



Nature Guide for Judges and Exhibitors (2025)

This guide is intended to help judges evaluate nature photography and to help photographers understand which images are eligible for Nature and Wildlife categories. The PSA/FIAP Nature rules (in Appendix A) exist not to limit creativity, but to preserve the integrity and authenticity that define nature photography.

This guide is divided into the following sections:

- A. NATURE SUBJECTS**
 - terminology (Wildlife)
 - Quick Reference: Acceptable Nature Subjects;
 - Details: Nature + Ethics + Other Rules
- B. EDITING TECHNIQUES**
 - Nature Editing Techniques (Overview)
 - Nature Editing Techniques (Checklist)
- C. JUDGING**
 - Judging Nature Images
 - Assessing Nature Story Strength
 - Nature Story: Interactions
 - Tricky Subjects (wild, domestic, hybrid or feral?)
- D. FAQ**
 - 10 frequently asked questions
- E. Appendix A**
 - The complete PSA/FIAP Nature definition, plus excerpts from:
 - Ethics Rules;
 - Statement on AI;
 - Statement on subject matter;
 - Image Create and Authorship;

Summary of Changes: For readers familiar with PSA's previous Nature definitions, here is a revision summary outlining the key changes introduced on January 1, 2025:

- The previous rule allowing **human-made elements** when "necessary to the nature story" has been replaced with three specific allowances:
 - 1) integral story elements (animals using manmade nest materials);
 - 2) when they are a small unavoidable part of the scene (like footprints & vehicle tracks);
 - 3) scientific equipment on animals (bands, radio collars).
- Attracting subjects with **food or sound** is explicitly prohibited (previously unaddressed), though incidental photography during hardship feeding remains acceptable.
- **Underwater** photography, previously permitted but unaddressed, is now mentioned.
- **Zoo photography** must now be at accredited facilities following best practices, expanded to include rescue centers and ethical farms (provided photographers don't artificially control or restrict animal movement).
- **Wildlife** photography is now restricted to natural habitats only, removing the previous allowance for 'adopted habitats'.

© 2025 Photographic Society of America. All photographs contained herein are the exclusive property of their respective creators and may not be used without their written permission. For permission to translate this guide into languages other than English please contact the Chair of PSA Nature Division at nd-chair@psa-photo.org.

Prepared by Frank St-Pierre (Chair, Exhibition Standards committee)

Reviewed and supplemented by: Pierluigi Rizzato, MFIAP, HonEFIAP, EFIAP/d3 (Director of FIAP Ethics Service)
Suman Bhattacharyya, MPSA, EFIAP/b (Nature Division Chair)
John Andrew Hughes, FPSA, PPSA, SSPAA, AFIAP (PSA President and CEO)

A-0 TERMINOLOGY (Wildlife)

WHAT is the subject

Organism is the fundamental biological term for any individual living being regardless of **domestication status** (wild vs. domestic/feral), **captivity status** (free-ranging/unconfined vs. captive/confined) or **geographic status** (native vs. introduced). The term *organism* unambiguously includes every form of life, from a Beluga to a Baobab to *Bangia*.

- ✓ In this document, a **wild** organism belongs to an evolutionary lineage that has never been domesticated, regardless of whether it is living in a captive state or is free-ranging. (*Wild is sometimes used as the opposite of cultivated/captive, but not in this document. See captive.*)
 - All **wild** organisms are permitted as Nature subjects.
 - Only **wild** organisms that are **free-ranging/unconfined** are permitted as wildlife subjects.
- ✓ **Wildlife subjects** (in this document) include **wild** organisms that are free-ranging, unconfined, unrestrained and uncontrolled, irrespective of any *indirect* human influence (habitat fragmentation, light or noise pollution, etc.) or temporary intervention (hardship feeding during drought). As mentioned, only these subjects are permitted as wildlife subjects. See **domesticated** on next page.
- ✓ **Hybrids** are the result of interbreeding of two genetically distinct species, either occurring naturally in the wild (natural/spontaneous) where species ranges overlap, or artificially through human-controlled breeding. Only wild **natural hybrids** are valid Nature subjects.

WHERE is the subject

Habitat is the fundamental ecological term for the specific place where an organism lives and finds the resources necessary for survival and reproduction. Habitat is a neutral term that describes a location without making a judgment on its condition (undisturbed/intact or human-altered). For example, the habitat of a Peregrine Falcon can be a remote cliff face or a skyscraper, and the Dandelion's habitat can be a remote alpine meadow or a crack in a sidewalk.

- ✓ **Natural habitat** refers to the specific region within a natural environment where conditions allow a species to naturally occur and to which it is adapted, such as a particular wetland area within a larger forest ecosystem where wood ducks nest and feed. Used in the Wildlife definition (see Captive, on next page).
- ✓ **Natural environment** generally refers to ecosystems and geographic regions minimally altered by human activity. For example, the Serengeti ecosystem contains multiple natural habitats like riverine forests along the Mara River for hippos, open plains for cheetahs, and grasslands whose seasonal rainfall patterns trigger the Great Migration of wildebeest. This term is used in the PSA Wildlife definition (*...may not be removed from their natural environment*) and should be interpreted as *captive* (or not collected or removed).
- ✓ **Human-modified environments** are areas where humans have altered natural conditions but don't actively control day-to-day operations, letting natural processes dominate, (suburbs, agricultural landscapes, urban parks, lightly managed nature reserves etc.).
- ✓ **Managed environments** are areas under active, ongoing human control and intervention (zoos, aquariums, botanical gardens, intensive agriculture). Permitted (with restrictions) in Nature, not valid in Wildlife.

HOW humans intervened

Captive (confined) and **Free-ranging** (unconfined) are the terms used in this document to describe an organism's freedom status relative to human intervention over its confinement. The PSA Wildlife definition uses expressions like “*free and unrestrained in a natural habitat of their own choosing*”, and “*removed from their natural habitat.*” Both of these phrases should be interpreted in this document as **free-ranging** (unconfined) and **captive** (confined) status respectively. For brevity, this document uses the terms captive and free-ranging to also mean confined and unconfined for all organisms.

Free-Ranging (unconfined) organisms are those with the ability to move without physical restriction or confinement. The term focuses purely on mobility and lack of captivity/confinement, and it is independent of an organism's origin status (native, introduced, wild, feral, domestic, hybrid). Not to be confused with **free-range** chickens.

Domesticated organisms are species selectively bred or cultivated by humans over generations for specific traits. **Cultivated** plants include any domesticated plant or cultivar intentionally grown and cared for by a human. **Feral organisms** are free-ranging descendants of domesticated species, and not valid subjects. **Hybrids** are the result of interbreeding of two genetically distinct species. Any artificially created hybrids by human-controlled breeding or other intervention are not valid subjects. For brevity throughout this document, the term **domesticated includes any human-created hybrid**.

Irrelevant Criteria: (for PSA Nature and Wildlife rules)

- ✘ **Native** and **Introduced** (non-native) are the fundamental corollary terms for describing an organism's geographic status, relative to human intervention in its location. The critical factor that separates "native" from "non-native" is whether a species arrived in an ecosystem as a result of human intervention. There are no PSA Nature or Wildlife restrictions against introduced organisms. Therefore, discussions related to **native species** and **native habitat** are not relevant when establishing whether Wildlife subjects are valid.

