

Wildlife Photographer of the Year

We have some impressive neighbours, including the National Museum of Scotland. Student Ambassador Carlotta visits an exhibition there.

Last week I visited the Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland. The exhibition shows the hundred finalists and two overall winners of the Wildlife Photographer of the Year awards, run by the Natural History Museum in London. The exhibited works have been chosen from among 48,000 entries, taken by photographers from 92 different countries. The exhibition's location at the National Museum, a short 5-minute walk from the William Robertson Wing, made it a perfect study break, and the £6 student price made it even more appealing. The exhibition is presented in a darkened room, with the images illuminated, making their colours stand out, and the focus of the images even more striking for the observer. Alongside the photographs was a description of how they were captured, as well as information about the animals and environments portrayed. This gave the exhibition an important educational function, rather than just being visually impressive.

Many of the works also aimed to highlight conservation and environmental issues affecting the animals and environments they captured. This was particularly true of one of the overall winners, 'Memorial to a Species' by Brent Stirton. Taken as part of an undercover investigation into the illegal trade in rhino horn, the photo shows a black rhino bull who had recently been shot and its horn cut off. The image was part of Brett's documentary series, several more photos from which were also shown at the exhibition, entitled 'Rhino Horn: The Ongoing Atrocity'. The series shows people on all sides of the story, from those involved in conservation efforts and

taking care of injured rhino, to those fighting to overturn bans on rhino hunting, and those who use the rhino horn for medicinal purposes. The most striking image of this series was that of the world's last male northern white rhino and his armed guard, who keeps a 24-hour watch over the male rhino and his female companions. This sanctuary has recently featured in the news, following the tragic death of the last male, and thus the certain extinction of the species. The other winning image, 'The Good Life' by Daniël Nelson, depicting Caco, a 9-year-old gorilla in the Odzala- Kokoua National Park in the Republic of Congo, also had a conservation message. In the image description, the photographer said that he wished to raise awareness through the image of the endangered nature of such gorillas.

My favourite photographs as I walked through the exhibition were those which depicted interactions between animals, particularly parents and their offspring. I found that oftentimes these interactions revealed the similarities in facial expressions and body language between animals and humans. One of these was 'Bear Hug', by Ashleigh Scully, depicting a mother brown bear and her cub. In the image description was a comment from Scully herself, about how from her time observing these bears in the Yosemite national park she was struck by how much their actions mirrored those of humans.

One area of the exhibition that I was particularly impressed by was the Young Photographers section, exhibiting entries by photographers of 17 years old and under. This included works by photographers as young as 5. One of the winners, Daniël Nelson, was in fact only 16 when he took his winning image. While the adult photographers tended to have travelled for their shots, and known what they were looking for, the young photographers demonstrated a natural connection to their subject matter. Many of the young photographers' photos were of the nature that surrounded where they lived, and most of

them had captured their photos on a whim.

The Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition is on at the National Museum of Scotland until the 29th April 2018, and I would heavily recommend it to anyone who is interested in animals and conservation, but also anyone who has an afternoon to spare. See some of the photos and find out more about the exhibition at the Wildlife Photographer of the Year website on the National Museums Scotland website.