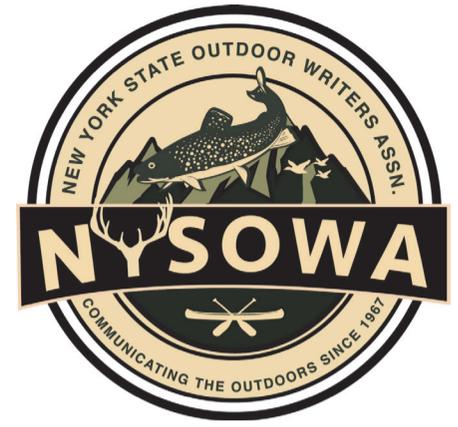


Addressed to:

ECPWSS  
PRESORTED STANDARD  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
DENTON PUBLICATIONS/  
NEW MARKET PRESS  
P.O. BOX 338  
ELIZABETHTOWN, NY 12832  
POSTAL PATRON

# NYSOWA Awards



October 2022



Inside...

- Eleven categories of writing and photographic awards

## Sponsored by:

**OUTDOOR  
SPORTSMAN  
GROUP**



# Excellence in Craft writing awards Judges:



## MAGAZINE FEATURE:

### ⊕ Chris Batin

Chris Batin is the long-time Alaska Editor for TravelAge West magazine and has worked as founding Editor and Publisher of Alaska Angler/Alaska Hunter Publications for 47 years. He has written 10 books, filmed and produced six DVDs and has won in excess of 200 national and regional awards for writing and photography. During the last 10 years he has won five Column of the Year awards from the Northwest Outdoor Writers Association and one from OWAA, and during his career has won 11 OWAA EIC first-place awards for magazine features. Chris received the Enos Bradner Award from NOWA based on lifetime achievement and upholding the high professional standards of outdoor journalism. A chapter of Doug Kelly's book, "Alaska's Greatest Outdoor Legends," is devoted to him. His latest book is "Advanced Alaska Fly Fishing Techniques."

### ⊕ Bob Mitchell

Bob Mitchell, now retired, worked for the Pennsylvania Game Commission for more than 30 years. His primary responsibility was serving as Editor of the agency's Pennsylvania Game News magazine, but he also produced several books, countless brochures and reports and many other handouts.

### ⊕ Slaton White

Slaton White is the Editor of SHOT Business magazine, the largest-circulated trade magazine in the shooting industry. He was formerly the Editor of Field & Stream magazine.

## MAGAZINE COLUMN:

### ⊕ Jack Burnett

Jack Burnett is managing editor of The Old Farmer's Almanac, a publication for which he has worked for 22 of the 47 years he has been a writer and editor. A New Hampshire resident now, Jack grew up in New York State, where he learned to hunt, fish and trap amidst the forests, fields and streams of Rensselaer County.

### ⊕ Laurie Lee Dovey

Laurie Lee Dovey is a highly awarded writer and photographer, with work published in scores of magazines and newspapers. She is also a media consultant and mentor. Laurie Lee is a past president of the Outdoor Writers Association of America. She was a founder of the Professional Outdoor Media Association and served as the organization's Executive Director for 10 years.

### ⊕ Vin T. Sparano

Vin T. Sparano has been an outdoor editor and writer for more than 50 years. He is Editor Emeritus of Outdoor Life magazine, having served as Editor-in-Chief in 1990-1995 and as Executive Editor for more than 10 years prior to that appointment. His professional experience includes syndicated features for USA Today and Gannett Newspapers. He has written 20 books, including

his Complete Outdoors Encyclopedia, winner of the Professional Outdoor Media Association Pinnacle Book Award in 2015. In fact, his books have won Pinnacle Awards for three consecutive years. Vin is listed in Who's Who in America.

## NEWSPAPER FEATURE:

### ⊕ Jeff Davis

Jeff Davis has been the editor of Whitetails Unlimited Magazine for 20 years. He previously worked as a freelance photojournalist for 25 years, producing images for more than 300 newspapers, magazines, and corporations. He is a member of the Professional Outdoor Media Association and has served as president of the Association of Great Lakes Outdoor Writers.

### ⊕ Bill Monroe

Bill Monroe is the retired Outdoor Writer for The Oregonian and continues contributing to that newspaper as a contract freelancer. He is a past president of both the Outdoor Writers Association of America and Northwest Outdoor Writers Association and has won numerous writing and photography awards.

### ⊕ Tom Wharton

Tom Wharton is a semi-retired writer for the Salt Lake Tribune, after a long career as that newspaper's Outdoor Editor. He is a past president of the Outdoor Writers Association of America.

## NEWSPAPER COLUMN:

### ⊕ Ben Moyer

Ben Moyer is Outdoors Columnist for the Pittsburgh (Pa.) Post-Gazette and a columnist for both Pennsylvania Game News and Pennsylvania Outdoor News. His articles have appeared in prestigious publications, such as Gray's Sporting Journal. He served as the longtime Editor of Pennsylvania Sportsman Magazine. His communication skills have been recognized by OWAA with its lifetime Excellence in Craft Award.

### ⊕ Brett Prettyman

Brett Prettyman served as Intermountain Communications Director for Trout Unlimited. He previously served as outdoor editor and environmental writer for the Salt Lake (Utah) Tribune and covered outdoor-related issues for that newspaper for 25 years. He has written three outdoor-related books and has received two Emmys for his work as producer, writer and host of the "Utah Bucket List" television show. Brett is a past president of the Outdoor Writers Association of America.

### ⊕ Mark Taylor

Mark Taylor is Eastern Communications Director for Trout Unlimited. He was formerly the Outdoors Editor of The Roanoke (Va.) Times. He is past president of the Outdoor Writers Association of America and former chair of its Newspaper Section.

## ONLINE:

### ⊕ John L. Beath

John Beath's YouTube channel, Let's Talk Outdoors ([www.youtube.com/jbeath](http://www.youtube.com/jbeath)), has had more than 3.5 million video views. His primary online writing sites are [halibutchronicles.com](http://halibutchronicles.com) and [salmonchronicles.com](http://salmonchronicles.com). He has served as an editor of Western Outdoors, has syndicated newspaper outdoor and travel columns and hosted a syndicated radio program. He also was the Editor of [GoFishMagazine.com](http://GoFishMagazine.com). He is a past president of the Outdoor Writers Association of America.

### ⊕ Tim Lesmeister

Tim Lesmeister is a full-time freelance outdoor writer, photographer and radio host. He began writing about outdoor pursuits in 1977 and made it a full-time career in 1987. Tim was President of the Association of Great Lakes Outdoor Writers (AGLOW) and was the 2013 recipient of AGLOW's highest honor, its lifetime achievement Golden Glow Excellence in Craft Award. He is currently a columnist for Outdoor News and host of Outdoor News Radio and was inducted into the 2020 class of the Minnesota Fishing Hall of Fame. Tim is the Chairman of the International Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame Selection Committee and is a member of the Southeast Outdoor Press Association.

