the leg of its much bigger adversary, but it was on the losing end of the battle as the attacking beetle eventually struck back.

The photographer used a 90 millimetre macro lens at ground level to get this intimate point of view of these insect predators. A ring flash makes the tiger beetle pop out of the sandy white background. Ripan has chosen an intermediate

depth of field with an aperture setting of f8. This captures the ant, the leg of attack, and the body of the beetle all in focus. The beetle's other 5 legs (slightly in the foreground and background) are out of focus.

This concludes our audio tour. Thanks for visiting Wildlife Photographer of the Year! We hope you enjoyed the exhibition, and the rest of your visit to the ROM!