

Carolinas' Nature Photographers Association 2024 Members' Choice Contest

2023/07/19

Being a nature photography organization, the Carolinas' Nature Photographers Association Members' Choice Contest is intended to showcase members' work and allow members to choose the best photos in each of two tiers and 8 categories; Landscape, Wildlife North America (USA, Mexico and Canada) (Central America to compete in World), Wildlife World, Captive, Birds, Plants, Small Stuff and Artistic/Creatively Processed (no artistic/creatively processed image is to be entered in any other category).

The CNPA 2023 Members' Choice Contest is open to all current CNPA members (Members' Choice Contest committee members are excluded from entering). This is a digital only contest. Members may submit a maximum of 10 images in any combination of categories the member chooses. The entry fee is \$9.50 per image.

Tiers (Recent change remains in effect)

The number of submissions in Tier Two is still a fraction of Tier One, so this year we will again allow some members who have had to compete in Tier One to compete in Tier Two, if they desire, based on the following criteria.

Two Tiers are defined as follows:

Tier One includes any member who has won a Best of Show, Top of Tier, First Place prize or multiple prizes (BOS, TOT, or 1st to 3rd Place prizes) in any previous CNPA Members' Choice Contest or who describes him/herself, or is generally recognized, as a professional photographer or workshop leader.

Tier Two includes any member who has never won a Best of Show, Top of Tier, First Place prize or won any multiple of prizes (BOS, TOT, 1st to 3rd Place prizes) in any previous CNPA Members' Choice Contest and who does not describe him/herself, or is not generally recognized, as a professional photographer or workshop leader.

A member who has entered in Tier One may enter in Tier Two in subsequent years if they meet the new criteria.

While any member may choose to enter in Tier One, the Contest Committee may require that a particular member enter in Tier One.

Categories

Landscapes

Images of landscape, scenery, sky, oceans or lakes taken in any part of the world.

Wildlife – Two Separate Categories

Wild animals, generally the size of chipmunks and larger, including mammals and large reptiles, living freely and unrestrained in a natural habitat. Animals found in large wildlife

parks/reserves such as found in Africa are entered in this category. All birds should be entered in the “Birds” (or captive, as appropriate) category.

Wildlife North America

Photos of animals the size of a chipmunk or larger photographed in their natural habitat in the USA, Mexico and Canada. All birds should be entered in the “Birds” (or captive, as appropriate) category.

Wildlife World

Photos of animals the size of a chipmunk or larger photographed in their natural habitat in areas outside the USA, Mexico and Canada. Photos taken in Central America compete in this category. All birds should be entered in the “Birds” (or captive, as appropriate) category.

Birds

Birds of all species living freely and unrestrained in a natural habitat.

Captive

Wildlife restrained behind bars, fences, in cages, or natural habitat enclosures, etc., in zoos, aviaries, butterfly houses, rehabilitation and rescue facilities. Every effort must be made to ensure that captive animals are handled in a humane and healthy manner. Facility accreditation is one way to show a facility is humane. The facility may be certified or otherwise accredited by the American Zoological Association (AZA) or similar accreditation organization or an equivalent accreditation association in other countries. **Images taken on game farms are not allowed.**

Plants

Plants, flowers, fungi and lichens. If a forest (shot from beside or in the forest) is the subject of the image, it can be submitted in Plants, but if the forest is a part of a larger landscape, it should be entered in Landscape. A leaf, or portion of a leaf, should be entered in this category.

Small Stuff

Insects, spiders, caterpillars, small reptiles, snails, crustaceans, and other organisms smaller than a chipmunk. Also, macro/close up images of inanimate objects such as shells, pebbles, etc. photographed in their original setting without rearrangement. Still life arrangements and images made using studio props are specifically excluded. Images of plants & flowers, regardless of size, should be entered in the Plants Category.

Artistic/Creatively Processed

Images that have been creatively processed such as by creating or adding textures or adding elements or using other creative techniques to process the photo. The nature subject must still be recognizable after processing.

Rules and Restrictions

Copyright Ownership:

- Images must be the original work of the member submitting them.

Human Element must be Minor and have No Impact

- Human elements (including structures and other man-made objects, humans and other signs of humans) are allowed in the image, **so long as the nature subject is the main element** and the human element is incidental to the main element.
- Bird bands, ear tags and radio collars on wildlife are permitted.

Such things as posts, wire, small boats on lakes and buildings in the “background” as well as people are allowed. If the human element is a significant element of the image, the image will be rejected. (Self-test: if the human element were removed, would the image have the same impact?)

In disqualifying images with unacceptable human elements, the decision of the contest committee will be final.

