

# FOCUS ...On Photography

## Improving Our Image

*Nature Photography Is One of Refuges' Claims to Fame*

"For more than 20 years, I've focused my cameras at our national wildlife refuges — to me, the places in America that vibrate most intensely with the seasonal movements of wildlife," says Karen Hollingsworth, renowned nature photographer and longtime refuge champion. "Through these images, an intimate season-by-season glimpse into these ever-changing landscapes and ecosystems is revealed...sharing the amazing variety and wonder of these rare and precious places."

Nature photography gives us the chance to be still, be silent, be patient and ultimately to become engrossed in the

challenge of capturing rare glimpses of nature's mysteries. Through our lenses, we see the natural world much differently. We are keenly aware of light and its magical reflections. The full spectrum of color suddenly appears more vibrant. We become conscious of shapes and angles as we carefully construct our compositions, taking nothing for granted. We are humbled by the wariness of our subjects, gaining a renewed reverence for the instincts that ensure their survival.

When persistence, talent and good fortune come together, our images not only give us a wonderful way to relive

## Images That Speak

*By Larry Richardson*

I have been a professional nature photographer for 25 years, about as long as I have been a wildlife biologist. Although I enjoy both careers, photography has become an avocation, an outlet for my curiosity for nature, and the camera a portal for discovery.

*This image of a captively bred Florida panther gives us a rare glimpse of the big cat at home in its native habitat.*  
(© Larry Richardson)



However, for the sake of a higher calling, pictures are just props for conveying powerful messages. If the old proverb is true, and each image is really worth a thousand words, then putting mine together into a show is like producing a play, and telling a story is the thrill.

Last September, a couple days after Hurricane Jeanne slammed the East Coast of Florida, I was shooting the brown and white pelicans resting on their namesake refuge, Pelican Island NWR. But for a few broken branches and high water licking the shores, you could not tell that the birds just survived the worst hurricane season ever. Later that week, green sea turtles along Archie Carr NWR were still crawling up on the sandy beaches and laying their eggs, while nearby homes lay in ruin, strewn across the same shoreline.

Up close these scenes illustrated unremarkable roosting and nesting behavior, but pulling back to the broader perspective of the storm's aftermath,

our memories, but also the gift of sharing our outdoor experiences with others.

In this issue of *Refuge Update*, we celebrate one of the fastest growing and most popular pastimes for refuge visitors: nature photography. Surveys indicate that each year, 34 million visitors, out of a total of 40 million, come to refuges to see and photograph wildlife and the thriving habitats that make up America's scenic landscapes.

Thousands of miles of trails and hundreds of observation structures on refuges make nature photography a relatively easy program to promote at most sites. "Most people don't realize that taking your car along refuge auto tour routes is an awesome way to get good shots," says Hollingsworth. "The key is being out there

at sunrise and sunset." About 140,000 people each year also use refuge photo blinds, and this is one area of visitor service benefiting from a partnership with the North American Nature Photography Association.

The nation's largest and most renowned group of nature photographers has been supporting the growth of photography on refuges for almost a decade since a formal MOU was signed with the Fish and Wildlife Service. A host of resources, including grants for photo blind construction, are available through this partnership. Those who have taken advantage of NANPA's expertise have found not only high caliber contacts but also enthusiastic supporters. Refuge employees can find out more by visiting [www.nanpafoundation.org/blinds](http://www.nanpafoundation.org/blinds) (see related story, pages 12-13).



(Charles H. Heck, Sr.)

Just this year, the Refuge System also became a member of the Travel Industry of America, giving access to another stellar pool of experts and resources to bolster refuge photography programs.

With many Americans already possessing an interest in nature photography, refuges can build recognition and support for the entire Refuge System. ♦

they defined nature's resilience against terrible odds.

By adding a few more images of sharks, manatees and frigate birds patrolling the waters off J.N. "Ding" Darling Refuge after Hurricane Charlie, a fascinating story emerges, speaking volumes about wildlife's response to such horrific storms. These images did not lie; life goes on.

Images can also be icons. These are my best — and I have only a few. They represent what I hope people will consider great images, like Ansel Adam's image of Half Dome in Yosemite. These are compelling, provocative and memorable images — pictures that leave a lasting impression — but more importantly, pictures that beg to be introduced, serenaded and placed center stage. To me they are still just props, but now we are producing an opera.

