

Bobcat photo takes 2021 California Wildlife Photograph of the Year honors

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Livermore native Sue Crow Griffin's image of affection displayed by a mother bobcat to her offspring along an Alameda County walking path has earned the 2021 grand prize in the 10th annual California Wildlife Photo of the Year contest.

In a virtual celebration today, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Director Charlton H. Bonham named Griffin's photograph the best among all entries in the yearlong contest. The contest is presented by California Watchable Wildlife and CDFW's Outdoor California magazine and sponsored by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy and Out of This World Optics.

"When you see this image, your jaw will drop," said Bonham. "What's special about this particular image is the way it shows emotion. There's caring here, love and a sense of tenderness. And on top of that, it's just a super cool photograph."

California Senator Steve Glazer (D–Contra Costa) joined Bonham to present Griffin with a Legislative Resolution for her accomplishment. Traditionally the winner’s legislative representative invited him/her to the floor of the California Legislature to announce and honor the winning photo. For the last two years, the presentation has been virtual as a result of pandemic restrictions.

Griffin recalled how she captured the shot. She said the adult bobcat had just called the youngster to her to offer a fresh caught ground squirrel. The pair greeted each other on the limb of a felled tree before the youngster accepted the squirrel and disappeared into the wooded background.

“I know we’re not supposed to put human emotions on the cats, but it was just so tender,” she said. “The mom had brought back the food; the kitten had eaten and then they were sharing some time on this log and then they butted heads—it was just precious.”

Griffin began walking as a way to improve her health and eventually started taking pictures of what she would see on her journeys. Griffin discovered all sorts of wildlife on her daily outings, ranging from bald and golden eagles to coyotes, foxes and a wide variety of birds. But the bobcats are what did it, she said, noting that she didn’t have any experience with photography prior to her walks.

Director Bonham selected the grand prize winner from 17 contest finalists. The contest had a record 741 entries this year.

Contest sponsors this week presented the finalists’ entries across social media, offering viewers a chance to see all the top images and build anticipation for today’s announcement. Additionally, the images are currently being showcased in an indoor digital display in the lobby of the new California Natural Resources Building in downtown Sacramento.

In addition to Griffin’s bobcat photograph, the finalists on display include:

Long-tailed Weasel races across field

(Douglas Croft)

Pacific Forktail Damselfly

(Andrew Lincoln)

Black-tailed Jackrabbit at Sacramento

National Wildlife Refuge

(Larry Whiting)

Urbane Digger Bee pollinating in

white cosmos

(Andrew Lincoln)

Bald-faced Hornet verses California

Yellowjacket

(Robin Agarwal)

Osprey catches morning meal

(Douglas Phillips)

Bald Eagles in the Angeles National Forest

(Andrew Lee)

Yellowed-bellied Marmots in

Yosemite National Park

(Vishal Subramanyan)

Coyote leaping for food in Yosemite

National Park

(Alice Cahill)

Golden Eagle versus Ground Squirrel

(Shravan Sundaram)

Northern Pygmy Owl in Santa Cruz

Mountains

(Robin Agarwal)

Spotted Owls at Golden Gate

National Recreation Area

(Maximilian Rabbitt Tomita)

Sea lions at Channel Islands

National Park

(Ken Howard)

California Condors at Tejon Ranch

(Loi Nguyen)

White-tailed Kites mid-air food transfer

(Don Henderson)

Great Gray Owl at Yosemite

National Park

(Vishal Subramanyan)

In addition to the contest winner, two other photographers received special recognition from sponsors California Watchable Wildlife and Sierra Nevada Conservancy. California Watchable Wildlife chose Alice Cahill's shot of a leaping coyote as a favorite, while the Sierra Nevada Conservancy picked Vishal Subramanyan's photo of a pair of Yellowed-bellied Marmots.

Outdoor California and California Watchable Wildlife first sponsored the contest in 2011 as a way to acknowledge photographs that illustrate the diverse wildlife and the viewing experiences found throughout the state's natural and wild lands. California Watchable Wildlife celebrates the state's wildlife and diverse habitats by promoting the value of wildlife viewing to individuals, families, communities and industries while fostering awareness of and support for conservation and protection efforts. Outdoor California magazine showcases the work done by CDFW to protect and enhance the wildlife and natural habitat found across the state.

Sierra Nevada Conservancy joined as a contest sponsor after the first year to encourage more representation from a region rich with a diversity of wildlife. The other sponsor, Out of This World Optics, has presented previous winners with high-end outdoor gear, such as high-powered spotting scopes.