Enhancement is permitted. Enhancement includes post-processing techniques to improve color, brightness, dynamic range (HDR), focus stacking, etc.

Manipulation is not permitted. Manipulation means adding anything not in the original image, removing anything from the original image (except as allowed below) or moving anything within an image.

Permitted:

- Images may be cropped.
- Post-processing correction to eliminate elements not part of the original scene such as sensor spots, dust, stray hairs, etc.
- Removal of small elements in the original image such as trash, leaves, twigs etc.
- High Dynamic Range (HDR) images.
- Creative processing/manipulation is allowed but only in the Artistic/Creatively Processed category. **With the presence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in photography software, it should be noted that images that have been adjusted with AI to reduce noise or increase sharpness are still allowed in all categories. If AI has been used to alter the contents of the image, such as, changing the background, removing or adding elements, it will only be allowed in the Artistic/Creative Category.**
- Focus Stacking of multiple images of the same subject to increase depth of field.
- Panoramic images composed of multiple exposures stitched together. However, bear in mind that panoramas will not display well on screens during voting nor will they look good when printed at the size specified for winning images.
- Black and White images, whether captured in camera or converted in post processing.

- Time Lapse images, where many images of the same scene (typically star trails) taken over a period of time are combined into a single image.
- Multiple Images **of the same subject** taken with slight movement of camera between frames and combined into a single image.
- Zoom blur and motion blur images.
- Infrared images.
- Selective or global lightening or darkening, color correction, sharpening and noise reduction are permitted in any category.
- The use of creative processing tools and techniques such as painter programs, textures, and artistic filters or the addition of elements are **only permitted in the Artistic/Creatively Processed category**. However, an image that has been creatively processed to the extent that the emphasis is no longer on the original nature subject may be disqualified.
- Borders are allowed only in the Artistic/Creatively Processed category.
- Barnyard animals and domestic pets are permitted in the Landscape and the Artistic/Creatively Processed categories, provided they are insignificant in size and incidental to the main subject. Barnyard animals and pets are not allowed in any other category.

Not Permitted:

- Man-made objects and structures in the original image may not be deleted.
- Elements that were part of the original scene may not be moved, cloned (that is, taken from one image and inserted into another), or rearranged. With the exception of panorama stitching, HDR processing, time lapse, multiple image with camera movement and focus stacking, images of different subjects may not be composited in a multiple exposure. Where any doubt exists, the member will be given the opportunity to submit the original camera RAW image for scrutiny. If the image was not captured in RAW, then at the discretion of the contest committee, a series of similar images from the same shoot may be substituted. This restriction does not apply to images entered in the Artistic/Creatively Processed Category.
- Creative processing is not allowed in any category except the Artistic/Creatively Processed category.
- Any member who knowingly submits a cloned or composite image in any category besides the Artistic/Creatively Processed category will have all their entries disqualified, will forfeit their entry fees and may be barred from future competitions.
- Images taken in a studio environment (such as high-speed capture of water droplets, etc.) or still-life arrangements are specifically excluded. Scenes that are staged outdoors of natural elements are still considered to be in a studio environment.

- Borders, visible watermarks, copyright notices and photographer's names or any other added text is not permitted. Borders are allowed, however, only in the Artistic/Creatively Processed category.
- Living creatures in all categories must be photographed in their natural or adopted (captive) habitat and specifically may not be moved to another setting or background.
- Images where any living creature appears to be stressed or harassed by humans in any way will be disqualified.
- Images winning prizes, including Honorable Mentions, in previous Members' Choice contests may not be entered again.
- Barnyard animals and domestic pets are permitted only in the Landscape and the Artistic/Creatively Processed categories, provided they are insignificant in size and incidental to the main subject. Barnyard animals and pets are not allowed in any other category.

Images not conforming to these rules may be disqualified. If time permits, the member may submit another image without an additional fee. However, **entry fees will not be refunded under any circumstance.**

Provided that they conform to the above rules, images taken with smartphones, tablets etc. and images processed using Smartphone Applications are permitted in all categories.

Submission Guidelines

Images must be the original work of the member submitting them and the submitter must own the copyright.

The image data (entered on the submission page) **must** include the following information:

- Caption: a brief descriptive title or caption for the image.
- Location (facility or geographical area) where taken
- Description: a statement describing the circumstances, etc. of photograph.

Copyright information, including photographer's name and year taken should be included in the photo metadata.

There must be no copyright or other added text visible on the image.

Size

- Images must be between 3000 and 6000 pixels on the **long side**
- File size **must not exceed 15 Mb**. Submit images at *the maximum* size within this constraint because winning images may be printed up to 24x36 inches for Best of Show and Top of Tier.

