Nature in Focus Photo Competition And Exhibition

The **Friends of Heinz Refuge (FOHR) "Nature in Focus"** Photo Competition opens Friday, May 15, 2026, and ends Monday, August 31, 2026, for photo submissions.

Who May Enter

FOHR's "Nature in Focus" is open to photographers of all ages and skill levels using any type of camera - film, digital, cell phone. Heinz Refuge employees, FOHR employees and current FOHR Board Members are not eligible to participate.

Age Divisions

Children (12 and under)
Teens (13 Thru 17 - 18 if in High School at time of contest entry)
Adults (18 and over)
** Participants under 18 years of age must have their parent/legal guardian's permission to enter.

Types of Photos Accepted (In Each Division)

Wildlife Photography - photos whose subject is a wild animal including birds, mammals, reptiles and insects.

Nature Photography - includes a wide range of photography taken outdoors and devoted to displaying elements such as landscapes, plants, close-ups of natural scenes and textures.

Eligible Photographs

All photos submitted must be images captured within the confines of the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge and must be the original work of the entrant. No domestic animals, pets, or ornamental flora are permitted and invasive plants & species may not be the central focus of the submitted photo (e.g. Phragmites, Swans, Snakehead fish).

Photos generated using Artificial Intelligence are prohibited. Normal processing of the original photo is acceptable including cropping, minor adjustment to color, white

balance, tone, lighting levels and curves, shadows and highlights, saturation, contrast, sharpness, moderate dodging and burning, and reduction of noise.

Photographs that have been digitally or otherwise altered beyond standard optimization will be disqualified.

Borders, signatures or watermarks imbedded in the photograph are not permitted.

Photos taken with drones are prohibited. (Drone photography is legally prohibited at the Heinz Refuge.)

How To Enter

All entries must be submitted online through SmarterEntry.com. First, go to https://client.smarterentry.com/FOHR to create a Username and Password. Once registered, log-in and select the appropriate **FOHR "Nature in Focus"** Contest: **Children**, **Teen** or **Adult** and follow the directions for submitting your photos. Photos submitted must be jpegs no larger than 5 MB.

Children and Teens

Children may submit 1 photograph for free. FOHR will print and mount all photos accepted for the exhibition at no cost. All Children's photos will be on display at the Visitor Center Exhibition. Photos may be claimed by the Child photographers at the conclusion of the exhibition.

Teens may submit up to 3 photos for free. FOHR will print and mount all photos accepted for the exhibition at no cost. Teen photos selected will be on display at the Visitor Center Exhibition. Photos may be claimed by the Teen photographers at the conclusion of the exhibition.

NOTE: Parents/Guardians must register at: https://client.smarterentry.com/FOHR on behalf of their Children and Teens as required by Child Online Protection Act (COPA).

Adults

Adults will be charged $30.00 for the first three photos and may submit additional photos for $10 each. There is no limit on the number of photos submitted. Adult photos selected will be invited to submit matted or mounted prints for exhibition at the Heinz Refuge Visitor Center.

Adults with current FOHR Memberships may submit the first 3 photos for free with a FOHR Membership Coupon Code.

The coupon code may be obtained at the **FOHR Nature Store** located in the Heinz Refuge Visitor Center or you may request the code by sending an email to info@fohrefuge.org.

To become a **FOHR** member, go to https://fohrefuge.org/involved/join/ and sign up.

Judging Criteria

The Judges will score eligible photographs using the following criteria:

- **Technical Excellence**
- **Composition & Visual Impact**
- **Creativity & Originality**
- **Wildlife & Habitat Representation**
- **Emotional Impact & Storytelling**

Selection Process

A selection of the top scoring photos in each Age Division Category will be invited to display their photos in the Nature in Focus 2026 Exhibition at the Heinz Refuge Visitor Center.

A panel of three judges will assess and rate all the photos submitted and select the top photos to be included in the Exhibition at the Heinz Nature Center. An Exhibition Judge will view the photos selected by the panel on display at the Heinz Nature Center and select the award winners as described below.

Competition Panel

Bernice V. Coles

Bernice V. Coles is an avid wildlife and nature photographer living in Southwest Philadelphia. Many of her photos are taken at the Heinz Refuge and can be viewed on the Fans of Heinz Refuge Facebook page. You can view her photos on Instagram at https://www.instagram.com/bernice_wildlife?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet&igsh=ZDNlZDc0MzIxNw==

Gregg Gorton

Gregg Gorton has been birding for 32+ years and began leading bird-walks at Heinz 30 years ago.
He has been very active in the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club (DVOC), having served on Council for eleven years and as past President in 2022 and 2023.
Recently, his in-depth obituary about James Carroll, the first Tinicum Environmental Center caretaker and first Black member of DVOC, was published in the club journal,

Cassinia. You can read the obituary at: https://dvoc.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Cassinia79_86-89_Carroll.pdf
Gregg enjoys looking closely at bird and nature photos and appreciates people who devote time to their creation.

