





PHOTOGRAPHER JOEL BOCHES

# Anticipation

THE THRILL OF THE SHOOT | BY KATHRYN MCKAY



Joel Boches

Above: "Whales"

Opposite: "Frog"

Both are photographs.

When a heron swoops down on the Potomac River, the bird isn't the only one with the potential for a great catch.

Wildlife photographer Joel Boches may live in Fairfax, but he views Great Falls National Park, Green Spring Gardens, Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve and other Mid-Atlantic locales as habitats, too.

For the most part, wildlife photography is a peaceful and safe pursuit, but Joel takes precautions. He watches his footing on the cliffs at Great Falls, makes sure there's a safe distance between himself and a fox and heads back to his vehicle when he hears gunshots during duck hunting season.

The one day he threw caution to the wind—or rather to the poison ivy—it wasn't worth the baby owl pictures.

Another time when Joel was photographing a red-shouldered hawk, the bird flew right at the camera. He had a split second to react. "Should I duck or keep shooting?" he wondered. Of course, Joel kept shooting.

Sometimes an animal seems playful. "The frogs at Green Spring thought they were hiding from me in their camouflage," he says. But they didn't escape

Joel's experienced eye and long lens.

Like a licensed professional, Joel follows the code of ethics established by the North American Nature Photography Association. "You shouldn't cause any animal stress or invade their space," he explains.

In urban parks, it's more likely that manmade structures invade a picture. Occasionally, that's a good thing. Joel didn't realize what a clean shot he had of the osprey flying in front of the George Washington Masonic National Memorial until he got home. Both the building and the bird are majestic.

Some wildlife photographers set up their camera on a tripod and wait. Joel takes the opposite approach. He moves like many of the animals he photographs—with purpose, determination and hope.

In seconds, his subjects may disappear or delight. The moment an eagle unfurls his wings, a monarch butterfly lands on a flower or a fox yawns cannot be orchestrated. Yet Joel tries to anticipate nature at her most photogenic times.

He does his research. Joel knows that the Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge in Delaware is a favorite



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—Joel Boches

Above, left: “Harbor Seal,” and “Fox”

Opposite: “Osprey”

All are photographs.

of foxes. He subscribes to listserves for birders to learn when rare species such as the Rufous hummingbird or Wilson’s warbler migrate through the area. And he keeps track of the species he photographs every year.

While Joel loves local wildlife, he was excited to bring his cameras on an Alaskan cruise with his parents and extended family in 2012. “I’m a cold weather lover, so I was disappointed that it was 85 degrees and sunny almost the whole trip, but it made for some good shots of both wildlife and landscapes,” he says.

The humpback whales surprised Joel. “I only expected to get shots of their tails, but the whales were bubble net feeding,” says Joel. “I’m not a biologist, but I understand that that’s when the whales work as a team to blow bubbles that attract schools of little fish to the surface. Apparently, it’s learned behavior. I was thrilled to get that picture!”

One day during the cruise, the weather was finally cool but along with the lower temperatures came problems. “All the helicopter excursions were canceled due to fog that ended in a torrential downpour,” Joel recalls. But the rain didn’t stop Joel from bringing his camera on a boat ride to Neets Bay. While the other passengers stayed under cover, Joel ventured out on deck. “I had just traveled across the country and I wasn’t going to let rain stop me,” he says.

For 45 minutes, Joel waited for the classic Alaskan shot. His patience paid off when a massive black bear grabbed a salmon at the edge of the water on the

beach. As Joel says, “Technically it isn’t the best photo, but it was a fun action shot nonetheless.”

The first time Joel displayed photographs was in 2005 as an emerging artist at the Potomac Arts Festival in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. He only sold two pictures, but he received so much encouragement and support from the other artists that he has become a regular professional exhibitor at major waterfowl and wildlife festivals.

Most of the events he participates in are also fundraisers for nonprofit organizations. “It’s become a way of giving back, too,” he says.

He brings an assortment of photographs in various sizes and formats to each event. “I can’t predict what the public will like,” he says. “Sometimes, it’s photos of seals or frogs. Other times it’s blue herons. One time, I couldn’t keep enough owl pictures in stock.” Regardless of the subject, Joel’s objective is crisp, well-crafted pictures.

His photographs have also been exhibited at the Best of Nature Photography Show in San Diego, the Manchester National Juried Fine Art Exhibition in Richmond and national juried shows at the Fredericksburg Center for Creative Arts.

Joel focuses on capturing the beauty that surrounds us every day in the Mid-Atlantic area. But upon reflection, he says, “If I go to Africa, I may change my story.”

Joel Boches | [www.joelboches.com](http://www.joelboches.com)