WHY terminology matters

Using correct terminology during award meetings avoids confusion and ensures all judges are evaluating the same wildlife criteria. When discussing subjects in nature general or wildlife, the correct terminology helps focus discussions on exactly the criteria that matters:

- ✓ domestication status (wild vs. domestic/feral);
- ✓ captivity status (free-ranging/unconfined vs. captive/confined).

For assessing wildlife criteria, the question “*Is this animal wild and free-ranging?*” is more diagnostic than vague concerns about whether something seems ‘natural’.

Recap: when the term **wild** is used, it must always refer to undomesticated species living without human control—not their geographic origin or habitat type. When the term **captive** (or confined) is used, it must always refer to organisms confined or controlled by humans—not their domestication status. An African elephant living in a Canadian zoo is wild and captive. Conversely, a free-ranging Mustang in the prairies is not wild—it's a domestic species living in a feral state. For Nature photography, wild and captive organisms are acceptable. Wildlife requires organisms to be both wild and free-ranging.

Using the terminology above, we can summarize the **Wildlife definition** as a single sentence, with extra redundancies for good measure:

Wildlife images depict wild organisms photographed authentically and ethically without coercion, restraint, management, confinement, staging, baiting or other manipulation of the subject or scene.

A-1 QUICK REFERENCE: Acceptable Nature Subjects

Please read the entire PSA/FIAP Nature definition in **Appendix A**. The quick reference below contains rules from that official definition as well as other applicable PSA rules.

Subjects Accepted within Nature	Not Accepted
<p>a) Wild organisms (plants, animals, fungi, etc.);</p> <p>b) Inanimate nature subjects (geological features, minerals, rocks atmospheric phenomena, stars, rainbows, etc);</p> <p>c) Underwater nature subjects;</p> <p>d) Human-made elements integral to the story, or small unavoidable features, or biotelemetry equipment (radio collars or tags, bands, rings);</p> <p>e) Zoo, rescue centers or ethical farms must be accredited facilities;</p> <p>f) Hardship Feeding of Wildlife: Supplemental feeding during natural hardships is permitted if photography is incidental to the feeding activity;</p> <p>g) A reasonably identifiable subject;</p> <p>h) A “natural” scene should not include any evidence that an animal is in captivity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hybrid and cultivated plants; • Domesticated or feral subjects, taxidermy, people; • anthropology or archaeology subjects; • objects reshaped by humans (gemstones, rocks, pyramids, carvings, etc); • Divers, goldfish, submarines; • human elements that are not part of the nature story <u>except</u> biotelemetry equipment or small unavoidable features; (see Judging Criteria) • Unethically confined animals or attracting subjects with food or sound; • Images where a well-informed person cannot identify the subject, or determine it was honestly presented with no unethical practices used; • Subjects showing evidence of being in captivity.
Wildlife Subjects	Not Accepted
<p>i) Ethical Wildlife images depict wild organisms photographed authentically without coercion, restraint, management, staging, baiting or other manipulation of the subject or scene.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wild animals in captivity, feral or domesticated animals and any organisms grown or raised under controlled conditions; • Staging or baiting for photography purposes; • Inanimate objects (clouds, desert dunes, sunsets, fossils, mountains, etc).
Related PSA rules	Not Accepted
<p>j) PSA Ethics Policy: 4(b)(iv)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal cruelty, such as baiting of live animals for creation of photographs is not permitted;
<p>k) PSA Statement on subject matter the welfare of living creatures is more important than any photograph;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baiting, nest disturbances, creatures may not be endangered, live creatures being fed to captive animals, birds or reptiles; • aerial photography that interferes, disturbs or disrupts animals or their environment.
<p>l) Image Creation and Authorship</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any image or visual element not personally captured by the author; • Images submitted without the author retaining full copyright ownership
<p>m) Similar Images</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identical or similar Images are not allowed in the same section or different sections of the same exhibition;
<p>n) Artificial Intelligence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Images or any visual element (no matter how small) created with generative AI software.

A-2

DETAILS: Acceptable Nature Subjects

Wild plants & fungi: acceptable nature subjects include those found in their natural or adapted habitats without human cultivation. This includes wildflowers in a meadow or greenhouse, lichen on a rock, or mushrooms sprouting from a fallen log.

Prohibited:
<p>If the main subject of the image is a plant that exists only in cultivated form, developed through extensive hybridization or selective breeding, it is prohibited. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modern garden roses, including the Hybrid Tea Rose, 'Peace', 'Mister Lincoln', and others which have no wild counterpart; • Garden Pansies (a hybrid created in the 19th century); and • most modern tulips like Parrot Tulips, Fringed Tulips, or Double Peony Tulips, and similar cultivars.

Wild animals: any zoological organisms as found in their natural habitats are permitted. The natural habitat may be the native ecosystem where a species evolved and naturally occurs, or may be an introduced habitat (non-native environment) where the species now lives. It may also be an area where animals are captive (zoo, wildlife refuge) provided specific conditions are met (see *captive* below).

Accepted zoological organisms:

- Wild vertebrates (mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians); and
- Wild invertebrates (insects, arachnids, crustaceans, mollusks, cnidarians (jellyfish, coral), echinoderms (starfish, sea urchins), worms and sponges).

Prohibited:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any domesticated or feral animals. The obvious examples are cows, chickens, sheep, dogs and cats. Some less obvious examples are listed in the <i>Tricky Subjects</i> section (C-4) below. • Captive animals when the scene is NOT natural, or when the animal is being harmed or when the environment is not ethically managed. • Taxidermized subjects (inanimate objects created by humans); • Humans.

Inanimate subjects: includes the entire realm of natural (non-man-made) objects:

- Geological and earth-based subjects include rocks, minerals, canyons, mountains, sand dunes, glaciers, lava flows, pumice stones, volcanic craters and icicles;
- Natural phenomena include natural wildfires, waterfalls, geysers, ripples, avalanches, sea foam;
- Atmospheric and celestial phenomena include clouds, mist, rainbows, lightning, aurora borealis, galaxies, planets, comets.
- inanimate organic matter (animal carcass, detritus, wildfires and controlled burns, etc).

Prohibited:
<p>Any object created or shaped or changed by humans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polished gems, sculpted rocks, carvings, arranged stones, etc.

Underwater nature subjects: All of the rules above apply to subjects located underwater or in aquatic environments. Acceptable subjects include wild organisms, caves, kelp forests, phytoplankton blooms, etc.

Prohibited:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domesticated aquatic species, like goldfish (<i>Carassius auratus</i>) and ornamental koi (<i>Cyprinus carpio</i>), guppies (<i>Poecilia reticulata</i>), mollies (<i>Poecilia</i> species), platies (<i>Xiphophorus maculatus</i>), and ornamental shrimp like Cherry shrimp (<i>Neocaridina davidi</i>), discus (<i>Symphysodon</i> species), or selectively bred cichlids such as ornamental angelfish (<i>Pterophyllum scalare</i>); • Captive or baited or otherwise attracted or forced into specific areas for photography.

Human elements: include a wide variety of anthropogenic material (plastic, concrete, wire, glass, etc) and anthropogenic disturbances (plowed fields, walking trails, cleared forests, rock carvings, footprints, etc). Whether the presence of these human elements disqualifies an image is open to interpretation, and is based on the three criteria that permit human elements:

- 1) integral to the nature story, like a bird nest in a barn, or a live tornado destroying a house.
Another common example are birds who incorporate man-made material into their structures, like the black kite (*Milvus migrans*), or white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), or the famous Australian Bowerbirds;
- 2) small unavoidable features (a vehicle track in national parks);
- 3) biotelemetry or science equipment (radio collars or tags, bands, rings).

