

# Contents

Foreword by Simon King	8
Director's Note	11
Birds on the Brink	12
Judging Panel	15
Competition Photographs Include the Following Images:	
Conservation (Single Image) and Bird Photographer of the Year Winner – Patricia Seaton Homonylo	16
Best Portrait Winner – Alan Murphy	25
Black and White Winner – David Stowe	37
Birds in Flight Winner – Hermis Haridas	45
Bird Behaviour Winner – Nathaniel Peck	60
Urban Birds Winner – Grzegorz Długosz	69
Comedy Bird Photo Winner – Nadia Haq	97
Birds in the Environment Winner – Kat Zhou	101
Portfolio Award Winner – Bence Máté	234
Conservation Documentary Award Winner – Chris Eley	240
Young Bird Photographer of the Year Winner – Andrés Luis Domínguez Blanco	246
Featured Photographers	254

## Magical Woods and Friends

Birds in the Environment  COMMENDED

Camelia Marculescu, United States

**Barred Owl, *Strix varia*.** Charleston, South Carolina, United States

Baby owls are one of my favourite subjects to photograph. It is rare to see two or three owlets surviving to maturity, and occasionally there is a survival battle among siblings. But this was not the case with this pair of Barred owlets, who displayed caring, loving behaviour towards one another. I took this photograph from a distance, on a magical day, in dappled light, waiting patiently until both owlets looked towards me. The forest branches and the moss swayed in a gentle breeze, creating a magical mossy curtain and a blurred leafy green background. It was almost like opening a mossy door framed by the nearby trees and entering a magical world of cute and fluffy friends.

*Sony A7R IV with Sony 600mm f/4 lens. 600mm; 1/125s; f/4; ISO 100.*



## Inmates

Conservation (Single Image)  SILVER

Cheng Kang, Australia

**Lovebirds, *Agapornis* species.** Bali, Indonesia

This poignant image captures the harsh reality in one of Bali's bird markets. The pair of lovebirds face each other in separate cages, appearing to say their final farewells, not knowing if they will see each other again. Who knows what joys they would have experienced together in their lush native rainforests and whether they will ever experience that again. Their silent connection transcends physical barriers, emphasizing the complex interaction between yearning for freedom and the urge to escape from captivity for human pleasure.

*Sony A7R IVA with Sony 24-70mm f/2.8 lens. 70mm; 1/125s; f/8; ISO 1,000.*

This is a powerful, heartbreaking image that speaks of both the devastating confinement of a previously wild bird and the isolation of individuals from such a social species. Well composed, stark and impactful, this photo compels us to consider and mourn the cruelty we visit on other beings for our own pleasure and monetary gain. MELISSA GROO





## Northern Dancer

Black and White □ COMMENDED

Aaron Todd, Canada

Great Northern Diver, *Gavia immer*.

Bancroft, Ontario, Canada

Here, a Great Northern Diver shakes off water and stretches its wings. I captured this image while swimming beneath a floating hide on small lake near Bancroft, Ontario, Canada in August 2022. Backlight from the setting sun highlights the water drops and the outline of the bird. I started with a kayak but switched to swimming with the hide to get a lower perspective.

