

Natural History NZ (MP)

Open entries: B-grade.

#25 BO View from the Top

Traditionally, central placement of the focal point is not favoured, although it is marginally more acceptable in portrait format, as in this image, where the people are very slightly off-centre. We wondered if they should not have been even more centrally placed. (If you are going to flout conventional wisdom, why not do it completely?) The overall composition provides the viewer with a sense of being there, enhanced by the aerial perspective: looking down towards the distant hills gives the picture great depth. We wondered if this was originally a well-positioned but not specifically planned snapshot ('planned' in the photoshoot sense). Having said that, the composition of the image ensures that it is more than just a snapshot. It is nicely composed, being divided into three equal horizontal layers. It is pleasingly coloured, with the bright green of the child's jacket contrasting well with the darker greens and blues of the distant background. The black mat was an excellent choice as the overall scene would have been diminished somewhat with a lighter mat. Highly Commended

Open entries: A-grade.

#1 AO Autumn Damp

An overriding impression of wetness, offset by patches of bright colour spread through the image. The position of the road produces a nice leading line to the centre of the image, just disappearing to the left at the top. Was it happenstance or by design that the bases of the tree trunks lined up along the road in the middle distance looked like a perfectly placed diagonal shot of soldiers on parade? The water streaks on the windscreen (or window) through which the photograph was taken lent a creative edge to the image. There was some debate amongst us as to whether the car on the left-hand side, under the trees, should have been in or out. Highly Commended

#2 AO Opononi Sand dunes

This image could have been submitted in the set subject. It conveys a good sense of depth with the distant sand dunes as the focal point. The detail is excellent detail, although the apparently subdued lighting has robbed it of something. Conventionally, situating the horizon through the middle of an image is not favoured. The horizon is very slightly skewed down of left, which could have been corrected by minor rotation. Merit

#3 AO Saturday Night

This is a well composed image. Creative use of slow shutter speed and slight camera movement produce a good sense of movement, complemented by positioning the trio so that they are walking into the light with lots of room ahead of them. The attractive colours and warm light on the people's faces is add further to this pleasing image. Highly Commended

Natural History (NZ) Assessments

Set subject: B-grade.

#26 BS Gannets Muriwai

A superbly captured image with excellent composition, exposure and detail. The image conveys well the sense both of action and of the birds' environment. The waves washing off the rocks in the background produce an additional sense of motion. There is a high degree of difficulty in getting such action shots, especially at relatively close range. Congratulations: Honours.

#27 BS Juvenile tui

This is a well composed image. Slight cropping at the top (1 cm or so) might add more balance and emphasise more strongly the diagonal composition portrayed by the branches. The bird itself is interesting: a relatively recently fledged juvenile tūi showing its bright orange gape flange, along with the collection of orange pollen on the bird's forehead. These patches of colour complement each other. Good use of bokeh in the background so they do not distract. The dark matting is a good choice as it offsets the light bottom-right corner. Honours.

#28 BS Kereru

The bird in this image is well framed, with the highlight in the eye nicely suggesting contact with the photographer. Nevertheless, it appears that the image has been heavily cropped. The bird's plumage looks overly smooth as a result; it lacks the detail one might expect to see in the feathers. Does the 'chain of pearls'—the spots of light shining through in the background—situated to the left of the bird, add or detract? Were they left in deliberately, to balance the curve of the bird's white upper breast–lower neck feathers? Might it have been better to try lessening them during post-processing the image, thereby serving to reduce this visual distraction? Merit

#29 BS Mantodea & Fly

This is a great action shot that tells a story. To capture this fleeting moment in such detail involved a high degree of difficulty. The small fly on the mantid's head is a bonus. The background is just right. Perhaps you could have tried darkening the head a bit. Honours

#30 BS Pied Shag

The bird is pleasantly posed and nicely balanced, showing well both its posture and the environment. The patch of colour in the face is lovely and bright. The image seems slightly overexposed, perhaps a consequence of the sun shining on the bird's back, leaving its front in the shade. Trying to compensate for this makes the image look slightly flat. Merit

#31 BS White-faced Heron

This is a stunning image, showing lots of detail and colour, well reflected in the water. We have very little to say other than 'wow'. Honours

Set subject: A-grade

#4 AS Black-headed Jumping spider

Superb composition, especially posed over the caterpillar bite mark in the leaf; perfectly exposed. Excellent detail, both on the spider (especially the hairs—trichobothria—on the legs) and on the cabbage tree leaf. Great eye contact. Honours

#6 AS Godwit landing

This is a great action shot, showing good detail and excellent composition, with the bird having plenty of room to move into. The bird appears to be dancing and is well reflected in the water. There is good depth of field throughout the entire bird. Could the subject have been more concentrated by slight peripheral cropping of image (top, bottom and on left hand side)? Highly Commended

#7 AS Juvenile Variable Oystercatcher

This image shows great detail. The composition is pleasing with the second bird, even if slightly out of focus, mirroring the main subject. This adds an extra dimension to image. The image conveys a good sense of the birds' environment but is slightly overexposed, resulting in a slight colour cast over whole image. You might consider using a darker (black) mat. The washed-out appearance of the image unfortunately gives it an Accepted

#8 AS Kereru

This is a stunning picture, well composed and sharply focused. We discussed at length how much post-processing went into producing it, relative to the original. Was it originally overexposed, with the colours of the bird being recovered post processing? The colours look oversaturated but, irrespective, it is still a superb image, situated at the interface between photography and art. Honours.

