

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Contact: Chelle Koster Walton

239-699-4754

ChelleTrav@aol.com

Caption for Rheannon Hill: Rheannon Hill's "Flowers" won first place.

Caption for Melinda Garvey: "The Lifespan of Green Fungus" by Melinda Garvey took second.

Caption for Virginia Bayne: In third place was Virginia Bayne's "Wings of Sun."

Caption for JUDGES: Judges David Jeffrey, Jennifer Littman, and Katy Howosaka

'Ding' Darling announces high school photo contest winners

Following a contest judging on Feb. 25, 2021, the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) announced winners and finalists in the eighth annual "Ding" Darling-Theodore Cross High School Photography Contest at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island. Due to COVID protocols, DDWS will not be holding an award ceremony this year.

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."

Refuge staff employee Katy Hosokawa, photographer David Jeffrey, and Cross family friend and DDWS volunteer Jennifer Littman judged the contest. They reviewed 179 images taken by students from 19 different schools.

Two monetary awards went to high school teachers who made special efforts to engage their students in entering the contest: Amy Smith from Cape Coral High and Maryellen Montana from Lehigh Senior High. The awards were donated in honor of one of the judges, David Jeffrey, a current DDWS board member.

First place went to an image titled “Flowers” by Rheannon Hill from Lehigh Senior High.

“This photo is stunningly beautiful,” said judge Jeffrey. “It’s subtle, the depth of field is great, and the composition is really well done. The lighting is also very subtle, yet the colors are beautiful. It makes me want to know what type of flower this is.”

In second place, Melinda Garvey from Lehigh Senior High portrayed “The Lifespan of Green Fungus.”

“I chose this photo because it has such vibrant colors - it feels so alive,” said Littman. “I like how the sun is coming through all the ferns in the background, and it really shows the fungus on the tree in all its glory.”

Third place winner “Wings of Sun” was submitted by Virginia Bayne of Fort Myers High.

“I love this photo because of how the artist captured a beautiful moment in nature,” said Hosokawa. “I love the light glowing through the wings, and the anhinga looks so welcoming.”

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. To view winning images online and for information on the 2022 photo contest, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/photo-contests.

Honorable Mentions (in alphabetical order)

Aspen Combs, Cape Coral High
Abby Corcoran, Cypress Lake High
Anna Gibson, Cape Coral High
Kendra Hernandez, Lehigh Senior High
Amber Irwin, North Fort Myers High
Natalee Jones, Cape Coral High
Juan Matos, Cape Coral High
Julia Miller, Lehigh Senior High
Karla Pichardo, Lehigh Senior High
Chase Qurollo, Cape Coral High
Kailyn Giselle Uria, Island Coast 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.

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