CHARTER OAK PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY (COPS) COMPETITION RULES

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Note: Implementing Visual Pursuits competition software in 2024 entailed a new process for submitting images via the COPS Competition Website at https://charteroakphoto.visualpursuits.com. The competition rules below refer at times to this submission process. For instructions on how to submit images, go to the COPS Main Website, https://charteroakphoto.org, and in the MENU select COMPETITION > SUBMITTING IMAGES.

DIGITAL IMAGE COMPETITION RULES

The following rules apply to all digital images submitted for club competition. For assistance in applying them to a given image, see Appendix A.

Each member may enter up to three digital images per month in any combination of competition types listed below. (Makeup images do not count towards that total [see rule 4].) Each type is judged and scored separately by competition level (i.e., Masters and Salon [see rule 6]). Each member's two highest scores in each monthly competition will be counted towards the annual awards (see rule 8).

No Digital Image entry can display a digital signature or identifying watermark.

Digital Image entries that do not clearly meet the criteria stated for each competition type will be declared out-of-category and therefore ineligible to compete. Any such image, however, may be resubmitted in its proper type in a future competition. Makeup entries for ineligible images must be submitted in the next month's competition (see rule 4).

1. Photographic origin

   All Digital Image entries must be of photographic origin, i.e., created or derived from an image or images created optically by the maker using a camera or scanner. Scanned images must not be the work of another. The use of textures, patterns, and/or brushes is allowed, whether purchased or created by the maker. Although a maker may seek guidance and advice about processing an image from others, s/he exclusively must perform the actual post-processing. If an image has been created using specialized lighting or other setups, the lighting or setups must be the work of the maker.

2. Digital Image competition types (formerly known as categories)

   a. Realistic

      (1) Wildlife: Wildlife entries may be manipulated as long as the final result appears realistic. Wildlife comprises all non-domestic animals including all vertebrate (mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, amphibians) and invertebrate species. The subject matter must predominate. Monochromatic wildlife images are entered in Wildlife, not Monochrome.

      COPS Wildlife entries need not conform to PSA Nature Photography rules. However, if one does meet PSA Nature criteria (Appendix D), please include the designation "NAT" in the image title. ("NAT" enables that image to be entered into NECCC Digital Nature competitions, which adhere strictly to PSA Nature rules.)

(2) Monochrome: Monochrome entries may be manipulated as long as the final result appears realistic. Monochrome entries are not restricted to black and white or sepia and may be of any single monochromatic hue. Monochromatic wildlife images are entered in Wildlife. Monochromatic infrared images are entered in Monochrome, but multicolored infrared images are entered in Creative.

(3) Open: Open entries may be manipulated as long as the final result appears realistic. Open comprises all subject matter. Digital Image entries that properly belong in Wildlife, Monochrome, or Creative are excluded from Open.

(4) Specified Topic: Specified Topic entries may be manipulated as long as the final result appears realistic (for potential restriction, see note below). Specified Topic encourages the photographer to learn new skills or capture new subject matter. The specified topic must predominate. The list of monthly specified topics will be made available to the membership.

Specified Topic entries may not consist of images that properly belong in Wildlife or Monochrome unless either of those is the specified topic of the month (e.g., PSA Nature rules, zoo photography, black-and-white photography). If an image fits Specified Topic as well as Open, the maker has the option of entering it in either (but not both). (E.g., if the specified topic is architectural elements, the maker may enter a color image of a gargoyle in either Specified Topic or Open.)

Note: When the specified topic is a PSA type (e.g., PSA Nature, PSA Photo Travel), manipulation of the image is restricted to what PSA rules allow (appendices D, E).

b. Creative

Creative comprises composites, abstracts, or obviously altered reality. The preponderance of the image must derive from the maker's optically captured image. Computer-generated elements or effects that enhance or distort the optically captured primary subject(s) are allowed. The use of textures, patterns, and/or brushes is allowed, whether purchased or created by the maker.

