

A red fox is captured in mid-leap, its body arched and its tail tucked. The fox's fur is a mix of reddish-brown and black, with a white patch on the tip of its tail. The background is a bright, snowy field with some dry, brown grasses visible in the foreground. The overall scene is dynamic and captures a moment of intense action in a winter setting.

SCENES
FROM THE

WILD

Determined red foxes, wild busy bees, mustangs on the move, vibrant sea life and soaring condors—photographing the wildlife of the West is an art. Five professionals offer insights on creating pictures that showcase some of Mother Nature's most intriguing creatures.

Mr. Red

Photographed by Daniel J. Cox
Yellowstone National Park, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming

This beautiful animal, whom I dubbed “Mr. Red,” was hunting on a snowy ridge when we saw him from the confines of our warm and comfy snow coach. I led our small group of winter photographers outside to the front of the van and suggested we keep our distance to not affect the fox’s hunt. The most important principle of good wildlife photography is the safety of your subject and yourself. Long lenses, such as the Leica 800mm I used for these images, allow me to stay out of the way.

The fox cocked his head, listening intently. Then, like a cat on springs, he jumped, his nose spearlike as gravity drove him to the prey below. —D.C.



To see bees up close is to understand their distinct beauty.

Buzzing By

Photographed by Michael Durham
Mount Hood National Forest, Oregon

Wild bees are magnificent to observe in their native habitat amid colorful fields of wildflowers. Coming in all shapes and sizes, there are more than 20,000 types of bees buzzing around the world, and to see them up close is to understand their distinct beauty.

I’m most interested in capturing photos of them flying. To accomplish this takes a fair bit of specialty equipment, including a custom, high-speed shutter, laser sensors and ultrafast flash units. The equivalent shutter speed is 1/40,000th second. The top photo was taken with a Canon 50D, the bottom with a Canon 60D. I used a Canon 100mm macro lens for both. I also used a Cognisys High Speed Shutter, Cognisys Laser Beam Sensor and Canon 540 EZ flash units.

Photographing bees also requires patience. It can take all day to wait for a bee to fly into a precise point of space so I can capture an exposure. I’ve found that photographing where there are lots of busy bees increases the odds of making a good image. Despite the needed patience, the work is always worth it when I see the detail of the waving antennae and the sun glinting off patterns in the bees’ wings. —M.D.



On the Run

Photographed by Michael Luque
Snake River Canyon area, Idaho

It had taken me more than an hour to slowly approach and get within 100 yards of these wild horses. I was in the Owyhee Mountains photographing the Black Mountain Herd of nearly 40 mustangs in the Snake River Canyon area.

I spent four hours shooting with my Nikon 200–400mm lens and camera, capturing amazing shots of these powerful equines. When it was time to go, I slung my tripod over my shoulder and started walking away.

The horses followed.

I stopped, snapped a few more photos and then kept walking. That’s when I heard the quickening hoofbeats. I looked over my shoulder and saw the herd running through the brush. Do I hit the dirt, wave my hands or keep taking photographs? I reached for my camera, of course.

The mustangs went around me and kept going, and I managed to capture the photo at right. It took my heartbeat a long time to stop galloping. —M.L.



I looked over my shoulder and saw the herd running through the brush.

Underwater Wilderness

Photographed by Brandon Cole
Cape Flattery and Deception Pass, Washington

Photographers willing to take the plunge will find colorful creatures and beautiful scenery in Washington's underwater wilderness. For 30 years I've used scuba gear to explore beneath the waves—from Puget Sound's protected reaches to the exposed Olympic Peninsula—capturing wildlife large and small, weird and wonderful.

In the shot at right, a diver glides through a reef fissure at Duncan Rock, off Cape Flattery—the northwesternmost part of the contiguous United States—and appears to be approached by curious sea lions. I used a Canon 5D Mark IV camera and 16–35mm f-2.8 II wide-angle zoom lens inside a waterproof Nauticam housing. Exposure settings were 1/200th second, f-9 aperture and ISO 800. Two Ikelite DS161 flashes provided illumination.

The bright bouquet of painted sea anemones, below, was taken at Deception Pass, off the north end of Whidbey Island in Washington. Each year, millions of people drive across the Deception Pass Bridge, but few people probably realize that beneath them, in the swirling, emerald-green waters, intrepid divers drift along a reef wall decorated with a living tapestry of marine life. To get the shot, I used a Canon 5D Mark III camera and 50mm macro lens inside a waterproof Nauticam housing. Exposure settings were 1/200th second, f-13 aperture, ISO 200. Two Ikelite DS160 flashes created the light. Myriad fish scooted over sponges and finned between burgundy feather duster worms, and camouflaged crabs marched past rainbow sea stars in a scene reminiscent of Dale Chihuly's fantastical glasswork. —B.C.



Intrepid divers drift along a reef wall decorated with a living tapestry of marine life.



Capturing Condors

Photographed by Joshua Asel
Big Sur, California

In the Santa Lucia Range, nearly 40 California condors, their wingspans stretching 10 feet, soared above me. I had set out with members of the Ventana Wildlife Society to visit the 80-acre Big Sur Coast Sanctuary, where I watched and photographed the work of the California Condor Recovery Program. VWS staff captured, blood-tested and GPS-tagged—and released back into the wild—members of one of the world's largest flying species. In a giant aviary with food and water, biologists and volunteers examined the birds of prey. More condors flew overhead and into the valley below—toward the meeting of mountain and ocean.

I used a Nikon D90 with a 70–210mm f-4 Nikkor lens—and one other kit lens, an 18–55mm f-5-5.6 that came with the camera—to capture these pictures.

It was an amazing experience made even better by knowing that, with the work of groups such as VWS, the California condor has gone from near extinction to a population of more than 440 birds. —J.A.

Condors flew into the valley below—toward the meeting of mountain and ocean.





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WILD

Three tips for perfecting your photography

Professional photographers Joshua Asel, Brandon Cole, Daniel J. Cox, Michael Durham and Michael Luque offered advice on wildlife photography. Here is a compilation of their recommendations.

Put background front of mind.

Obviously, the subject of your image is critical, but paying attention to the background and the quality of light can make all the difference in how your subject looks.

Find interesting lines, shapes and even colors that can lead the viewer's eye into your main subject. Certain textures, colors and shapes look better in shaded, softer light, while others look their best in direct sunlight. Have patience as you make adjustments—even the best photographers struggle to get it right.

Tell a story. Think of your subject like a character in fiction. What are her motivations, and what stands in her way? Without a story, your image might lack power. Play around with unusual angles and unexpected camera settings, and keep working the scene.

Shift your focus. In your photography, always try to look at things in a new light. If you specialize in photographing animals, spend a day just shooting landscapes and another day focused on people.

The new experiences will add to your perspective on important elements such as movement, exposure and composition, and allow you to find more potential in every image.