The Rectrix

Special Issue: Entries from “Hope is the Thing With Feathers”
MRBO’s 2017 Photography Contest

rectrix [rek-triks] noun. (pl. -trices) any of the larger feathers in a bird’s tail, used for steering in flight.
Dear MRBO Members and Friends,

We are delighted to unveil the wonderful entries we received in our recent bird photography contest, *Hope is the Thing With Feathers*. Many of you will remember that our first contest in 2016 was titled *Images of Hope*. We wanted to stay with the hope theme because we feel that birds are superb ambassadors for optimism and goodwill. A glimpse of a wild bird can lift you up when you’re feeling down, and birds are often the “gateway” through which people begin their journey into love and concern for the natural world.

This year we had 38 photographers submit 103 photographs. We were so pleased to have 13 photographers from last year along with 25 new entrants! Thanks to the entry fees, the contest raised $2,369.52 in support of MRBO’s on-going education programs.

All of the judges said that the scoring process was difficult due to the quality of the photographs and the wide variation in photo descriptions. This year we had a number of photographers provide descriptions that represented very well thought-out connections between their photo and bird conservation. Next year we are planning to have the conservation relevance be an even bigger part of the judging, since conservation is the ultimate objective in all we do! We will be sharing all of these excellent photographs in publications, presentation and social media for the purpose of increasing appreciation for Missouri’s avian diversity.

We are very grateful to all of the photographers for their important contributions to our education program and our mission to conserve Missouri’s birds and their habitats.

Sincerely,

Dana, Ethan & Paige
Clockwise from top left:

1st Place: Henslow's Sparrow by Bill Blackledge
Henslow's Sparrow singing on the prairies of Dunn Ranch. These beautiful sparrows are an indicator species of the few remaining tallgrass prairies in Missouri.

2nd Place: I Was Just Leaving by George Allbright

3rd Place: Connection by Jacob Walter (age 12)
I camped out in the front yard for weeks watching a young hummingbird family. Just after this chick left the nest, I got to see the mom feeding the chick. This photo shows amazing events in my own yard.

Director's Choice: Northern Rough-winged Swallow Call
by Chris Valentine

Youth: Mallard Feathers by Chelsea Mostellar (age 13)
I watched this Cooper’s Hawk hunt in our yard, diving into a holly bush next to the bird feeder. The bush exploded with sparrows flushed from their hiding place. Eventually, the hawk peered out of the bush, surveying its surroundings. This photo captures that moment. Although the predator was unsuccessful, the hunt illustrated interconnections in suburban nature.
As members of a group of species referred to as neotropical migrants, palm warblers pass through Missouri each year on their journey between their Caribbean winter home and their Canadian nesting areas. Though not a species of greatest concern they are subject to the same pressures of vanishing habitat as other North American songbirds, and Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary provides an island of habitat in which they can find refuge and resources to continue their semi-annual trip.

Left: *It’s Almost Like Home* by Tony Harris.

Right: *Flying Fast* by JoAnn Casner.

My husband was haying the cattle. He came rushing to the house and told me to grab my camera because there were geese on the pond. I did and tried to get close without scaring them but they became edgy and flew before I could get very many pictures. I did manage to get this one and felt very lucky.

Below left: *All Rise* by Kenneth R. Prier.

Right: *Female Red-Winged Blackbird* by George Albright.
Above left: *Young Red-tailed Hawk* by K-Cee Colburn. Above right: *Goldfinch on Thistle* by Paul Winn.

Left: *Blue Grosbeak Showing Off* by Paul Moffett. The beautiful grosbeak is a great example of the variety of birds in the confluence area. The confluence area and its wetlands are vital to the survival of birds.

Above: *Soaring Above* by Kyle O’Bryan

Left: *After Dinner Break* by Donnie Nichols.

Below left: *Painted Bunting* by Betsy Garrett Below right: *Grubby* by Rhyan Brooks.

Above left: *Northern Bobwhite* by Shelby Thomas (age 16). Above right: *Pecking Order* by Chuong Doan.

Due to declining population numbers, this uncommon winter resident is a Species of Conservation Concern. Like with a number of grassland avian species, habitat loss and fragmentation are reasons for their struggle, but conservation efforts will focus on benefiting not only the owls, but other grassland species too.