One of my most used images, an endangered manatee at Crystal River NWR, was taken the first time I used an underwater camera. I shot a lone sea cow rising from the murky bottom. It slowly rotated to present its belly for a dose of

scratching from a waiting friend treading water near the surface. That image of a human hand on a manatee defined what "endangered" really means to me — a species that cannot survive without our help.

My favorite, though, is an image of the endangered Florida panther. Not a wild cat, but one of the very few bred from captive stock whose kin had long since been removed from the wild and raised by people. It's simply an image of a panther lying in its native habitat, a blanket of oak leaves on the ground surrounded by palmettos. What is remarkable about the image is that the cat is at rest, something that no one will ever see a wild panther do. This image defines a sense of place, a big rare cat at home.

There is something philosophical and darn right exciting about images that evoke such meaningful messages. For lands included in the Refuge System, where our mission is to safeguard wildlife, it makes sense that we give them a voice. ♦

Larry Richardson is a wildlife biologist at Florida Panther NWR.



This photo, taken shortly after Hurricane Jeanne, symbolizes wildlife's resilience to the forces of Mother Nature. (© Larry Richardson)

## Photography Is a Focal Point for Refuge Friends

By Bill Buchanan

I want to take you on a little journey to meet one of the most dedicated groups in the National Wildlife Refuge System. It has been my good fortune to have been part of this from the beginning, first as a volunteer and then as a Fish and Wildlife Service staff member who now serves as the liaison between the Friends of the Heinz Refuge at Tinicum Photo Group and the refuge staff. I am still an active photographer and contributor to the group, but rely, as do many of the staff, on the generosity and expertise of group members.

One of the first committees created when the Friends of the Heinz Refuge at Tinicum, PA, was established in the mid-1990s, the photo group consisted of just a few people. Many regularly took the refuge's "photo walks" that I led as a volunteer. I thought we could serve the fledgling Friends group and the refuge

through our photo skills and suggested we become a committee under their umbrella. We eschewed bylaws, officers and individual dues by not designating ourselves a "club." Members must simply keep up their yearly Friends membership and contribute, as time allows.

Today, the photo group, with about 10 seasoned members, not only provides breathtaking images and video for interpretive displays, environmental education and public outreach, but also offers a "Learning about the Environment Through the Lens" program for high school students, organizes an annual Photo Fest community photography contest and creates traveling exhibits that are used regionally.

Once or twice annually, as many as six students from the greater Philadelphia area are invited for a half-day each of classroom, field and display work with the guidance of photo group members. In addition to individual displays, the students also work on a collective display to build a sense of teamwork. These are showcased at the refuge.

Over two consecutive Saturdays, the students first learn through classroom and field work and then edit photos and create displays. In the process, they learn the history of the refuge and Tinicum Marsh and its role in the Darby Creek Watershed and Delaware Estuary. Students not only gain a sense of place, but also a better understanding of the natural interconnections in the watershed.

### A Lifetime of Learning

Each student is teamed with a photo group mentor who guides him or her through field work, photo composition and creativity — skills that only experience and experimentation can hone. I have always believed it is that human connection that can only be appreciated as

*"I have found there never seems to be a lack of energy or enthusiasm for photography, the refuge and the natural world as a whole."*



As part of the Heinz Refuge Photo Group's "Learning Through the Lens" program, photo group mentor Larry DiPietro gives guidance to student Joe Melchiorre during a field day session. (Bill Buchanan)



*This image of a snowy egret by Ron Holmes, a member of the Heinz Refuge Photo Group, is just one of dozens taken by group members and featured in traveling exhibits that showcase the refuge throughout the region.*

one generation hands down to another what may be a lifetime of trial and error.

First launched in 1998, more than two dozen students have participated in "Learning Through the Lens." Information is distributed through press releases, flyers posted at schools and libraries, in the Friends' quarterly newsletter and on the refuge Web site. The refuge's environmental education specialist has also spread the word to area teachers.

The 35mm cameras used by the students were purchased at cost through a donation from Sunoco and the generosity of Webbcam, LLC in Philadelphia. Webbcam and Kodak donate film and the cost of processing. We are hoping to expand the number of cameras, thus the number of students, for the program, and looking to enhance the program by purchasing longer lenses and other equipment.

