

# MY FAVORITE IMAGES FROM THE 2023 SAFARIS



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# IMAGE 20



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm F5.6 PF telephoto lens, ISO 400, f8 at 1/640 second. Shot June 3, 2023 at 5:02pm. Handheld.

## Safari and Subject Details

Before this amazing encounter, my stock library had only scattered images of beavers. The images were mostly on the far banks of rivers - like Soda Butte Creek and Lamar River, and I've had a few closer encounters on the Gardiner River, and on the Flathead River in Glacier NP. Only two or three times were the beavers close, but only for seconds, not minutes.

Over the course of about an hour I shot several hundred images of this family of very cooperative beavers. The beaver house was on the far side of the pond, mostly hidden in the willows. One after another the four beavers maneuvered to my side of the pond and began to chew both willows and fallen cottonwoods. The largest of the group climbed out of the pond right in front of me and began to widen the cut it had previously chewed in a cottonwood trunk.

The beaver that I took to be the mother seemed more concerned with preening the two younger, smaller-sized juvenile beavers. While the point blank shots of the large beaver were cool - and a first for me - the images of the mother beaver tending to her young struck a cord with me. That is why I choose this image for my top 20 of 2023 list.

It was interesting to watch the mother swim through the pond, trailed by the juveniles. In this image the mother is on the left, juvenile on the right, as they come together and rub faces for a brief moment. Shadows on the pond were growing longer, and though we came calling on other days, we never saw the beavers out and about like this again.



# IMAGE 19



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm F5.6 PF telephoto lens, at ISO 800, f7.1 at 1/500 second. Shot on May 2, 2023 at 6:56am. Handheld.

## Safari and Subject Details

This was one of the many warblers I encountered on my first trip to Ohio's Magee Marsh - a world famous birding mecca known for spring migration of bird species north towards Canada, particularly warblers, like this Yellow Warbler.

Unfortunately, a late spring cold front had moved down from Canada a few days before my arrival, crossed over Lake Erie, and had stopped the migration immediately. After a conversation with a local birder, it seems the majority of the warblers were hung up farther south in Kentucky, waiting for the cold front to move aside.

Even with the cold front I ended up shooting 15 new bird species along the mile long boardwalk that winds through this hardwood marsh. This encounter was stunning for how close the birds came to me, almost relaxed, and posed. I had scrambled to shoot other birds, like Palm Warblers and their cousins - the Kinglets, but this was easy.

Magee Marsh Wildlife Area is about 2000 acres in size, with the famous boardwalk wrapping around a core area of about 25 acres of hardwood swamp. Several hundred bird species pass through yearly, with the spring migration being all about songbirds. I was there primarily for the warblers, and their cousins. We had windy, overcast conditions most of the time, and got sprinkles throughout each day - but the bird photography was amazing.

I've scheduled my 2024 trip to Magee Marsh to hit more in the middle of the migration. The walkway had groups, but I was never really crowded. I hand-held all the photos there so I wouldn't have to manage a tripod amongst the other folks feet.



# IMAGE 18



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm PF Lens, at ISO 3200, f5.6 at 1/125 second, and eV Compensation of +.33, handheld. Shot December 13, 2023 at 3:48pm.

## Safari and Subject Details

Taken on the Texas Wildlife Safari, this Javelina, also known as a Collared Peccary, hides behind a skinny bush thinking I can't see it. Taken near the University of Texas International in Laredo, TX, the dark skies made for a difficult shot. Shooting from a road within the campus, there was nowhere for me to pullover and park - so I had to keep idling, always a potential source of vibration. These timid animals would not allow any sort of physical approach, but I did have photographed them successfully from a blind.

I pushed the ISO setting to 3200, and even then only got a shutter-speed of 1/125 wide open at f5.6. The compensation was +.33 to brighten the image a little. I thought it turned out great, and I was able to stifle most of the noise through careful noise reduction software. The VR on the 500 PF lens is so good that I knew I would get a sharp picture after just shooting a short burst of 5 images, with 4 very sharp.

There was actually a pretty large group of Javelina, maybe 20-25 animals rooting along the brush edges where the manicured lawn stopped and the bush and mesquite began. We also encountered our first white-tailed buck in Texas there, as he followed a couple of does just a hundred yards from the Javelina.