### ⊕ Steve Waters

Steve Waters is the Outdoors Writer for the Miami Herald and also contributes features to Salt Water Sportsman magazine, [SportFishingMag.com](http://SportFishingMag.com), The Parklander and JAKES Country. He has written and produced online videos about the outdoors for the South Florida Sun Sentinel newspaper. He was the cohost of The Weekly Fisherman radio show for 14 ½ years on Miami's WINZ 940-AM. Steve served as the assistant sports director for WCFT-TV, where he produced numerous outdoors features for the CBS affiliate in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and worked on a local outdoors TV show as a producer, writer and cameraman.

## BOOK

### ⊕ Jay Cassell

Jay Cassell most recently served as Editorial Consultant for Skyhorse Publishing. Recipient of the Excellence in Craft Award from OWAA in 2009, Cassell has been published in Time, Business Week, Popular Mechanics, and most major outdoor magazines, and has written or edited seven books. He has served on the editorial staffs of Field & Stream, Outdoor Life and Sports Afield magazines. He graduated from Syracuse University with an MA in communications and has lived in New York State his entire life.

### ⊕ Steve Griffin

Freelancer Steve Griffin was for more than four decades the outdoor columnist for the Midland (Mich.) Daily News and is a field editor and columnist for Michigan Outdoor News, as well as a regular contributor to Boating magazine. Steve has also crafted museum text and taught courses in newspaper/magazine feature writing at the college level as an adjunct instructor. He is a member of the Outdoor Writers Association of America, the Association of Great Lakes Outdoor Writers and the Michigan Outdoor Writers Association.



## A message from our PRESIDENT

Chris Paparo

It is my pleasure to congratulate the recipients of the 2022 New York State Outdoor Writers Association's Excellence in Craft Awards and the Janice M. Keesler Memorial Photo Awards. This annual contest gives NYSOWA members a chance to showcase their work by being judged against some of the best writers and photographers in the state—and beyond.

We would have no awards program if it were not for the numerous entries submitted by our membership. Thank you for continuing to raise the bar each year. The awards program pushes each of us to become better at our craft.

Administering these awards programs is no easy feat, and Glenn Sapir and Deborah Brosen have done an outstanding job chairing them. Processing each entry, sending them off to the judges for review, organizing the awards for each of the winners and creating the presentation at the awards banquet takes a ton of work. I want to thank them for making this year's awards program a success.

I would also like to thank the many judges who volunteered their time to carefully review each of the entries. As we all know, time is extremely valuable, and we are deeply grateful to these exceptional professionals for taking the time out of their busy schedules to decide which entries they deemed the best of the best.

The world-class-quality first-place awards and the handsome second- and third-place certificates and cash awards, as well as our annual commemorative awards publication, are made possible by our sponsors, Ducks Unlimited, Redding Reloading Equipment and the Outdoor Sportsman Group, and we thank them for their generous support. I would also like to thank the National Shooting Sports Foundation for its extremely generous support in sponsoring the awards dinner at our annual conference. Hats off, too, to Greg Foster for an outstanding job of designing this awards publication.

Again, congratulations to each of the recipients of the 2022 New York State Outdoor Writers Association's Excellence in Craft Awards and the Janice M. Keesler Memorial Photo Awards, and a big thank you to everyone who made this program possible.

Chris Paparo, President, NYSOWA

# Award winners for articles published in 2021 (Books in 2020 and 2021)

## Magazine Feature

First place

By Paul Schnell

*Chasing 29*

Outdoor Life, No. 4 issue, 2021



You might call Dennis Dunn a romantic pragmatist.

His romantic side fuels a lifelong love of pursuing wild animals with only a stick and a string. It has motivated his unreasonable quest to harvest all 29 species of big-game mammals in North America. His practical side, though, reckoned that, at 79 years old at the time, he likely didn't have enough years left to successfully draw a limited bison tag in one of the five states that offer them. So two years ago, Dunn cut the line of unsuccessful applicants and bought at auction what is called the Arizona governor's bison license, which goes to the highest bidder and gives the holder 365 days to hunt.

Last year, Dunn spent 71 of those 365 days in a ground blind on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, just a few yards outside Grand Canyon National Park. This is when his romantic side numbed him to the tedium of spending 12 hours every day inside a dark tent, in a straight-backed chair, peering out at the same changeless view for more than 10 weeks.

He read the Bible—all of the New Testament and about half of the Old Testament. He read about Abraham, who at 100 years old begat his son Isaac with the formerly childless Sarah. He read about patient Job, whose faith was rewarded by twice as many riches as were taken from him in a challenge of his resolve. But he didn't read only about tests of endurance and faith. Dunn also read about the Kaibab Plateau bison herd, and about how the older bulls have become nocturnal since hunting was initiated as a population-management tool.

He knew that any chance to take one with his recurve bow in the daylight hours would be sudden and fleeting. So for those 71 days he somehow remained vigilant and ready, even though he saw bison on only seven of those days.

"I describe it as my 71-day COVID quarantine," says Dunn, whose pursuit of the North American 29 with instinctive archery gear—no sights or releases or poundage-amplifying cams and none of the pulleys of a compound bow—is detailed in his 2008 book, *Barebowl: An Archer's Fair-Chase Taking of North America's Big-Game 29*.



A 380-inch Arizona bull taken on public land in 2015.

On day 71, just as he was packing up to leave the blind, Dunn sensed an animal's approach. An ancient bison bull was walking directly toward his blind, headed for a salt block nine yards from his hide. The bull was facing directly toward Dunn, but when the bison lifted a hoof to turn, Dunn drew his bow, a Whitetail Hawk recurve drawing 60 pounds at his 31-inch draw.

"I had learned from watching bison that you have a split second when they turn to slip an arrow between their ribs."

The bull went only 18 yards before he went down, his life taken by an 800-grain wooden arrow driving a single-bevel two-bladed broadhead.

Dunn had only three more days before his tag expired, but he had achieved his goal, adding one more North American game animal to the Pope and Young Club's book of archery records. His next, and final, Pope and Young critter would be an Alaska barren-ground caribou. So he was back at it last August, now 81 years old but with the drive and ambition of a man half—or even a quarter—his age.

### AN INTENTIONAL LIFE

Dennis Dunn has lived a singular life that's been devoted to achievement of one sort or another.

He was born in 1940 to a family of nonhunters. Dunn's mother borrowed from her experience as a Stanford University undergrad who had taken formal archery instruction for her athletic activity.

