

## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption for 1<sup>st</sup>: Jackson Mytnik's "Owl at Sunset" took first place.

Caption for 2<sup>nd</sup>: "Leaves at the Beach" by Nathaniel Pechenino won second.

Caption for 3<sup>rd</sup>: In third place was Ethan Epperly's "Inversion."

Caption for judges: Contest judges Andrew West, Laura Harkey, and Bill Miller hold winning photos with contest coordinators Sierra Hoisington and Terry Baldwin.

[Images available upon request]

### **'Ding' Darling announces high school photo contest winners**

At a special ceremony on March 30, 2019, the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) announced winners and finalists in the sixth 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 that still visits there, 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."

Longtime Fort Myers *News-Press* photojournalist Andrew West judged this year's contest, along with acting refuge manager Bill Miller and Sanibel resident Laura Harkey. They reviewed 122 images taken by students from 16 different schools.

First place went to an image titled "Owl at Sunset" by Jackson Mytnik from Cape Coral High. "What's not to love about any owl?" remarked Harkey. "These guys are just too cute. I tend to favor wildlife over vegetation."

In second place, Nathaniel Pechenino from Island Coast High in Cape Coral portrayed "Leaves at the Beach." "I love the composition, I love the light, how the photographer used the light," said West. "It has a good vibe, it feels good. It makes me want to dive into that water."

Third place winner "Inversion" was submitted by Ethan Epperly of Port Charlotte High School. "I like the fact that the colors are not what you'd expect; they're not blue, but purple," Miller explained his vote. "The light pulls me in. I'm on a journey. There's a lot to find and discover in the image."

Honorable mention winners and other finalists are listed below.

Judges and contest coordinators expressed great difficulty in narrowing down the choices. "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 wants its donations used in this way – to reach an age group that often falls through the cracks of conservation education. Kudos to development officer Sierra Hoisington, volunteer Terry Baldwin, 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. To see them online and for information on the 2020 photo contest, visit [dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/photo-contests](http://dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/photo-contests).

**Honorable Mentions** (in alphabetical order)

Asai Aviles, Cape Coral High  
Samantha Colon, Island Coast High  
Hailey Gervais, Cape Coral High  
Brigitte Grover, Port Charlotte High  
Hannah Hendry, Gulf Coast High  
Kaylie Morgen, Ida S. Baker High  
Kynlee Price, Ida S. Baker High  
Hailey Rozanski, South Fort Myers High School  
Sedona Scott, Cape Coral High  
Yalexis Sensat, Ida S. Baker High

**Finalists** (in alphabetical order)

Bella Bastedo, Port Charlotte High  
Adara Bonilla, Cape Coral High  
Meegan DeYoung, Port Charlotte High  
Eric Feichthaler, Oasis High  
Julian Gonzalez, Cypress Lake High  
Ilyssa Harrison, Cape Coral High  
Hannah Hendry, Gulf Coast High  
Luis Hernandez-Trejo, Labelle High  
Leah Herold, Ida S. Baker High  
Paige Moyer, Port Charlotte High  
Nathaniel Pechenino, Island Coast High  
Gabriella Schol, Cypress Lake High  
Sedona Scott, Cape Coral High  
Hannah Simon, Cape Coral High  
Kailyn Uria, Island Coast High  
Lauren VanDyke, Cape Coral High  
Christina Walch, 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 profits.

To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit [dingdarlingsociety.org](http://dingdarlingsociety.org) or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or [director@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:director@dingdarlingsociety.org).

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