Prohibited:
Examples of when human elements are not acceptable, from each of the 3 criteria above:
1) an upside-down car in the <u>aftermath</u> of a tornado is not a nature story, it's photojournalism;
2) buildings or power lines in a landscape are <u>avoidable</u> features in a nature story;
3) a falcon wearing a hood or leather tethers (jesses) does not represent <u>science equipment</u> ;

Zoos, rescue centers or ethical farms: these must be accredited facilities, and judges must assume the photographer has ensured they are, unless evidence to the contrary is presented.

Prohibited:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evidence that the animal is in captivity; • indication of human involvement.

Hardship Feeding of Wildlife: Supplemental feeding during natural hardships is permitted if photography is incidental to the feeding activity;

Prohibited:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baiting or attracting animals with food; • evidence that the animal is in captivity.

Reasonably identifiable and honestly presented subjects: a well-informed person may not be expert enough to name the species, but the subject must not be rendered unidentifiable. A reasonable person must be able to determine if a scene was dishonestly presented or captured unethically. For example, if a close-up of an ostrich is presented with beautiful bokeh (minimal environmental context), it could easily be a zoo environment and should score lower in a Wildlife theme than if a wildlife environment was convincingly shown.

Prohibited:
Any intended or unintended effect that renders the subject unidentifiable:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An extreme close-up of part of the subject (eyelash, nostril, color pattern, etc); • Blurring, excessive noise or pixelation, silhouetting or clipping, etc.

A-3

Wildlife: Details

A wildlife image captures genuine, unmanipulated moments of wild living organisms, on land, in the air or underwater. Therefore, in addition to the Nature rules, a wildlife image must also meet the following criteria:

- 1) **Authenticity:** The organism must be in its natural, unconstrained habitat. This means it must be living free and not be in any form of captivity, such as a zoo, vivarium or game farm.
- 2) **No Human Manipulation:** The subject must not be domesticated, captive, or manipulated for photography purposes. This excludes zoos, game farms, baiting, calling, staging, or coercion, while allowing natural observation and non-intrusive photography techniques.

Prohibited:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any organism in an arboretum, botanical garden, terrarium, greenhouse, flowerpot, etc; • Any organisms held in zoos, wildlife or marine parks, aquariums, aquaculture operations, etc; • Any captive, domesticated, hybrid or feral organisms; • Any evidence of human activity (shacks, shipwrecks, fences, nets, hunters, divers, etc); • Any organisms that are fed, baited, controlled or influenced by humans; • Inanimate objects (clouds, beaches, sunsets, fossils, mountains, desert dunes, snowy peaks, etc).

A-4 Wildlife: Beyond Flora and Fauna

Although the PSA Wildlife definition only mentions **zoological** and **botanical** organisms (flora/plants and fauna/animals), this doesn't exclude other organisms that are highly relevant for nature photography. **Fungi**, mushrooms and colorful molds are neither plants nor animals but form their own kingdom of life. **Lichens**, partnerships between fungi and algae, create vibrant growths on rocks and trees. **Bacteria** form vibrant biofilms and create bioluminescent displays in marine environments, while **archaea** are responsible for the rainbow colors seen in Yellowstone's geothermal pools. **Protists** range from single-celled organisms to large multicellular structures like kelp forests in marine ecosystems. Photographers should interpret the Wildlife definition's core principles of as applying universally to all living organisms.

A-5 Ethical Practices

Ethical practices for Nature photography are described in three documents: the PSA/FIAP Nature definition, the PSA Ethics Policy: 4(b)(iv) and the PSA Statement on subject matter. These rules help ensure nature photographers capture authentic, un-staged nature stories without causing harm or to nature subjects or their environment.

- **No Live Bait or Feeding:** Never use live animals as bait to attract wildlife. Avoid feeding animals, whether captive or wild, to create a photo opportunity.
- **Do Not Harm or Sacrifice:** It is strictly forbidden to kill any creature to use as a photo prop.
- **Respect Nests and Habitats:** Do not disturb animals in their nests, dens, or burrows. This includes moving branches or otherwise altering their home to get a better shot.
- **Avoid Artificial Restraints:** Do not use any form of restraint, such as ropes, ties, or cages, to control an animal's movement. This also includes physically manipulating creatures like insects or reptiles into a certain position.
- **Don't Alter Natural Behavior:** Never use artificial methods, like reducing an animal's body temperature or using anesthetics, to slow it down.
- **Maintain a Safe Distance:** Do not approach an animal too quickly or too closely, and avoid scenarios where the animal shows signs of stress—such as a bird repeatedly flying away from its nest.
- **Leave No Trace:** Do not alter the natural environment to get a shot. This means no cutting or damaging plants. If you move natural debris to improve a photo, return it to its original location afterward.
- **Limit Technology Interference:** The use of drones, remote-controlled vehicles, or flash photography is prohibited if it causes stress or harm to the subject.

A-6 Image Creation and Authorship

In any photography competitions, **plagiarism** is a serious offense. The following are fundamental principles that govern all PSA competitions:

- **Original Work Only:** All elements within your submitted photograph must be entirely your own work. This includes every aspect of the image, from the main subject to the background. This is the principle behind the prohibition against generative AI tools that create synthetic content.
- **No Outside Content:** Incorporating any work created by others is not allowed. This includes stock images, your friend's images, your agent's images, AI-generated content, Photoshop skies, or photos of other people's artwork.
- **Authorship:** The photographer must be the author (creator) and copyright holder of all visual elements within the submitted image. **Ownership** is insufficient, since ownership can be transferred; someone can legally own the rights to an image without having been the one to create it.

A-7 Artificial Intelligence

While subtle differences in rules may evolve as AI technology evolves, the essence of PSA's stance on the use of AI in photo competitions is the following:

- **all content must be created by the photographer**, preserving the principle of **authorship**. While AI-assisted editing tools like sharpening and intelligent masking are permitted because they only enhance the existing visual information within your photo, generative AI tools that create new, synthetic content based on external data are strictly forbidden.
- The core distinction between which AI tools are permitted and those which are not, is whether an AI tool modifies what you've already captured in a photo, instead of generating synthetic elements that you didn't originate.

A-8 Similar Images

In nature photography, it is common to rapidly shoot a sequence of images to capture a story as it unfolds (predation, mating, cataclysmic storms). However, each must show a **noticeable change** from the previous image, as described in the section on **Practical Equivalence** in Appendix A.



*These are the same subjects within a sequence, but these are **not** practical equivalents, as defined.*

B-1 Nature Editing Techniques (Overview)

Nature photographers entering competitions should ensure that their images are genuine representations of the captured scene; a strong emphasis on the integrity and authenticity of the scene is paramount. Therefore, the photographer's objective when using editing tools is for the final image to look natural to the intended viewers, which are the judges.

Permitted Editing Techniques

Any editing techniques that restore or enhance the truth of a scene without altering its content are permitted:

- **Standard Adjustments:** tools to correct common issues like dust spots, noise, or lens distortion, brightness, hue, saturation, contrast and others are permitted, as long as they are used to restore the original appearance of the scene.
- **Compositional Corrections:** Cropping, straightening, and perspective correction are allowed.
- **Multiple Image Techniques:** Combining multiple images of the same subject for exposure or focus stacking is permitted, provided the images being combined contain the identical content and were taken in a single, continuous sequence. Combining a series of panned images to create a panorama is also permitted.
- **Color Adjustments:** In addition to the color adjustments mentioned above, a color image can be converted to black and white (grayscale monochrome).