"When I was 5 years old, my mother brought home a toy set of bows and arrows with rubber cups on the ends of the arrows," Dunn recalls. "At age 7, Mother sent me off to summer camp, where they had real bows and arrows with steel tips. There I became addicted to the sport of bowhunting. Over the next few years, I spent my time fantasizing over how American Indians snuck through the forest with bow and arrow in hand, in quest of a deer or elk."

An early friendship with Glenn St. Charles, the pioneering founder of the Pope and Young Club, intensified Dunn's interest in archery. His first two bows were recurves, one with an aluminum riser, the second a 50-pound fiberglass model.

Dunn did plenty of hunting with compounds, albeit without sights attached for aiming. But in 2006, he returned to his traditional-archery roots and mainly carried his Whitetail Hawk, built by Steve Gorr's Cascade Archery. At Dunn's 31-inch draw, the bow pulls 60 pounds, a substantial draw weight for archers even half his age.

Hunting might be Dunn's life calling, but he's had a career in politics—he served as a high-ranking officer of the Republican National Committee (for a time he was married to six-term Washington congresswoman Jennifer Dunn). He also had a career in public policy, serving as director of international trade organizations. He's worked as a securities broker. He writes poetry as well as books and is a devoted patron of the opera. He now lives in Sun Valley, Idaho.

Bowhunting has been the throughline in his life, and he reflects on his accomplishments with a sense of both achievement and restlessness. Why does he pursue it with such intensity and purpose?

First, his audacious achievements did not necessarily start as lifetime goals. Instead, "My hunting career has consisted of a series of smaller goals, used like stepping-stones to progress from one to the next," he says. "With each success, my confidence would grow, and I would focus my sights on a new goal, a different species, or a bigger buck or bull. Eventually, as my dreams began to coalesce around ever more ambitious goals in the bowhunting world, I finally came to realize that there was virtually nothing I could not achieve provided I was willing to work hard enough, be patient enough, and make the sacrifices necessary to get there."

That pursuit of personal growth is the real, intangible trophy



An Arizona bison bull taken with a governor's tag in August 2020.

of his career as a hunter. But Dunn recognizes that the world is built on expressions of overt achievement—trophies—and his collection of record-book, traditional- archery kills has elevated him to the top of the bowhunting pantheon. This fact hasn't changed his perspective on what a trophy animal means.

"A trophy is a very personal thing for me, as it is for anyone," says Dunn. "For me, the experience is the trophy, the opportunity to hunt the most remarkable landscapes on Earth. But the first animal I ever took with a bow was a squirrel, and that was a trophy. My first mule deer—a doe that I shot when I was 24—was a great trophy."

### PURSUIT WITH PURPOSE

Dunn doesn't meander in the mushy margins of defining a trophy. For him, the definition is simple: an animal that's better, as defined by dimensions of antler or skull, than those of that species he previously killed.

In other words, it's a measure of personal improvement, no matter how you quantify it.

"My father was a high jumper at the University of Washington," says Dunn. "I can't recall what he cleared—something over 6 feet—but I remember him talking about what a challenge it was. How he trained, and every day he tried to improve his personal best. For me, that's what hunting is. It's about the challenge and hope that I can clear the bar that I've set for myself."

Once he achieved his goal of killing all 29 North American big-game species with traditional archery equipment, Dunn set about raising the bar for his next goal: taking specimens that make the Pope and Young record book.

When Dunn arrowed that massive Kaibab Plateau bison—which just misses the Boone and Crockett record book but easily makes the Pope and Young book—he was well on his way to "upgrading" all of his North American critters.

His last remaining "upgrade" is that Alaska barren ground caribou.

"All animals were taken using purely instinctive shooting," says Dunn. "No archer has yet accomplished that goal. Only five have done so with compound bows and yardage sight pins for aiming."

Dunn's accomplishments are memorialized in his 504-page book, which weighs more than 9 pounds and is equal parts natural history overview, chronicle of hunting from 1964 through 2004, and ruminations on what it means to be a trophy hunter.

More specifically, Dunn is a trophy hunter who greatly limits his lethal range. This is, as pioneering bowhunter Howard Hill put it, "hunting the hard way."



A Boone and Crockett cougar taken with an Osage orange self-bow.

“The stickbow hunter knows that the odds are stacked against him, but he embraces the hardship,” says Dunn. “You learn to enjoy the challenge of willfully limiting yourself to a weapon of limited range in order to make the contest more equal. And when you accept that you will only release an arrow at a specimen that’s at least larger than the previous one you killed, then you understand that you may be looking for an animal you will not find, or if you do, it might not be killable.”

But Dunn counts close encounters as nearly equal to kills. Given his incredible bowhunting success, most would expect Dunn to be an elite archer, but that’s not necessarily the case.

“I’m not a very good shot with a bow, so I’ve honed my hunting skills to the extent that I’ve become a very good stalker,” he says. “When I voluntarily limit myself, I give my quarry all the advantages, and an old male at the end of his life has significant advantages, of keen smell and hearing and sense of movement as well as intimate knowledge of their terrain.

“All I have are my wits and intelligence, but using them to get so close, and so far inside an animal’s fight-or-flight perimeter, makes it possible for me to connect with my Paleolithic ancestors, and to observe Mother Nature in a way few others can. I thus become part of that natural world.

“Even if I don’t find the quality buck or bull I’m searching for during an entire week of hunting, if I experience a very close encounter with a doe deer or cow elk or moose or caribou, that produces nearly as big a thrill for me as arrowing the mature male animal I was seeking.”

Dunn’s decades of hunting every species from musk ox and brown bears to Coues deer and tule elk have taught him that careful hunters have one weapon that can be just as deadly

as a modern firearm: patience.

“I have time, patience,” says Dunn. “The biggest difference between a successful and unsuccessful bowhunter is patience.”

But Dunn, who turns 82 in May, is aware that while he has talent, resources, and patience in spades, he is running out of mortal time.

He has one more goal to achieve before he can turn his attention to other benchmarks, which might include more publications detailing his remarkable experiences traveling the continent hunting big game.

That trophy Alaska barren-ground caribou eluded him last August. As he was homing in on candidate bulls over the course of 25 days in the bush, he tore his calf muscle. For a few days he shrugged off the injury, hobbling around the muskeg. But the torn muscle kept him from getting within stickbow range of a target bull.

Dunn finally conceded and flew home for medical attention. But he intends to be back on Alaska’s tundra in the fall of 2022, his eyes firmly fixed on the bar he has set for himself.

