EDITORIAL NOTE FROM OUR JUDGES – previously-announced winning image disqualified
MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO:

For six months of every year this achingly beautiful display of Africa’s splendours dominates our lives, and my team and I bask in the glow and challenge of selecting each week’s best images to share with you. Until finally, in May, we select the ultimate winners. What a process!

This year we again broke all preceding records, with a never-before-seen 29,887 entries. The annual increase in popularity of Photographer of the Year is humbling, and a source of great pride for us.

Our approach to what makes a good photograph is largely based on whether that photograph evokes an emotion, tells a story and reflects the true diversity and amazingness of Africa. Of course, there are technical issues to consider, and these are important. But most important for us is that the photograph breaks through the clutter of everyday life and makes you FEEL Africa’s pulse.

We are not prescriptive about post-production tinkering, so long as the image faithfully represents the real-life situation. Photography is a blend of so many elements – including experience and patience, technique, equipment, art, timing and knowledge of the subject. There is no exact formula, no iron-clad route to perfection, and each image presented below reflects this diversity of inputs.

I would like to thank our sponsors Airlink and Klaserie Drift Safari Camps – who, like us, believe with every fibre of their being, that quality ALWAYS trumps quantity.

Lastly, my team and I thank everybody who submitted their photographs for consideration. Without your impressions of life in the far-flung corners of this great continent we would all be the poorer. Please do so again in 2020.

- Simon Espley, CEO

WINNER – 2019 PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR

© Eraine van
Eraine van Schalkwyk – “This friendly, 1cm in length, jumping spider (Hyllus sp.) was found wandering in leaf litter in the Greater Kruger National Park in South Africa. Jumping spiders are very curious creatures, and often intrigued by the camera flash. They are harmless to humans.”

Judges’ comments

Eraine’s image is pure macro-magic! What made this image of hers stand out head-and-shoulders above the other macro entrants was that she managed to include so much of the habitat in her capture. So often macro photography involves tight focus and shallow depth of field, where only the subject is clear. This tiny predator appears to be surfing in a tube wave, as it gazes straight at the camera. This added sense of place makes this a wonderful image.

ABOUT ERAINE VAN SCHALKWYK

Eraine has a great appreciation for all organisms and is an amateur photographer specialising in spiders and other invertebrates and would like to bring awareness of spiders and their worth in our world.
Bob Ditty – “This photo of Mzee (Luganda for ‘Old Man’) goes along with a series of photos showcasing the elderly in Uganda. Uganda is one of the youngest populations in the world so the fact that he turned 100 is no small feat here. It was wonderful celebrating with him, bringing him cake and soda. He was so touched as he never had a birthday cake until now – his 100th birthday! He is an Ugandan World War II vet who fought alongside the British, serving in Burma. He has so many stories to share. He is so in love with his wife that when I asked to take a photo of him, he insisted that she was included as well.”

Judges’ comments

Bob’s sensitive portrait of this dignified couple is just so classy it seems to soften the air around it. Over the past few years we have seen a growing emphasis on portable photographic studio portraiture, where backdrops are erected in situ, props added and subtle lighting provided to create a uniquely dramatic take on the photography of Africa’s remote and unique peoples. What made us enjoy this particular rendition of the genre was the sense of dignity and respect and the obvious love between these two beautiful humans. Subtle earthy tones add to the overall impact of making this image easy on the eye, and are a change from the often colourful and sometimes shouty style of others.
My name is Bob Ditty and I’m a humanitarian photographer and filmmaker. I grew up in Ohio, USA and lived there most of my life. In 2014, I moved to Uganda and now currently follow my passion for photography and filmmaking. I work full time for an NGO called Healing Faith Uganda as their photographer/filmmaker as well as a freelance photographer/filmmaker in my spare time. I feel now that my calling in life is to get the story of East Africa to the world. It’s something I’m passionate about and love doing! I’m grateful that we live in a time where media can be shared very quickly and easily. With my photography, I strive not just to tell a story but to “feel” the story. I know that may sound strange to many but it’s truly how I approach my craft. I strive to wring perfection out of every photo that I take and edit. I know that’s not possible but it’s worth the effort to me.

SECOND RUNNER-UP

Jens Cullmann – “A lion drags an elephant calf under a tree to feed after it was killed by two lions the previous night, Mana Pools National Park, Zimbabwe.”

