

2008 Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest

By Patrick T. Isakson

The ever-vigilant long-eared owl often goes unnoticed by passersby. With its feathers compressed, this large, aerial predator of small mammals can pass for a broken tree branch.

The long-eared owl chosen as the 2008 Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest Poster winner, however, “stood out” to judges having to examine hundreds of wonderful photos entered in the contest.

Every year, seemingly more and more quality photos are entered in the Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest. The task of selecting top images in the different categories is difficult, and this year was certainly no exception.

Winners are chosen in four categories: nongame, game, insect and plant. The overall winner’s work appears on a poster promoting the Watchable

Wildlife tax check-off on the state tax form, which further enhances North Dakota Game and Fish Department programs supporting watchable wildlife.

Brad Berger, Fargo, captured the 2008 poster image. Berger is no stranger to the contest, taking first place in the insect category in 2006.

The Game and Fish Department encourages those with an interest or experience in nature and photography to enter quality images in the Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest. The deadline for the 2009 contest is tentatively set for September 30. Rules for the contest can be reviewed on the Game and Fish website at gf.nd.gov.

PATRICK T. ISAKSON is a nongame biologist with the Game and Fish Department.



Brad Berger

OVERALL CONTEST WINNER

Long-eared Owl

Brad Berger, Fargo

The long-eared owl is one of North Dakota’s largest owls, with adults reaching 16 inches from head to tail. The owl gets its name from the feathered tufts that can stand up on the top of its head, giving the appearance of ears. It is similar to the great horned owl in appearance, but lacks the white throat patch and sports vertical barring as opposed to horizontal bars on its chest.

The long-eared owl is found in both hardwood and coniferous woods, usually near the edge where it can hunt rodents in open grasslands. Like most owls, it is a nocturnal hunter, spending most of the day perched near the trunk of a tree. Its patterns of tan, black, brown and white give it excellent camouflage in this habitat.



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PLANT CATEGORY

1st Place

Prickly Pear Cactus

Art Mues, Bismarck

Many species of cactus are described as prickly pears. They all belong to the same family, but come in many shapes and sizes, some even missing the characteristic spines.

They are found throughout the western half of the United States, Mexico and Canada. North Dakota's prickly pear species is found most commonly in the southwestern part of the state in arid grasslands and badlands. The oval-shaped pads of the prickly pear are not its leaves as one may think, but actually are the plant's stem. Its leaves are the clusters of sharp spines spread across the plant, providing protection for the succulent edible pads behind them.



Art Mues

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INSECT CATEGORY

1st Place

Giant Ichneumon Wasp

Cathy Myrum, Petersburg

The giant ichneumon wasp is one of the largest insects in North Dakota, with some reaching 6 inches from head to tail.

Unlike other wasps, the giant ichneumon does not have a stinger. The tails coming from the abdomen are actually what the wasp uses to lay its eggs. It pushes these structures, known as ovipositors, into the wood of dead trees (as seen in the photograph) searching for larva of other insects. When the search is successful, the wasp paralyzes the larva with its ovipositor and lays its eggs on top. This gives its young something to eat when they are born.

The young then remain under the bark until spring when they emerge as adults. Only females possess the long ovipositors; males are generally smaller and differ in color.



Cathy Myrum



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GAME SPECIES CATEGORY

1st Place

American Badger

Peggy McDougall, Rolla



Peggy McDougall

The American badger is found throughout much of North Dakota. It is most commonly found in grassland and agricultural habitats.

The badger is covered in buff to gray-colored fur. The badger's head is quite distinctive, with a black muzzle and cheek patches and a striking white stripe between its eyes. Its body is built for life underground, with a flat appearance and covered in loose skin, allowing the badger to maneuver into small underground burrows.

The badger's short powerful legs and sharp claws are the perfect tools to dig burrows in search of its favorite prey, the ground squirrel. While it eats other small rodents and birds, the ground squirrel is preferred. It is not uncommon to find a badger roaming a prairie dog town or Richardson's ground squirrel colony during daylight hours in search of a meal.