“I intend to hunt until I drop, in order to have lived the fullest life possible, as close to Mother Nature as I could get, and so that I might better understand and more fully appreciate the limitless number of miracles that God Almighty has created on this planet. But I realize that I am now very much in a race with Father Time.” ■

## Magazine Column

First place



Tom Schlichter

*Northeast Seaboard: Cape Cod’s Great White Shark Activity*

Southern Boating and Yachting, June 2021

Anyone who has ever dipped a toe in the ocean has probably considered the possibility of a shark attack. Such events are extremely rare, but they can have disastrous results, especially when the largest of the predator fish species, the great white shark, is involved.

There’s little doubt that shark sightings and interactions with humans have been increasing over the past decade along the New York and New England coasts. The uptick in some areas, such as off Cape Cod, Massachusetts, may link to the expanding seal populations that serve as a shark food source. A new study published in the journal *Wildlife Research* last April focused on the travels of great white sharks in the waters off Cape Cod. It resulted in some interesting data, the most striking being great whites in the study area spent nearly half of their time in water depths of 15 feet or less, often close to public swimming spots. The study was funded by the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy (AWSC), a nonprofit that provides financing and resources for scientific research to improve public safety and educate the community about white sharks.

It’s no secret that great whites cruise the shoreline along this famous stretch looking to predate on seals during the summer and fall. Still, until now, there was precious little data as to how much time the big predators spent in shallow waters close to shore. While shark sightings in Cape Cod are



Research has shown great white sharks spend nearly half of their time in shallow water off the coast of Cape Cod.

fairly common these days, shark attacks are not. There have been four unprovoked attacks reported since 2012. The one fatality in 2018 was the first in Massachusetts since 1936.

For the study, lead author Megan Winton, a research scientist with the conservancy, and co-authors, Dr. James Sulikowski and Dr. Gregory Skomal, analyzed tagging data collected by the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries off the coast of Cape Cod during the summer and fall of 2017. The tags recorded temperature and depth data and were used to characterize the habitat preferences of white sharks when in the area. Sharks spent 95 percent of their tracked times at depths of 0 to 100 feet and water temperatures ranging from 48 to 69 degrees Fahrenheit. Great whites, specifically, spent almost half (47 percent) of their time at depths of less than 15 feet while alternating between the surf zone and deeper offshore waters.

“It’s important to note, these data are specific to the Cape Cod study waters and can not be extrapolated up and down the coast as the seals likely draw the sharks into the shallow waters where they are most densely packed,” explains Skomal. “If you live in an area without seals, you probably don’t have to worry about great whites. On the other hand, if you are managing beaches on Cape Cod, or you are a surfer, surfcaster, or enjoy swimming and water sports close to shore along the Massachusetts coastline, keep aware of this information.”

“It’s important to realize sharks hunt for seals in shallow water, and areas with seals or visible schools of fish should be avoided,” adds Cynthia Wigren, AWSC’s CEO. “If you go in the water, stay close to shore where rescuers can reach you, and swim, paddle, kayak, or surf in groups; don’t isolate yourself.” Other tips to evade shark interactions include avoiding murky water where a shark might mistake you for a seal, limiting splashing, adhering to all signage and flag warnings at beaches, and following lifeguard instructions.

Skomal also notes that the conservancy recently created a new app, *White Shark Logbook* ([shiny.atlanticwhiteshark.org/logbook](http://shiny.atlanticwhiteshark.org/logbook)). It uses acoustic data from tagged sharks to track their near shore presence in Massachusetts coastal waters. “You can track any individual white shark we’ve tagged along the Massachusetts coastline, see an overlay of all tagged great whites, and select great white tag detections by year,” he says.

View the study’s summary at [atlanticwhiteshark.org/white-shark-news/2021/3/25/new-research-sheds-light-on-the-habits-of-white-sharks-off-cape-cod](http://atlanticwhiteshark.org/white-shark-news/2021/3/25/new-research-sheds-light-on-the-habits-of-white-sharks-off-cape-cod). ■

## Newspaper Feature

First place



Tom Schlichter

*Angling for the Perfect Lure*

Newsday, June 20, 2021

Larry Welcome of Cutchogue has been hooked on fishing since his dad took him for the first time at age 5. Like most anglers, Welcome started fishing using bait and targeting smaller, readily available species from shore. As he got older, his fishing techniques grew more sophisticated and he began using artificial lures.

“I threw mostly small lures like bucktails and rubber swimbaits,” he explained, “but as I started catching larger fish in the surf like striped bass, bluefish and weakfish, I found myself needing bigger and better lures called ‘plugs’ in fisherman’s parlance.”

As Welcome, 71, tells it, each step up in fishing proficiency

required a leap in lure size and design, along with a similar increase in the skills required to make an effective presentation. “Of course, money also figured into the equation,” he said, smiling. “Even back in those days, big plugs weren’t inexpensive, and I needed to fill my tackle bag. Since I wasn’t making much money in my younger years, I eventually started making my own surf plugs. It really was a natural progression when you think about it.”

At first, Welcome concentrated on making plugs for his own use in a small machine shop to which he had lunchtime access. Later, he set up a shop in his home and, as his reputation and business started to grow, his operation ultimately landed in an out-of-the-way building on the North Fork.

Today, Welcome enjoys a hard-earned reputation as one of the top designers and builders of surf plugs on the East Coast. While the plugs he sells through his company, **North Bar Tackle**, are now cast in plastic, he continues to create dozens of wooden plugs each year in his prototype shop to test out before approving production runs. These he uses himself or gives away to close friends and fishing “sharpies” to field test, ensuring each new design receives a thorough trial and returns proven results long before it sees mass production.



Larry Welcome holds a wooden plug in his workshop in Cutchogue.

### CONSIDERED CRAFTSMEN

“I guess that’s the short story for most of us who build these things,” said Welcome. “We get drawn in over the years. We love the feel of the wood in our hands, all the steps it takes to shave and model a block of wood until it somehow resembles a real baitfish in size, appearance and the way it moves through the water.”



Chris Voorhies in his workshop in Harbor Isle.

“We appreciate all the hard work that goes into creating the perfect lure for catching big, smart fish, and we marvel at the changes in motion and results that even small alterations can make in a plug’s performance. Once you get started making plugs, there’s really no turning back,” he said.

Chris Voorhies, 46, of Harbor Isle, agrees.

“There’s a need that triggers the progression,” he said with a laugh. “That might be a desire to have the best lure for the type of fishing you like to do, or a need to save or even make money. There are plug builders who consider themselves artists, craftsmen who love working with wood, and even a few people who want the peer recognition that comes with producing a truly productive lure.

“Personally, I love the intricacies of a flawlessly designed fishing plug, from the curves and angles of the head and body to the lip — or lack of one — that produces the ideal swimming action,” Voorhies said. “Then there’s the paint jobs that light up fish and anglers alike ...”