This year's program took place in conjunction with International Migratory Bird Day May 14. This allowed the students to learn more about the fascinating story of the refuge's hemispheric travelers.

Another large undertaking by the photo group has been the development of a traveling photo exhibit, about 40 mounted and framed 11x15 inch photos shot by group members to showcase the refuge. The exhibit is booked at several regional venues and displayed at the refuge's Cusano Environmental Education Center between destinations.

There never seems to be a lack of energy or enthusiasm for photography, the refuge and the natural world as a whole. Ours is as diverse a group as you could ever find, and those differences make the group dynamic.

### **Bringing New People Into Focus**

The group also encourages "new blood" to come into the fold. Without it, any organization becomes stagnant and stale. We have seen members come and go, but there always seems to be a core group that becomes the glue that keeps it all together.

"The photo group has been an invaluable asset to the refuge," said Refuge Manager Kate McManus. "Its members have given an amazing amount of time and talent. Many also contribute to the refuge in other ways, such as by serving on other committees, getting involved with refuge projects and always giving us outstanding materials for use in public relations, interpretive displays and documentation. We thank them for their time, talents and dedication to the refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System."

And I thank them for all the joy, admiration and friendship they have given me all these years. The group flattered me during Photo Fest by having the "best of show" award be given in my name. The "Bill Buchanan Award for Photographic Excellence" was their way of recognizing me as their founder. I hope that what I have written here can express to all of them my sincere pride and thanks for what they have contributed. ♦

*Bill Buchanon is the outdoor recreation planner at John Heinz NWR at Tynicum, PA.*

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## NANPA Helps Photography Soar to New Heights

By Jane S. Kinne

“Committed to Photography of the Environment” was the mantra adopted by the North American Nature Photography Association when it was founded in July 1994. Three years later, the fledgling organization signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Fish and Wildlife Service. Both parties enthusiastically agreed that constructing photographic blinds on suitable refuges was the most appropriate way to fulfill the partnership.

Nearly eight years later, NANPA's non-profit Infinity Foundation has helped supply funding for the construction of photo blinds at 17 refuges, with six more under construction and another 14 approved for funding. We have consulted with countless refuges needing professional expertise in developing better facilities and services for nature photographers. We have real progress to show, but there is a lot more potential to expand our work together.

*Photography is one of the wildlife-dependent recreation pursuits named in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act.*



Each situation is different, but in every case, the advice, leadership and coordination by refuge staff has been invaluable in the successful completion of blinds. Many times, the labor has come from Friends organizations, while on another occasion, at Fort Niobrara NWR, NE, for example, from a dedicated and energetic Boy Scout troop.

Refuges must follow some guidelines when requesting funding. Some of these are basic, such as ensuring the refuge has a suitable area, away from heavy visitor traffic. NANPA can help identify areas that maximize morning and evening light as well as assist with a design plan. Grant proposals must include price quotes for all necessary materials, show that donations of goods have been solicited from local vendors, and demonstrate that a labor force, such as the Friends organization or other volunteers, has been recruited for construction. Lastly, we appreciate progress photos showing the site before, during and after construction for our historical archives and publicity purposes. More information on these guidelines and a sampling of completed projects is available on [www.nanpafoundation.org/blinds](http://www.nanpafoundation.org/blinds).

If you're interested in being a part of this partnership, there are some easy steps to take upfront. Deborah Moore, in the Branch of Visitor Services, has coordinated our collaborative work since the MOU was signed, and has persistently helped spread the word about partnering possibilities (703-358-2386 or [Deborah\\_Moore@fws.gov](mailto:Deborah_Moore@fws.gov)). To learn more about NANPA, please visit the Web site listed above or contact us using [info@nanpafoundation.org](mailto:info@nanpafoundation.org). ♦

*Jane S. Kinne is a past president of the North American Nature Photography Association and its foundation, and currently serves as development director for the latter.*