Folks sometimes call the Javelina a "Desert Pig" or "Skunk Pig". They can grow up to 4 feet long and weigh up to 90 pounds. In previous encounters I've photographed their tusks as they tussled during breeding season - and they look like formidable weapons. The word Javelina means "Wild Boar" in Spanish and they are sometimes kept as pets.



# IMAGE 17



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm PF Lens, at ISO 1600, f5.6 at 1/100 second, and eV Compensation of -.33, handheld. Shot December 13, 2023 at 3:48pm.

## Safari and Subject Details

We spent all day shooting at the T5 (Tipps) Ranch between Beeville and Oakville, Texas before this buck made an appearance. My friend and fellow guide - Butch Ramirez - called this buck "Stickers" for all the smaller points and drop tines. As we moved around the ranch, stopping in different areas to photograph the bucks, I'm sure we encountered at least 20 large, 10-point or better, bucks.

The Texas Wildlife Safari concentrates on three main areas, with some smaller satellite locations that are nearby. We shoot the birding mecca of Salineno on the Rio Grande River south of Zapata, TX, and there are some local spots nearby. Then we went out to a different area to call and photograph Gray Hawks, though they proved more difficult this year than last. Then we shoot at the T5 Ranch (Tipps) a couple of hours east of Laredo, closer to San Antonio. The ranch has a few exotics, and we spent some time working Blackbucks that we encountered. After that we spent a day working the raptors and songbirds at Butch's Ranch - The Rockin R6 in the mesquite country north of Laredo. On the safari this year (including Bosque del Apache NWR near Socorro, NM) I set a new personal high of 35,000 images.

Moving from the much colder Rio Grande River Valley in New Mexico to the much warmer Laredo, Texas area was a pleasure. Same river, just much lower in elevation and closer to the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

These whitetails are much smaller than the mule deer and coastal blacktails I'm used to seeing and photographing in California. Their population is expanding into Arizona, Utah, and other western states.



# IMAGE 16



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm PF Lens, shot in DX mode, at ISO 3200, f5.6 at 1/250 second, and eV Compensation of +.33, window rest. Shot January 22, 2023 at 2:40pm.

## Safari and Subject Details

It is just never easy to photograph bobcats, as anyone who has tried will tell you. As you can see from the feet and legs of this tomcat, there had been a steady rain during most of the day before we had this encounter. While I have photographed bobcats in the rain before, usually a rainy day is a strike-out day of searching for them.

On this bobcat safari we were searching on the east side of the Sierra Mountain foothills - the rolling oak woodlands facing into the San Joaquin Valley. While there might be more cats on the west side mountains and foothills, if you run across one you almost always get images.

After searching both Yokohl Valley and the Dry Creek Road to the Drum Valley Road, we had stopped in Three Rivers for lunch. After lunch we headed up the very narrow North Creek Road intending to both look for cats as well as call for Northern Pygmy Owls. We turned around at the end of the road where it meets Sequoia NP and headed back when we had this encounter.

The bobcat was moving on the hillside above us, coming towards us. I spotted him about 80 yards away and was able to bring my truck to a quiet halt without alarming him. I didn't turn my engine off as I knew we would need to maneuver to a spot so we could shoot between the oaks if he stopped to look at us. Re-starting the engine can startle a bobcat and force a change in direction - always away - and I didn't want to do that. The grass was green and very wet from a series of winter storms, but a hungry bobcat will hunt, no matter the water. As predicted, he paused and jumped on this log for about a minute, glancing around, my mouse squeaker getting him to look in our direction.



# IMAGE 15



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm PF Lens, at ISO 400, f6.3 at 1/2000 second, using eye focus, Induro tripod and Wimberley Head. Shot December 16, 2023 at 8:16am.

## Safari and Subject Details

Another shot from the Texas Wildlife Safari makes my top 20 for 2023 list. This Harris Hawk was shot against a beautiful blue sky as is circled above a favorite tree on Butch Ramirez's Rocking R6 Ranch. We were in a blind that was about half buried in the ground, about half above.

As we drove in the ranch quad out to the blind Butch said that when the birds hear the engine, they come to find out what is going on. In past safaris I had seen up to 3 Harris Hawks, but on this trip we saw an entire family of 7, as well as the Crested Caracaras' that live in the area.