No doubt there are many reasons plug builders get into the trade, but both Welcome and Voorhies said the need for bigger lures that catch lunker fish is always near the core.

“My downfall was the winter season,” explained Voorhies. “I was so passionate about fishing that I needed a way to stay connected during the colder months, and plug building proved the perfect venue. As a kid I was always tinkering with old lures and repainting them. As a grown-up, I bought the machinery to do it on a grander scale.” (You can find Voorhies’ plugs at [instagram.com/cvoorhies](https://www.instagram.com/cvoorhies).)

Relatively new to serious plug building, Voorhies has 20 years’ overall experience, though he has only recently been acknowledged as an expert in his craft. He turns out 400 to 500 custom wooden plugs a year from a machine shop in his garage. In terms of fishing, he likes to key in on big baits, like bunker, in deeper water than most anglers, so he designs larger, deep diving, wooden lures. “For me, these lures are tools. I know collectors think they look great on their walls, but I build them to catch fish, pure and simple,” he said, admitting he has gotten better at painting in the past few years. “I do get a lot of satisfaction out of finishing a plug that looks really sharp.”

Welcome, by comparison, has a considerably larger machine shop and has built between 50,000 and 60,000 handcrafted wooden plugs in his lifetime while his company has produced more than a million plastic plugs. His preference is to fish in rips (areas of strong current), for which he likes a large, yellow darter or similar big-bait mimic. He also sees his lures as a means to an end. Although every custom plug he designs and tests is highly detailed and finished, styles that don’t “catch” are quickly altered or retired.



A collection of wooden plugs that have been used over the years by Chris Voorhies.

## COMBINING FORM, FUNCTION

While these two custom plug builders may not find their craft particularly “artsy,” most people who catch sight of one of their lures suspended in a tackle shop display case admire its beautiful workmanship and sleek, polished appearance. Back in the late 1960s and early 1970s, at the height of plug building activity on Long Island, most plugs sported one or two primary colors; body and lip designs were limited to a few basic styles, too.

Today, though the number of serious plug builders in the area has dwindled from dozens to a precious few, the products the best of the lot turn out are masterpieces of appearance, form and function. They have a lifelike sheen to the finish, wild-looking eyes that mimic a large, panicked baitfish, a smooth, natural blending of colors transitioning from back to belly, and even gill slits painted or etched into the body just behind the head. It’s no wonder many anglers collect plugs from better-known builders, hanging them throughout the house or placing them into shadowboxes where they’ll never be used but never be lost.

Still, the magic of these huge lures, many of which measure 6 to 10 inches long, runs deeper than their beautiful exteriors. “Do you realize how much work goes into making some of these lures?” chided Welcome. “Each one probably takes 20 to 30 steps to complete, and a lot of time can be necessary between some steps. Unless you are highly experienced at this, it can take several hours to complete a single plug.”

Indeed, there are more than a dozen basic plug designs — from metal-lipped swimmers and darters with angled heads that drive them deep on the retrieve to surface poppers, shallow swimmers and even a plug called the “needlefish,” which is shaped like a thin cigar and often catches big fish at night when retrieved as slowly as the angler can bear.

Yet construction of just about any surf plug follows the same basic steps. As Welcome explained it in abbreviated version: a length of wood is cut to the approximate lure length and width; it’s then placed on a lathe and trimmed to the desired shape. Next the lure is pre-drilled to accept body weights that add casting distance, balance the lure in the water and allow for a through-wire that provides a line tie at the nose while securing both the belly and tail hooks that will be added after painting is completed. After serious sanding, the lure is sealed with a water repellent or waterproof material and allowed to dry. Five to 15 coats of airbrushed paint later, plus more sealant and commensurate drying times, and the plug is ready to do its thing — whether that be to tempt a record striper or shine in a shadowbox down the hallway.

## CATERING TO CUSTOMERS

Craftsmen like Welcome and Voorhies generally have “standards,” which allow them to replicate measurements quickly and easily. Still, all that time and work invested comes at a premium price for the angler or collector.

Available in tackle shops that cater to surf fishermen, at outdoors shows and, of course, online, custom-crafted wooden surf plugs can run anywhere from \$30 to \$75 a pop, and sometimes much more.

Ken Morse, proprietor of Tight Lines Bait and Tackle in Sag Harbor, doesn’t make surf plugs, but he sells them, fishes with them and collects a few as well. “It’s great to have custom plugs here in the shop,” he said. “Our customers appreciate all the minute details plug makers cut in these days, and there’s no doubt these lures catch big fish, especially stripers. From a sales perspective, they really stand out amongst the mass-produced lures.”

While Morse, who also lives in Sag Harbor, is happy to sell plugs, he keeps part of his personal collection in a large custom case on a shop wall — and those aren’t for sale. “I love to collect squid plugs,” he explained, “I find squid to be among the most intelligent and interesting creatures on the planet, so when I see a nice custom squid plug, I usually buy it. I’m not wealthy, but I’ll spend up to \$130 for a plug I find unique. I picture the plug builders looking at a squid photo and then using their airbrushes to make the wood come to life in vibrant colors.”

At age 86, Don Musso of Farmingdale, is the reigning dean of Long Island plug builders, acknowledged by many, including Voorhies and Welcome, for his influence on their own designs. Musso started Super Strike Lures, in 1976, a wholesale seller of plastic replicas of Musso’s originals. These days, his son Steve, 53, of Amityville, a plug builder in his own right, runs daily operations.

“It’s amazing to look back to the glory years of plug

building here on Long Island,” said Don. “In the 1960s and ’70s there were plenty of us because the only way to get the big lures we needed was to custom-build them ourselves.

We had more big bass in our surf waters then, so there was a lot of demand to produce original work, introduce new styles and build upon earlier successes.”

The elder Musso still builds wooden prototypes. “I never stopped, never will,” he said boldly, “and I’m proud to have influenced many of the custom plug builders we have today. We didn’t care about how artistic our lures were when I started out. We just wanted them to work — and work they did. We never imagined they might someday be collectibles.”

Voorhies said he can relate to that, and while he’s never been much for collecting plugs, he is glad that other people have. “We can look back and see how master plug builders like Stand Gibbs from Cape Cod, Dan Pichney of Queens and Donny Musso made design improvements and tackled different problems,” he said. “Maybe we can even incorporate a little of their paint schemes into our own work as tribute.

Who knows, maybe one day when I’m gone someone will be inspired by one of my lures they find in a collection. I think I might be OK with that — even if my plug ultimately ended up on somebody’s wall.”