Creative includes, but is not limited to

- Predominantly monochromatic images with portions in color
- Multicolored infrared images
- Abstract shapes or designs produced by twirling, distorting, or warping
- Images rendered nonrealistic by means of in-camera and/or post-processing filters
- Images in which the use of textures, brushes, or patterns is more than subtle
- Images with borders composed of more than simple, narrow lines

Creative entries may not include

- Clip art
- Images downloaded from the Internet
- Another maker's image, painting, or drawing as the basis for the maker's further revisions or enhancements

3. Duplicate and same subject images

a. Duplicate images: An image that has been entered in a COPS monthly competition cannot be re-entered in another COPS monthly competition in the same or any future year. There are two exceptions:

- Alternate competition type renditions (e.g., Open vs. Monochrome, Monochrome vs. Creative) of the image can both be entered, but not in the same competition year.

- Digital and print renditions of the image can both be entered, but not in the same competition year.

b. Same subject images: The club encourages members to photograph different subjects. Therefore any image, in any format (i.e., digital, print, color, or monochrome), of the same subject as an image previously entered in the same competition year by the same member is not permitted. For the purposes of this rule, “same subject” means a substantially similar composition of the same photographic element(s). A substantially different composition of the same photographic element(s) may be entered by that member in any format at any time, provided it otherwise complies with these rules.

4. Makeup images

Makeup images are permitted but must be submitted in the monthly competition immediately following the competition being made up. (Therefore, a maker could enter as many as six digital images in a monthly competition: three entries for the present month and three makeups from the previous month.) Makeup images receive scores but are not eligible for ribbons. When uploading via the COPS Competition Website, be sure to select the Makeup competition type.

5. Requests for comments

The maker may request comments from the judges on any submitted image except makeup images by checking the appropriate box during the image submission process. The judging software will recognize requests during the competition. During competition, anyone present, including the maker, may ask for comments on an image. Due to time constraints, the competition chair reserves the right to limit the number of such requests.

6. Competition levels (formerly known as classes)

Each member participating in Digital Image competitions is assigned one of two competition levels:

- Masters: Those members who have attained a high degree of photographic skill.

- Salon: All other members who wish to compete. At year’s end the top scorer(s) in Salon will be promoted to Masters.

7. Monthly awards

Ribbons are awarded in each competition level and type. The highest score receives a blue first-place ribbon. The second-highest score receives a red honorable-mention ribbon. Ties are not broken; all images with the highest or second-highest score are awarded a blue or red ribbon, respectively.

8. Eligibility for annual awards

At the end of each competition year, in both levels, the members with the highest aggregate scores in the year's monthly competitions will receive awards. Ties are not broken. The number of awards in each level is determined by the number of participants who have submitted at least two images per month.

- 1-5 Members eligible: 2 awards
- 6+ Members eligible: 3 awards

9. Digital Image annual awards

a. Digital Image of the Year is awarded in Monochrome, Wildlife, Open, and Creative. Any member who has entered any of the monthly Digital Image competitions may designate up to ten (10) images from that competition year in any combination of types for Digital-Image-of-the-Year consideration. Images need not be ribbon winners. However, no more than five (5) images from any single type are allowed.

b. Art and Arline Rich Nature Award: Any Nature digital image receiving a score of at least 23 points in any monthly competition during the competition year is eligible for this award. PSA Nature rules apply (Appendix D). Judging is limited to five (5) images per member.

c. Jane H. Sibley Photo Travel Award: This competition is open to all members whether or not they have entered images during the competition year. Images must have been captured at least 50 miles from Hartford and must conform to PSA Photo Travel rules (Appendix E). Judging is limited to two (2) images per member.

10. Retention of digital images

The competition chair and the webmaster retain images submitted during the competition year. Unless the maker specifies otherwise, the images may be displayed on the club main website and/or entered in interclub competition. (For questions regarding copyright and permissions, see Appendix C.)

PRINT COMPETITION RULES

The following rules apply to all prints submitted for club competition. For assistance in applying them to a given image, see Appendix B.

All members compete on an equal basis (i.e., not in Masters or Salon levels). Each member may enter one print image in each of the three competition types listed below for a possible total of three images per month. (Makeup images do not count towards that total [see rule 4 below].)