Judges’ comments
Jens’ dramatic image reminds us of how ruthlessly efficient nature is when left to its own devices. We received many images of predators and prey, of blood and guts – all of which also portray raw Africa. Some of those images were technically superior to Jens’ image, but what made Jens’ image stand out is that this lion was feasting on an elephant, and a baby one at that! Judging by the many comments on our various online platforms over the years, we seem okay with predators taking out warthogs, impala and even buffalo, but many of us are uncomfortable when elephants and primates are the targets. Jens’ image reminds us to move away from the cartoon characters we were told about as kids, and the Disneyfication of African wildlife that has many people not understanding or accepting what really goes down in the remaining wild regions of Africa.

ABOUT JENS CULLMANN

In 2008 Jens Cullmann discovered his passion for wildlife photography on a roadtrip from Germany all the way down to Africa. It became a lifestyle. The passion never left nor did he. Animals in action are his trademark and no one has more patience (as long as it’s animals) to get that one shot.

HIGHLY COMMENDABLE FINALISTS

THE FOLLOWING EIGHT HIGHLY COMMENDABLE FINALISTS ARE IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER
Daniel Koen – “Lion cubs look up at their mother while at a wildebeest kill in Sabi Sands Private Game Reserve, South Africa.”

Judges’ comments

Daniel’s touching image of motherly love is unusual for an image of this nature, in that we are not the focus of a chocolate box dewy-eyed gaze. Instead we are mere observers to this moment of deep connection between mother and cubs. The bloody carcass in the background makes a fitting backdrop to this tender moment.

ABOUT DANIEL KOEN

I was born in Natal, Durban after which we moved to Alberton where I spent most of my life. I went on to study Nature Conservation at the then Technikon Pretoria and obtained a National Diploma in Nature Conservation. I currently work as a Nature Conservator in Gauteng. My interest in wildlife photography started at an early age during family trips to the Kruger National Park. I hope to dedicate more time in the future to honing my photography skills.
Hesté de Beer – “A white rhino calf refuses to leave its mother after she was darted for a dehorning, South Africa.”

Judges’ comments

Hesté’s image really speaks to us on many levels and tugs on our emotions. Our newsfeed screens are so full of bloodied poached rhino carcasses and traumatised orphans, that this bitter-sweet moment confuses us all. The dehorning of rhinos (whether as a farming or anti-poaching exercise) is a controversial topic that toys with our sense of right and wrong, and the additional matter of a stressed-out baby adopting a ‘cute’ pose adds to the emotional roller-coaster impact of this image.

ABOUT HESTÉ DE BEER

I grew up in Mtunzini, a small town in northern KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. My father, mother and sister are skilled photographers, but it was not until about nine years ago that I became interested and asked my father to introduce me to the secret world of photography. He is still my mentor and strictest critic! I am lucky to have the opportunity to travel with my partner to distant locations over the world, trying to locate some of the most endangered species of the animal kingdom. That is where I started to realise that the ever-growing human population, modern technology and media destroy nature and that so many wonderful creatures, ancient tribes and cultures are extinct or highly endangered. I want the world to see what I see through my lens. I want to make people aware of what is happening to our world and I want to immortalise the images of creatures that our children and their children might not be privileged enough to see. I want everybody to know that their passion, skill or talent can make a difference in this world. It is all worthwhile.

© Angelia Young / Tikki Hywood Foundation
Angelia Young – “A black-bellied pangolin rescued from the bush meat market in Yaounde, Cameroon. This photo was taken when she was released. No filters or tweaks needed when you photograph pangolins because their magic just shines through!”

Judges’ comments

Angelia’s image emphasises the vulnerability of all pangolin species, as this black-bellied pangolin curls up to defend itself. Pangolins are the most trafficked wild animal species on the planet, and the insatiable demand from the Far East for pangolin scales, combined with a thriving local bushmeat industry, is driving these helpless creatures towards extinction.

ABOUT ANGELIA YOUNG

I am a 35-year-old South African living in Cameroon. I have been living in Cameroon for the last eight years. I am a keen conservationist by heart, deeply caring about all species of wildlife and the environment. The black-bellied pangolin photograph is one of the hundreds that we have rescued and released. I am grateful for the chance to share my photograph and in my opinion I already feel like I’ve won if I managed to reach just a few people, to bring awareness to an animal that is little known but terribly persecuted through poaching for their scales to Asian markets. I am proud to be part of the Tikki Hywood
Foundation who are leading in coordinating the efforts in many regions of Africa to save these magical animals from extinction.

