

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Contact: Chelle Koster Walton

239-699-4754

ChelleTrav@aol.com

Caption for Virginia Bayne: Virginia Bayne's "Lip Smacking Good" took first place.

Caption for Mouna Benmerabet: "The Shining Snail Shell" by Mouna Benmerabet won second.

Caption for Christina Walch: In third place was Christina Walch's "Changing Perspectives."

Caption for JUDGES: Jeff Beale, Steve Allen, and Kevin Godsea deliberate over the finalist photographs.

'Ding' Darling announces high school photo contest winners

At a special ceremony on March 14, 2020, the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) announced winners and finalists in the seventh 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, 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."

Wildlife photographer Steve Allen, acting refuge manager Kevin Godsea and Sanibel resident Jeff Beale judged the contest. They reviewed 121 images taken by students from 14 different schools.

First place went to an image titled "Lip Smacking Good" by Virginia Bayne, a junior from Fort Myers High.

"I really liked the subject matter," said Godsea. "This photo had great light and it is centered and in focus, but still leaves a lot to the imagination. There's a sense of mystery as to what else is going on in the photo. Great shot."

In second place, Mouna Benmerabet, a junior from Cypress Lake High in Fort Myers, portrayed "The Shining Snail Shell."

"This is a very interesting photograph," said Allen. "The framing and contrast of the swirl on the shell to the upright trees is very visually appealing. Because the background is out of focus, your eyes go up to the tops of the trees and swirl back down to the shell. I also really love this photograph because it shows the habitat the snail lives in very well."

Third place winner "Changing Perspectives" was submitted by senior Christina Walch of Cape Coral High.

"This is a very creative photo and makes you think and ask how this happened," said Beale, a former art and photography teacher. "I also really enjoyed the warm orange colors and cool blue tones."

Honorable mention winners 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 2021 photo contest, stay tuned to dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/photo-contests.

Honorable Mentions (in alphabetical order)

Ashby Beckner, The Village School of Naples
Kylah Eng, North Fort Myers High
Hailey Gale, North Fort Myers High
Adriel Gomez, Cape Coral High
Natalie Handzlik, Cape Coral High
Lillian King, Cape Coral High
Juliet Nelson, Island Coast High
Jillian Peska, Cape Coral High
Michelle Rodriguez, Cape Coral High
Serra Roiland, Lehigh Senior High
Alex Sanchez, North Fort Myers High
Jori Webb, 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 or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

###