

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption for 1st: Hankyeol Yang's "Dead Butterfly" took first place.

Caption for 2nd: "The Visit from a Snake" by Tiffany Sanchez won second.

Caption for 3rd: In third place, Francisco Mayorga's "Weigela"

Caption for TCJUDGE: Deb Szymanczyk, John Thompson (center), and Arne Svenson judged the contest.

'Ding' Darling announces high school photo contest winners

At a special ceremony on Feb. 3, 2018, the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) announced winners and finalists in the fifth annual "Ding" Darling-Theodore Cross High School Photography Contest at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island.

Sponsored by the Theodore Cross Family Charitable Foundation, the competition invited high school students from Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Glades, and Hendry counties to compete for prizes that included a Canon digital SLR camera package, chartered class trips to the refuge, Tarpon Bay Explorers excursions, and copies of *Waterbirds: Portraits and Anecdotes from Birding Adventures* by contest namesake, the late Theodore Cross.

Cross, who lived part-time on Sanibel Island and has family still living here, marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; advised the Johnson and Nixon administrations on anti-poverty programs; wrote the influential book *Black Capitalism*, among others; and created Birders United, a birding Web site that ranked legislators according to their record of bird protection support.

Late in life, Cross decided to indulge his love for birds and photography and traveled the world to collect stunning portraits and stories to chronicle his adventures. He photographed often at "Ding" Darling, and a number of the images in his book reflect his love for the refuge. Cross published *Waterbirds* in 2009 at age 85; he passed away shortly after that in February 2010.

NPR's *All Things Considered* called Cross' collection of 179 images and countless anecdotes "spectacular." The *New York Times* described it as "part visual encyclopedia, part memoir."

World-renowned New York photographer and friend of the Cross family, Arne Svenson, judged this year's contest, along with "Ding" Darling law enforcement officer John Thompson and Sanibel resident Deb Szymanczyk. They reviewed 363 images taken by students from 16 different schools.

First place went to an image titled "Dead Butterfly" by Cape Coral High 10th-grader Hankyeol Yang. "This one says so much about the intersection of nature and society," said Svenson. "I found the juxtaposition of color in the butterfly and the black-and-white background to be very dynamic. The animal scale-wise overshadows what man has created, leaving one to believe it will be there after we're gone."

In second place, Tiffany Sanchez, a ninth-grader from Cape Coral High, captured a black racer in her portrait "The Visit from a Snake." "For me, it's about the timing," said Szymanczyk. "And the head up, the details, the pattern on its chest, its eyes looking at me."

Francisco Mayorga, in 11th grade at Lehigh Senior High, took third place with "Weigela," a portrait of a girl in the background of flowers." "It's well-composed," Thompson explained his vote. "She has this dream-like expression."

Honorable mention winners and other finalists are listed below.

Judges expressed great difficulty in narrowing down the choices. "I was happy with the end product," said Thompson. "We got such a full variety."

"It always amazes me, the quality of photos we get from these young adults," said Sierra Hoisington, who coordinates the contest. "We marvel at the unique perspectives and angles."

"Theodore Cross' family made this contest possible, and it has become a solid success story," said Birgie Miller, DDWS executive director. "We couldn't be more thrilled that the family wanted its donation used in this way – to reach an age group that often falls through the cracks of conservation education. Kudos to senior intern Sierra and our staff for a fabulous job of running the contest."

“We are so happy to be supporting a contest in my father’s name, a contest that will get our youth involved with nature by looking at it – as my father so loved doing – through a camera lens,” said Amanda Cross.

Students were able to submit up to two photographs. Winning and honorable mention images are on display at the free “Ding” Darling Education & Visitor Center and are available to view by Facebook album on DDWS’ page www.facebook.com/dingdarling. For information on the 2019 photo contest, stay tuned at dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/photo-contests.

Honorable Mentions (in alphabetical order)

Chabely Acevedo, Estero High
Rebecca Brownlie, North Fort Myers High
Bella Bastedo, Port Charlotte High
Alyssa Fraser, Estero High
Karina Gonzalez, Lehigh Senior High
Brandon Hill, Port Charlotte High
Sydney Luzik, Lehigh Senior High
John Olvera, Lehigh Senior High
Moises Ramierz, Lehigh Senior High
Donovan Souppa, North Fort Myers High
Leidy Tejon, Lehigh Senior High
Christina Walch, Cape Coral High

Finalists (in alphabetical order)

Derrick Battle, Lehigh Senior High
Meredith Brown, Estero High
Kira Cambino, Cape Coral High
Dominic Covietz, North Fort Myers High
Alexis Henry, South Fort Myers High
Carlye Morgan Mahler, Charlotte High
Justin Marcum, Lehigh Senior High
Luke Mitchell, Lehigh Senior High
Jackson Mytnik, Cape Coral High
Erik Parent, Riverdale High
Logan Rollmann, Lehigh Senior High
Donovan Souppa, North Fort Myers High
Shawna Werner, Lehigh Senior High
Bailey White, Cypress Lake High
Anthony Zhang, Cape Coral High

ABOUT DDWS

As a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, DDWS works to support J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge’s mission of conservation, wildlife and habitat protection, research, and public education through charitable donations and Refuge Nature Shop proceeds.

To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit dingdarlingsociety.org or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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