

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption for 1st: Dani Mosser's "Fly" won first place.

Caption for 2nd: "Frog in the Shade" by Ryan Mitchinson took second.

Caption for 3rd: In third place was Claire Henry's "Peeking Lizard."

Caption for JUDGES: Judges Nick Adams, Carl Greenbaum, and Chelle Walton with the winning photos

'Ding' Darling announces high school photo contest winners

Following a contest judging on Feb. 25, the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) announced winners and honorable mentions in the ninth annual "Ding" Darling-Theodore Cross High School Photography Contest at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island. Due to federal government COVID protocols, DDWS will not be holding an award ceremony this year; winners will receive their prizes by mail.

Sponsored by the Theodore Cross Family Charitable Foundation, the competition invites high school students from Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Glades, and Hendry counties to compete for prizes that include 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 parttime 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. He did a presentation of his book for the "Ding" Darling Lecture Series two weeks before his death.

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."

Professional photographer Nick Adams, refuge volunteer Carl Greenbaum, and island freelance writer Chelle Koster Walton judged the 2022 contest. They reviewed 270 images taken by students from 12 different schools. Three teachers of students who submitted photos from in-need schools received a digital SLR camera as a result of a donation made to DDWS specifically for that purpose.

The contest required that students submit a paragraph explaining the context of their shot along with their photographs.

First place went to an image titled "Fly" by Dani Mosser from Cape Coral High. "I saw a perfect opportunity to capture a close up of an insect that is not usually appreciated," the student wrote. "However, the photo revealed amazing textures and colors."

"A photo of a fly is inherently hard to get, especially with such detail, the compound eyes," said judge Adams. "You can tell the photographer got very close and so didn't have to enlarge it a lot by the really good quality of the focus."

In second place, Ryan Mitchinson from Cape Coral High portrayed "Frog in Shade." The photographer wrote: "I have fond memories of this day walking with my friends through the garden looking at all the vast colors and life around me. With this photo I tried something different with the depth of field, having it being very shallow, when I normally use a more deep depth of field."

"I was drawn by the soft green tones from the shallow depth-of-field" said Greenbaum. "You get a sense that the frog was hiding in there. Look, you can even see the little pads on its feet."

Third place winner, "Peeking Lizard" was submitted by Claire Henry of Cape Coral High. "It may seem like a menial point in this lizard's lifetime, but it represents the daily life of the wildlife around us, and how these small creatures take advantage of their surroundings," wrote Henry. "It helps us better understand how animals interact with a manmade environment."

"I love the way the photographer captured the anole mid-position – its kinetic energy, like it is just getting ready to move, showing only part of its body," said Walton. "There's a nice play of textures, shapes, lighting, and shadows."

Judges and contest organizers expressed great difficulty in narrowing down the choices. "Being able to put on this contest with so many passionate and creative young photographers is so exciting," said DDWS associate executive director Sierra Hoisington, who coordinates the contest. "Their different perspectives and ability to find the beauty in anything is so special. Their choice of subject matter may seem unique to us, but I believe their outlook on life is something we could all learn from."

"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 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. To view winning images online and for information on the 2023 photo contest, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/photo-contests.

Honorable Mentions (in alphabetical order)

Katherine Elizabeth Borowski, Gulf Coast High
Amber Cohen, Riverdale High
Jaidah Estep, Riverdale High
Rheannon Hill, Lehigh Senior High
Harlie Holloway, Lehigh Senior High
Jessica Hornick, Cape Coral High School
Natalee Jones, Cape Coral High
Kiersten Lacombe, Cape Coral High
Divinity McBride, Lehigh Senior High
Isis McGhee, Fort Myers High
Jillian Peska, Cape Coral High
Hanson Tang, Dunbar 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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