

AIBS Photo Contest: Through the scientific lens

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The American Institute of Biological Sciences' (AIBS) annual Faces of Biology Photo Contest (<https://www.aibs.org/faces-of-biology>), cosponsored with the Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology, blends creativity with research making science more accessible and engaging for a broader audience.

The competition highlights biological research through impactful, personal imagery, illustrating its diverse forms and settings. By showcasing these visuals, it aims to help the public and policy-makers recognize the importance of biological research and education.

"The Faces of Biology Photo Contest is more than just a competition; it's an opportunity to capture science through photography, to celebrate creativity, and to connect society with the beauty in biology," said Scott Glisson, CEO of AIBS. "It reminds us that every

moment in science is worth preserving, and every scientist has a story to tell."

Brandon A. Güell, a postdoctoral research associate at the Institute of Environment at Florida International University, won first place showing colleague Janelle Goeke, a recent postdoctoral research associate, collecting biomass cores from experimental fish exclosures in the Everglades Stormwater Treatment. Güell said, "Photography is a powerful tool not only to communicate science but also to help inspire a passion for wildlife [and] wild places and [to] create advocates for conservation."

Güell is a first-generation Costa Rican–American Wildlife Ecologist and photographer whose passion for wildlife, conservation, and animal behavior began at a very young age, largely inspired by traveling throughout Costa Rica as a child. Güell understands the



First place: Janelle Goeke collects biomass cores from experimental fish exclosures in the Everglades Stormwater Treatment Areas on the border of the Everglades Protection Area. Photograph: Brandon Güell.

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Second place: Alyssa Kullberg and Lauren Coombs collecting canopy leaves from a *Cecropia* tree at the Boiling River in the Peruvian Amazon. Photograph: Riley Fortier.

role photography places in science. “I have learned that photography is a powerful agent that can generate empathy and advocates for wildlife and wild places, often more so than even the clearest scientific publications or compelling data.”

Riley Fortier, from the University of Miami, who won second place, said, “I entered the photo contest to help show that field-based research is still relevant and exciting in an increasingly digital age of research.” The image from Fortier shows Alyssa Kullberg and Lauren Coombs collecting canopy leaves from a *Cecropia* tree at the Boiling River in the Peruvian Amazon. The Boiling River’s geothermally heated waters provides a unique study system to investigate the effect of elevated temperatures on lowland tropical forests.

Fortier always tries to have a camera close because “photographs not only help to share experiences between scientists but are also one of the most accessible means of outreach that we scientists have in getting our work out to the public.”

Third place went to a photo by Ryan Wagner, from Washington State University. Wagner’s entry depicts the kiwakiu, one of the most endangered birds in the world, in the hands of an ornithologist as the bird is administered a few droplets of medicine from a pipette. Following the introduction of mosquitoes in the 1800s, which carry deadly avian malaria, native Maui birds have found refuge on the slopes of Haleakala volcano, too high and cold for mosquitoes to reach, until now. A boost of electrolytes and protein help strengthen the bird for a quick helicopter flight to the Maui Bird Conservation Center, where it will be treated for malaria and will join a captive breeding program to help save the species from extinction.

“Science is not just graphs and publications,” shared Wagner. “It is also the hard work of curious individuals who want to expand our knowledge of how the world works.”

Güell wants to remind scientists and the public that “conducting biological research is exciting and surprising, especially when



Third place: An ornithologist giving a kiwikiu, also known as the Maui parrotbill, a few droplets of medicine from a pipette. Photograph: Ryan Wagner.

working with other living organisms. Always bring your gear, and try to capture these serendipitous moments!"

All three winners received a 1-year subscription to *BioScience*. Güell also received \$250. The 2025 contest is currently open. Visit the AIBS website for more information.