*Nikon D850 with Nikon 400mm f/2.8 lens. 400mm; 1/2,200s; f/5.6; ISO 320.*

## Red Drama

Best Portrait □ COMMENDED

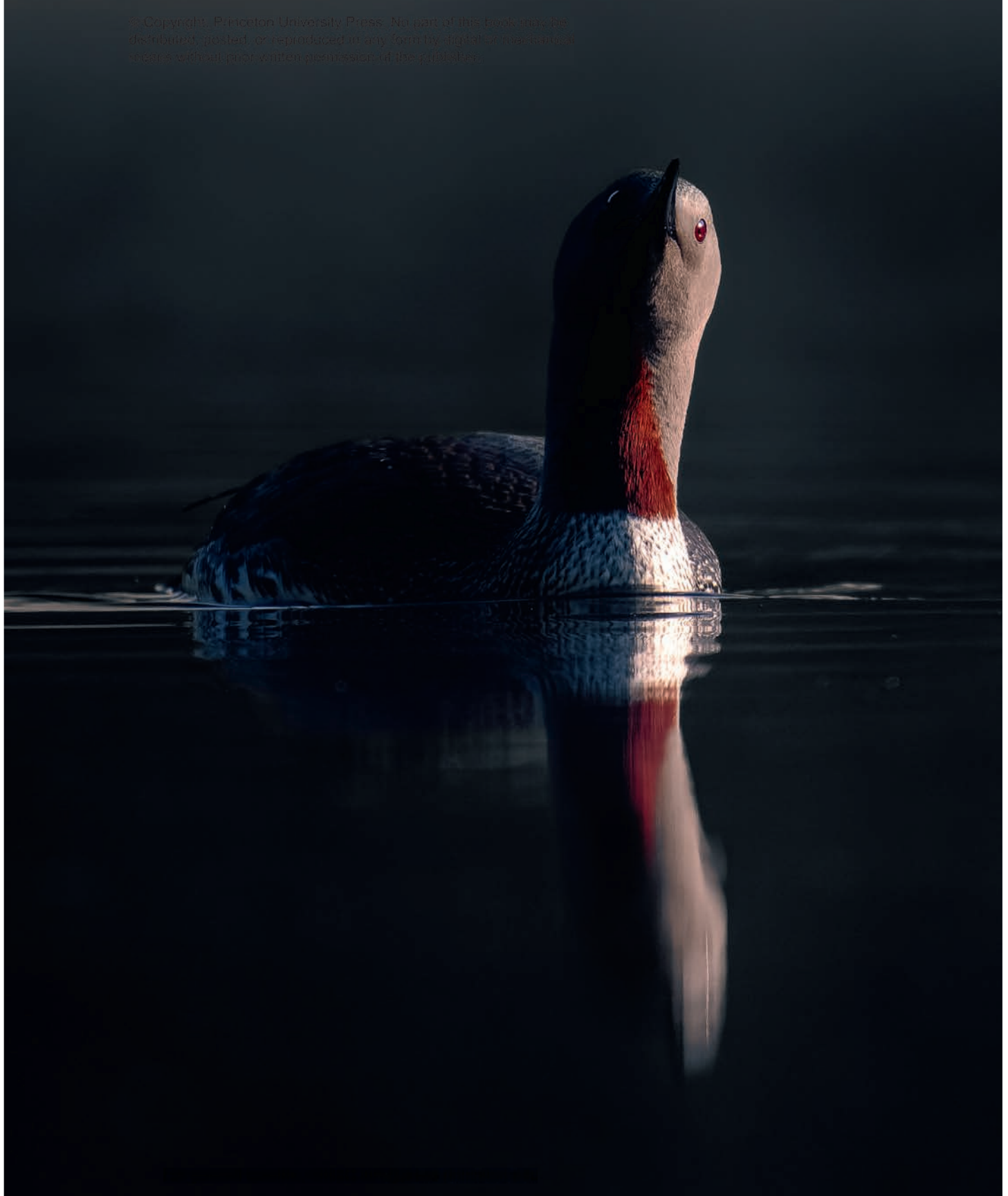
Tom Nickels, Finland

Red-throated Diver, *Gavia stellata*.

Espoo, Finland

I took this photo at my local lake where a couple of Red-throated Divers nest every year. As hikers regularly walk past this lake, the birds are used to people. If I lie down on the shore, they sometimes approach me to check me out. The sidelight combined with morning mist produced an interesting and unusual portrait of this mysterious bird.

*Sony A1 with Sony 200–600mm f/5.6–6.3 lens and 1.4× teleconverter. 840mm; 1/1,600s; f/9; ISO 2,500.*





## Flight at Sunrise

Birds in Flight □ COMMENDED

Erik Mandre, Estonia

**Black Grouse, *Lyrurus tetrix*. Läänemaa, Estonia**

One freezing April night I hiked through the dark forest to an open bog area where I had a hide near a Black Grouse lek. I needed to be in the hide while it was still dark in order to avoid disturbing birds, because they arrive at the lek at least an hour before sunrise. It is fascinating to watch their mating rituals, how they protect their territory, how they display themselves to grab the attention of females, and listen to the sounds they make. Black Grouse energeise the

whole bog in spring and to be in the middle of that game is truly remarkable. You can hear them several kilometres away. As soon as the sun starts to rise, the males at the lek become very active and start to protect their 'patch' from intruding competitors. They jump and fly around and by doing so they also attract the attention of female birds. I was lucky to witness all this on a very clear and crisp morning. As the sun rose behind the birds, I was able to capture how the sun's rays passed through their plumage and framed their outline.

*Nikon Z 9 with Nikon 400mm f/2.8 lens and 2x teleconverter. 800mm; 1/8,000s; f/5.6; ISO 1,600.*

## Dawn's Whispers: Graceful Hoopoe Silhouette at Sunrise

Birds in Flight □ GOLD

Hermis Haridas, India

Eurasian Hoopoe, *Upupa epops*.

Al Qudra Lakes, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

A Eurasian Hoopoe took flight with its wings spread in a smooth motion across the canvas of the early-morning sky illuminated by the sunrise's bright hues. I saw that this bird would occasionally grab its prey in the air and other times on the ground. Additionally, I noticed that each time it caught prey, it flew in the same direction to a nearby tree. That was when I had the idea to photograph the bird against a background divided into dark and light, representing the contrasting sides of existence. The following morning, I returned to the same spot well before sunrise, eager to witness nature's spectacle unfold once again. Anticipation heightened as the first rays of light bathed the landscape, and, true to my expectations, the hoopoe appeared in the distance, gliding gracefully towards the perch that was familiar from the previous day. With my camera poised and settings adjusted, I commenced capturing the unfolding scene. Among the flurry of clicks, I chanced upon a frame that resonated deeply with me – a moment frozen in time, brimming with unique charm. It was as if nature had bestowed upon me a gift, a singular composition that encapsulates the essence of the hoopoe's beauty and grace. Indeed, many have remarked that this frame is a marvel that cannot be replicated – a testament to the serendipitous wonders that await those who seek them amid the natural world.