Prints must be mounted; the mount board cannot exceed 16 x 20 inches. (The interclub competition cases do not accommodate larger sizes). Mats are optional. Note that although digital versions of the prints may be projected for the benefit of the competition's audience, all Print entries are judged as they appear in the print box, rather than as digital entities. Therefore make sure that mats do not adversely crop images. Framed prints are unacceptable. No entry can display a name or other identifying mark on the front.

Print entries that do not clearly meet the criteria stated for each competition type will be declared out-of-category and therefore ineligible to compete. Any such image, however, may be resubmitted in its proper type in a future competition. Makeup entries for ineligible images must be submitted in the next month's competition (see rule 4).

1. Photographic origin

All Print entries must be of photographic origin, i.e., created or derived from an image or images created optically by the maker using a camera or scanner. Scanned images must not be the work of another. The use of textures, patterns, and/or brushes is allowed, whether purchased or created by the maker. Although a maker may seek guidance and advice about processing an image from others, s/he exclusively must perform the actual post-processing. Images can be printed by another individual or entity provided that no additional post-processing occurs during the printing process. If an image has been created using specialized lighting or other setups, the lighting or setups must be the work of the maker.

2. Print competition types (formerly known as categories)

a. Realistic

(1) Monochrome: Monochrome entries may be manipulated as long as the final result appears realistic. Monochrome entries are not restricted to black and white or sepia and may be of any single monochromatic hue. Monochromatic infrared images are entered in Monochrome, but multicolored infrared images are entered in Creative.

(2) Color: Color entries may be manipulated as long as the final result appears realistic. Color comprises all subject matter. Print entries that properly belong in Monochrome or Creative are excluded from Color.

b. Creative

Creative comprises composites, abstracts, or obviously altered reality. The preponderance of the image must derive from the maker's optically captured image. Computer-generated elements or effects that enhance or distort the optically captured primary subject(s) are allowed. The use of textures, patterns, and/or brushes is allowed, whether purchased or created by the maker.

Creative includes, but is not limited to

- Predominantly monochromatic images with portions in color
- Multicolored infrared images
- Abstract shapes or designs produced by twirling, distorting, or warping
- Images rendered nonrealistic by means of in-camera and/or post-processing filters
- Images in which the use of textures, brushes, or patterns is more than subtle
- Images with borders composed of more than simple, narrow lines

Creative entries may not include

- Clip art
- Images downloaded from the Internet
- Another maker's image, painting, or drawing as the basis for the maker's further revisions or enhancements.

3. Duplicate and same subject images

a. Duplicate images: An image that has been entered in a COPS monthly competition cannot be re-entered in another COPS monthly competition in the same or any future year. There are two exceptions:

- Alternate competition type renditions (e.g., Color vs. Monochrome, Monochrome vs. Creative) of the image can both be entered, but not in the same competition year.

- Digital and print renditions of the image can both be entered, but not in the same competition year.

b. Same subject images: The club encourages members to photograph different subjects. Therefore any image, in any format (i.e., digital, print, color, or monochrome), of the same subject as an image previously entered in the same competition year by the same member is not permitted. For purposes of this rule, "same subject" means a substantially similar composition of the same photographic element(s). A substantially different composition of the same photographic element(s) may be entered by that member in any format at any time, provided it otherwise complies with these rules.

4. Makeup images

Makeup images are permitted but must be submitted in the monthly competition immediately following the competition being made up. (Therefore, a maker could enter as many as six print images in a monthly competition: three entries for the present month and three makeups from the previous month.) Makeup images receive scores but are not eligible for ribbons. When uploading via the COPS Competition Website, be sure to select the Makeup competition type.

5. Requests for comments

The maker may request comments from the judges on any submitted image except makeup images by checking the appropriate box during the image submission process. The judging software will recognize requests during the competition. During competition, anyone present, including the maker, may ask for comments on an image. Due to time constraints, the competition chair reserves the right to limit the number of such requests.

