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THROUGH THEIR EYES: BEST OF TEXAS 2014

Photographers share their love of Texas' natural wonders.

By Louie Bond

How many times do you hike a trail or drive the back roads of Texas and come upon a sight that you long to capture and keep, only to realize you've left your camera elsewhere? It can be the instant just before a wild animal senses your presence and flees or when the lighting is unique, reflecting off the water or painting the mountains. Perhaps you actually get to snap a shot, only to be disappointed when the results contain none of the magic that inspired you. Every month, we share the work of the state's greatest nature photographers, who spend hours upon days upon months upon years capturing for posterity those moments that we mere mortals miss. This fourth annual installation of our Best of Texas series features these fine artists. We asked them to share the stories behind some of their favorite images of the Lone Star State.



© Wyman Meinzer

Wyman Meinzer: A friend told me about some potentially unique images in the middle of a 100,000-acre Rolling Plains ranch during the droughty summer of 2011, and we discovered an entire mud flat inhabited by thousands of young bullfrogs. Suddenly, one huge bullfrog rose from the muddy soup, and smaller frogs began to hop upon its back. It was truly one of the more interesting phenomena in nature that I had seen in quite some time.

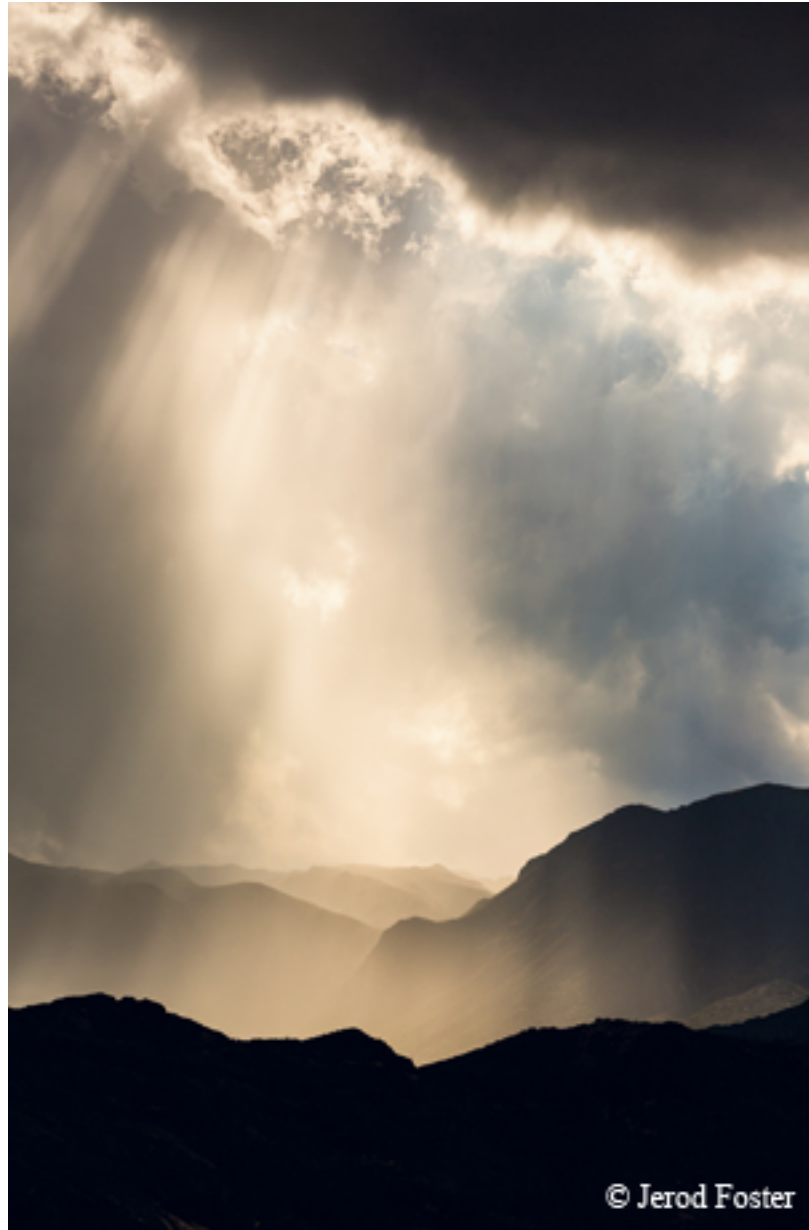
www.wymanmeinzer.com



Russell Graves: I grew up in an outdoors family, and now there is nothing I love more than taking my family hunting. Hunting with kids is more about letting them experience the outdoors and less about bag limits. My kids love putting out decoys, retrieving birds and staring through binoculars while we hunt. It's not hard to see that they are making memories. www.russellgraves.com



Andrew McInnes: My favorite time to photograph the beach at Galveston is after a cold front, when a northerly light bathes the island. I often drive around and let the light suggest what I shoot. At a beach just past the west end of the seawall, lingering clouds hung low on the western horizon, painting a palette of pastels on this series of red posts. <http://2amphotography.wordpress.com>