With a blue sky and perfect morning light, the custom area mode with eye focus that I use worked perfectly. Every shot was tack sharp, only the position of the bird deciding if I kept the image when I edited them.

The broad band of brown feathers on the back of the wings just glowed, and the hawk was nice to look back in our direction to add eyeshine to the image. This was my best image from this particular burst of 33 images, all locked on and sharp, but this one stood out for the angle on the wings, fanned tail feathers, and head position.

The hawks range from the extreme desert southwest of the United States, especially Texas and Arizona, to Chile and Argentina. An accipiter hawk it hunts ground mammals like rabbits, squirrels, and other small prey. It is notable from other hawks in that it also hunts in cooperative family groups. These groups can surround the prey and drive it into the claws of one of the other birds.



# IMAGE 14



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm PF Lens, at ISO 400, f6.3 at 1/200 second, Window rest. Shot May 2, 2023 at 1:46pm in a light rain.

## Safari and Subject Details

Sometimes by paying close attention to the animals and birds you are shooting, you notice some kind of behavior you haven't seen before - that was the case with this image.

Magee Marsh, in Ohio, had been a blustery, overcast, and windy experience with short periods of rain most days. One afternoon as some rain drifted in off Lake Erie I drove back towards the Visitor's Center of the marsh and encountered numerous Canada Geese herding their goslings near the road bordering open water canals.

Shooting the goslings suddenly appeared like a good alternative to walking the boardwalk in the drizzle. I photographed them for a bit and then noticed that the goslings began to take shelter under their parents wings as the rain increased. While I had seen grebes carry their chicks on their backs under feathers, I had never seen this happen with geese.

With the goslings moving under wings, I slowly brought my rental car a bit closer, the parents not wanting to jostle their young - so they sat tight. I could see the feathers moving around on one adult when suddenly I saw a gosling face staring at me, half hidden under its mother's wing.

I liked the image for the behavior/interaction aspect of it, and for the rain drops on the feathers. The little gosling held that position for about a minute, when it was just as suddenly gone, as other goslings climbed under the wings as well. The patient adult, probably the mother, just endured the cold rain as the other adult stood guard nearby. It was a fun moment to shoot.



# IMAGE 13



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm PF Lens, shot in DX mode, at ISO 400, f5.6 at 1/3200 second, Handheld. Shot May 11, 2023 at 7:18am, on San Juan Island, WA.

## Safari and Subject Details

In many locations Bald and Golden Eagles are the top predator, and such is the case on San Juan Island off the coast of Washington State. While I was on the island to photograph red fox kits and adults, I never miss photographing these predators.

Near Cattle Point Lighthouse there is a steep cliff that falls about 60-70 feet down to the rugged coastline below. I noticed bald eagles flying down that bluff parallel to the west facing cliffs, riding the thermals they created. One morning I walked over to cliffs when I saw eagles flying. When I got there the female eagle and three of her offspring were flying up and down.

I walked a quarter mile north along the cliffs to see if the eagles, which had flown in that direction, were doing anything interesting. Apparently, the mother eagle had killed a seagull and was in the process of eating some of it. The juveniles were stationed about 10 feet away from her, calling and acting irritated that she wasn't sharing her food with them.

They would take off, fly a bit, then come back to land in a slightly different position, but none of them challenged her for the food. I was getting great shots of them flying, huddled on the rocks, and interacting with each other. Suddenly, the female eagle began to raise her head to the sky and call, repeatedly. The juveniles were nearby so she wasn't calling them.

The sun had finally risen enough to cast direct light on them. That was the moment of this image. The eerie call of the eagle resonating up to the cliff I was standing on as it stood on the unlucky gull.



# IMAGE 12



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm PF Lens, shot in DX mode, at ISO 200, f8 at 1/500 second, Induro Tripod. Shot May 25, 2023 at 9:56am, in Yellowstone National Park.

## Safari and Subject Details

With over 11,000 sandhill crane images in my stock library, photographing these birds is pretty common, getting them adjusting eggs on a spring nest, is very uncommon.