Song Sparrows are year round residents at the Mussel Fork Marsh. I find them nesting in about the same location year after year. In the spring they sing their hearts out which makes it almost impossible to get a perfect photo as they vibrate all over.
I took numerous photos of this pair, building, repairing, flying their sticks in, then this one photo where it looks like their beaks are touching. To me, personally, nothing says conservation quite like our Bald Eagles. It’s been a success story but we need to continue to be vigilant because there are forces at work in DC that are tearing down these protections that the Bald Eagles have enjoyed for many years, that have aided their successful comeback. I never get tired of seeing Bald Eagles or photographing them. I have photographed this pair and their offspring for several years now and have thousands of photos. They represent Conservation Success.

Middle Right: Snack Time

Bottom Left: Lookout

Bottom Right: Talking to the Kids
From top to bottom left:
Pollinators
I love to take pictures of hummingbirds. Taking them around a feeder is ok, but I like to get them out in our wildflower patch. We have three acres of wildflowers for the pollinators and other bird species. We see lots of finch in the flowers and they are a favorite roosting site for a covey of quail. We like to think we are doing our part for conservation.

Swan Heart
I was taking pictures of swans on a private lake near our home when I saw these two swimming toward each other. I hoped they would do this and they did! Swans are a remarkable conservation story - less than 100 in the country at one time to now seeing them in fall and winter is commonplace thanks to the efforts of many conservation agencies across the country.

Sunset Snows

Mass Confusion
Below: Wood Duck
We have a pond in our timber that wood ducks frequent in the spring and fall. I saw about a dozen go in one day so I crawled up the pond dam and took a few pictures. We manage our 120 acres for wildlife conservation practices include timber stand improvement, burning our grass lands in spring, planting three acres of wildflowers for pollinators, to foodplots- 12 acres of beans, wheat, corn, sunflowers, turnips and clover for all species of animals. We have wood duck boxes up on this pond but they prefer along the creek that runs through the place.
by Marvin De Jong

Top Left: Blue Beauty
The Blue Beauty photograph of a Cerulean Warbler is important if for no other reason that this species is rapidly declining, perhaps threatened, and it is good to know that some survive.

Top Right: Cedar Waxwing

Right: Father and Sons

Below Left: Spring in the Ozarks

Below Right: The Fisherman
The Fisherman, a photo of a Green Heron with a fish in its beak, was taken on Bull Creek as it passes through our property. Bull Creek is a clear, spring fed stream, that provides habitat for Herons, Kingfishers, and Waterthrush. All species of birds should be nurtured and protected; the Green and Great Blue Herons, in particular, are indicators of a viable stream habitat.
by Tom Tucker

Top Left: A Gorgeous Redhead on the Trail

Top Right: Next Time I Won't Get So Close to the House Painter

Left: May All Your Christmases Be Bright

Below Left: Bittern Not See Me
Refuges along the Missouri River Flyway provide not only rest areas but overwintering habitat for beautiful species.

Below Right: The First Glimpse of Spring
Out of 200 species of nectar producing plants in North America, over 150 of those depend on the Hummingbird for survival. Hummingbirds are crucial pollen carriers. Nectar producing plants need Hummingbirds, just as much as the Hummingbird needs the plant.

In a ritual predating human arrival on the continent, greater prairie chickens gather on leks in the spring to display and seek mates for the coming year. Due to the very specific requirements of prairie chickens for this process, Dunn Ranch Prairie is one of the few places left in Missouri where this still occurs. Dunn Ranch protects part of the less than 1 percent of tall grass prairie remaining in Missouri, providing native plants and animals with a carefully nurtured area to continue to thrive.

Maintaining critical habitat by conserving land and using methods such as controlled burns is all part of insuring future generations of wildlife such as these Snow Geese will thrive.
Above left: *Trumpeter Swans* by K-Cee Colburn. 
Below: *Weathering the Storm Together* by Lisa Hostetter.

Above Right: *White-breasted Nuthatch Storing Up For the Winter* by Amy Petersen. 
This little guy is hoping to find and stash enough food for the inevitable cold and wintry times ahead. The Nuthatch is seen here in the late fall perched on a feeder at the Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary in Liberty, MO, taking advantage of the available nuts here at the sanctuary.

Left: *Swainson’s Thrush, Fall Migration* by James Gorski
Below: *Blue Jay Eating a Nut* by Chelsea Mostellar (age 13)
Left: **Taking A Break** by Ryan Steffens

Right: **Pileated Woodpecker - M** by Tammy Simmons

Below Left: **Young Canadians** by Rhyan Brooks

*This image, captured in Loess Bluffs NWR, illustrates two juvenile Canada Geese grazing contently on grass seed at the waters edge. Due to their migratory nature, geese assist in transporting seeds, in their droppings, from one area to another enhancing diversity in plant life.*

Below Left: **Take Off** by Rhyan Brooks

Below: **Peek-A-Boo** by Mary Casey.