Michiel Duvenhage – “We were camping at Polentswa in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. The waterhole is known for its thousands of doves drinking at the overflow. The previous day was overcast and the solar pump was not pumping enough water for the waterhole to overflow. All the doves had to drink from the waterhole itself. It is a deep waterhole so the doves were sitting inside and this provided a unique opportunity for the black-backed jackal. He was able to sneak up behind the hole, almost to the edge, without the doves spotting him. He would then wind up like a spring and then literally fly over the hole, catching any doves flying up. He was very successful and caught four doves that morning.”

Judges’ comments

Michiel’s snapshot of a flying jackal takes the cake from a number of submissions this year with a similar theme. The jackals that ambush doves and sandgrouse coming in to drink at various dry-country waterholes are lightning-fast, and Michiel’s use of a shallow depth of field to capture the airborne jackal’s total focus on the quarry is spectacular.

ABOUT MICHIEL DUVENHAGE

I was born in Kimberley in the Northern Cape, and currently I am the grounds manager at St Michael’s School for Girls in Bloemfontein. Ever since I was young I was always close to nature, and loved spending time camping with my wife and our trusted 4×4 camper – especially in the Kalahari. When I got married 10 years
ago my wife and I started doing photography and I fell in love with it. Now I am only working to fund our next photo trip to try and capture those beautiful golden moments in the Kalahari. For the past five years I have been an active member of the Bloemfontein Camera Club. I have a passion for bird photography (or apparently anything that is flying), backlight photography and capturing the action.

Patrice Quillard – “Geladas are found in the Ethiopian Highlands, especially in the Simien Mountains National Park. Nowadays their territory is increasingly threatened by human pressure (repercussion of agricultural expansion and as a result of pastoralism development on grasslands traditionally inhabited by monkeys). These primates have developed a complex and fascinating social system, communicating with each other using body language, facial expressions and also a wide range of grunts and whispers. I wanted to work on photographic portraits to highlight their interactions, their meaningful glances and the richness of their exchanges. After a slow and discreet approach to a group of about 30 primates, I sat down and slowly set up my camera on the tripod. The group quickly tolerated me and then ignored me completely. A magnificent male with a long, thick cape of hair proved to be the dominant of the group. He was protective with females and kept potential rivals at bay as well as young males. It was exciting to observe his leadership. I captured this image as he began to yawn, revealing his impressive set of teeth.”
Patrice’s unusual and somewhat demonic capture of this already rather eccentric-looking monkey shoved aside other entries of the same species. The gelada is an unusual primate, what with it being the only grass-grazing monkey, that bright red chest patch and outlandish wig-like pelt. We know that geladas can clown it up, but this performance takes the cake!

ABOUT PATRICE QUILLARD

I have always been in love with Africa! As soon as my work allows it, I leave to find her, with the greatest happiness. The contact with nature and wild animals has taken an essential place in my life. In my images, I like to capture the looks, emotions and beauty of all these wonderful wild animals. I often prefer B&W, which allows me to express the character traits, the majesty of the postures, the intensity of the looks and the personality of the animal, as in the case of the human portrait, by reducing the border between humanity and animality. I exhibit my images in various photo festivals in Europe to raise public awareness of the fragility of ecosystems and the serious threats of extinction of many African species.
Yaron Schmid – “Most of the time, if you drive by a herd of zebras they will move aside but will keep doing what they’re doing. The second you stop, they will turn their butts towards you and walk away. In Lewa Conservancy in Kenya you can find the beautiful and endangered Grevy’s zebras – the zebras are a bit more cooperative and a bit less skittish compared to other parks. I was hoping for a shot like this for a long time, and during my last visit to Lewa I was lucky that the zebra looked at me just as another walked behind it, making an almost symmetric background around its head, and the illusion that this head has two bodies.”

Judges’ comments

Yaron’s hypnotic image of a frequently-covered theme is so symmetrical, so visually confusing, that we had to include it amongst the highly commended entrants. The fact that this is an endangered Grevy’s zebra helped, as did that (naturally) brown nose that looks like it was dipped in coffee granules.