## SIMPLE TIPS FOR CATCHING BASS ON PLUGS

- Larry Welcome of North Bar Tackle: “You can’t go wrong with yellow for striped bass.”
- Chris Voorhies of Voorhies Customs: “Go deep for big fish.”
- Don Musso of Super Strike Lures: “Blue and white plugs work great if there is a September mullet run along the South Shore.”
- Ken Morse of Tight Lines Bait and Tackle: “Nothing beats a pencil popper for raising bass and blues to the surface.”

## 5 GREAT PLUG TYPES

**Pencil poppers:** Great for long casts to reach big fish breaking on the surface. Work rapidly for big blues, slower and more deliberate for large striped bass.

**Needlefish:** Known as a “do nothing lure.” Fish it on the midnight shift with a retrieve barely fast enough to keep the line tight.

**Darters:** Use in strong currents, allowing the lure to naturally sweep left and right while retrieved against the flow. An occasional slight pause followed by two pumps of the rod sometimes triggers vicious strikes.

**Metal-lip plugs:** These plugs feature a big metal lip on the front that causes the lure to dig in and wiggle seductively. Some run on the surface, some just below, and others swim deep. Use around large baits like adult bunker.

**Swimmers:** With a slimmer profile than darters and metal-lip plugs, these lures imitate smaller baits like spearing or sand eels. Productive in daylight but awesome at night. Comes in both surface and subsurface versions. ■

## Second Place

⊕ **Paula Piatt**

*Is Professional Training Necessary for a Well-Oiled Canine Machine*

Pennsylvania Outdoor News, Aug. 13, 2020

## Third Place (Tie)

⊕ **David Figura**

*Angler Enjoys the Challenge, Funny Side of Catching Fish*

The Post Standard, Aug. 5, 2021

⊕ **Glenn Sapir**

*Turkey Hunting Strategies for Seniors*

New York Outdoor News, April 2, 2021

# Newspaper Column

## First place

**Steve Piatt**  
*Still Out There Dreaming of the Dacks*  
Morning Times, Aug. 19, 2021



I miss the Adirondacks, especially during deer season, where I made the transition from farm country to big-woods hunting rather seamlessly. I never did take down one of those

200-pound, heavy-racked bruisers, but I had some success and lots of excitement as I tracked whitetails in the backcountry.

Don’t get me wrong; I’m thrilled to be home and this is where we’ll stay, and I enjoy hunting both sides of the Pa.-N.Y. border. But I’ll probably head north sometime this fall, when there’s tracking snow in the ‘Dacks and big bucks are on the prowl.

Just about every Adirondack deer hunter has stories of big buck encounters at the worst possible time. Stacking wood outside on a fall day. Driving to a high school soccer game or the post office. Walking the dog up the road just before sundown.

Always without a gun in their hand. Sometimes the buck of their dreams.

I’m no exception. A bruiser of a rut-crazed buck strolled in front of my pickup one evening as I headed to a meeting. His stiff-legged gait, swollen neck and heavy rack sent me into a rubbery-legged mess. I wobbled into the meeting, hands

shaking, in need of a cigarette. And I don’t smoke.

It happened again a couple years later as I returned from the post office mid-morning, loaded down with three Labrador retrievers who had just taken an energetic run on the town golf course.

This time, however, it wasn’t just a good buck. It was the biggest buck I’d ever seen in my life.

The nausea returns even as I type this. I see his rack: wide, thick, high, bright yellow with patches of deep brown. I see his body: thick, wide, long, definitely topping 200 pounds on the hoof, probably 200 or more field dressed. I see the leaves and rocks flying as he lumbers up the hill, bounding away with incredible power, then looking back one last time before shaking the rain off his body, sending a watery spray that glistened in the morning sun, and strolling off into those big woods that require a serious effort to hunt.

I see our yellow Lab, Maddie, watching intently as the big buck – seriously big – leaps in front of the pickup, bounds up onto the bank and powers off. Even she was impressed. We both needed a cigarette.

I've seen big bucks before. I generally err on the side of caution, careful not to become caught up in the excitement of the moment, sizing up the situation, and making sure I saw what I saw and then backing off my assessment a bit. Even after doing this, this remains the biggest buck I'd ever seen, at least in looking at the total picture. The biggest rack? No. The biggest body? By far. Most beautiful whitetail ever? Easily.

This was the kind of buck that would cause a serious deer hunter to quit his job, leave his family for a month, sleep under a tarp and eat Ramen noodles every night in pursuit of him. In fact, I know a few guys in the Adirondacks who do just that.

In trying to size him up, the best I've come up with is that buck on the cover of Bryce Towsley's book, "Big Bucks the Benoit Way." Or, if you're handy with Photoshop, grab a

picture of former MMA star Brock Lesnar and put a thick, even, high set of antlers on him.

What made the sighting even more painful was that the big boy was coming from an area where I'd spent most of my hunting time that fall. It's entirely possible – even though I don't want to think about it – he made his way past one of my watches an hour or two earlier.

That year, I could have been the one on the other end of the camera.

Oh, I still get out there, hoping another monster buck makes another swing through. It's about as unlikely as having him cross the road in front of me while singing a Brad Paisley tune, which is what I was doing when it did happen. So it can happen up there. And it does. I see the photos every year, hear my friends' stories. Watch big bucks get weighed in at a couple local taverns.

I drove to the post office every day, and during that time of year when love-starved bucks are on the move I was almost afraid to turn my head and check the woods and fields, fearing I might see another buck of my dreams. ■

## Online Publication

### First place



David Figura

*Finger Lakes Land Trust Began as Cornell Master's Degree Project, Now Covers 26,000 Acres*  
NYUP.com, Oct. 13, 2021

The Finger Lakes Land Trust was created as Andrew Zepp's master's degree project at Cornell University back in the late 1980s when he was pursuing a graduate degree in natural resource policy.

"I grew up in the Hudson Valley and when I came to Ithaca and went to Cornell I fell in love with the landscape and saw areas that I knew would change in the future – the beautiful gorges, the remaining undeveloped shoreline along the lakes," he said.

The then, 25-year-old graduate student, who had experience in conservation and in the forming of a landtrust in Connecticut, used that background in the late 1980s to gather some folks together in the Ithaca area and eventually throughout the Finger lakes region who shared his passion to create the non-profit Finger Lakes Land Trust in 1989.

"It was my idea, but I wasn't the founding president. I recruited and trained the founding board of directors. I just knew it would take off because there are so many people who value the resources of our region," he said. "This notion of a consensus-based approach is very appealing to people. It clicked very quickly.

"The key to a land trust is that we don't tell landowners what to do with their land," he said. "Instead, we figure out what's the win-win solution that meets their personal, family and financial goals and that conserves their property, whether its lake shoreline, productive farmland, wildlife habitat -- whatever."

Today at age 58, Zepp, after pursuing several other career opportunities after getting his master's degree from Cornell, is the executive director of the land trust – a position he has held for the past 18 years.