© Jerod Foster

Jerod Foster: Monsoon season (August to October) in the Big Bend desert can produce some bizarre weather conditions. As I was driving through Big Bend Ranch State Park, a shower moving along the Rio Grande dropped water so dense that it appeared to bounce off the mountains. Backlit by the sun, the mountains on both sides of the river transformed into ethereal landscapes. Just a few hundred yards away, the rain was nowhere in sight. www.jerodfoster.com



© E. Dan Klepper

E. Dan Klepper: Unlike many rugged, challenging mountain bike trails in Texas, Caprock Canyons Trailway offers a more relaxing ride. Nearly the entire first half of the 22-mile stretch to Quitaque is downhill! I could swear I saw this horned lizard (or perhaps a relative) on the trail in the same place just beyond the South Plains Trailhead the last time I rode by. www.edanklepper.com



Earl Nottingham: Sometimes I stumble upon a scene that seems not merely photogenic, but positively poetic. In the early light of a crisp autumn morning at Guadalupe River State Park, as a lone crow echoed in the nearby canyon, the gossamer remnants of a low fog began to dissipate. I was able to make only two exposures in the soft and eloquent light before the sun broke through and began another warm Texas day. www.earlnottingham.com



Larry Ditto: Springtime in Texas is the season of magic for a bird photographer like me. Whether I'm capturing images of migrating songbirds along the Gulf coast or patiently waiting for hummingbirds at a patch of Hill Country wildflowers, all that heavy photo gear gets "light as a feather" when I'm spending spring with the birds. www.larryditto.com



Laurence Parent: I arrived at Guadalupe Mountains National Park about an hour before sunset. I slogged through 10 inches of snow to Smith Spring in a snowstorm. This exposure, my last photo, was more than 10 seconds long, warning me that darkness was imminent. I had no flashlight. Blowing snow erased my tracks; failing light and falling snow made it difficult to find the path. I managed not to panic and found my way back to the car, sweating and shaking. www.laurenceparent.com



© Tosh Brown

Tosh Brown: This image represents everything that I love about the challenge of stalking redfish on the flats of the Texas coast. Bright skies, light winds and clear water allow anglers to wade quietly and spot redfish as they forage in the shallows for crabs, shrimp and baitfish. Angler Mike Siegman casts his fly to a wary redfish near Port Aransas. www.toshsbrown.com



Rolf Nussbaumer: One day right before dusk, as I was driving through Choke Canyon State Park, I thought I saw something in the tall grass. I wasn't sure if my eyes were playing tricks on me, but my instincts told me to turn around to double-check. Sure enough, this majestic buck was lying in the grass waiting for nightfall.

I quickly pulled over and started taking pictures out of my truck. www.rolfnussbaumer.com



Chase Fountain: My favorite place to photograph is not a physical location but rather a place in time, “the golden hour.” As the sun reaches the horizon line, the lighting becomes softer and richer in color, and serenity fills the air, as it did here at South Padre Island. It is at this moment when I am often reminded of how much

I love my job as a photographer for *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine. <http://imagesbychase.smugmug.com>



Todd Steele: In the waterfowl world, sandhill cranes are the noisy neighbors. Their fights, like an aerial kung fu dance, always start with dominant males throwing their heads skyward with a bugle call. There's a silent pause, then they launch themselves skyward to spar, wings walloping, feet clawing, bills jabbing and voices hissing and moaning as they establish dominance. All the while, crowds of cranes cheer on the match. www.toddsteelephotoart.com



Kendal Larson: I've seen unusual nude beach announcements around the world. From the carved and painted stones and crude signs of Mexico to the rough-hewn statuary of France, the warnings for visitors are whimsical and amusing. This "sign" north of South Padre reflects the fascinating diversity of the Texas experience. I especially love this shot for the juxtaposition of the soft textures of the beach and the early summer thunderstorm against the roughness of the old lifeboat. www.kendallarsonphotography.com



Kathy Adams Clark: Combining ancient light and 21st century technology, my favorite photos show streaks of light left behind by the stars and planets. These “star trails” range in color from pure white to blue, red and golden, all based on the temperature of the light. I escape light pollution by driving an hour or two away, especially to parks and ranches, to find dark skies to capture these images. Recent innovations in digital photography make the process more reliably successful. www.kathyadamsclark.com



John C. Abbott: A wondrous cyclone of 20 million Mexican free-tailed bats emerges from Bracken Cave (just north of San Antonio) every evening from March through October to feast on several tons of insects. Not only is it visually stunning, you can feel the vortex being created as they spiral out of the cave and can smell the guano left behind. www.abbottnaturephotography.com



Jesse Cancelmo: Stetson Bank, in the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, is the hands-down favorite for tropical fish lovers like me. Towering pinnacles atop this siltstone base host an eye-popping array of colorful Caribbean varieties, from queen angelfish to scrawled cowfish to graybys. www.cancelmophoto.com