*Nikon Z 8 with Nikon 400mm f/2.8 lens. 400mm; 1/3,200s; f/6.3; ISO 320.*

A stunning matchup of colours makes the composition of this image unique. Excellent foresight from the photographer led to this frame, and a very one-of-a-kind take on birds in flight. WILL NICHOLLS





## Ocean Hunters

Bird Behaviour □ COMMENDED

Henley Spiers, United Kingdom

Wedge-tailed Shearwater, *Ardenna pacifica*. Offshore, Eastern Pacific Ocean, Costa Rica

Far offshore in the eastern Pacific, the water surface has been turned white with froth by a frenzy of activity. Lanternfish have been chased up from the depths by Yellowfin Tuna and are pinned just beneath the surface by tuna attacking from below, with shearwaters diving down from above. The seabirds leave trails of bubbles as they swiftly pursue the baitfish with beats of their wings underwater. Within moments it was all over, with nothing but shimmering scales in the water remaining as evidence of the frenzied battles that had occurred.

*Nikon D850 with Nikon 28–70mm f/3.5–4.5 lens. 28mm; 1/500s; f/13; ISO 800.*

## Shearwater at Lunch

Bird Behaviour □ HIGHLY COMMENDED

Henley Spiers, United Kingdom

Wedge-tailed Shearwater, *Ardenna pacifica*. Offshore, Eastern Pacific Ocean, Costa Rica

Surrounded by a football-pitch-sized school of Lanternfish, I watched this Wedge-tailed Shearwater struggle to pick out an individual fish. The deepwater Lanternfish had been chased up the water column by Yellowfin Tuna and Spotted Dolphins. Now, pinned just beneath the surface, they attracted an army of open ocean predators, from rays to dolphins and seabirds. It was an incredibly special and ephemeral scene of open ocean abundance and one of the greatest days of my career as an underwater photographer.

*Nikon D850 with Nikon 28–70mm f/3.5–4.5 lens. 28mm; 1/500s; f/8; ISO 1,000.*





## Hokey Pokey

Best Portrait □ COMMENDED

Danny Lee, Australia

Shy Albatross, *Thalassarche cauta*. Bass Strait, Tasmania, Australia

When this beautiful Shy Albatross landed close to my boat out on Bass Strait, I just knew I was in for an incredible encounter. It seemed bold, and so relaxed, as if it had spent much of its life around boats, hoping for an opportunistic feed. I slipped into the water with my camera, to become less imposing with only my head, hands and camera housing above the waterline. The albatross then had more confidence as I was now in its world, and it comfortably approached to within a couple of metres. This allowed me to take this split shot which gives a perspective that very few would ever get to see with their own eyes. The combination of the moody sky, the calm glassy sea, and one of the most impressive seabirds on the planet made this an unforgettable experience and a moment in photography that many will only dream of.

*Canon PowerShot G7X II with 9–37mm in-built lens. 9mm; 1/800s; f/8; ISO 200.*



## Feeding Frenzy

Birds in the Environment □ BRONZE

Jonas Beyer, Denmark

Cape Petrel, *Daption capense*.

View Point, Antarctica

I was cruising in a Zodiac when I saw a group of Cape Petrels in the water. As I approached I could see they were feeding on something, along with Giant Petrels and Snow Petrels. I had my big underwater rig with me and thought it was a chance for a split sea surface photo. As I slowly drifted closer, I noticed all the birds were too busy feeding to care about me being around. So I 'parked' the boat next to some ice, leaned over the side and dropped my underwater housing in the water, then waited for the birds to come close. I really wanted to capture a photo showing both above and below the surface. Even though we cannot see exactly what they are feeding on, I love this perspective of both worlds in one shot.

*Sony A1 with Sony 16–35mm f/2.8 lens.  
18mm; 1/1,000s; f/10; ISO 640.*

The photographer's keen eye and bold approach allowed for the creation of a truly mesmerising split image, showcasing the seabird both above and below the waterline. The composition not only captures the energy and vitality of the moment but also invites viewers to contemplate the intricate interconnectedness of life above and below the waves. This image is a testament to the photographer's skill and vision. APARUPA DEY



## Dignified Pretzel

Black and White □ HIGHLY COMMENDED

Julian Łoziński, Poland

Mute Swan, *Cygnus olor*.

Brodnica Landscape Park, Poland

I photographed this Mute Swan while kayaking in Poland's Brodnica Lake District. The bird was very calm and took its time preening its feathers. This allowed me to position myself in a perfect spot looking into the sunlight. Capturing a backlit white bird allows for more creativity and automatically creates an interesting and high-contrast scene.

