

For Immediate Release
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2023 Hill Country photo contest winners announced and 2024 Calendar for sale!

The Texas Hill Country is a unique region filled with diverse wildlife, clear springs, sprawling rural landscapes, historic towns, and some of the starriest night skies in the country. With a rapidly growing population and increasing development coming into the region, many of these special qualities are at risk of being lost. Each year the Hill Country Alliance (HCA) holds a photo contest encouraging photographers to capture features of the Texas Hill Country they would like to protect forever.



Between March and May, HCA received almost 500 entries in the 2023 Hill Country Photo Contest from amateur and professional photographers alike. Submissions ranging from enchanting wildlife to starry Texas nights truly captured the beauty of the Hill Country's incredible treasures. This year, a beautiful photo of a Great Blue Heron at Inks Lake State Park received nearly 700 votes and took home the People's Choice prize. Photographer, Michael Kinder, was recognized with a cash prize and a photo feature in the 2024 calendar. The additional four winning photographs were selected by a panel of judges and are featured in HCA's popular 2024 Texas Hill Country Calendar, [available now on the HCA website.](#)

Photographer Alan Zhou's grand prize-winning shot, *Hawkeye*, was taken at Mueller Greenway in Austin and features a close-up view of a Red-tailed Hawk. Like the heron pictured above, hawks are found in a variety of habitats across the Hill Country – from busy urban landscapes to undeveloped, open spaces. So much of the photography submitted in this annual contest spotlights our region's fascinating wildlife and reminds viewers of our own ties to this delicate web of life. This connection also underscores the mission of HCA's Land Program - dedicated to advancing local land stewardship and conservation efforts that directly benefit the wild creatures and open spaces of the Texas Hill Country.





Rob Knerr earned first place with *Enchantment* – a stunning view of the Milky Way over Enchanted Rock near Fredericksburg. Enchanted Rock State Park is an International Dark Sky Park and one of a growing number of places in the Hill Country recognized for their commitment to reducing light pollution and protecting clear views of night skies. Texans across the region can help protect our connection to the cosmos by getting involved and

supporting initiatives like Lights Out Texas, local Friends of the Night Sky groups, and HCA’s Night Sky Program.

Joseph Richards’ photo, *United*, received second place for capturing an endearing moment between two gray foxes. These charismatic creatures play a vital role as omnivores, eating small mammals, insects, berries, and more - contributing to the region's ecological balance.



In third place is Wade Blissard’s *Middle Creek*, taken near Johnson City. After recent summers marked by challenging drought conditions, this photo serves as a poignant reminder of the vital role that water plays in the Texas Hill Country. While the region remains in a rainfall deficit, HCA’s Water Program is working with local advocates, community leaders, and groundwater districts to ensure our region’s water supply is resilient and accessible for both people and wildlife that call the Texas Hill Country home.

In addition to these photo contest winners, the Hill Country Alliance would like to recognize the following contestants whose photography is featured in the 2024 Hill Country Calendar:

Jennifer Bauerkemper
Julie Bentley
Sharon Carter
Susan Cherico
Robert Currie
Sheila Ellwood
Matt Erpenbeck
John Freud
James Harris

Peggy Howard
Meghan James
Rita Johnston
Steve Kotzur
Khanh Le
Alison Lyons
Lorelei Murphy
Joyce Owen
Alicia Paparo

Glenn Perrigo
Jerry Sargent
Carol Serur
Winifred Simon
Lance Stevens
Tom Torget
Jennifer Watts
Brittany Wegner



You can enjoy all these photos and much more in the [2024 Hill Country Calendar](#), available for purchase now on the Hill Country Alliance website. HCA's annual Texas Hill Country Calendar features stunning photography from the prior year's photo contest, highlights the beauty of the region, and provides an informative resource on Hill Country conservation. Now in its 16th year, the Hill Country Alliance hopes their annual photo contest and calendar will inspire residents to learn more about the environment and biology of the Texas Hill Country and to become involved in protecting the natural resources of this special region.

The Hill Country Alliance is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to raise public awareness and build community support around the need to preserve the natural resources and heritage of the Central Texas Hill Country. Visit us at www.hillcountryalliance.org.

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