

*For Immediate Release*

October 7, 2025

## **Hill Country Alliance announces 2025 Photo Contest winners and new 2026 Calendar for sale!**

The Texas Hill Country is a beautiful 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.

With more than 500 entries in the 2025 Photo Contest, this year's winning photos show the diversity of life and natural beauty that is abundant within our region – brilliantly colored songbirds, flowing rivers, hidden caverns hosting entire ecosystems beneath our feet, and clear views of a million stars above. The final four winning photographs were selected by a panel of judges and are featured in HCA's popular 2026 Texas Hill Country Calendar, [available now on the HCA website](#).

Geary Schindel's grand prize-winning photo shows a rare view of the Texas Hill Country taken to the west, in Edwards County. *"Into the Depths, Devil's Sinkhole"* stole the show with a view from within the sinkhole, reminding us of the hidden world beneath our hills – made up of caves and karst. As Schindel noted in his submission, "The entrance to the Devil's Sinkhole is a 145-foot rappel into a large chamber. The cave is home to a large colony of Mexican free-tailed bats and swifts." Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area is open to the public and managed by Texas Parks and Wildlife and the Devil's Sinkhole Society.



Moving from ecosystems to individuals, the first runner up went to Phil Ort for his entry *"Painted Bunting"* – a familiar face to many folks across the Hill Country. With vibrant blue, green, and red feathers, male Painted Buntings are a sight to see, especially during their annual spring migrations. Right now, Texas is in the midst of peak fall migration – the time of year when nearly two billion birds pass through Texas on their way south for the winter. You can support migrating songbirds like this Painted Bunting by turning off non-essential outdoor lighting from 11:00PM-6:00AM or switching to night sky friendly lighting and going #LightsOutTexas.



Night sky friendly lighting – or lighting that is aimed downward, warm-colored, and only on when needed – not only helps migratory bird populations, but it also helps us preserve our view of the stars at night. Our region is famous for its starry skies and second runner up Kim Clendenen’s “*Captured by the Stars*” is a beautiful testimony to the power of time spent looking up. Taken on the banks of the Guadalupe River, Clendenen shared, “One of my favorite activities during a photography class at the beautiful Mo-Ranch was gathering at the low water crossing to capture the stars.” October is Hill Country

Night Sky month, and we highly recommend celebrating by spending some time with the stars!

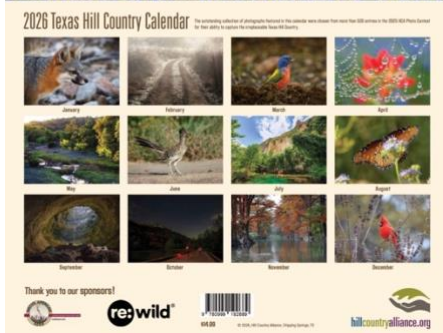
Third runner up, “*Changing Colors*” by Norman Williams captured not only a season but a moment in time. Taken on the Guadalupe River near Comfort before the floods of this summer, this photo stands out as a reminder of the delicate beauty and rugged balance living in the Hill Country entails. Rivers and their banks are a fragile resource – and strong native plant species like the bald cypress trees and tall grasses shown here are crucial in times of both flooding and drought.

So much of the photography submitted in this annual contest reminds viewers of their own connection to the region’s delicate web of life. This urgency underscores the importance of HCA’s work to advance local land stewardship and conservation efforts that directly benefit our rivers and streams, wild creatures, and open spaces of the Texas Hill Country. In addition to these photo contest winners, the Hill Country Alliance would like to recognize the following contestants whose photography is featured in the 2026 Hill Country Calendar:

Airon Mothershed  
Alicia Paparo  
Allan Boutwell  
Amira Van Leeuwen  
April Rohlich  
Ashley Campbell  
Carol Serur  
Carolyn Whiteside  
Colette Nicholl  
Daniel Filipe  
Holly Ewing  
Jacob Janssen  
Jeffrey Newton

Jesus Corona  
John Neyland  
Karen Roberts  
Kathy Locke  
Khanh Le  
LaRue Roth  
Laura Bray  
Laura M Levy  
Mariela Rodriguez  
Mia Havelka  
Michael Mallory  
Michael Tidwell  
Michael Wight

Michelle Graham  
Pascual Cervantes  
Patrick McKimmey  
Sergina Flaherty  
Sheila Ellwood  
Stephanie Saldivar  
Steve Kotzur  
Susan Hanson  
Tracy Costello  
Cole Hoffman – People’s  
Choice Award Winner



You can enjoy all these photos and much more in the [2026 Hill Country Calendar](#), available for purchase now on the Hill Country Alliance website. Both the photo contest and the calendar aim to highlight the beauty of the region, provide an informative resource on Hill Country conservation, and inspire folks to learn more and become involved in the issues important to keeping the natural resources of this unique region intact.

#### About Hill Country Alliance:

*The Hill Country Alliance is a nonprofit organization that brings together a diverse coalition of partners to preserve the open spaces, starry night skies, clean and abundant waters, and unique character of the Texas Hill Country. Visit us at [www.hillcountryalliance.org](http://www.hillcountryalliance.org).*

**Contact:** Jennifer Berrong, Marketing and Communications Manager | [jennifer@hillcountryalliance.org](mailto:jennifer@hillcountryalliance.org)

#### Photos:

[Click here to view shareable copies of all winning photos.](#)



Grand: Geary Schindel – Into the Depths, Devils Sinkhole (Edwards County)





First: Phil Ort – Painted Bunting (Burnet County)



Second: Kim Clendenen – Captured by the Stars (Kerr County)



Third: Norman Williams – Changing Colors (Kendall County)