Prohibited Editing Techniques

Any manipulation that alters the factual nature of the photograph is prohibited. You must not in any way change the truth of the scene. This is core requirement prohibits the following editing activities:

- You can't move, remove, add, or duplicate any element within an image. You can't replace a sky, or remove objects (people or trees), or add objects (birds or clouds), or flip or mirror images. You can't selectively blur or darken image elements, add textures or artistic filters that alter the truth of the scene.



Adding (cloning) visual elements is prohibited



Replacing the sky or altering the truth of the scene is prohibited



Removing image elements (animals tree branches) is prohibited, unless by cropping.

B-2 NATURE EDITING TECHNIQUES (Checklist)

permitted [✓]	prohibited [X]	NATURE
a) Cropping, straightening and perspective correction.		✓
b) Removing or correcting elements added by the camera or lens (dust spots, noise, chromatic aberration, lens distortion).		✓
c) Global and selective adjustments such as brightness, hue, saturation and contrast to restore the appearance of the original scene.		✓
d) Complete conversion of color images to monochrome grayscale.		✓
e) Using permitted AI-enhanced editing (see Note 1 below).		✓
f) Image stitching – combining multiple images with overlapping fields of view that are taken consecutively (panoramas).		✓
g) Blending of multiple images of the same subject and combining them in camera or with software (exposure blending or focus stacking).		✓
h) Combining images (2-4), each with a small white border on a single image that depicts a progression of events or related activity.		X
i) Adding, deleting or moving pictorial elements of which you ARE the author.		X
j) Removing, adding, or changing any part of an image, except for cropping and straightening.		X
k) Blurring or darkening parts of the image to hide pictorial elements, or adding a noticeable (dark or light) vignette during editing.		X
l) All color conversions other than to monochrome grayscale.		X
m) Conversion of parts of an image to monochrome, or partial toning, desaturation or over-saturation of color.		X
n) Using prohibited AI-enhanced editing (see note 2 below).		X
o) Adding pictorial elements of which you ARE NOT the author, such as sky, background, people, animals, etc. Refer to the PSA statement on Image Creation and Authorship. (see note 3 below).		X
p) Adding a watermark, copyright or any similar visible markings.		X

- Permitted AI-enhanced editing:** includes editing tools that perform transformations, enhancements, or corrections based exclusively on the existing pixel data captured in the author's original photograph without introducing externally-sourced content.
- Prohibited AI editing:** includes any synthetic image generation that incorporate external image data not captured by the author. Tools that generate new visual elements, textures, objects, or scenes not originally present in the author's photograph are prohibited.
- Authorship:** The photographer must be the author (creator) and copyright holder of all visual elements. All elements within your submitted image must be entirely your own work.

C-1 Judging Nature Images

PSA's Core Principles of NATURE Photography:

1. Nature images must convey the truth of the scene;
2. The welfare of living creatures is more important than any photograph;
3. The most important part of any nature photograph is the Nature story it tells;
4. High technical standards are expected, but these are secondary to the Nature story.

While primarily intended for judges, this section should also be read by exhibitors, to learn what criteria are used by judges and perhaps adjust their exhibition entries accordingly. However, exhibitors should be aware that virtually all the subjective elements and interpretation described below can vary substantially from judge to judge depending on their competence.

Judges use their experience and knowledge to ensure all accepted and awarded images in a salon are compliant with all rules described in this document, including all rules governing PSA's ethical practices. Importantly, judges must also remain unbiased when evaluating all other image criteria, from the image's technical qualities to its emotional impact and strength of its Nature Story.

Based on the core principles listed in the box above, section **C-1** will start with **ethics** and end with the **Nature Story**.

- Ethics**
- **Live baiting, live feeding, and sacrificing animals:** These practices directly stage a photo opportunity, creating a scene that is not authentic. An image is not a genuine depiction of a natural event if live bait was used to lure a predator for the photograph, regardless of whether the scene was set up in a controlled environment or in the wild. For instance, it would be misleading to show a photograph of a great horned owl swooping down on a mouse if the mouse (live or dead) had been used to bait the owl.
 - **Disturbing animals or their environment:** removing animals from nests, altering nesting sites, approaching predators or prey too closely on foot, in vehicles or with drones, etc. Such actions manipulate the scene, resulting in an unnatural moment. For example, it would be deceptive to submit a picture of a fawn lying in a patch of sunlit flowers if the photographer had moved the animal from its safe, hidden location simply to create a more pleasing image.
 - **Artificial restraints and reducing natural movement:** Any staged scene for a photograph removes the authenticity of the animal's behavior.
 - **If there is evidence that ethics rules have been violated, the jury should deliberate and if appropriate, disqualify the image and report it to ethics investigators.**
 - **(See the Exhibition Standards section ES-K10, related to image disqualifications.)**
- Authorship**
- **Image Creation:** the requirement that all visual elements be your own work is central to being faithful to the truth of the scene. Plagiarism is a serious violation.
 - **Generative AI tools:** generating synthetic visual elements directly violates the principle of the truth of the scene.
 - **If there is evidence that the image has been plagiarized, the image should be disqualified by the jury and be reported to ethics investigators.**
- Editing**
- **Altered Reality:** Any editing techniques that alter the reality of the scene are a direct violation of the truth of the scene. In particular, techniques like replacing a sky, removing a branch, adding a bird or cloning out any elements, no matter how small, create a fabricated reality. Other examples of prohibited editing include hiding

elements by blurring or under exposing, or removing small particles suspended in the air or underwater, which are equally deceptive techniques.

- The **complete list of prohibited editing techniques is listed in section B-2, above.**
- **If a judge strongly suspects an editing violation, it should be discussed during the jury's award meeting, and a resulting low score is typical.**

Human Elements

- 1. Integral part of the nature story:** these are permitted only if the human element is a necessary component of the animal's behavior or enhances the nature context. See the previously cited examples.
- 2. Small but Unavoidable part of the scene:** judges may not universally agree on what constitutes a minor or unavoidable element, given the real-world context of the wildlife. The judge might wonder if a different camera angle could have excluded footprints, while in reality, achieving that camera angle was impossible without stressing the subject or stepping off a cliff.
- 3. Scientific equipment:** a competent nature judge will easily recognize these.
 - **Knowledgeable juries should recognize violations of any of these rules, which in obvious cases (i.e. non-scientific tags), would disqualify an image.**
 - **Unless violations are obvious, judges' interpretations of whether human elements are integral or unavoidable will vary greatly and will be reflected in their scores.**
 - **To minimize disappointment related to a judge's misinterpretation of a scene, exhibitors should avoid human elements when possible.**



This chase sequence started without any visual human elements...



... and continued onto a vehicle track, which is permitted as an unavoidable human element.



This Tern caught the bait mid-air as it was being cast, making the hook integral to this Nature story.





This African Wild Dog is wearing a radio collar. (Scientific tags, collars, and bands are permitted).



The road (red arrows) is not an integral part of this nature story.



