

May 1, 2025

Media Release

***How Wild!* Contest Results Announced**

The Marine Education and Research Society (MERS) and the Canadian Conservation Photographers Collective (CCPC) are thrilled to announce the results of the inaugural “***How Wild!***” contest. The contest aims to help shift the culture, language, and imagery of marine mammal viewing and photography from “how close” to “how wild”.



Winner - photo from land
©Claire Guillaume / OrcaLab
Kailash Dancing in the Wild Seas

Winner in the category photo from land: Claire Guillaume - “Kailash Dancing in the Wild Seas” taken in Kwakwaka'wakw Territory with a Sony A7III and 600 mm lens.

Contest Winners

- Photo from land: Claire Guillaume
- Photo from vessel: Kristiana Bardsnes
- Video from land: Stan Novotny
- Video from vessel: Sophie Ward

Honourable Mentions

- Photo from land: Laura Lefurgey-Smith
- Photo from vessel: Nate Small
- Video from land: Jake Tinkler-Josephi
- Video from vessel: Justine Charollais

Photography Prioritizing the Wild

Wildlife imagery is often valued based on how large animals appear in the frame, with narratives that emphasize proximity. Caitlin Birdsall, MERS Executive Director, emphasized the potential impacts associated with such images and discourse.

“Wildlife photography that suggests close encounters can feed the desire or expectation of others to get close, which can have significant negative impacts for animals and people.”

In the case of marine mammals, close approaches contribute to increased underwater noise, vessel collisions, and confusion about laws and best practices. Disturbance from vessels can exacerbate the effects of other threats such as reduced prey availability and chemical pollution.

Josh DeLeenheer, Director for the CCPC, expressed his enthusiasm for the collaboration with MERS.

“The best way to ensure that we do not disrupt the natural behaviours of wildlife is to remain at a distance where our presence does not impede on our photography subjects. This contest embodies a primary principle of ethical photography and the winning images and videos clearly demonstrate that beautiful content can be captured while maintaining a respectful distance.”



Winner - photo from vessel
©Kristiana Bardsnes
Little Refuge

Winner in the category photo from vessel: Kristiana Bardsnes - “Little Refuge”, taken in Gwa'sala-Nakwaxda'xw Territory with a Canon EOS R and 100 to 400mm lens.

Contest Impact

MERS and the CCPC are deeply grateful to everyone who entered the contest and supported its promotion. The response to its mission was extremely positive and included more than 140 photo and video submissions to the contest.

All submissions were required to meet the following ethical criteria:

- Images must be taken legally in British Columbia, outside minimum avoidance distances and not using drones.
- Marine mammals must comprise less than 20% of the frame.
- Images must not suggest interaction with the photographer (e.g., stress behavior, eye contact).
- Submissions must include the First Nations Territory where the image was taken and details of the equipment used (e.g., lens focal length).

Many of the contest entries, beyond the winners, will serve as valuable resources for additional efforts to further a culture of wildlife photography focused on minimizing impact and celebrating marine mammals in the wild, rather than close to human activity.

The contest builds on the objectives of the [For the Whales responsible whale-watching campaign](#), a collaboration between MERS, 4VI/Tourism Vancouver Island, and the North Island Marine Mammal Stewardship Association.

For further background on the contest including video winners and a compilation of additional entries, please [see this link](#).

For media inquiries or access to contest images, please contact:

Jackie Hildering


Education / Communications Director
Marine Education and Research Society

 jackie@mersociety.org

 www.mersociety.org

Josh DeLeenheer

Executive Director and Founding Member
Canadian Conservation Photographers Collective

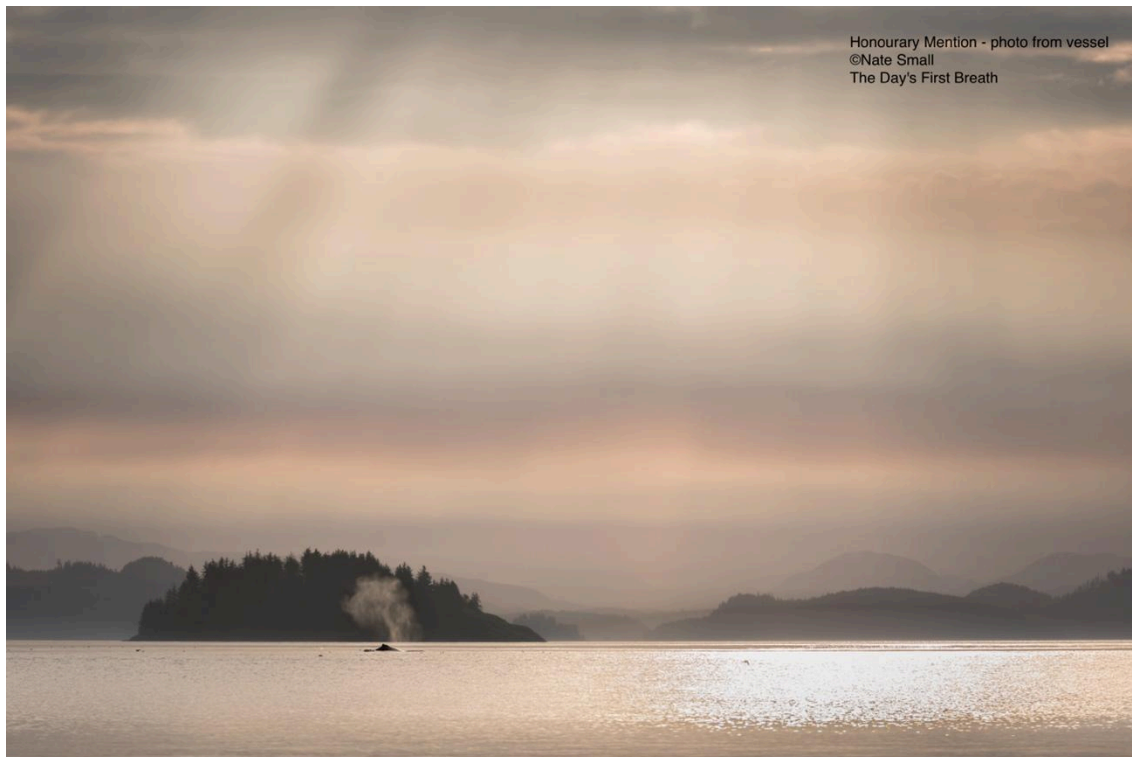
 info@theccpc.ca

 www.theccpc.ca



Honourary Mention - photo from land
©Laura Lefurgey-Smith
After the Spawn

Honourable Mention in the category photo from land: Laura Lefurgey-Smith - "After the Spawn", taken in Snaw-Naw-As Territory with a Nikon D7500 and 200 to 500 mm lens.



Honourary Mention - photo from vessel
©Nate Small
The Day's First Breath

Honourable Mention in the category photo from vessel: Nate Small - "The Day's First Breath", in 'Nāmgis / Kwakwaka'wakw Territory with a Nikon D750 and 100 to 400 mm lens.