I love to watch the variety of birds that perch in the dogwood tree outside my window in the winter. They are amazing creatures who have the ability to balance themselves on their little legs as they perch in the trees or when they take off in flight. Of all the birds that visit, the cardinals I find are most interesting. The male and female differ not only in their coloring but also in temperament. The males seem to be very flighty while the females are much more patient. This lovely lady cardinal was very patient while I took her photo last winter. All the birds differ in coloring, size and temperament; they have their own pecking order; some are more aggressive than others, but they are all created by God and it is our responsibility to protect and care for them as well as respect their home in the wild.

Left: Midair by Jacob Walter (age 12)

Bottom Left: Summer Tanager by Suzanne Wright.

Bottom Right: Next In Line by Cinderella Morff
Above left to right: Nature’s Umbrella and Looking Back by Kenneth R. Prier
Below left: Barred Owl by Betsy Garrett. Below right: Kentucky Warbler by Shelby Thomas (age 16)

Top Left: Red-breasted Nuthatch
by Shelby Thomas, (age 16)

Middle Left: Snow Falling on Owl
by Amy Petersen
Just as we were exiting Montauk State Park in southeast Missouri, the snow began to fall. We stopped to marvel at this beautiful Barred Owl. He is sitting in this great old barn, protected yet out in the elements and enjoying the beauty of the silently falling flakes. He looks as if he’s looking right at me, but I like to think he was spying some prey down the road and we were just a mere blip in his day. As we stopped, I lowered my window took three shots and we drove off. He never moved from his perch, just as it should be.

Bottom Left: Yellow-billed Cuckoo
by Betsy Garrett
People are surprised to know there are cuckoos in Missouri. The call of the yellow-billed cuckoo is pretty unique and can be one early birders can be taught to recognize, increasing their enjoyment and knowledge.

Bottom Right: Lift Off
by Kenneth R. Prier
Above: Eastern Kingbirds and Below: Sharp-shinned Hawk by Suzanne Wright

Above: Woodthumper by Rhyan Brooks.
Below: Ruby-throated Hummingbird (Male) by Bill Blackledge

Bottom Left: No Sunscreen Necessary by Kenneth R. Prier. Bottom Right: Taking Time to Tidy Up by George Albright
As sports fans in the US prepare to watch the 51st Super Bowl, two trumpeter swans and a third eagle enjoy the action as an adult bald eagle swoops in to displace a younger one from a fish. Riverland Migratory Bird Sanctuary (RMBS) provides a protected area for bald eagles, swans, and other migrating waterfowl to spend the winter months taking advantage of the rich resources of the Mississippi River and its surrounding wetlands, and the accessibility and proximity to the St Louis area of RMBS make it a popular place for wildlife enthusiasts to gather and appreciate the natural world.
Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I’ve heard it in the chillest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

~Emily Dickinson, 1830-1886

~Our Thanks To~

**The Photographers**

David Stonner, Photographer, Missouri Department of Conservation
Noppadol Paonthong, Photographer, Missouri Department of Conservation
Karen Avery Miller, Artist, The Little Studio & Gallery
Steve Garr, Conservationist, Birds-I-View and Missouri Bluebird Society
Tim Hickok, Conservationist, Flint Hills Falcons

**Contest Judges:**

- David Stonner, Photographer, Missouri Department of Conservation
- Noppadol Paonthong, Photographer, Missouri Department of Conservation
- Karen Avery Miller, Artist, The Little Studio & Gallery
- Steve Garr, Conservationist, Birds-I-View and Missouri Bluebird Society
- Tim Hickok, Conservationist, Flint Hills Falcons

**Contest Sponsor:**

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- Susan Hazelwood, Columbia MO
- Bruce Satterlee & Mandy Dorrance, Arrow Rock MO
- The Gearin Family, St. Louis MO
- Kate Corwin, Kansas City MO
- Karen O’Donnell, in honor of Jim & Patty Hamilton, Kansas City MO
- Timothy Donze, St. Louis MO
- Karen & Terry Stair, Lee’s Summit MO
- Donnie & Kim Nichols, Warsaw MO
- Rad Widmer, St. Louis MO
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- Carol Davit, Jefferson City MO