What made this encounter unique was that I was on a hill about 25 feet above the pond these cranes were nesting in. I don't think I had ever had this kind of high angle on a nest before, especially only a short distance off. Further, the large eggs were not obstructed by reeds, something that had happened at every other nest I had photographed.

In the winter, usually at Bosque del Apache NWR in New Mexico, the sandhills are a very solid gray with only a bit of color. As you can see here, this sandhill has a beautiful golden brown cloak of feathers. As we watched and photographed from the hilltop both adult sandhills took time working on the nest, moving the eggs by rolling them over, and standing watch for predators.

Many years ago I saw a sandhill crane go after a coyote that had moved close to it. With its wings extended, the long-billed bird charged and stabbed at the coyote - who decided discretion was the better part of valor. Sandhills mate for life and stick together year-round. Their flute-like call can echo for miles if they are flying at any altitude.

A couple of days later we returned to this nest and one egg had hatched, the colt wandering close by the nest. Upon careful examination, the second egg had a beak poking out of it, evidently it was working on escaping the enclosure. The next day the parents and colts were feeding in the pond, far from the nest.



# IMAGE 11



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm PF Lens, shot in DX mode, at ISO 400, f8 at 1/1250 second, Handheld. Shot June 5, 2023 at 9:07am, in Grand Teton National Park.

## Safari and Subject Details

Few hummingbirds are as beautiful as the Calliope, nor more difficult to find to photograph. Here in California I've run into them a few times, but never really had time to work them properly - just stray shots here and there.

While in Yellowstone a week previous I had heard a guy talking about some bushes along the Snake River that was a gathering spot for these hummers. That peaked my interest, and when we were down in the Tetons a week later we went looking for these gorgeous birds.

I spelled out the exact location in my Newsletter of June 2023, check it out on my website. A short distance from the bathrooms at Schwabacher's Landing I headed down the dirt trail from a parking lot.

The bushes in question turned out to be flowering Bearberry Honeysuckle, and there was just a couple of them. As we approached, a couple of these hummers burst from the bush and proceeded to buzz around us before landing, fairly quickly, on the branches of the honeysuckle. A nearby willow also provided a few landing spots.

For the first time I was actually able to photograph the Calliope Hummingbirds for an extended period of time. This image of a male Calliope shows his streaked rosy gorget feathers along his neck. That he was preparing for take-off only made the photo that much better. It was a beautiful spring day, sunny and warming - with no wind to move the branches. This hummer has replaced the Allen's Hummingbird as my favorite hummer to shoot, those gorget feathers being the icing on the cake.



# IMAGE 10



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm PF Lens, shot in DX mode, at ISO 200, f5.6 at 1/800 second, Induro Tripod. Shot December 16, 2023 at 10:04am, at the Rocking R6 Ranch near Laredo, TX.

## Safari and Subject Details

When it comes to strong color, only a few birds can compete with a male Northern Cardinal. Only the summer tanager, vermilion flycatcher, and a few other birds put on this dramatic red color. We did shoot these cardinals at Solineno two days before, but the overcast weather didn't really show off this birds assets.

What made this image streak up into my Top 20 list was the mesquite thorns framing the bird. They are simply fearless flying through mesquite, banking and rolling, to get to their desired perch. There was a sharp-shinned hawk that came hunting, and that scattered the birds, but the first bird to reappear was this male cardinal. Maybe he felt safe amid the thorns, even with his bright colors turned up clearly making him a target if the sharpie returned.

This image was taken from the same blind I shot image #15 from, the Harris Hawk. There were dozens of birds around: cardinals, titmice, orioles, woodpeckers, thrashers, warblers, wrens - and many others.

Seven eastern states count the northern cardinal as their state bird. Their populations have expanded over the past century, no doubt in part due to its ability to push out 2-3 nestings per year. The Rocky Mountains have proven a barrier, but they do venture into the desert southwest as far as southern Arizona. I've never seen one in Yellowstone, but their range does include much of eastern Montana. Named for the red cloak Cardinals wear in the Catholic Church, a group of cardinals is aptly called a conclave, or college. The MLB team St. Louis Cardinals, are named after the bird, as well as being the icon for a number of colleges.



# IMAGE 9



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm PF Lens, shot in DX mode, at ISO 800, f5.6 at 1/500 second, Handheld. Shot September 21, 2023 at 10:54am, in Many Glacier, Glacier National Park.

