

Media alert

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Wildlife captured like never before

Sneak preview of first images from world's most prestigious wildlife photography competition, Veolia Environnement Wildlife Photographer of the Year

London's Natural History Museum and *BBC Wildlife Magazine* today revealed a small taste of what to expect from their annual global search for the best and most creative visions of nature.

Judges of the Veolia Environnement Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2009 competition have completed the mammoth task of selecting the winning photos from a record 43,000 entries from 94 countries.

Competition Manager Gemma Webster said the record entries, up 33 per cent on 2008, highlighted that the international appeal of what is widely regarded as the world's most prestigious wildlife photography competition continues to grow.

'While the UK and the US remain our major source of entrants, the greatest growth in entries is happening in China and Russia. This year we had the first-ever entries from photographers in Bangladesh, Guatemala, Macedonia, Oman, Qatar, Tunisia and Bahrain, and we've had our first category winners from Estonia, Zambia and the Czech Republic,' Gemma said.

The winning selection of 100 images will be showcased at an exhibition opening at the Natural History Museum on 23 October, before touring to regional and international venues. The first two winning images were unveiled today as early ticket sales opened.



Footsteps © Robert Friel /

Veolia Environnement Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2009



Arctic fight © Morten Hilmer /

Veolia Environnement Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2009

British photographer Robert Friel was highly commended in the One Earth Award category, which seeks to highlight interaction between humans and the natural world. He captured his amusing, but thought-provoking, *Footsteps* photo of a curious king penguin chick on the sub-Antarctic island of South Georgia.



'As I was walking back along the foreshore to the landing site, I was looking at the tracks penguins were making in the wet sand when a chick walked towards my footprints. It seemed to consider them briefly before moving back to the other groups of penguins. I thought it merely a quirky moment, but later it became a more poignant reminder that, however brief and well managed our visits, we are intruding on their environment,' Robert said.

Danish photographer Morten Hilmer lived for three months in an isolated Greenland weather station and braved temperatures of minus 25 degrees Celsius to capture his *Arctic fight* image, which won him a runner-up award in the Behaviour: Mammals category.

'I had been observing fighting Arctic hares for several weeks so I knew where to find them and positioned myself where they would be backlit by the sunset. All animals in the Arctic have to fight for their survival because of these extreme weather conditions and the limited amount of food,' Morten said.

Chair of the judging panel, zoologist and broadcaster Mark Carwardine, said the growth in entries was daunting but the quality of the winning photos was inspiring.

'Among the judges, we have some of the world's most renowned wildlife photographers and they were wowed by the finalists in the kid's categories, let alone by what the winning adult professional and amateurs had captured,' Mark said. 'We obviously saw thousands of beautiful images, but the winners found a creative or original way to show the drama, beauty or unique behaviour of wildlife. That gave their photos an extra impact that set them apart.'

Tickets go on sale early because of the huge popularity of the exhibition at the Natural History Museum. Last year, it attracted 161,000 visitors. People can buy tickets in person at the Museum or online at www.nhm.ac.uk/wildphoto/exhibition

The competition, owned by the Natural History Museum and *BBC Wildlife Magazine*, has been running annually since 1964. This year, the competition is being sponsored by Veolia Environnement, a world leader in environmental services.

The overall winner, Veolia Environnement Wildlife Photographer of the Year, will be chosen from the winners of the competition's 14 adult categories. The Veolia Environnement Young Wildlife Photographer of the Year will be chosen from the winners of the three junior categories.

Natural History Museum exhibition information for visitors:

Dates and times:	23 October 2009 – 11 April 2010, 10.00–17.50
Visitor enquiries:	020 7942 5000
Admission:	Adult £9 Gift Aid admission* Concessions £4.50 Gift Aid admission Family ticket (up to two adults and up to three children) £24 Gift Aid admission Free for children aged three and under, Patrons and Members
Nearest tube:	South Kensington
Website:	www.nhm.ac.uk/wildphoto



*The ticket prices above include a small voluntary donation to the Museum. Gift Aid donations from UK taxpayers allow us to claim back the tax on the whole ticket price and help support the important scientific work of the Museum. The standard admission charges for people wishing to opt out of the donation are: adult £8, concessions £4, and family £21.

Media access to the photographs (not for publication)

The two images mentioned above can be published from 19 August. Further highly commended photos will be released in late September, and all the remaining exhibition images (category winners, runners-up and specially commended) can be published from 22 October*. Media with long production deadlines will be able to access the photos earlier, under embargo, by signing a non-disclosure agreement (we cannot reveal early which photos have been named as the overall winners – Veolia Environnement Wildlife Photographer of the Year and Veolia Environnement Young Wildlife Photographer of the Year).

At each release stage, media may use up to five photos free of charge.

*A media preview will be held on 22 October at the Natural History Museum. Please contact Gary Spink to attend.

Notes for editors:

- For further details about the competition and the various categories, see www.nhm.ac.uk/wildphoto.
- Veolia Environnement is a world leader in environment services. With more than 300,000 employees in its global operations, it provides tailored solutions to meet the needs of municipal, commercial and industrial customers to reduce their environmental impact in water, waste and energy management as well as freight and passenger transport (see www.veolia.co.uk).
- The Underwater World category is supported by Project AWARE Foundation (International), a non-profit organisation dedicated to conserving underwater environments with direct support from divers and water enthusiasts worldwide. www.projectaware.org
- The Gerald Durrell Award for Endangered Wildlife is supported by ARKive. ARKive is the world's centralised digital library of films, photographs and fact-files of threatened species – freely accessible to all online and preserved for future generations – with almost 30,000 images and film clips donated by the best wildlife film-makers and photographers in the business. www.arkive.org

Media contacts:

For more information, high-resolution images or to arrange interviews, please contact:

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