*Canon EOS R5 with Canon 400mm f/2.8 lens and 1.4× teleconverter. 560mm; 1/3,200s; f/4; ISO 250.*





## On Ice

Birds in the Environment  COMMENDED

Ben Penson, United Kingdom

Whooper Swan, *Cygnus cygnus*. Lake Kussharo, Hokkaido, Japan

Whooper Swans overwintering on Lake Kussharo in Hokkaido rely on thermal springs around the shore to provide some respite from the harsh conditions. Seeming unperturbed by the bitter wind and temperatures well below freezing, this swan was walking to an area of open water kept clear by a hot spring. For this image, I wanted to include both the bird and its environment. I lay on the frozen surface to get an eye level perspective and used a relatively narrow aperture to give some definition to the background mountains, which were partially obscured by spindrift.

*Nikon D800 with Nikon 70–200mm f/2.8 lens. 75mm; 1/400s; f/16; ISO 320.*

## Swanception

Best Portrait  SILVER

Samual Stone, United Kingdom

Mute Swan, *Cygnus olor*. London, United Kingdom

I conceived the idea for this image some time ago, but each time I attempted to turn it into reality one of the elements was not right. It felt like I was in a creative rut and I had not taken an image I was really happy with for a while. On this particular morning, I decided to return to this idea out of desperation. I spotted my local Mute Swans in their usual spot, preening in the morning light. Fortunately, it was also a crisp morning, and the mist was slowly descending, creating a soft morning glow. After so many attempts, everything finally came together when a swan swam into the perfect spot. Finally, I created the image I had pictured in my mind.

*Nikon Z 6 with Sigma 150–600mm f/5–6.3 lens. 155mm; 1/500s; f/6.3; ISO 1,600.*

This image is striking in its creative composition, with the curve of one swan's neck framing another, drawing attention directly to the focal point. This natural framing creates a sense of intimacy and elegance. The diffused lighting enhances the serenity, and the shallow depth of field keeps the focus on the central swan, while the foreground bird adds depth. It's a wonderful example of natural elements and the subject's behaviour combining to craft a photograph that tells a story. AARON BAGGENSTOS





## Rainy Day

Black and White  COMMENDED

Tomasz Szczansny, Poland

Great Tit, *Parus major*. Nędza, Racibórz, Śląskie, Poland

I like to take pictures of common birds in a different way. I also think that it is worth connecting bird photography with unusual weather conditions. To create this picture, I waited for a rainy day. Then I used two flashes that were set in front of me and the 'front curtain' setting on the camera. The aim was to show the movement of the bird in a completely unreal world.

*Canon EOS R6 with Canon 400mm f/2.8 II lens. 400mm; 1/50s; f/14; ISO 100.*

## Simplicity

Black and White  COMMENDED

Paul McDougall, United Kingdom

Vulture, *Gyps* species. Samburu National Reserve, Kenya

The Doum Palm trees of Samburu always make for interesting images. I drove past this tree several times and knew that I should be photographing it although I did not really know what to do with it as there were no birds or baboons in the tree. Then, one morning we drove the opposite way around the tree and I saw it in composition between the two hills. A vulture that landed on the left of the tree completed the shot. I always had in mind that I wanted to convert this into black and white due to the simplicity of the composition.

*Nikon D850 with Nikon 70-200mm f/2.8 lens. 200mm; 1/2,000s; f/8; ISO 64.*





## Misty Mornings

Best Portrait □ COMMENDED

Shelley Pearson, Australia

Black Swan, *Cygnus atratus*. Perth, Western Australia, Australia

I got up early in anticipation of spending an hour driving to Whiteman Park, north of Perth, Western Australia, to search for birds. I was surprised to see that the land had been inundated by recent rains, and shallow ponds had appeared where there was once dry land. It was foggy and dark, and as the sun rose, a few swimming Black Swans appeared out of the mist. The golden brightness and mist in front of me was breathtaking. The orange glow of the rising sun was disappearing fast, so I moved a bit closer in silence and knelt, working swiftly to take pictures. It made for serene and peaceful photography. Focusing on the swans was difficult through the mist, but as this one floated closer I noticed the detail was better. The mist seemed to hang all around the bird, and I liked the effect it created. I was left to reflect on the lovely moment I had had when the Black Swans departed after a short while.