The Finger Lakes Land Trust, at 26,000 acres is among the biggest and most expansive land trusts in the state. It has "saved" a host of properties in the Finger Lakes region through a combination of creating public nature preserves and helping landowners to conserve their properties by buying development rights and conservation easements.

The land trust's mission is to "conserve forever the lands and waters of the Finger Lakes region, ensuing scenic vistas, local foods, clean water and wild places for everyone."

Based in Ithaca, Zepp said the land trust has a 16-person staff – four that just focus on land management issues – and a network of 200 volunteers throughout the region "who do everything from being our eyes and ears in monitoring properties, constructing and rehabilitating trails and addressing invasive species issues."



Andrew Zepp, executive director of the Finger Lakes Land Trust. The land trust started as his master's degree project at Cornell University and was created in 1989.

"Frankly, we couldn't possibly do what needs to be done without our extensive volunteer network," he said.

The following are excerpts from a recent interview with Zepp:

**So after you formed the land trust and was working with it for a few years you went away. What did you do?** "I was away for about 13 years. For six years I stayed in the region and worked for the Nature Conservancy – staying connected to conservation work in Central and Western New York. And for nearly seven years, I went to Washington, D.C. and worked for the Land Trust Alliance, an umbrella group for all land trusts. But I couldn't resist coming back to the Finger Lakes and returned and have been with the land trust for about 18 years."

**What was the first project initiated?** "It was a beautiful gorge that is about a mile from downtown Ithaca. Called Lick Brook Gorge, it is traversed by the Finger Lakes Trail and is part of a 2,000-acre block of conservation land that also includes Buttermilk Falls and Robert Treman state parks. The pristine area was clearly in the path of development. The land trust cultivated a relationship with the landowner. It took a number of years, but we ultimately acquired it and now manage it. It's still pristine and you can visit it today.

**Talk about the land trust's 26,000 acres.** Our holdings stretch from one end of the Finger Lakes to the other. We have around 6,000 acres of nature preserves (nearly 40 in total), which are open to the public to use and enjoy, and the rest is conservation and development rights. (See the Finger Lakes Land Trust website for an interactive map showing all the nature preserves, including details about each parcel, trail maps and directions to get there).

**How do you acquire these parcels and where does the money come from?** "Our projects are a mix of purchases and sometimes that involves buying land outright. Other times we acquire a conservation easement that limits development, while allowing the land to remain in private ownership. Sometimes, the land acquisitions are donations. Funding for the land trust comes largely from individuals. We have some 4,000 families across the region that currently support us. In addition, on some projects we may get public money from grants. We've also been helped in various ways by other conservation agencies to acquire land and by getting assistance from towns, counties, the state and other non-profits. But most of what we have has come primarily through individual philanthropy."

**Your mission statement mentions conserving "local foods." How are you doing that?** "By working with the Finger Lakes agricultural community through conservation easements. We purchase development rights from farms that are in the path of development. So that in places like Canandaigua or near Skaneateles, we work with several farmers who intend to continue farming and pass it on to the next generation. With support from New York State grants, we've purchased development rights and these farmers then plow that money back into their operations to expand or to allow for generational change to the land. It's really important that in areas like Canandaigua that has some of the most productive soils in the Northeast that we retain those lands because it's quite possible that a generation or two down the road that Central Valley in California won't be able to continue producing all the stuff we now see in Wegmans. It's securing our most productive soils so that in the future they're still available."

**These nature preserves, what public uses are allowed? Hunting? Fishing?** "These areas vary in size from say an acre of lake front on a very important spot to 800 acres in other areas. We have to balance access, safety and habitat protection. Typically, our preserves have a parking lot with hiking trails, which is a very popular use. Hiking, wildlife watching, walking your dog hiking. We also put effort to safely accommodate deer management and each year we provide about 300 free permits to allow deer hunting on some properties. The permits issued take into consideration safety and size of the property. Sometimes the hunting allowed varies. For a smaller site, it may be bow hunting only. Contact our Ithaca office about the options and availability (of these permits). As for fishing, it's a mix. Some areas we do provide access to fishing opportunities on trout streams and lake shores, and in some areas there are only small ponds, which are not open to fishing."

## Second Place

⊕ **Dan Ladd**

*Getting Around: Thankful for Thanksgiving Day Hunts*  
New York Outdoor News, Nov. 13, 2021

## Third Place

⊕ **Glenn Sapir**

*Here and There, Now and Then: Losing Things, Especially Afield*  
New York Outdoor News, Sept. 17, 2021

**Any short-term goals you'd like to mention?** "One we're pursuing with a lot of other people is to come up with solutions to the harmful algal blooms we're having on your lakes. We think it's an existential threat to our region. The land trust alone is not going to address it, but we recognize we need to play a role in working with local governments and 11 lake associations. It's critical to the future of the Finger Lakes."

**Anything else you'd like to mention?** "It's something not just limited to a land trust. We need to make people aware of how we're changing our environment around us and that is a combination of things like climate change and the introduction of non-native, invasive plants and animals. And the last piece of the puzzle is the area's growing deer population, which can have a big effect on the future of our forests. The challenge is that people may walk in their woods and think it looks fine, but actually when you go out two generations, say about 40 years, there are some really significant changes we need to address. It's really in slow motion in many cases. However, if we don't address them, these habitats will be degraded."

**Do you have a favorite piece of property, anything you're particularly proud of acquiring?** "There's so many, I don't have a favorite. I kind of love them all because of their variety. When you're in Corning, you can literally walk out of the south side of the city and you'll be in a wooded terrain and see black bear, which is so different than the rolling farmlands around Skaneateles."

"One thing I'm particularly proud of recently is our progress in shoreline acquisitions. About five years ago we realized that we were seeing the last of our undeveloped shoreline disappear in the Finger Lakes to development. So we've made a concerted effort the last few years to secure some of the last undeveloped shoreline and it's worked. Particularly in partnerships involving the state, we've established shoreline conservation areas on Skaneateles Lake, where we own a chunk, a 2,000 foot stretch at Staghorn Cliffs."

"Last year we opened a nature preserve on the east shore of Owasco Lake that's now open to the public. On Cayuga Lake we have 2,000 feet of shoreline on the west shore (and recently acquired 4,000 more feet in Tompkins County) -- and some on Canandaigua Lake, a hard area to secure land. We've really made a lot of progress." ■



The Finger Lakes Land trust recently acquired this 4,000-foot of shoreline on the eastern shore of Cayuga Lake, including 200 acres beyond. Sharon Heller photo.