6. Monthly awards

Ribbons are awarded in each competition type. The highest score receives a blue first-place ribbon. The second-highest score receives a red honorable-mention ribbon. Ties are not broken; all images with the highest or second-highest score are awarded a blue or red ribbon, respectively.

7. Eligibility for annual awards

At the end of each competition year, for each competition type, the members with the highest aggregate scores in the monthly competitions will receive awards. The number of awards per type is determined by the number of participants who have entered one image per month in that type. Ties are not broken for annual awards.

- 1-5 Members eligible: 2 awards
- 6+ Members eligible: 3 awards

8. Print annual awards

Print of the Year is awarded in the Monochrome, Color, and Creative competition types. Any member who has entered any of the monthly Print competitions may submit up to seven (7) prints from that competition year for Print-of-the-Year consideration. Images need not be ribbon winners. However, no more than four (4) images from any single type are allowed.

9. Retention of digital versions of Print entries

The Digital Image chair retains all digital images submitted during the competition year, including digital versions of prints entered in Print competitions. Unless the maker specifies otherwise, the images may be displayed on the club website and/or entered in interclub competitions. (For questions regarding copyright and permissions, see Appendix C.)

APPENDIX A: HOW TO APPLY COPS RULES TO DIGITAL IMAGE COMPETITIONS

All entries must satisfy the basic requirements (headnote; rule 1). To ensure eligibility and determine the proper competition type, ask yourself the following series of questions.

1. Determine eligibility (rule 3)

   a. Have I entered this image in another format (i.e., digital vs. print, monochrome vs. color, realistic vs. creative) in a monthly competition earlier this membership year? If YES, save the image for another competition year. If NO, go to 1b.

   b. If this image's subject and pictorial elements appeared earlier this year in one of my COPS competition entries, is the composition of this image substantially different from the earlier entry? If YES, you may enter the image this year. If NO, save the image for another competition year.

2. Determine competition type (rule 2)

   a.i. For non-infrared images: Does my non-infrared image look realistic, i.e., does it present its subject and pictorial elements in a way that they would logically appear to the human eye looking at the world? If YES, go to 2b. If NO, enter your image in Creative.

   a.ii. For infrared images: Is my infrared image monochromatic? If YES, enter it in Monochrome and go to 2d. If NO, enter it in Creative.

   b. Is my main subject a non-domestic animal (i.e., vertebrate [mammal, bird, reptile, fish, or amphibian] or invertebrate [shellfish, insect, or arachnid] species)? If NO, go to 2c. If YES, enter your image in Wildlife. Then review the PSA Nature Photography criteria (Appendix D) and if your image meets them, add "NAT" to your image title. Then go to 2d.

   c. Is my (non-Wildlife) image monochromatic? If YES, enter it in Monochrome and go to 2d. If NO, go to 2d.

   d. Does my image fit this month's specified topic? If YES, you have the option of entering it in Specified Topic or not. If you enter it in Specified Topic, go to 2f. If you do not enter it in Specified Topic, and you still have not found a competition type for your image, go to 2e.

   e. If you have not yet found a competition type for your image, enter it in Open and go to 2f.

   f. Does my (non-Wildlife) nature image meet PSA Nature Photography criteria (Appendix D)? If YES, feel free to add "NAT" to your image title.

APPENDIX B: HOW TO APPLY COPS RULES TO PRINT IMAGE COMPETITIONS

All entries must satisfy the basic requirements (headnote; rule 1). To ensure eligibility and determine the proper competition type, ask yourself the following series of questions.

1. Determine eligibility (rule 3)

   a. Have I entered this image in another format (i.e., digital vs. print, monochrome vs. color, realistic vs. creative) in a monthly competition earlier this membership year? If YES, save the image for another competition year. If NO, go to 1b.

   b. If this image's subject and pictorial elements appeared earlier this year in one of my COPS competition entries, is the composition of this image substantially different from the earlier entry? If YES, you may enter the image this year. If NO, save the image for another competition year.