Images must be

- sRGB Color Profile
- JPEG format

- maximum quality allowed by the dimensions above.

During the submission process, members may be required to verify that their images conform to these rules and guidelines.

The winning images may be printed and displayed at the Annual Meeting.

As a condition of entering the contest, the member grants to CNPA a perpetual, non-exclusive license to reproduce and publish the image(s) in printed and/or electronic form for promotional purposes only.

Voting

All CNPA members may vote for first, second and third place in each Category and Tier.

A Best of Show and two Top of Tier images will be selected from the first, second and third place images.

Aside from the winning images, individual results cannot be provided.

Prizes

Cash prizes will be awarded for first, second and third place in each category and tier and Top of Tier and for Best of Show. One or more honorable mentions will also be awarded in each category. **In the event of a tie, all images that are in the tie will receive the prize money for that place. However, images that finish below the tie do not move up to the higher place 'vacated' by one of the tying images. For instance, if there is a tie for 2nd place, all tying images will receive the prize money for 2nd place and no 3rd place will be awarded.**

Prizes will be awarded as follows:

Best of Show	\$150
Top of Tier (each Tier)	\$100
First Place (each Category)	\$75
Second Place (each Category)	\$50
Third Place (each Category)	\$25

Best of Show and Top of Tier winners are selected by our speakers at the Annual Convention.

Schedule

- **Entry Submission:** 8 am October 1 to 6 pm October 31.
Note: The submission system will close automatically at 6 pm Oct 31. **Entries still in process at that time will be rejected. No extension will be allowed.**
- **Please, please, please don't wait for the last day! Every year there are a number of images that come in on the last day. If there is a problem with the upload or any of these need to be disqualified, the member may not have time to replace it.**

In each category, entries will be displayed for voting in the order in which they were submitted. The earlier an entry is submitted, the closer to the top of the gallery it will appear.

- **Member Voting:** Opens approximately 1 week after close of submission period and closes Midnight, December 2.
- **Announcement of Results:** Annual [Convention](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

Why must entry be sRGB?

sRGB is the color profile universally used for online display of images. Images uploaded with any other profile (Adobe RGB, ProPhoto RGB etc.) will not display correctly.

Why is there no category for Black and White images?

The categories represent subject matter (Landscape, Wildlife etc.). Black & White, HDR, Infrared, etc. are techniques, not Categories. If we introduced a Black and White category, we might also be required to have separate categories for Infrared, HDR, Panorama, Time Lapse, etc. Black and White images may be entered in any category and will be judged on their merits.

Why is there an entry fee? I pay an annual membership fee; the contest should be free.

Every year we award over \$2,400 in prize money. There are other expenses associated with the contest including printing, software development, gallery room rental, etc. Since not every member enters the contest, it would be unfair to take the contest expenses from the annual membership fees, which are used to provide many other benefits for all members.

My camera does not capture RAW images. Can I still enter the contest?

A RAW image will only be requested if the Contest Committee has a reason to suspect that an image is a clone or composite. If you cannot submit a RAW image for scrutiny, you may be allowed to submit several other images shot at the same time.

Why do we no longer have a Print contest?

The logistics of the print contest were proving unmanageable and the display board and lighting setup gave unfair advantage depending on where a member's print was displayed [or the size of the image](#). Also, since many photographers use external print services rather than doing their own printing, there is no additional skill involved.

I don't possess an editing program. How can I remove sensor spots, stray hairs etc. from my images?

There are many low cost or free editing programs available. However, the best advice is to keep your camera clean and you shouldn't have the problem in the first place.

I am a beginner and I don't know how to prepare my images for submission. Can you help?

The members of CNPA collectively have a wealth of knowledge and are usually willing to share it. You should ask members in your Region for assistance. **The Contest Committee cannot show bias by assisting individual members.**

Can I email my entries? Can I mail a CD?

We do not have a mechanism for accepting images by email or on CD. The CNPA website software must be used to submit images.

Ansel Adams did his best work in the darkroom. Why should I not be allowed to submit images that have been extensively post processed?

CNPA is a nature photography organization. Images are judged on the merits of the nature related subject and the skill of the photographer in capturing the image. Artistic/creatively processed images are allowed in the Artistic/Creatively Processed category only.

Can I enter images in both Tiers?

No. Before you upload images, you will be asked to select your Tier, and all your entries will be in that Tier.

In the Small Stuff category, can I enter an image of an arrangement of shells that I collected from a beach?

No. This would be considered a studio or still life setup. Shooting the shells as found in their natural environment on the beach is perfectly permissible.