*Canon EOS R5 with Canon 600mm f/4 III lens. 600mm; 1/3,200s; f/4; ISO 2,000.*

## Iceberg

Birds in the Environment □ HIGHLY COMMENDED

Stanislao Basileo, Italy

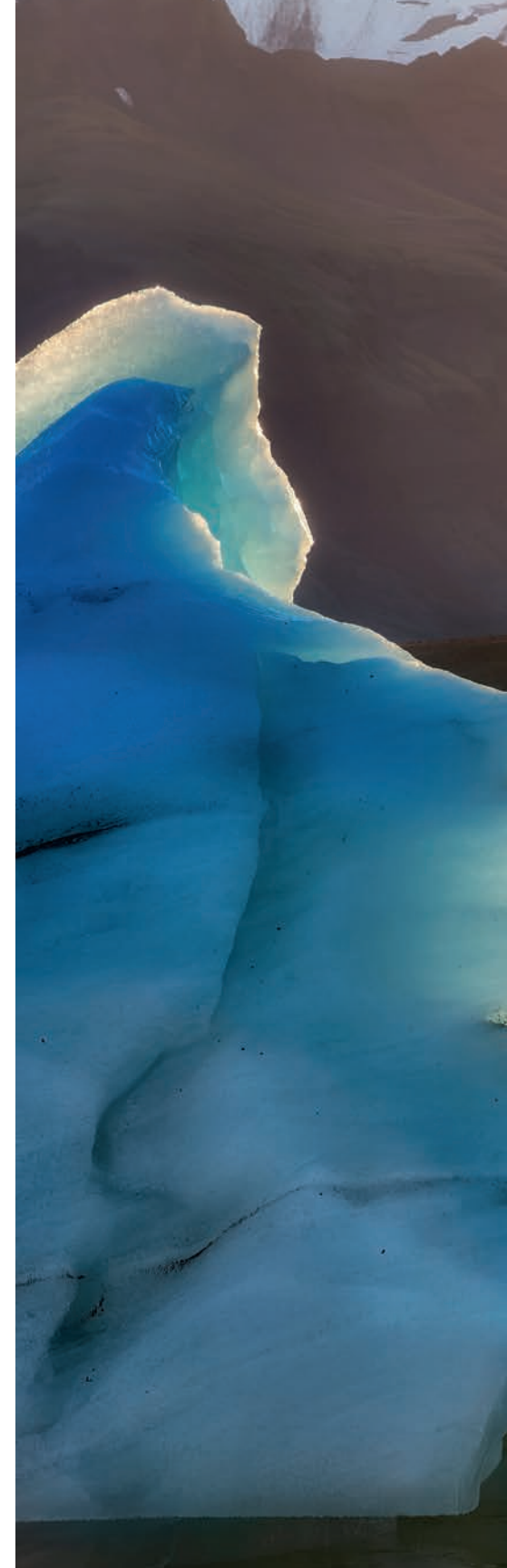
Glaucous Gull, *Larus hyperboreus*.

Jökulsárlón, Iceland

One August I decided to go to Iceland, and when I arrived I decided to rent an off-road vehicle to be able to travel around the island independently. One day I stopped at Jökulsárlón, where the light was splendid and the icebergs were magnificent. The low angle of light alone made for superb photography. However, every now and then a gull would appear and add a subtle extra dimension to the image.

*Nikon D4 with Nikon 70–200mm f/2.8 lens.*

*180mm; 1/400s; f/11; ISO 560.*





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## Apartment

Urban Birds □ SILVER  
Boldizsár Szűcs, Hungary

Common Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*. Pécs, Hungary

The owner of this apartment installed a nest box between the flowerbeds on his terrace, and Common Kestrels found it a suitable home. Kestrels have become urbanised due to the abundance of food in cities and the presence of tall buildings which are used for nesting. By installing similar nest boxes, we can create further favourable conditions for them. I used a wide-angle lens to take several pictures, which I then stitched together to create a panorama. As a result, you can see the urban environment behind the birds.

*Panasonic Lumix G9 with Laowa 14mm f/4 macro lens.*  
15mm; 1/640s; f/32; ISO 500.

A glimpse into the urban world of these kestrel chicks reminds us that we share our cities with many feathered residents. The wide-angle composition places the birds into the wider scene, and the popping colours throughout the backdrop bring life to the cityscape. WILL NICHOLLS

## North Window

Urban Birds □ COMMENDED  
Łukasz Gwiździel, Poland

Black-legged Kittiwake, *Rissa tridactyla*. Lofoten, Norway

I took this photograph at Nusfjord, the oldest fishing village in the Lofoten archipelago, during a winter trip to northern Norway. The image shows Black-legged Kittiwakes that were looking for shelter from a snowstorm, standing on the board above the window of a wooden house. There is a lamp in the window whose light was once supposed to guide lost travellers and sailors to their homes.

*Canon EOS R5 with Canon RF 70–200mm f/4 lens.*  
200mm; 1/125s; f/5.6; ISO 400.



## Trompe L'Oeil

Birds in the Environment □ COMMENDED

José Elías Rodríguez Vázquez, Spain

Western House Martin, *Delichon urbicum*. Alange, Extremadura, Spain

To take this image I used a shutter speed of  $1/2,000^{\text{th}}$  of a second to freeze the movement of the flying house martin, and an aperture of  $f/8$  to get a good depth of field so that the background was sharp. Every spring I go to Alange in Extremadura for photography, and while I am taking images people often stop to ask me about how I work. This provides me with the opportunity to talk about the benefits of protecting these birds, which are part of the urban landscape.