Rob Lybeck

Rob Lybeck is an established Center City Philadelphia Photographer, a current member of the Da Vinci Art Alliance and a contributing photographer to Hidden City Philadelphia.
Through Rob's enjoyment of daily wanderings throughout the city, his awareness of his surroundings developed into a passion for photographically capturing Philadelphia's architectural ornamentations. More recently, he's expanded his sights to include cityscapes, landscapes, flora, and not least, high contrast B/W street photography. Aside from a personal fascination with Philadelphia's built environment, it is also Rob's endeavor to capture the many facets of urban life against the metropolitan landscape. He particularly enjoys discovering geometric abstraction in buildings and street scenes. In 2014, HarperCollins Publishers chose an image of Rob's as the cover for Pulitzer-prize winning author Richard Ford's novel *Let Me Be Frank With You*, published internationally. https://pictures.abebooks.com/inventory/30563903470.jpg. He was also honored to have an image of his selected for the archives of the Museum of the City of New York, with that image published in the "Lens" section of the New York Times. You can view his work online at: https://www.youtube.com/twostopsover and https://www.facebook.com/rob.lybeck.images

Exhibition Judge

Bobby Stormer

Bobby Stormer is an award-winning and published wildlife photographer based in northern New Jersey. Inspired by wildlife conservationist Steve Irwin, Bobby has been fascinated by animals since childhood. He has volunteered for wildlife rehabilitation rescues, dog rescues, and conservation efforts throughout his journey, and credits this experience as instrumental to his success in reading animal behaviors, tracking wildlife, and capturing those treasured moments. Through his work, Bobby hopes to make a positive impact on animal welfare across the globe, as well as inspire others to pursue their own passions.

You can view his photos on Instagram at: https://www.instagram.com/b.stormer/

Awards

Photos must be displayed in the exhibition to be eligible for prizes

Children (12 and Under)

First Place - $50
Second Place - $35
Third Place - $25

Teens (13-17) - 18 if in High School when submitted.

First Place - $100
Second Place - $75
Third Place - $50

Adult (18 & Over)

First Place - $150
Second Place - $100
Third Place - $75

All Photos Selected (Regardless of Age Division)

Best In Show - $200

Selected by the Exhibition Judge.

Best Wildlife Photo - $175

The best photo of an animal (Mammal, Bird, Amphibian, or Insect, etc.) Selected by the Exhibition Judge.

Best Nature Photo - $175

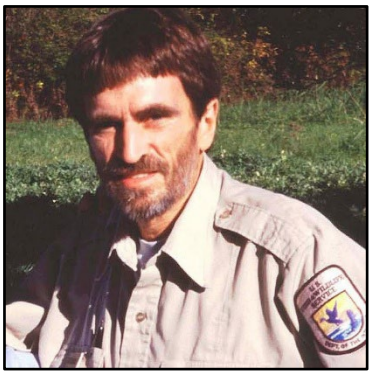
The best nature photo (Landscape, Plant, Flower, Etc.) Wildlife may be included in the photograph but must not be the primary subject. Selected by the Exhibition Judge.

People's Choice Award - $100

This award will be based on voting of the viewing public. The public will be invited to vote for their favorite of all photos displayed at the exhibition in the Heinz Refuge Visitor Center.

Bill Buchanan Award - $150

Favorite photo in the Exhibition as chosen by the Refuge Manager.



The Bill Buchanan Award honors Bill Buchanan in recognition of his lifelong dedication to photography, conservation, and public engagement. An avid photographer, Bill served for 12 years as Outdoor Recreation Planner and Public Affairs Officer at John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge, where he shared the refuge's story through hundreds of media features and led impactful photography and education programs.

Before retiring from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2012, Bill also gave many years of service as a volunteer, writer, and photographer. His leadership and passion inspired countless people to connect with nature through the lens.

A recipient of numerous honors, including National Volunteer of the Year and Conservationist of the Year, Bill's legacy reflects a deep commitment to conservation and community. This award celebrates his lasting impact on both the refuge and all those he inspired.

Photo Exhibition

The "Nature in Focus" Photography Exhibition will be on display at the Heinz Refuge Visitor Center in October. Awards will be announced at a reception to be held following the FOHR Annual Membership Meeting on November 7.

If your photo is selected for the Exhibition, you will receive an email with instructions for dropping it off at the Heinz Nature Center. Children and Teen Photos selected will be printed and mounted on foam boards by the Friends of Heinz Refuge at no cost to the photographer. (Note: Optionally, Teen and Children photographers may print and mount or mat their own photos for the exhibition.)

Adult Photos selected for the exhibition must meet the following standards:

Photos may be either mounted on a foam board or matted but **not** framed.
Photos may be no longer than 14 inches on the longest side **including** the mat or border.

Questions/Help Requests

Any questions regarding the competition or requests for help may be submitted by email to: info@fohrefuge.org.