## Second Place

⊕ **David Figura**

*One Man's Solitary Life of Trapping, Smoking and Selling Eels on the Delaware River*  
NUP.com, Aug. 29, 2021

## Third Place

⊕ **Megan Plete Postol**

*BOW Weekend Offers Women Opportunity for Challenge, Learning*  
Adirondack Explorer, Oct. 19, 2021

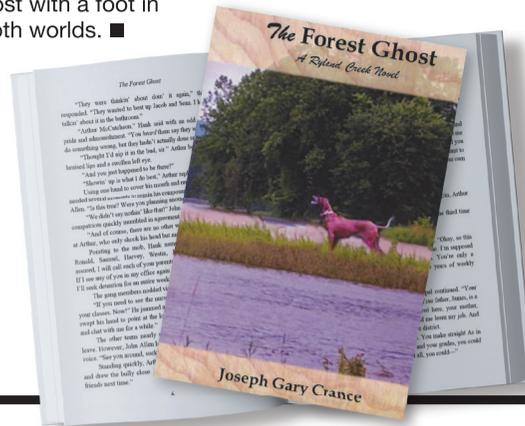
# Book

## First place

**Joseph Gary Crance**  
*The Forest Ghost: A Ryland Creek Novel*  
 Lulu Publishing Services, 2021



Arthur learns about the woods and life from the venerable Seneca chief, John “Gray Eyes” Cornplanter. It won’t be easy as Gray Eyes, his daughter, Mist, and wife, Shell, try to teach the bumbling if eager teenager. But one thing is certain. There’s something different about this youth from Painted Post with a foot in both worlds. ■



In 1962, young Arthur McCutcheon hails from a well-to-do family who wanted ivied collegiate walls for him. Instead, Arthur is drawn to the tree-covered hills of Painted Post. Just beginning to explore the forests, Arthur’s life is turned upside down by villainous schemes, and his future quickly becomes murky. Thrust into a new world with Renee, his loyal hound,

## Second Place

⊕ **Joseph Gary Crance**  
*The Master of Hounds: Book IV of the Ryland Creek Saga*  
 Lulu Publishing Services, 2020

## Third Place

⊕ **Doug Goodman**  
*Autumn Footsteps: A Hunter’s Journey*  
 Newman Springs Publishing, 2020



# Janice M. Keesler Memorial Photo Awards winners

# Judges:

### ⊕ **Mark Bowie**

Mark Bowie is a professional nature photographer, writer and much sought-after public speaker. He is a frequent contributor to Adirondack Life magazine and his work has been published internationally in books, on calendars and posters, and in advertising media. His first two coffee table books, Adirondack Waters: Spirit of the Mountains and In Stoddard’s Footsteps: The Adirondacks Then & Now, have become landmark regional publications. They were followed by The Adirondacks: In Celebration of the Seasons. He is an expert on night photography and has written two comprehensive e-books: The Light of Midnight: Photographing the Landscape at Night, and After Midnight: Night Photography by Example. Mark is a staff instructor for the Adirondack Photography Institute, leading digital photography workshops and tours.

### ⊕ **Chris Murray**

Chris Murray is a photographic artist, instructor and writer working primarily in the woods, lakes, mountains and streams of his home state of New York. His work has appeared in several magazines including On Landscape, Popular Photography, Shutterbug, Adirondack Life, New York State Conservationist, and Thousand Islands Life, among others. Chris leads photography workshops through the Adirondack Photography Institute and teaches classes at the Thousand Islands Arts Center.

### ⊕ **Mindy St. George**

Mindy St. George’s first 35mm film camera was given to her by her father, who was a strong influence in her life, and from there, her love affair with photography was born. While in college, she began working professionally as a studio portrait photographer. She stayed on that path for several years before advancing into portrait and event photography. Mindy travels widely, capturing priceless moments along the way.

### ⊕ **Dan Sylvester**

Dan Sylvester is an award-winning freelance photographer and artist living his dream of exploring beautiful and wild places with the goal of capturing unique photographs that evoke emotion and drama. Dan’s work can be found in galleries and featured in calendars depicting the beauty of national parks. Dan loves photographing the beaches, mountains, towns, and woodlots across New England and the United States. He prefers the challenge of going off the beaten path to experience the beauty of nature one on one.



# The photo award winners

## People



First Place (Pictured)	Second Place	Third Place
⊕ Paul Schnell	⊕ Bill Hilts, Jr.	⊕ Angelo Peluso

## Outdoor Action



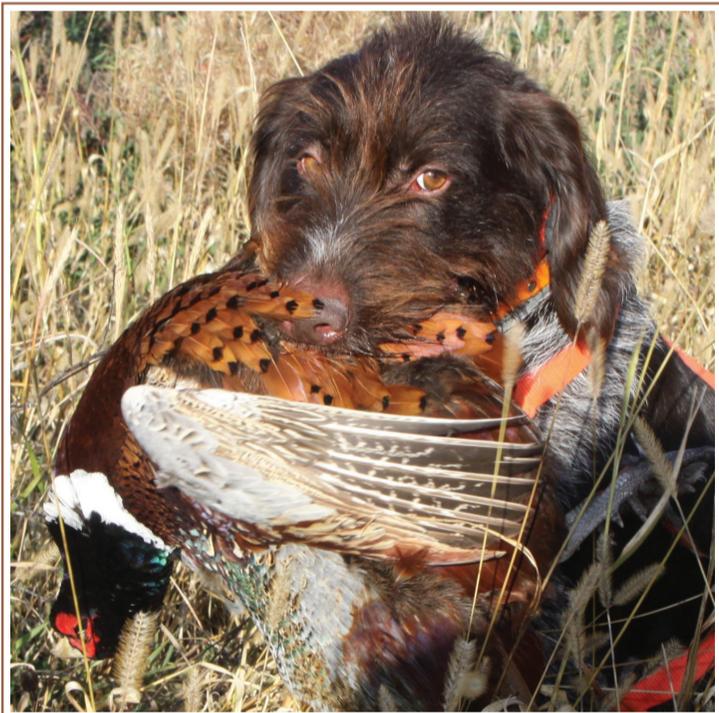
First Place (Pictured)	Second Place	Third Place
⊕ Paul Schnell	⊕ David Figura	⊕ David Figura

## Outdoor Scenic



First Place (Pictured)	Second Place	Third Place
⊕ Charles Witek	⊕ Peter Cody Fiduccia	⊕ Chris Paparo

## Hunting & Fishing



First Place (Pictured)	Second Place	Third Place
⊕ Bill Hilts, Jr.	⊕ Angelo Peluso	⊕ Chris Paparo

## Wildlife



First Place (Pictured)	Second Place	Third Place
⊕ Chris Paparo	⊕ Peter Cody Fiduccia	⊕ Paul Schnell

Special thanks to our sponsors:

Ducks Unlimited  
Redding Reloading Equipment  
Outdoor Sportsman Group