This young elephant (and many more) perished near Mana Pools (Zimbabwe), despite supplemental feeding provided (red arrow). This is this an example of human element that is specifically allowed, and might even be considered integral to this nature story.

Judging BIAS

Despite efforts toward objectivity, judging is often influenced by unconscious biases that can overshadow genuine photographic vision and skill.

- **Location bias:** Overvaluing photographs from exotic or remote locations
- **Species bias:** Preferring megafauna (lions, bears, elephants) over common subjects like insects, plants, or common birds. Whether a judge finds the subject interesting or attractive is irrelevant.
- **Novelty bias:** Favoring rare moments or unusual behaviors simply because they're uncommon. Regardless, how often you have seen the subject before, the story's value isn't diminished by its familiarity.
- **Comparison bias:** A judge's personal memory of whether a similar subject was portrayed more effectively elsewhere is not valid judging criteria.
- **Inconsistent scoring bias:** Consistency is critical to ensure fairness. Judges may become more lenient or harsh as a session progresses due to fatigue, comparison effects, or shifting internal standards.
- **Personal preference bias:** Image scores should be influenced by judges' personal tastes, color preferences, shooting styles, or cultural backgrounds; good judging requires objectivity.
- **Judges should be aware of these biases, and consciously avoid them as they interfere with objective evaluation of photographic skill and story-telling.**

High Technical Standards

Judges should note the PSA Nature guideline's requirement **that high technical standards are expected**, typically requiring a combination of the following:

- **Sharpness, color and exposure:** critical elements (especially eyes in wildlife) should be tack-sharp. Colors should appear natural and true-to-life. Reduced scores for poor focus, poor contrast, over saturation, motion blur, exposure problems that obscure details, and incorrect shutter speed, etc.
- **Minimal post-processing:** the editing restrictions were previously listed. Reduced score for any manipulation that misrepresents the natural scene.
- **Technical distractions:** Reduced score for obvious technical faults such as excessive noise and blown highlights that draw attention away from the nature story.
- **Appropriate depth of field (DOF):** depth of field should be controlled, whether isolating a subject from background or capturing environmental context with deep focus. Reduced score for DOF that leaves key elements soft or creates confusing bokeh.
- **Composition and framing:** Reduced score for distracting elements like lens flare, tilted horizons, awkward cropping, framing and other pictorial distractions.
- **Reduced scores are appropriate for any heavy manipulation, artificial elements or any suggestion that the truth of the scene is misrepresented.**



Judges look for sharpness, controlled highlights and colors, correct exposure, appropriate shutter speed (for action), good composition, etc.

Subject Matter

Judges should consult with the Chair when uncertain whether an image violates Nature or Wildlife rules.

- **Identifiable subjects:** judges need to identify a subject in order to ascertain that it is a legitimate Nature image. Without an identifiable subject there is usually no identifiable Nature Story, resulting in a low score.
- **Nature Story:** The strength of the Nature Story is an important criterion for judging Nature. (See section **C-2** *Assessing Nature Story Strength*).
- **Honestly presented:** competent judges look for evidence that a photo was not staged or unethically captured, and that the truth of the scene was not altered during editing.
- **Captive animals (zoos, sanctuaries):** judges must assume the photographer has ensured the location is properly accredited and conforms to best practice. For the scene to be "natural", it should not include any evidence that the animal is in captivity.
- **Judges should give low scores to images that suggest environmental manipulation especially if there is insufficient evidence of natural, unrestrained conditions.**

- Judges typically give low scores to nature subjects that they perceive to be unidentifiable or unnatural looking, or which violate the Nature definition.
- Judges should apply the established criteria for nature and wildlife subjects, giving exhibitors the benefit of the doubt when uncertain.
- Images with clear evidence of ethical violations should be flagged for disqualification.

Tricky Subjects

Where an organism is known to occur in the wild and the image does not indicate the involvement of humans, judges should score on the basis that the image is a valid Nature subject. (see section **C-4** *Tricky Subjects*).

- Artificial hybrid plants and cultivars have traits that serve human aesthetics over evolutionary function, like unusually large flowers or fruit. Perfectly spaced plantings might be a sign of cultivation, permitted (if a wild species) in Nature but not Wildlife.
- Wild plants rarely have the vibrant, unusual colours (deep purple, saturated blue, etc.) or variegated leaves (striped, spotted, etc).
- Many escaped garden plants thrive only in disturbed areas like roadsides, old homesteads, or forest edges, as they aren't adapted to compete in a stable, established native ecosystem.
- Beyond obvious indicators such as jesses on a falcon, judges will typically discuss subtle indicators like animals in obviously managed settings or displaying breeds or color variations that suggest selective breeding. They might also discuss the animal's behavior for signs of captivity, such as unusual docility around humans or behaviors that indicate the animal is tamed, not truly free-ranging.
- Judges should consult with the Chair if unsure whether an image complies with Nature or Wildlife rules.



PSA Species Identification Service:

This service is only available to PSA members. It provides members with assistance in identifying the technical names of natural subjects in their photographs. This service helps photographers accurately identify wildlife, plants, and other natural elements in their images, particularly for nature photography competitions and exhibitions that require precise identification of subjects.

Contact: nd-identification-services-director@psa-photo.org

C-2 Assessing Nature Story Strength

Nature photography operates as visual epistemology, with each image functioning as a knowledge claim about the natural world. To judge the strength of the Nature Story is to assess the information conveyed. Whether you've previously seen the subject 100 times is not relevant to the strength of the story. The story's value is not diminished by its familiarity.

Readers should review the detailed explanation by Rick Cloran (GMPSA), available here:

<https://www.psa-services.org/ES/Nature-Story-Value-RCloran.pdf>

A - Weaker Story

There is no impact and very little information about the subject, either because of overly artistic or because of technical flaws (blurred, underexposure), or because subject is rendered without significant detail (e.g., in deep shadow, or too tightly cropped).



A Pangolin in Busanga Plains (Zambia), cropped too closely, & technically flawed (too soft).



This Shoebill in Mamamba Swamb (Uganda) reveals very little about its environment.

B - Average Story

There may be some interesting information about the subject's form, features, uniqueness, and technical quality. Minimally impactful images and portraits of animate or inanimate subjects usually fall into this category.



These boobies in the Galápagos Islands provide little information. The image is technically and compositionally weak (soft, poor cropping).



A slightly more informative and technically competent image than the boobies, but this Ugandan Weaver bird's strongest nature story element (it's nest) is cropped out of the frame.

C - Stronger Story

Images depict unique aspects of the subject's behavior or state, especially subjects interacting with its habitat, or with members of its species or with other species.



Playful sparring is a common type of interaction, especially in bachelor herds.