## Safari and Subject Details

The Bohemian Waxwing is one of the most elegant, beautiful songbirds I've ever photographed. While the more common Cedar Waxwing is seen more frequently in my area of California, I had never seen a Bohemian Waxwing before this encounter in the Many Glacier area of Glacier National Park. The second I saw the yellow edging on the wings I knew this flock of birds was different.

I ran across this large flock of Bohemians along the edge of the big parking lot right uphill from the big lodge. There was about 30 birds, once or twice they flew off only to return quickly to this bare tree branch. The wind was brisk and the branches were swaying a bit (and it was cold) so shooting handheld on the hillside leading up to the tree wasn't easy.

Even though this is a close-up, the actual full image shot in DX mode (750mm) shows the entire flock in the tree. I just couldn't get closer, so I ended up doing a big crop of that image for this shot. Had the birds been grouped closer together that would have been a great shot, but they were scattered throughout the tree.

The range of the Bohemian Waxwing is more northern than the Cedar Waxwing, dropping down into the US in the Northern Rocky Mtn states and across the northern Great Lakes region. It is about an inch larger than the Cedar, twice as heavy, and has the overall gray appearance compared to the brown/yellow of the Cedar.

Photographing an unexpected bird, especially one I had never seen before, was a treat.



# IMAGE 8



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon D850 Camera Body, Nikon 24-120mm F4 Lens. Exposure of ISO 50, f16 at .4 seconds, Indura Tripod. Shot September 21, 2023 at 2:28pm, along McDonald Creek, Glacier National Park.

## Safari and Subject Details

Along McDonald Creek in Glacier National Park, there are literally thousands of little riffles and pools, fed by glaciers, lakes, and snowmelt, each one with it's own character, it's own flow. I've always been attracted by the flow of rivers, how they sometimes meander, and sometimes hurry down stream crafting channels through rock.

A longer exposure blurs the water the way I see it at the time I shot it. In this exposure I also used a polarizer to reduce the reflections that hide the rocks under the water. I like this image because the line created between the frothing water and the water falling shows the water-smoothed rocks with an almost glassy appearance. The motion of the water is beautiful, almost classical, and the warm colors of the rock seem to glow. The water itself is twisting and turning, pushed one way and then another, completely at the mercy of the rocks and gravity that drive it.

Like strands of cotton, some colored by the glacier milk flowing down the mountains, the water splashes into the air, losing definition in the long exposure of the image.

In last years Top 20 of 2022 I highlighted Sacred Dancing Cascade on McDonald Creek at #10, and this little riffle is about 100 yards west of it. We spent several hours shooting along the creek, more properly called a river, over several days. I don't pursue landscape photography, I just shoot what looks good, and if that happens to be a landscape image - so be it. The American West is a vast area of magnifiscent wildlife and alluring landscapes, the least I can do is capture that when I see it.



# IMAGE 7



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm F5.6 PF Lens. Exposure of ISO 800, f5.6 at .1/800 second, window rest. Shot February 13, 2023 at 4:52pm, at Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, Utah.

## Safari and Subject Details

Ducks are difficult to photograph, which makes getting a good behavior shot meaningful to me. This Common Goldeneye drake was putting on a breeding exhibition for several hens that are in the same little 15 foot pond. However, as the drake semi-submerged and paddled around the hens he encountered a very mean American Coot, or mudhen.

The much larger coot took exception to the drake trying to push him away from the uncaring hens, and a fight broke out. The coot made himself look much larger by rising up as tall as it could, trying to physically dominate the much smaller goldeneye. That worked for a bit until they actually started nipping at other. The goldeneye dove to avoid the bigger coot, while the coot made a half-hearted attempt to kick him.

It was a lame confrontation that ended in a draw between the two birds. The drake went back to putting on a show for the hens until two more drakes came winging in. Now there were six goldeneyes on the little pond, and moments after arriving they all took off together.

I shoot more images of Common Goldeneye's in the winter, than summer. They are a common duck along the frozen reaches of the Lamar River and Soda Butte Creek, darting between small areas of unfrozen, open water.