2. Determine competition type (rule 2)

   a.i. For non-infrared images: Does my non-infrared image look realistic, i.e., does it present its subject and pictorial elements in a way that they would logically appear to the human eye looking at the world? If YES, go to 2b. If NO, enter your image in Creative.

   a.ii. For infrared images: Is my infrared image monochromatic? If YES, enter it in Monochrome. If NO, enter it in Creative.

   b. Is my image monochromatic? If YES, enter your image in Monochrome. If NO, go to 2.c.

   c. If you have not yet found a competition type for your image, enter it in Color.

APPENDIX C: IMAGE PROTECTION POLICY

As part of the routine operation of the Charter Oak Photographic Society, members submit their images to the club in print or digital format for competitions at both the club and interclub levels, as well as for display to the public, both physically and on the World Wide Web. Images submitted to the club are typically protected by the maker's copyright. It is the maker's responsibility to establish his/her copyright. It is also the maker's responsibility to obtain any necessary permissions or releases from third parties, e.g., subjects or property owners, before submitting an image to the club for any form of public display. Unless the maker specifies otherwise, images may be retained by the club for further use or display, such as on the club website, in interclub competitions, or in public exhibitions. Images submitted in digital format, because of the ease with which they may be copied or transmitted and because they may be displayed to millions of people on the club website, require particular attention, not only to the rights of the maker, but also to the rights of any subjects.

APPENDIX D: PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA (PSA) NATURE RULES

NATURE DIVISION: DEFINITION OF NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY

Nature Photography is restricted to the use of the photographic process to depict all branches of natural history, except anthropology and archeology, in such a fashion that a well-informed person will be able to identify the subject material and certify its honest presentation. The storytelling value of a photograph must be weighed more than the pictorial quality while maintaining high technical quality.

Subjects

Photographs of human-created hybrid plants, cultivated plants, feral animals, domestic animals, or mounted specimens are ineligible.

Human elements shall not be present except:

1. When they are integral parts of the nature story

    a. Nature subjects (e.g., barn owls, storks, or urban peregrine falcons) adapted to an environment modified by humans may be depicted within that environment.

    b. Nature subjects availing themselves of a human-made element to engage in natural behavior (e.g., a songbird singing from a fencepost or a nest incorporating nylon string) may be depicted with that element.

    c. Human structures in situations displaying natural forces (e.g., hurricanes or tidal waves) exerted upon those structures are allowed.

2. When they are unobtrusive, unavoidable, and do not interfere with or distract from the nature story

    a. Non-distracting background elements (e.g., a footprint or track) are allowed.

    b. Scientific bands, scientific tags, or radio collars on wild animals are allowed.

Processing

Processing must be limited to rendering the image as close as possible to the original scene, although conversion to grayscale monochrome is allowed.

Allowed

- Cropping, straightening, and perspective correction
- Removal or correction of elements added by camera or lens (e.g., dust spots, noise, chromatic aberration, and lens distortion)
- Global and selective adjustments such as brightness, hue, saturation, and contrast to restore appearance of the original scene
- Global conversion of color images to grayscale monochrome

- Blending of multiple images of the same subject combined in camera or with software (i.e., exposure blending, focus stacking)
- Image stitching, combining multiple images taken consecutively with overlapping fields of view (i.e., panoramas)

Not allowed

- Removing, adding to, moving, or changing any part of the image (except for cropping, straightening, and perspective correction)
- Adding a vignette
- Blurring or darkening parts of the image to hide elements in the original scene
- Local conversions to monochrome; or partial toning, desaturation, or over-saturation of color
- Any global conversions of the image other than to grayscale monochrome

HOW TO APPLY PSA NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY RULES TO COMPETITION IMAGES

To determine if your image qualifies for competitions adhering to PSA Nature Photography rules, ask yourself the following series of questions.

1. Evaluate processing

   a. Did I composite multiple images or use textures, patterns, or brushes to create this image (other than exposure blending, focus stacking, or panorama stitching)? If YES, your image does not qualify for PSA Nature designation. If NO, go to 1b.

   b. In processing my image, did I use only cropping to remove any unwanted elements of the original scene? (Note: Imperfections added by the camera or lens, such as dust spots, noise, chromatic aberrations, or lens distortions, may be removed by any means available.) If YES, go to step 2. If NO, your image does not qualify for PSA Nature designation.