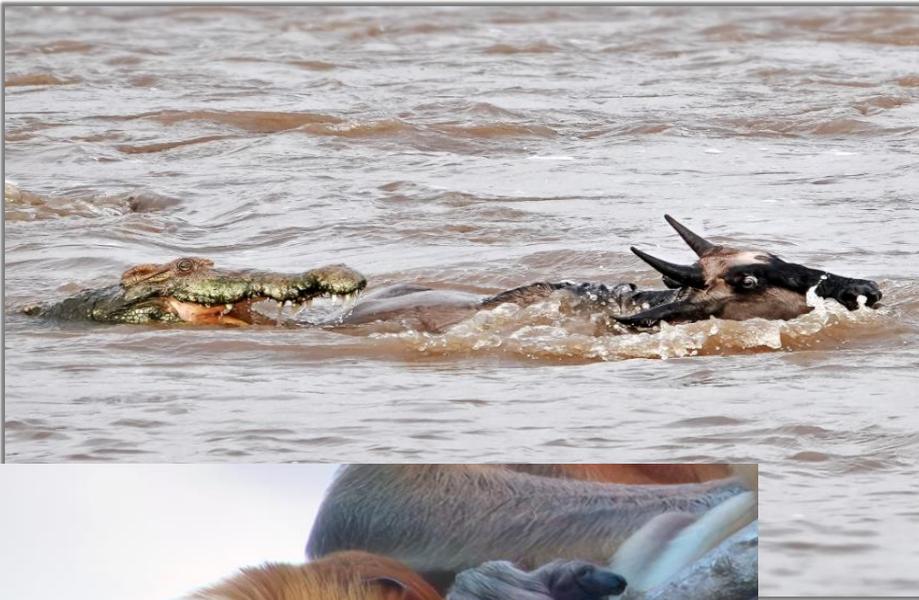
Despite the passive interaction, this nature story has tension, given that males readily kill young cubs when taking control of a pride.

C-3 Nature Story: Interactions

Simple Interactions (Usually Single-Species)

Images which show how individual animals interact with others of their own kind, or a lone animal performing a key survival behavior:

- **Social Behavior:** animals in a group dynamic (wildebeest migration).
- **Courtship, Mating, parenting:** birds engaged in courtship ritual; animal nurturing.
- **Competition:** males fighting for dominance.

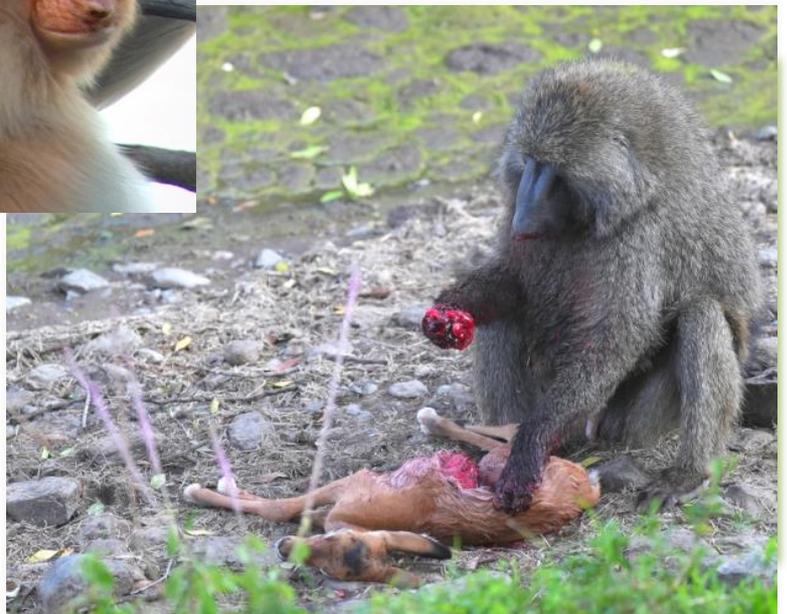


Left: The eyes of both crocodile and wildebeest (Mara River, Tanzania) augment the emotional impact and the dramatic story value.



Left: An example of Proboscis Monkey parenting in the treetops (Borneo). Note the additional interaction (eye contact) with the photographer.

Right: This baboon in the Naboisho Conservancy (Kenya) is selectively feeding on a baby gazelle he captured earlier, providing a strong nature story.



Interactions with the Environment

Images showing an organism interacting with or affected by its natural surroundings, usually depicting adaptation or survival.

- **Adaptation:** a polar bear on an ice floe, penguins huddling.
- **Tool Use:** a chimpanzee extracting termites from a mound using a stick.
- **Innate behavior, or Responding to Forces of Nature:** a salmon struggling to get upstream.



Annual salmon runs are examples of innate behaviour. Interactions with environments can provide a strong nature story.



The annual wildebeest migration provides many types of strong nature stories, especially when the herds reach the Mara river in the northern Serengeti, as depicted above, and more impactfully, below.



A wildebeest plunges into the Mara river (Northern Serengeti, Tanzania), where instincts override the threat of submerged crocodiles, creating a compelling nature story.

Complex Interactions (single or multiple-species):

Images which depict interaction between two or more species:

- **Predator-Prey:** life and death is arguably the most powerful and dramatic nature story.
- **Symbiotic Relationships:** bee pollinating a flower, oxpeckers, remoras.



Above: Complex interactions at 3 levels. Parenting (single species), instinctive protection (2 species) and predation (2 species).

Right Side: Interaction involving 3 species, (red circles). Osprey with fish being chased by opportunistic pelican (Florida, USA).



Baboons are omnivores and capable hunters, who sometimes eat their prey while still live. Interactions involving predation and death provide powerful and dramatic nature stories.

C-4 Tricky Subjects: domestic, feral, hybrid or wild?

Wild organisms are permitted in PSA exhibitions, including **natural hybrid** organisms. Not permitted are **feral, domesticated** and anthropogenic **hybrid organisms (created by humans)** such as the **liger** (breeding a male lion and a female tiger in captivity), or the **modern garden rose**. Natural hybrids typically occur when reproductive barriers between closely related species are inadequate and geographic ranges overlap. Some natural hybrids are relatively easy for a non-specialist to identify, such as the **grolar bear**, a cross between a grizzly and a polar bear. Other natural hybrids are more difficult to distinguish from each other, such as **Brewster's and Lawrence's Warblers**.

Zoological organisms (animals)

Since certain animal lineages exist in wild, domesticated, and feral forms, and since distinctions between them are sometimes blurred further by hybridization, it is not uncommon for nature judges and photographers alike to sometimes mistake one form for the other. Therefore, the partial list below is intended to encourage further exploration and discovery:

- African Wildcats: the domestic house cat (*Felis catus*) is a subspecies of the African wildcats (*Felis lybica*) which still exist in Africa, parts of Asia and Europe. Other small extant wildcats include the European version (*Felis silvestris*) and the Sand Cat (*Felis margarita*). Although wild, these bear a resemblance to domestic cats and might be scored low or rejected for that reason.
- Dingoes and Dogs: the dingo taxonomic classification is debated (*Canis lupus dingo* or *Canis dingo*). Dingoes are considered by some to be a wild canid native to Australia, and by others to be the result of feralization. In addition to the dingo, there are about 30 other living species of wild canids, including foxes, wolves, coyotes, jackals and several species of wild dogs: African Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus*), Bush Dog (*Speothos venaticus*), Short-eared Dog (*Atelocynus microtis*), and the Dhole (*Cuon alpinus*). Key visual factors causing confusion between some wild species and domestic or feral dogs: similar sizes, coat colors and overlapping habitats.
- Emus: Vast populations exist in the wild across Australia but in many areas of the world, there are Emu farms.
- Geese, ducks, swans: The Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*) is the ancestor of most breeds of domestic geese, and there are both wild and feral populations. Snow Geese and Canada geese are wild, not domesticated. The Egyptian geese (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*) found in Kenya/Tanzania, the Nile Valley and introduced elsewhere is wild but is not a goose: it belongs to the same subfamily of waterfowl as shelducks (*Tadorninae*). The Mallard duck (*Anas platyrhynchos*) is considered the ancestor of nearly all domestic duck breeds except the Muscovy. However, where wild and feral Mallard populations co-exist in urban settings, interbreeding results in hybrid plumages. Many other wild duck species exist, including Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*), Canvasback (*Aythya valisineria*), and Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*), etc. No species of swan has ever been fully domesticated in the same way as geese or chickens. However, the Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) is known for having been managed (not domesticated) in Europe for centuries (ex: the annual Swan Upping on the Thames river), which may cause confusion for some judges.
- Llamas (*Lama glama*) and Alpacas (*Vicugna pacos*) are always either feral or domesticated, but their respective wild ancestors - guanacos (*Lama guanicoe*) and vicuñas (*Vicugna vicugna*) – still exist and may confuse the untrained eye.
- Mouflon: is a wild sheep species (*Ovis orientalis*) native to the Middle East and introduced elsewhere. It is considered the ancestor of domestic sheep (*Ovis aries*) and often confused with feral sheep or with the European Mouflon. The latter is considered by some taxonomists as a distinct subspecies (*Ovis aries musimon*) while other consider it feral.