*Nikon D780 with Nikon 200-400mm f/4 lens. 250mm; 1/2,000s; f/8; ISO 100.*





## Cock-of-the-rock Display

Best Portrait  COMMENDED

Sunil Gopalan, United States

**Andean Cock-of-the-rock, *Rupicola peruvianus*. Mindo, Ecuador**

This stunning male Andean Cock-of-the-rock was photographed from a raised hide at a lek in the cloud forests of Ecuador. Several males were displaying in the forest. The wing flapping appeared to be part of a courtship behaviour to attract and impress a mate. The photograph captures the male with the wing perfectly extended out.

**Canon EOS R3 with Canon 600mm f/4 II lens and 1.4x teleconverter. 840mm; 1/200s; f/5.6; ISO 10,000.**

## Woodland Flame

Best Portrait  COMMENDED

Alan Murphy, United States

**Baltimore Oriole, *Icterus galbula*. Galveston, Texas, United States**

Every spring for the past 20 years, I have been photographing migrating songbirds on the Upper Texas Coast. In April, songbirds that winter in the tropics make their way up through central America and cross the Gulf of Mexico from the Yucatán Peninsula on southerly winds. They arrive on the Upper Texas Coast 15 to 20 hours after they depart. Tired, hungry and in need of fresh water, they land upon reaching the coast. I set up a blind in front of a drip pond and photographed the birds as they made their way down to drink and bathe. I was happy when this stunning male Baltimore Oriole stopped and gave me a look-back pose.

**Nikon Z 9 with Nikon 600mm f/4 lens. 600mm; 1/500s; f/7.1; ISO 1,250.**





## Scavenger

Bird Behaviour □ GOLD

Nathaniel Peck, United States

Turkey Vulture, *Cathartes aura*.

West Virginia, United States

In early March 2023, the remains of an American Black Bear were discovered by hikers along a rushing mountain stream in West Virginia. It was very clear from the large patches of missing fur that the bear had died after a battle with mange. After being informed of the carcass and securing permission, I set up a DSLR camera trap that took images of all the animals that came in to investigate and scavenge off the bear. The set-up remained in place for six months. As the weather warmed in spring, this Turkey Vulture became a frequent visitor, sometimes spending hours at the carcass.

*Nikon D750 with Nikon 24–120mm f/4 lens. 24mm; 1/125s; f/11; ISO 800.*

Not everyone is a fan of camera traps, but I am. In part that is because they provide opportunities to witness hard-to-observe behaviour in shy species, and they also allow a degree of intimacy that is almost impossible to achieve in any other way. This image is a classic example. Like other New World vultures, Turkey Vultures locate their food in part by smell, and in this stunning photograph you can almost catch a whiff of the putrefaction that attracted the bird.

PAUL STERRY



A low-angle perspective of these wild chickens strutting their stuff showcases this unlikely pedestrian in a magnificent frame. WILL NICHOLLS