Their nearly identical cousin is the Barrow's Goldeneye, which can be identified by both the type of white mark on their cheek, and by the more dominant white striping on their back.



# IMAGE 6



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm F5.6 PF Lens. Exposure of ISO 640, f5.6 at .1/5000 second, Induro Tripod. Shot May 30, 2023 at 7:10am, at Le Hardy Rapids, Yellowstone National Park.

## Safari and Subject Details

There are a lot of bird images in this year's Top 20 from 2023. This is an image of a Harlequin Duck drake blasting through the high running water of the Yellowstone River at Le Hardy Rapids. While these colorful ducks are common in Yellowstone in the spring, this is literally the only place I have seen them.

Each year about a dozen drakes and hens take up residency on the boulders, and sometimes logs, at Le Hardy Rapids. They disappear if the water is too high and covers their rocky perches, and they have to share this set of rocks with the female Common Mergansers that also like to fish here.

The ducks and mergansers (a type of duck) come to this location to fish in the backwater pools created by the high running Yellowstone River. After drying out on the rocks for awhile the Harlequins jump back in the cold river and begin foraging for aquatic insects and small fish. They fight their way through the rushing waters, often times appearing to fly through the crashing, turbulent waves to reach a new fishing spot.

That's why I like this image so much. This drake is literally blasting through the water running and flapping, seemingly impervious to the power of the current he is fighting, just to change his feeding location.

X-rays of this duck show that many adults have had numerous broken bones in the past that have healed - part of the trauma of living along the edges of the roughest waters around. Yellowstone is at the extreme southern tip of their normal range, which extends north into Canada and Alaska.



# IMAGE 5



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm F5.6 PF Lens in DX mode. Exposure of ISO 400, f5.6 at 1/250 second, Induro Tripod. Shot May 24, 2023 at 2:55pm, in Yellowstone National Park.

## Safari and Subject Details

The lives of these grizzly bears is tough, and when they are small and vulnerable, it is even tougher. This sow is commonly known in Yellowstone as the Obsidian Sow, and this year she had 3 coy, or cubs-of-the-year. She lives in the same general area near Roaring Mountain, the Twin Lakes - both south of Sheepeater Cliffs. Over the years I have photographed her a number of times in this general area, always with cubs.

A couple of years ago I photographed her with two three-year-old cubs (actually 2.5 years old) that I had previously encountered when these cubs were still just coy. That year she went into breeding and a big mature boar began following her. To make a long story short, he attacked one of the juveniles killing it, in an attempt to push the Obsidian Sow into mating. While this isn't uncommon, knowing that one of these cubs had been killed like that puts me in a gloomy mood. It happened again to three coy I had photographed in Grand Teton National Park, just a week after my safari had ended.

In this image the Obsidian Sow is leading her three coy across fallen logs in an area that had burned decades ago. They cross these logs in order to not have to wade/swim through the little creek running through this meadow. About an hour after I shot this image I photographed them crossing logs again over a bigger creek, and much closer but without the sow being in the photo with them.

Over the course of this safari I photographed four different sows with cubs, two with coy and two with older cubs. Since 1983 the grizzly population in the Yellowstone ecosystem has grown ten-fold, from 132 to over 1400 grizzly bears.



# IMAGE 4



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm F5.6 PF Lens in DX mode. Exposure of ISO 400, f5.6 at 1/1250 second, handheld. Shot May 10, 2023 at 4:19pm, on San Juan Island, WA.

## Safari and Subject Details

These red foxes with melanistic genes that make them black, are typically called Silver Foxes, and sometimes Black Foxes. The red foxes that have less of a black coat, but with black fur not as dominant, are called Cross Foxes. All red foxes can be identified by their white-tipped tail - whether they are black or not.

I do a spring safari out to San Juan Island, off the coast of Washington, to photograph the island's foxes, whether black, red, or brown. Every year my images get better as I learn more about the foxes and am able to anticipate some movements and actions. This particular kit had come out of the den hidden in dense nearby woods, and relaxed on this spot. Later in the day, with light in his face, I shot this image of it relaxing.

This particular fox kit had four siblings at the den site to play and romp around with. And like I've seen at many other dens on the island, there were adult foxes from the previous year's litter that were helping raise this year's young. You might ask how I know which adult foxes are which? All you have to do is watch how the kits act around them - they know their parents from the others.