#9 AS Korimako in Kowhai

This is a 'busy' picture in which the bird tends to blend with the detail of its background. The nature of the subject—a feeding and therefore moving bird—and the environment in which the photograph was taken would have made it difficult to reduce this merging of the bird and its background. The bird and its feathers are shown in great detail, so it is a really good study of the species. Although the bird's pose is natural, the head-down posture is not as flattering as it might have been had the photograph been taken when the head was more horizontally aligned. Merit

#10 AS Kotuku Nest Material

This picture tells a story: excellent. The heron's white plumage is not blown out: a well-exposed image showing lots of detail in the feathers. The background is not too dark and, overall, conveys nicely a sense of the environment in which this species lives. Would a square print be an improvement? Possibly. Highly Commended.

#11 Lithophytic *Metrosideros excelsa*

This is a great image, depicting well the species in its environment. The lighting is perhaps not at its optimum for the subject, leaving the image looking a bit flat. Merit

#12 AS Long-tailed blue butterfly

This image shows good detail of an unusual species, with soft lighting and excellent exposure. Too much of the area covered by the front florets is out of focus. A square format might have been a better option by cropping on the left and a bit off the bottom. Merit

#13 AS Maui's Copper Butterfly, *Lycaena edna*

This is a stunning image, showing great detail in the subject, set against a uniformly blurred background. Would a slight rotation to the right have improved the image, by situating the subject more squarely in it? You might consider slight cropping on all sides to accentuate the butterfly even more. Was gloss paper the best choice? Incidentally, the specific name, even though it may refer to someone's name, should still be spelt with a low-case 'e': *edna* not *Edna*. Honours

#14 AS Nan Keen Night-heron (incidentally, the species' common name is Nankeen Night-heron)

This is a superb portrait of a special Whanganui species. The detail shown in the feathers is outstanding. The out-of-focus twig on lower right-hand side of the image could have perhaps been burnt in. This would have reduced its prominence, which is distracting, too much so for an Honours. Highly Commended

#15 AS New Zealand Dabchick.

This is a perfect portrait of a difficult-to-photograph species, well composed. There is some loss of definition around head suggesting that the subject has been over-enlarged. There is also slight vignetting around edges of the image. You might consider cropping the right-hand side marginally to bring bird more into the centre. Highly Commended

#16 AS Pukeko

This is a nicely balanced portrait of a pukeko showing its feeding behaviour, although there is a slight colour cast. This, together with the muted tones, lessen the image's impact. Increasing the contrast might help. In life, the legs would surely be redder, further suggesting some colour imbalance. Would a looser cropping have been better, perhaps avoiding the truncation of the ripples around the bird's leg at the bottom of the image? Accepted

#17 AS Ruapehu Snow Cover

This is a good representation of the mountain, showing considerable detail in the snow cover without any apparent blow out. We were undecided as to whether you should have tried lightening the bottom of the image, at the risk of detracting a bit from the detail of the mountain, or if this was deliberately left dark to provide an interesting contrast with the mountain, as a partial natural frame. Highly Commended

#18 AS Southern Green Shield Bug (*Nezara viridula*)

The exact nature of this specimen—a nymph of the Southern Green Shield Bug—cannot be seen clearly from the photograph. The intention of the Natural History (NZ) competition is to have an identifiable image of the subject. This is not really clear here. Whereas the colours, exposure and detail are all good, the areas of focus are too limited (for example, the head and eyes are not in focus, which they ought to be to be identifiable). The background is also somewhat busy, which is further distracting. Accepted

#19 AS Thermal Activity Mt Tongariro

This is a nicely composed image that portrays the natural environment well. It looks a little flat, however, and has a slight colour cast, giving it a hazy look. The mat is perhaps too large for what is a small print. Could the image have been printed larger, thereby achieving a better balance between it and the surrounding mat? Accepted

#20 AS Toutouwai

This is a nice portrait of the species, with its characteristic upright pose well captured. The overall image is a bit dark, however, and quite soft especially around those parts of the bird to which one's eye is drawn, the head and bill. Accepted

#21 AS Tui

This is a stunning image, with exceptional colours and showing subject in great detail. The exposure is perfect, with the bird's poi showing no sign of blowout. Our only quibble is that the image seems slightly oversaturated, as shown by the orange tint to what should be yellow flowers and a deeper blue sky than one normally sees, but this is a nit-pick. The background is perfectly out of focus. The internal white edging to the mat adds a further dimension to the presentation. Honours

#22 AS White-face Heron

This is a nice, sharply focused image, especially the face. We have some questions over its composition, however. Is the bird positioned too centrally? Could you have provided more space on left so that the bird is flying into negative space? Alternatively, would cropping the right-hand side slightly achieve the same effect? (But beware of the tail being set too close to the right-hand edge.) You might also consider cropping the bottom of the image to remove the rocks there and to the left. There is also a slight colour cast, suggesting that the photograph was taken in cloudy conditions but not adjusted for in post processing. Despite these cavils, it is a good image of a flying bird, difficult to capture perfectly. Highly Commended

#23 AS Whitehead Mohoua albicilla

This is a good environmental portrait of the species, not an easy subject to capture well. The bird is sharply focused. Cropping on right and from bottom might concentrate the view of the bird better and serve to reduce the distracting element at the bottom left. The horizontal burnt-out branch in the middle background is also distracting. Could this have been burnt in more, to reduce the distraction? Possibly, but it would be difficult to do. Merit

#24 AS Wrybill

This is a nice portrait of the species, photographed from the proper angle to show its defining characteristic, the bill bent to the right. The right-hand side of the bird's face could perhaps have been lighter. Slight cropping at the top and bottom and on the right-hand side to concentrate the viewer's attention. Would a square composition have been better? Merit

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## **Overall winners**

BS #29 Mantodea and Fly (but note that this was a difficult choice as there was one other outright contender).

AS #8 Kererū (also a difficult choice as there was another image that was a serious contender).