## Key West's Wild Chickens and Roosters

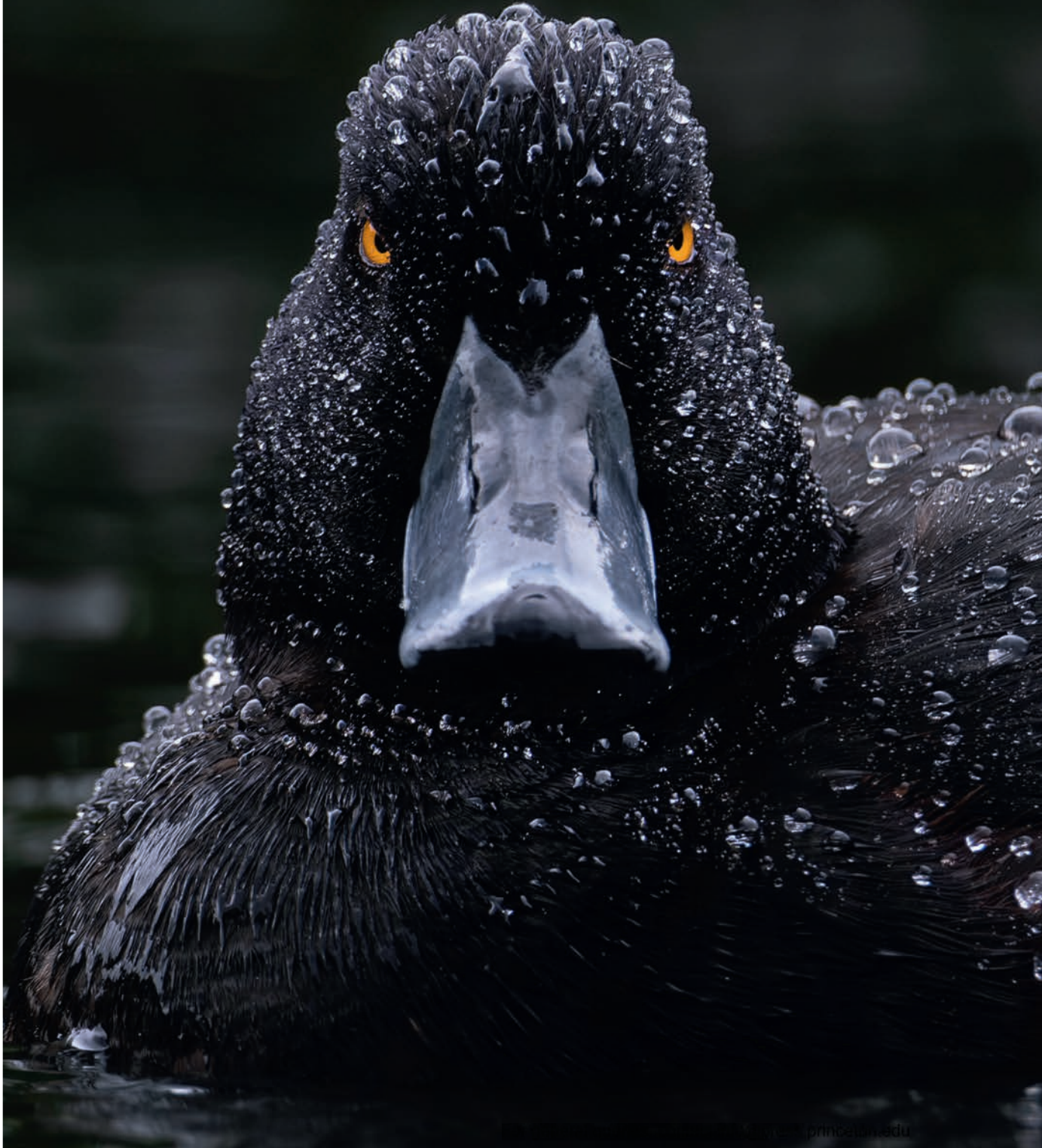
Urban Birds □ HIGHLY COMMENDED

Bill Klipp, United States

Chickens and roosters, *Gallus gallus domesticus*. Key West, Florida, United States

Key West in Florida is known for many things, but one of the spectacles the tourists get a kick out of is our wild chickens and roosters, which can be found throughout the island. During the Covid-19 lockdown there were few people wandering about and there seemed to be an explosion in the chicken population. The reality, though, was that the streets were quiet and mostly void of people, cars and the like, so the chickens left their normal hideaways and started wandering everywhere. I too rambled about with my camera and caught these guys just hanging out in what would normally be a main intersection.

*Nikon Z 6 with Nikon Z 24–70mm f/4 lens. 50mm; 1/500s; f/8; ISO 1,100.*



## Caught in the Rain

Best Portrait  COMMENDED

Simon Runting, United Kingdom

New Zealand Scaup, *Aythya novaeseelandiae*.  
Western Springs Lake, Auckland, New Zealand

This image shows a New Zealand Scaup seemingly not having a great day during yet another Auckland downpour. These diving ducks are real characters and always fun to photograph. The challenge was the low light, the low shutter speed and the need to catch the droplets on the bird before they were shaken off.

*Fujifilm X-H2s with Fuji 150–600mm f/5.6–8 lens. 600mm; 1/250s; f/8; ISO 640.*





### Bubble Beater

Bird Behaviour □ COMMENDED

Alan Murphy, United States

Ruddy Duck, *Oxyura jamaicensis*.

Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada

I set up my camera at a tranquil pond where male Ruddy Ducks display for onlooking females. It might look like the duck is blowing bubbles, but male Ruddy Ducks beat their blue bills against their chests very fast to create bubbles, which attracts the females. To capture this image, I was in waders and immersed in the water, with my tripod holding my lens just above water level for an intimate perspective.

*Nikon D850 with Nikon 600mm f/4 lens and 1.4x teleconverter. 850mm; 1/1,600s; f/6.3; ISO 640.*

## Feed Me!

Bird Behaviour  COMMENDED

Jamin Taylor, United States

**American Crow, *Corvus brachyrhynchos*. Anchor Point, Alaska, United States**

Crows were the last thing on my mind when I visited Alaska's Kenai Peninsula, a location where I often find a variety of shorebirds, as well as Bald Eagles and several duck species. As I walked along the beach, however, I spotted this young American Crow begging what I assume is one of its parents for something to eat. They were both perched on some old craggy driftwood in a grassy area, and it was simply too good a photo opportunity to pass up. I am so glad I stopped to take this photo of such a common and often overlooked species as it really shows the character and behaviour of the birds.

*Nikon Z 9 with Nikon 500mm f/4 lens. 500mm; 1/4,000s; f/4; ISO 500.*

## Stand Your Ground

Best Portrait  COMMENDED

Kaitlin Marks-Dubbs, United States

**Chestnut-breasted Coronet, *Boissonneaua matthewsii*. San Isidro, Ecuador**

For this portrait, I sought to capture the three most distinctive features of Chestnut-breasted Coronets: their peculiar wings-up pose upon perching, their aggressive temperament and their bold, contrasting colouration front and back. I focused on a bird resting with its green back to me and stood parallel to its perch to increase the chance of catching two birds' eyes on the same focal plane, in a sharp image, should a rival arrive. When one did, I was able to show the copper colouring throughout the inside of its wings as it landed. Shot during a split-second standoff of overlapping bills, this portrait captures the essence of a confrontational species, with one bird doing its best to intimidate, the other standing firm in the face of it all.