If the father fox, known as a dog, shows up, the kits lick his jowls hoping he will regurgitate a meal for them. If it is the female, known as a vixen, they will attempt to nurse from her. The babysitter foxes will play with the kits but not attempt to feed them, though I have seen them drop off food at a den and then trot away. When either parent shows up, the older siblings will act very submissive to them, getting down on their bellies and showing deference to them.



# IMAGE 3



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm F5.6 PF Lens. Exposure of ISO 400, f5.6 at 1/1600 second, handheld. Shot June 3, 2023 at 9:20am, in Grand Teton National Park.

## Safari and Subject Details

My first Osprey images date back to 1985 from one of my first Yellowstone safaris - back when slide film ruled. Since that time I've shot thousands of these raptors known as "fish eagles", they have become one of my favorite subjects.

I've photographed them in Washington, Florida, Utah, Wyoming, California, Colorado, Montana, Texas, New Mexico - all the states I normally see on my photo safaris. They range over the entirety of North America, and over much of the Western Hemisphere. Of all the raptors I encounter, they seem to be the most determined, hunting for long periods to feed themselves, their mate, or their nestlings. Their talons are the ideal fish catchers, able to snag fish like giant treble hooks.

While birding guides states they are found around bays and estuaries, rarely found on streams or rivers - that is the only place I have photographed them - along rivers, lakes, and streams. Unlike many raptors that have a varied diet, Osprey eat fish, and little else. When autumn comes and frozen water is on the horizon, Osprey push south to warmer climates and open water.

With a nearly 6 foot wingspan, they soar with confidence as they seek the shadow of a fish - then start their headlong dive, talons first, plunging into the water to the necessary depth for a capture. With a large fish they struggle to the surface, and then gathering themselves, mighty wings pushing down on the air, they rise with another meal locked securely in their talons.

This image exemplifies my thoughts on these birds, the Grand Tetons rising in the background.



# IMAGE 2



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm F5.6 PF Lens in DX mode. The Exposure was ISO 800, f5.6 at 1/640 second, window rest. Shot March 30, 2023 at 9:28am, in Tulare County, CA.

## Safari and Subject Details

It was tough not to have this bobcat portrait be my favorite image of 2023. My trusted mouse squeaker made the cat stop in its tracks, and turn back one more time to look at me. The rains during the winter of 2023 had flushed the world with green and wildflowers, and my cat was in the middle of a meadow of yellow fiddleneck, with just a sprinkling of white popcorn flowers.

The year 2023 was a year of improving bobcat encounters, as the population began to rebound from the dismal 2019-2021 years when the mange had thinned bobcat numbers. Of the fourteen years I've been photographing bobcats, 2014 was my biggest year with 152 bobcat encounters spread over just 20 safari days. If you don't have a calculator that comes out to an amazing 7.6 cats per safari day. That year I had my largest single bobcat encounter day - 16 bobcats scattered across about 130 miles of back roads, mostly in San Benito County.

The areas with the highest density of bobcats suffered the worst with this skin plague. I saw my last bobcat with mange in 2021, and since then the population seems clear of the mange - for now. Just a few weeks ago I had my first 3 bobcat day since 2020, and a few years of new bobcat kittens should be a boon to photography encounters.

I read a recent story about a trail-camera in the White Mountains of Arizona that captured a large, healthy looking jaguar walking past. That would add a fourth cat to the United States - bobcats, lynx, mountain lions, and jaguars. But until the other three species become more obvious, bobcats are the cat of choice, especially here in California.



# IMAGE 1



## Camera Information

This image was taken with a Nikon Z9 Camera Body, Nikon 500mm F5.6 PF Lens in DX mode. The Exposure was ISO 400, f8 at 1/1000 second, handheld. Shot April 5, 2023 at 2:43pm, in Kern County, CA.

## Safari and Subject Details

This Screech Owl is my favorite photograph from 2023, not because they are hard to find and photograph, but because I find the feather detail on the owl amazing.

I was leading a safari to Antelope Valley near Lancaster, CA to photograph the bloom of California Poppies. After a morning shooting in the poppy fields, and lunch, we returned to Hwy 58 to head up into the southern Sierra-Nevada Mountains to find and photograph baby blue eyes wildflowers. As the road began to climb we drove through a grove of California Sycamore trees.