- Peacocks (peafowl) exist in wild, feral and domesticated forms. In their native range they are wild: Congo Peafowl (*Afropavo congensis*), Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) and Green Peafowl (*Pavo muticus*). They are also widely kept worldwide as captive-bred ornamental birds.
- Peccaries: look like feral pigs but are a separate family (*Tayassuidae*) of artiodactyls native to the Americas, which include species like the Collared Peccary (Javelina) and White-lipped Peccary.
- Pigeons: most urban "pigeons" are feral, descendants of the wild species Rock Dove (*Columba livia*) that still exist in its natural habitat: rocky coastlines in Europe, North Africa and Asia.
- Rabbits: The European rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) and the North American cottontail rabbits (genus *Sylvilagus*) exist in wild forms, but only the European Rabbit has been domesticated and is the source of all domestic rabbit breeds. Hares (genus *Lepus*) including the African Scrub Hare and American hares (Snowshoe Hares, Black-tailed Jackrabbits), are exclusively wild animals that have never been successfully domesticated.
- Squirrels: accustomed to humans in urban settings, they are undomesticated rodents that live in various natural habitats, from forests to urban parks.
- Wild Bactrian Camels: are a distinct and critically endangered species (*Camelus ferus*) that exists in parts of China and Mongolia. It is wild and is a separate species from the domesticated Bactrian or dromedary camels. Many people incorrectly assume any camel living in the wild is simply a feral version of a domestic camel, and this makes any camel an unreliable subject for a nature photo.
- Wild Boar: this is a wild species (*Sus scrofa*) still widespread in Europe, Asia, and introduced populations elsewhere. It is the ancestor of domestic pigs.
- Wild Bovids: The African Cape Buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*), found in Kenya (Maasai Mara) is definitely wild. Wild populations of the Asian water buffalo (*Bubalus arnee*) native to Southeast Asia (India, Nepal, Bhutan, Thailand) still exist alongside their domesticated and feral descendants (*Bubalus bubalis*). Other wild bovids include the African Forest Buffalo and the Indonesian Mountain Anoa and Lowland Anoa. The wild yak (*Bos mutus*) can be confused with the feral and domesticated Yak (*Bos grunniens*).
- Wild Equids: (horses, asses, and zebras) With the exception of zebras, these surviving wild species might be confused with their domesticated, feral or hybrid cousins.
 - African Wild Ass (*Equus africanus*) are the ancestor of donkeys (*Equus asinus*). Note that the mule is a sterile hybrid offspring of a female horse bred with a male donkey.
 - Asiatic Wild Ass (*Equus hemionus*), also called Onager, are native to the deserts and arid regions across the Middle East and Central Asia.
 - Przewalski's Horse (*Equus ferus przewalskii*), also called the 'Tahki' was extinct in the wild by the 1960s. Current populations (about 2,000 individuals) are the descendants of twelve (12) captive bred individuals (wild-caught and domesticated), reintroduced into the wild in the 1980's in China. Unlike feral populations (American Mustang, Australian Brumby) which are descendants of (*Equus caballus*), the Przewalski's horse is genetically distinct.
 - Tibetan wild ass (*Equus kiang*), also called Kiang, is native to the Tibetan Plateau.
 - Zebras are wild. No domestic form exists.

Botanical organisms (plants)

When the main nature subject is a plant or fungus, it must be a wild organism. All cultivated plants are prohibited. Within the definition of **wildlife**, any organisms growing in botanical gardens or flowerpots are disallowed because they are **confined**. Below are a few examples of common plants that exist in multiple forms: wild, feral (naturalized), hybrid and domestic (cultivar):

- **Orchard apples** (*Malus domestica*) are a familiar cultivar, whose wild ancestor (*Malus sieversii*) still grows in Central Asia.
- **Teosinte** (*Zea mays* subsp. *parviglumis*) is the wild subspecies, and modern corn (*Zea mays* subsp.

mays) is the domesticated subspecies.

- **Queen Anne's Lace** is a naturalized version of the cultivated carrot (*Daucus carota*).
- wild olive (*Olea europaea*), also known as the oleaster still exists in the Mediterranean region, along with cultivated olive trees and naturalized (feral) groves.
- **Peppermint** (*Mentha × piperita*) is a classic hybrid of a cross between watermint (*Mentha aquatica*) and spearmint (*Mentha spicata*).
- **Orchids** hybridize naturally and are cultivars.
- **Hybrid Cattail** (*Typha × glauca*) is a natural hybrid between the native broadleaf cattail (*Typha latifolia*) and the introduced narrowleaf cattail (*Typha angustifolia*).

D-1 FAQ: Question and Answers

1. Can Nature or Wildlife images contain images of people?

No.

2. Are zoo animals accepted in Nature and Wildlife images?

Zoo animals are **NOT** accepted in the Wildlife definition. They are only accepted within the Nature definition, and only when these restrictions are followed: (1) the scene is natural; (2) the animal is not harmed; (3) the environment is ethically managed, and (4) there is no evidence that the animal is in captivity.

3. Is a dead animal (carcass) an acceptable subject for Wildlife?

Carcasses can appear in wildlife images and contribute to the nature story, but the Wildlife definition specifies “*Zoological organisms must be living free and unrestrained*” and therefore the subject of the image must be living, not dead.

4. Can I remove trees from interfering with my image if it is located at the edge of the photo?

You can **crop** an image to remove the tree at the photo edge. You can't remove a tree or other object other than by cropping, because that would change the reality of the photo.

5. Can I photograph a cardinal perched on a backyard bird feeder?

No. Bird feeders are human-created objects, in this case for attracting the subject, which violates the rule against attracting subjects through food for photography purposes.

6. Can I submit a photo of a rehabilitated owl taken at an accredited wildlife rescue center?

Yes for Nature category, but **No** for Wildlife category because Wildlife requires animals to be "living free and unrestrained in a natural habitat of their own choosing."

7. Can I darken the background of my image to make my subject stand out better?

No. Darkening parts of the image during processing to hide or de-emphasize elements in the original scene is specifically prohibited.

8. Can I replace the sky with another sky I photographed (I am the author of)?

No. You cannot remove, move, add to, or change any part of an image, including the sky unless it is by cropping and straightening.

9. Can I photograph a prize-winning rose from a botanical garden?

No. Human-created hybrid plants and cultivated plants are not allowed in nature photography.