*Canon EOS R5 with Canon RF 400mm f/2.8 lens. 400mm; 1/160s; f/5.6; ISO 320.*







## Tough Fight

Bird Behaviour □ COMMENDED

Nicola Protani, Italy

Eurasian Coot, *Fulica atra*. Ostia, Italy

Coots are very aggressive birds and highly territorial. For this reason, they often clash in fights which can be violent, sometimes even deadly, although not in this case. Lying on the floor of a floating wooden hide, I noticed that these two subjects were about to engage in a duel. I quickly reduced the focal length of my zoom to the minimum to capture the whole scene with as much splash as possible. They did the rest.

*Sony A7 III with Sony 200–600mm f/5.6–6.3 lens. 200mm; 1/3,200s; f/6.3; ISO 800.*

## Hammer Slam

Bird Behaviour □ HIGHLY COMMENDED

Alan Murphy, United States

Greater Prairie-Chicken, *Tympanuchus cupido*.

Yuma County, Colorado, United States

I set up a hide in the dark at a Greater Prairie-Chicken lek. I could hear the birds arrive long before I could see them. Once the light came up I was able to photograph some wonderful display and fighting action. Using a shutter speed of 1/8,000<sup>th</sup> of a second I was able to capture and freeze the action of the explosive fight between two birds. It was a wonderful experience, both to see and to photograph the action on this frosty morning.

*Nikon Z 9 with Nikon Z 600mm f/4 lens and 1.4x teleconverter. 840mm; 1/10,000s; f/5.6; ISO 1,250.*

Grouse species are typically ground-dwelling, but this photographer captured their aggressive fighting behaviour in mid-air – a very well-timed image! Well done. RATHIKA RAMASAMY



## Do You Know Where Your Cat Is?

Urban Birds □ HIGHLY COMMENDED

Linda Dalton Walker, United States

Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*. Utah, United States

Lying prone on a mat on the ground, I began photographing the local Mallards and their ducklings, who frequent our communal backyard pond. I zoomed in as far as I could, so I could capture these common wildfowl from a different perspective. Shortly after I began photographing the adorable ducklings, the mother quickly escorted her young ones away from the edge. Trying to figure out what was going on, I looked through my viewfinder again. I was shocked to see one of our neighbour's cats lurking in the upper frame of the image. I continued to press my shutter, ready to jump into action at any moment to stop the cat if necessary. I have found one too many ducklings lying around the property, left by domestic cats, so this scene caused me much alarm. According to the American Bird Conservancy, domestic cats are the greatest human-related threat to wild birds in the USA and Canada, surpassing car accidents and hunting. They kill 2.4 billion birds every year and have contributed to the extinction of at least 63 species of birds, mammals and reptiles.

*Nikon D780 with Nikon 200-500mm f/5.6 lens. 500mm; 1/2,000s; f/5.6; ISO 500.*

## Treacherous Journey

Urban Birds □ GOLD

Grzegorz Długosz, Poland

Goosander, *Mergus merganser*. Warsaw, Poland

Goosanders breed in the park about 1 kilometre from Poland's life-giving River Vistula. Each mother has to move her brood to the river as quickly as possible due to lack of food and safety in the park. They make the journey through a series of underground passages and over a six-lane highway. Each year a group of volunteers help them cross this deadly road by stopping the traffic. After crossing they arrive at the River Vistula where they can feed and grow. This image shows a mother Goosander crossing a smaller road because she decided not to use the scary and dark underground passage below it.

*Canon EOS R6 with Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 lens.*

*500mm; 1/2,500s; f/7.1; ISO 6,400.*

What a tender moment to capture  
– a truly heartwarming scene.

This image is a great example of how humans and wildlife can coexist, and showcases urban wildlife. Allowing the birds to stop traffic demonstrates humanity and respect for these creatures.

RATHIKA RAMASAMY







## Water Drops

Best Portrait  COMMENDED

Levi Fitze, Switzerland

King Penguin, *Aptenodytes patagonicus*. Volunteer Point, Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas)

Next to Volunteer Point's breeding colony of the King Penguins I found a small beach where the birds used to take a bath. I spent many hours in this location, lying down and waiting for the penguins to get used to my presence. Sometimes they totally forgot about me and started chasing each other just a few metres in front of me. Penguins are familiar creatures, and it is easy to forget the dangers they face now and those they face in the future. Overfishing and climate change are having a huge impact on their environment and their lives.

*Sony A1 with Sony 400mm f/2.8 lens. 400mm; 1/2,500s; f/3.2; ISO 1,000.*