2. Evaluate signs of humankind

   a. Other than scientific tags/bands or radio collars, does my image show any signs of humankind (e.g., fences, mown grass, electrical wires, roads, hybrid plants, feral domestic animals)? If YES, go to 2b (i or ii, depending on subject). If NO, you may add “NAT” to your image title to qualify it for interclub Nature competition.

   b.i.*a.* For wildlife images: If there are signs of humankind in my wildlife image, are they integral to the wild creature’s usual means of survival given how its species has adapted (e.g., a barn as habitat for barn owls)? If YES, you may add “NAT” to your image title to qualify it for interclub Nature competition. If NO, go to step 2.b.i.*b.*

   b.i.*b.* If there are signs of humankind unrelated to the subject species’ essential habitat in my wildlife image, are they integral to the natural activity the image depicts (e.g., a bird singing from a fencepost)? If YES, you may add “NAT” to your image title to qualify it for interclub Nature competition. If NO, go to step 2.b.i.*c.*

b.i.*c.* If there are any other signs of humankind in my wildlife image, are they unobtrusive, unavoidable, and not interfering with or distracting from the nature story of the image (e.g., a human footprint in the background)? If YES, you may add “NAT” to your image title to qualify it for interclub Nature competition. If NO, your image does not qualify for PSA Nature designation.

b.ii. For images portraying natural forces: If there are signs of humankind (e.g., buildings) in my image of natural forces (e.g., violent waves, volcanic eruptions) do those signs contribute to the story my image is telling? If YES, you may add “NAT” to your image title to qualify it for interclub Nature competition. If NO, your image does not qualify for PSA Nature designation.

APPENDIX E: PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA (PSA) PHOTO TRAVEL RULES

PHOTO TRAVEL DIVISION: DEFINITION OF PHOTO TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY

Note: For purposes of the Jane H. Sibley Photo Travel Award, COPS combines the two PSA Photo Travel Division subdivisions instituted January 2026 (Photo Travel Division Documentary [PTDD] and Photo Travel Division World in Focus [PTDW]). The difference between them is that PTDD does not allow images of events staged for photography, and PTDW does.

A Photo Travel image is a portrayal of the real world we live in as it is found naturally. There are no geographic limitations.

Subjects and capture

Eligible images predominately or exclusively depict people and their activities; locales (e.g., land-, sea-, or cityscapes); buildings and monuments; or animals in their native environment. In each instance, the subject matter must be distinctive and characteristic of that country, region, or continent.

Portraits or other close-ups must include elements of the surrounding environment to demonstrate that they were not taken in a studio setting.

Images from public events such as festivals and historic re-enactments are allowed, as well as events, activities, and subjects arranged, directed, or hired specifically for photography.

Images must look natural. Long exposures are allowed if the image looks natural. However, if the long exposure produces a dominating and unnatural special effect (e.g., star trails or long light trails), then it is not permitted. Highly distorted images such as those produced by fisheye lenses are not permitted.

Processing

Processing must be limited to rendering the image as close as possible to the original scene, although conversion to grayscale monochrome is allowed.

Allowed

- Cropping, straightening, and perspective correction
- Removal or correction of elements added by camera or lens (e.g., dust spots, noise, chromatic aberration, and lens distortion)
- Global and selective adjustments such as brightness, hue, saturation, and contrast to restore appearance of the original scene
- Global conversion of color images to grayscale monochrome
- Blending of multiple images of the same subject combined in camera or with software (i.e., exposure blending, focus stacking)
- Image stitching, combining multiple images taken consecutively with overlapping fields of view (i.e., panoramas)

Not allowed

- Removing, adding to, moving, or changing any part of the image (except for cropping, straightening, and perspective correction)
- Adding a vignette
- Blurring or darkening parts of the image to hide elements in the original scene
- Local conversions to monochrome; or partial toning, desaturation, or over-saturation of color
- Any global conversions of the image other than to grayscale monochrome