10. Are Landscapes suitable subjects in Wildlife?

The 'Wildlife' theme is defined by organisms *living free and unrestrained* (animals, birds, insects, plants, etc.). Therefore, subjects that are inanimate objects (mountains, geological formations, sunsets at a beach, moonrise over a mountain, snow, clouds, waterfalls) do not fit this definition. If an image of a forested hillside is submitted in Wildlife, the judges' low score would reflect its suitability as a *Wildlife* image and the strength of the nature story (see section **C-2** above).

Appendix A

PSA/FIAP Nature Division

Content Guidelines

Nature photography records all branches of natural history except anthropology and archaeology. This includes all aspects of the physical world, both over water and underwater. Nature images must convey the truth of the scene. A well-informed person should be able to identify the subject of the image and be satisfied that it has been presented honestly and that no unethical practices have been used to control the subject or capture the image. Images that directly or indirectly show any human activity threatening a living organism's life or welfare are not allowed.

The most important part of a Nature image is the nature story it tells. High technical standards are expected and the image must look natural.

- Objects created by humans, and evidence of human activity, are allowed in Nature images only when they are a necessary part of the Nature story.
- Photographs of human-created hybrid plants, cultivated plants, feral animals, domesticated animals, human-created hybrid animals, and mounted or preserved zoological specimens are not allowed.
- Photographs made where the scene is natural and the animal is unharmed in a carefully managed environment, such as Zoo, rescue centers, and ethically managed natural environment farms are permitted.
- Attracting or controlling subjects through the use of food or sound for the purpose of photographing them is not allowed. Maintained situations such as provided supplemental food due to hardship caused by weather conditions or other conditions beyond the animals' control, where photography is incidental to the feeding of the animal does not fall under this provision.
- Controlling live subjects by chilling, anesthetic, or any other method of restricting natural movement for a photograph is not allowed.
- Human-made elements shall be permitted under the following circumstances:
 - a) When they are an integral part of the nature story, such as a songbird singing atop a fence post, a manmade object used as nest material, or a weather phenomenon destroying a man-made structure.
 - b) When they are a small but unavoidable part of the scene, such as an unobtrusive footprint or track in the background.
 - c) Scientific tags, collars, and bands are specifically allowed.

When photographing at a zoo, sanctuary, or rehabilitation center, it would be construed that the photographer ensured that it's properly accredited and conforms to best practices.

WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY

In addition to the restrictions on Nature photography, to be eligible for any Wildlife award images must meet the following conditions:

- a) Zoological organisms must be living free and unrestrained in a natural habitat of their own choosing
- b) Images of zoological organisms that have been removed from their natural habitat, are in any form of captivity, or are being controlled by humans for the purpose of photography are not allowed.
- c) Botanical organisms may not be removed from their natural environment for the purpose of photography.
- d) Images that have been staged for the purpose of photography are not allowed.
- e) *Attention is drawn to the PSA Statements on Artificial Intelligence and Subject Matter which apply to all sections.*

Editing Guidelines for Nature

Processing or editing must be limited to making the image look as close to the original scene as possible, except that conversion to grayscale monochrome is allowed.

Allowed editing techniques

- Cropping, straightening and perspective correction.
- Removal or correction of elements added by the camera or lens, such as dust spots, noise, chromatic aberration and lens distortion.
- Global and selective adjustments such as brightness, hue, saturation and contrast to restore the appearance of the original scene.
- Complete conversion of color images to grayscale monochrome.
- Blending of multiple images of the same subject and combining them in camera or with software (exposure blending or focus stacking)
- Image stitching – combining multiple images with overlapping fields of view that are taken consecutively (panoramas)

Editing techniques that are not allowed

- Removing, adding to, moving or changing any part of an image, except for cropping and straightening.
- Adding a vignette during processing.
- Blurring parts of the image during processing to hide elements in the original scene.
- Darkening parts of the image during processing to hide elements in the original scene.
- All conversions other than to complete grayscale monochrome.
- Conversion of parts of an image to monochrome, or partial toning, desaturation or over-saturation of color

Attention is drawn to the PSA Statements on Artificial Intelligence and Subject Matter which apply to all sections.

PSA STATEMENT ON SUBJECT MATTER

The fundamental rule that must be observed at all times and applies to all sections offered in exhibitions with PSA recognition is that **the welfare of living creatures is more important than any photograph. This means that practices such as baiting of subjects with a living creature and removal of birds from nests, for the purpose of obtaining a photograph, are highly unethical, and such photographs are not allowed** in any exhibition with PSA recognition. **Under no circumstances may a living creature be placed in a situation where it will be killed or injured for the purpose of obtaining a photograph. Images that show live creatures being fed to captive animals, birds or reptiles are not permitted under any circumstances.**

There are also concerns about the use of aerial photography, using drones, helicopters, or low flying aircraft. These should not cause any interference with other individuals or animals which causes a disturbance in their normal activity or disrupts the way any individual or animal interacts with their environment. Entrants in PSA recognized exhibitions should comply with all relevant laws and regulations associated with aerial photography in the country in which the image was taken.

Entry into PSA recognized exhibitions is conditional on accepting the above policies. The images must comply with the division and section definitions listed on the PSA website and other conditions. Images that do not comply will be disqualified by the judges.

Image Creation and Authorship

Summary: All submitted images must be entirely the photographer's original work, with every pictorial element captured by the submitting photographer. Images must not incorporate or present other artists' work as the photographer's own, in whole or in part (clip art, stock images, replacement skies, photos of others' artwork, AI-generated content, etc.). The term *author* refers to the person who is the original creator of a submitted image; photographers may own the rights to use purchased content; however, authorship requires that all visual elements in the submitted photograph be personally created by the photographer. Photographers must retain copyright ownership of all visual elements contained within any submitted image, including composites. A violation of this rule constitutes plagiarism, a serious PSA ethics offense.

Artificial Intelligence

Summary: For the latest rules, consult the AI Statement on PSA's website. AI photo editing tools which enhance, adjust, or intelligently modify what was already captured in your photograph are permitted, provided they use only visual information already present in your photograph. *Outpainting tools* (generative fill) which allow you to expand a cropped image using a context-aware extension of the original photo are permitted, unless restricted by the Division's definition. Other *generative AI* tools that generate new synthetic visual content based on external image data not originally present in the author's photograph are prohibited, regardless of how small the edited area. Any person who violates this AI rule shall be banned from PSA exhibitions for a period ranging from 3 years to permanent exclusion.

PSA Ethics Policy

While photographers must adhere to all applicable rules in the PSA Ethics Policy in connection to PSA activities, nature photographers should note the **prohibited conduct** described in 4(b)(iv):

- Animal cruelty, such as baiting of live animals for creation of photographs;

Practical Equivalence

Two images are considered **practical equivalents** unless two of the following parameters vary between the images:

- **Noticeable change in camera position:** examples of a camera position change include high angle vs low angle, pan, tilt or tracking shots, etc.
- **Noticeable subject movement:** a subject's movement may be slight (a head movement) but must be obvious. This parameter may also apply to inanimate subject matter (arrangement of subjects in a lightbox).
- **Noticeable change of compositional or design elements:** this includes a wide variety of possible changes, from lighting and lines to spaces and shapes.
- **Story-telling sequences:** Can apply to any Division. For example, in PJD and ND story-telling sequences are captured by multiple images (change of facial expression or emotion, animal interactions, foraging, etc.)