As these trees mature they are known for all the cavities that abound in their trunks. As we drove I caught a shape/form that didn't fit - there was a western screech owl sitting in a cavity, barely above the road and only about 25 feet away. There was a grade that dropped off next to the road, so the trees roots were about fifteen feet below, but the cavity in the tree was maybe just 6 feet above the road.

We immediately turned around and found the owl still sitting there, giving us an opportunity on that tight, curvy road to shoot bursts of images of it. I returned to that owl a week later and photographed it again, this time hearing a chorus of screech owls hooting in the surrounding trees. After a few minutes this owl began to hoot back to the others, no doubt telling them he was being photographed by owl paparazzi.

The detail of the feathers struck me, both by their intricate design and subtle color changes, blending back and forth across the little owl's face. Its eyes blinking closed adds to the feather affect, and makes this image all about design and beauty.



# EPILOGUE

Putting together these images each year is an exercise in frustration. Selecting just 20 images is tough, looking not just for the unique, but to images that mean something to me - after all, these 20 are my favorites.

Without the folks (clients and friends) who participate in these safaris I probably wouldn't have done them alone, so I have to thank all of you that have come along for the great ride that is Wildlife Photography. The great part of wildlife photography is the rush of adrenaline when some amazing encounter occurs, the part that sucks is when circumstances don't allow for great images - which happens fairly often.

Those moments when an encounter works out, like all the images in the top 20 this year, keep all of us coming back for more, me included. The days and the miles add up, the hours during the day float by, and yet the chase continues. All of us continue the chase in our own ways, with the ultimate goal being the same - just seen differently. What I mean by that is for some of us it's the final image, for some it's the experience (with good or bad photos) of being around wildlife, while for others it's being out in nature - whatever the end result.

All three are true for me. **BRP**

## Best 20 Details

### Safari Locations

YNP/GTNP Safaris - 6 Selections  
San Juan Island Fox Safari - 2 Selections  
Glacier Park Safari - 2 Selection  
Bobcat Safari - 2 Selection  
Texas Wildlife Safari - 4 Selections  
Magee Marsh (OH) Safari - 2 Selection  
Utah Raptors Safari - 1 Selection  
California Poppy Safari - 1 Selection

### Time of Photos

Morning 5:30am to 10am - 9 Selections  
Late Morning 10am to 1pm - 2 Selections  
Afternoon 1pm to 4pm - 6 Selections  
Early Evening 4pm to 7pm - 3 Selections

### Lens Used

500mm PF Telephoto - 19 Selections  
24-120 f4 Zoom - 1 Selection



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# PREVIOUS YEARS FAVORITES

2020



BRENT PAULL PHOTOGRAPHY  
Cross Fox - Yellowstone/Grand Teton Spring Wildlife Safari



BRENT PAULL PHOTOGRAPHY  
Black Bear Sow and her Cub - Sequoia Black Bear Safari

2019



BRENT PAULL PHOTOGRAPHY  
The Ermine and his Vole - Utah Raptors Safari



BRENT PAULL PHOTOGRAPHY  
Cinnamon Black Bear Cub - chillin' - Black Bear Safari

2021



BRENT PAULL PHOTOGRAPHY  
Common Dolphin - Santa Cruz Island Gray Fox Safari

2018



BRENT PAULL PHOTOGRAPHY  
Bighorn Ram on winter range - Yellowstone Winter Wildlife Safari



BRENT PAULL PHOTOGRAPHY  
Mating Behavior Vermilion Flycatchers - Morongo Valley Bird Safari

2017



BRENT PAULL PHOTOGRAPHY  
Bugling Harem Bull Elk in Snowstorm - Yellowstone National Park

2022



BRENT PAULL PHOTOGRAPHY  
Wolf attacking Elk - Yellowstone/Teton Winter Wildlife Safari

2016



BRENT PAULL PHOTOGRAPHY  
BLUFF CHARGE - CINNAMON BLACK BEAR - SEQUOIA NP



BRENT PAULL PHOTOGRAPHY  
Hovering Great Gray Owl - on the attack, Yellowstone National Park