ABOUT YARON SCHMID

Veterinarian, conservationist, animal lover, award winner, wildlife photographer and safari leader. Born and raised in Israel. Living and working in New York City.
Geo Cloete – “This photo tells the story of an expert sailor. These Portuguese man-o’-war (Physalia utriculus) call the deep pelagic waters their home and, are perfectly adapted to survive the harsh conditions. The Portuguese man-o’-war is in fact a colony of tiny specialised animals called polyps, which are all connected to each other and function like the organs and tissues of single multicellular organisms like fish and humans – to the extent that the polyps lack the ability to survive by themselves. Similar to a well-functioning sailboat, where each crew member has a specific duty, so each polyp has a function towards ensuring the survival of the colony.”

Judges’ comments

Geo’s combination of natural and flash light absolutely blew us away. He submitted a number of stunning underwater images this year, and a few others were technically as good as this one, but our judges decided that this transition of an ‘ordinary’ subject into magic was simply exceptional.

ABOUT GEO CLOETE

The manner in which artists worked across multi-disciplines during the Renaissance period has been a main motivational factor in the career of the multi-talented Geo Cloete. It was whilst studying architecture at the Nelson Mandela Bay University, that he got to learn this guiding principle. Since successfully completing his studies, Geo has been pursuing his dream. As a lifelong waterman and ocean lover, sharing the awe and beauty of the underwater world is a primary focus of his photographic projects. Geo strongly believes in the notion that we only love that which we know and that we only protect that which we love. It is therefore of cardinal importance to him to share the majestic beauty of the ocean, not only with fellow ocean-lovers but with humans from all walks of life. The ocean plays a pivotal role in the survival of this planet and therefore the wellbeing of it and its creatures directly impacts all of our lives.
Hubert Janiszewski – “I experienced this sighting together with my wife while we were self-driving in Mabuasehube, Botswana earlier this year. When I saw this scene through the viewfinder of my camera I instantly knew that this is an unusual sighting. The leopard tortoise was clumsily trying to get out of the waterhole, while swarms of brown-veined butterflies were fiercely swirling around and sitting all over him to suck moisture from his shell. It was a beautiful and extraordinary sight, but it looked quite funny too, because the poor guy’s face seemed really annoyed by those obsessive intruders. But after a few minutes we realised the gravity of the situation as despite numerous attempts, the tortoise could not get out of the waterhole. We were watching his struggles for quite some time, and finally after 45 minutes I decided to help (otherwise he could possibly not make it out of the waterhole alive). When I was sure there are no other animals around I quickly got out of the car and gave him a helping hand. He was a bit frightened at first moment, but when he realised that he was free he quickly went on his own way. When on safari, it’s not only the big game that matters. Pay attention to small things and you may be rewarded with great unexpected sightings, like this one.”

Judges’ comments

Hubert’s image captures so much of why life in the African bushveld is NEVER boring. These opportunistic butterflies are taking advantage of the tortoise’s slow exit from the water to grab their share of moisture. This exceptional capture makes us laugh at first, then wonder, then realise how much life is going on all around us, unnoticed while we rush between meetings and social events.

ABOUT HUBERT JANISZEWSKI

I live in Warsaw, Poland, working as an analyst, spending most of my time in the office, but I’m also a keen nature enthusiast and wildlife photographer, so I always try to spend my free time as far from the big city as possible. Six years ago I visited southern Africa for the first time, and quickly fell in love in this part of the world. Africa became my passion – I enjoy self-driving, camping and being in the African wilderness as much as I enjoy photography. I have already travelled South Africa,
Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Madagascar and can’t wait to come back for more.

AUDIENCE FAVOURITE WINNERS

THE FOLLOWING ARE THE WINNERS OF OUR ‘AUDIENCE FAVOURITE’, AS VOTED FOR BY THE PUBLIC

WEBSITE FAVOURITE

As chosen by our online community through voting on our website voting page.

Steve Pressman – “A lioness peers out from behind a tree in MalaMala Game Reserve, South Africa.”

VOTES: 5,577
FACEBOOK FAVOURITE

As chosen by our Facebook community through voting on our Facebook page.

Rodney Nombekana – “A giraffe mother with her calf in Pilanesberg National Park, South Africa.”

VOTES: 629
INSTA FAVOURITE

As chosen by our Instagram community through voting on our Instagram page.

Nick du Plessis (@nick_dup) – “A lioness with her tongue sticking out in Singita, Sabi Sands Private Game Reserve, South Africa.”

VOTES: 6,500