Completed Blinds	Under Construction	Funds Approved
Bear River, UT	John Heinz at Tinicum, PA	Modoc, CA
Ruby Lake, NV	Humboldt Bay, CA	Stewart B. McKinney, CT
Moosehorn, ME	Black Bayou Lake, LA	Montezuma, NY
Seney, MI	St. Marks, FL	Tetlin, AK
Cameron Prairie, LA	Tishomingo, OK	Stillwater, NV
Willapa, WA	Cibola, AZ	Oxbow, MA
Ft. Niobrara, NE		Upper Mississippi, MN, WI, IA, IL
St. Catherine Creek, MS		Turnbull, WA
Morris WMD, MN		Agassiz, MN
Salton Sea, CA		Sacramento, CA
Shiawassee, MI		Eastern Virginia Rivers, VA
Buenos Aires, AZ		Missisquoi, VT
Prime Hook, DE		Rocky Mountain Arsenal, CO
Quivira, KS		Tewaukon, ND
Blackwater, MD		
Minnesota Valley, MN		
DeSoto, IA		

## Bear River Refuge Leads by Example

Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, UT, was the first to benefit from photographic blind support under the MOU with the North American Nature Photography Association.

“We were impressed by a photo blind on stilts we’d heard about at Sacramento Refuge, and we knew we just had to have one,” says Refuge Manager Al Trout. “Bear River is a great place to photograph a wide variety of birds, but like so many areas, it helps a lot to have some cover if you want to get really good shots.”

With NANPA’s help, the blind became reality. “NANPA folks helped us refine the design for our refuge, and actually they provided funding to support us in constructing two blinds,” Trout says. NANPA also helped the refuge connect with local photography clubs to consult with on the best site and other details for construction.

“NANPA has definitely made it easier for us to offer visitors a better outdoor experience,” says Trout. “It’s a fantastic partnership for the Refuge System.” ♦

## Photo Blind Paves the Way for New Photo Contest

*By Charles H. Heck, Sr.*

With a brother who retired from refuge service, I frequently traveled to refuges to view and photograph birds and animals from a distance. On some of these excursions, I had opportunities to use photographic blinds, and eventually decided to purchase a portable blind. The portable gave the advantage of cover, but also the disadvantage of not being in place long enough for wildlife to become acclimated to it.

My hometown of Monroe in northeast Louisiana is surrounded by refuges and state wildlife areas, creating a haven for many varieties of birds and endangered species. Black Bayou Lake NWR is within five miles of home, offering a beautiful natural lake filled with picturesque and stately cypress and tupelo trees, surrounded by swamps graduating into bottomland hardwoods and mixed pine and hardwood uplands.

I became a regular at Black Bayou Refuge, patrolling with camera on window mount, vigilant for photographic opportunity. I grew to know the manager, and became a member of Friends of Black Bayou.

A forester at Black Bayou suggested putting a photographic blind on the refuge to enable visitors to get close to their subjects without disturbing them. The refuge manager and Friends members approved the idea, and I was asked to find a site and funding for the project.

Through the Internet, I found out about the North American Nature

Photography Association and its partnership with the Fish and Wildlife Service. As an avid reader of photographic literature, I was floored by NANPA's membership, as well as their goals and projects.

NANPA representatives were friendly, knowledgeable and encouraging, providing guidance and data on successful blinds in other areas. My pleasant experiences with these professionals led me to enthusiastically and proudly join this environmentally supportive group. Through NANPA's direction, the refuge received its first grant.

Our blind will be situated in a relatively remote location, requiring road work, long asphalt trails and elevated boardwalks. It soon became clear that more funding was needed. After much searching, we were awarded a National Wildlife Refuge Friends Group Grant, and should now be able to complete our dream project.

The blind project engendered other new ideas. In October 2004, we had our First Annual Friends of Black Bayou Photo Contest, which resulted in more than 165 entries. Ribboned entries may be viewed at <http://friendsofblackbayou.org>.

Serving as judge and keynote speaker for our awards event, Mark Lagrange, an excellent nature photographer (and NANPA member) from south Louisiana, narrated a collection of images called "Creativity in Nature Photography." We are gearing up for our second annual competition, to be held during National Wildlife Refuge Week in October. ♦

*Charles H. Heck, Sr. is a member of the Friends of Black Bayou. He was introduced to refuges by his brother, Berlin Heck, who served as refuge manager at Squaw Creek NWR, MO, and Little River NWR, OK.*



*Black Bayou Lake NWR, LA, offers a beautiful lake surrounded by swamps graduating into mixed pine and hardwood uplands. (Charles H. Heck, Sr.)*