My dad and I took a birding trip to eastern Oregon in late July. At Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, our favorite technique is to find and photograph birds by car, resting the camera lens on a rolled-down window and using the vehicle as a blind. Driving down the road at 55 mph, I suddenly spotted a covey of California Quail on the shoulder of the road, and I could see there were one or two sitting on fence posts—perfect! We pulled a U-turn and crept up on the quail with cameras ready. As the main flock foraged on weed seeds along the shoulder of the road, one or two “scouts” were always up on fence posts keeping watch. The bird in this photograph is one such scout. Before the bird flushed, I took several shots, both horizontally and vertically composed. I decided I liked the vertical composition best because of the vertical fencepost and vertical grass in the background. Although the bird is somewhat central in the frame, I think in this case if it were lower down there would have too much headroom. Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon; 1 August 2004. © Noah K. Strycker, Age 18.
I first learned of the presence of this Rufous Hummingbird in mid-December, when it was reported at a feeder about 15 minutes from my house. The bird had been alternately feeding at the homeowner’s nectar feeder and on the rotten fruit in the backyard apple tree. Over the course of several weeks, I visited this beauty five times, attempting photography on several different occasions. However, a combination of poor lighting and equipment failure (possibly due to exceedingly cold temperatures) halted photography until 1 January, when I finally found clear morning light and warmish temperatures. I positioned myself about even in height with the Rufous’s favorite perch in the apple tree and waited behind a bush. I set up my tripod and attached my flash unit to get some fill-lighting, hoping to accentuate the dazzle of the hummer. After a few minutes of waiting, I saw the bird zoom in and begin probing the few rotting apples still hanging on the tree. After a few seconds it perched on the anticipated twig. Snap, snap, snap... I got several shots off as the hummer sat fluffed-up right next to its apple. Finally, I made the photograph I had been waiting several weeks to produce. Middletown, Pennsylvania; 1 January 2004. © Tom Johnson, Age 15.

While driving past Windsor Lake, I observed several Double-crested Cormorants and a few other different birds, among them Ring-billed Gull, California Gull, American White Pelican, Mallard, and Canada Goose. Since I was looking for waterfowl to photograph, my mom parked the car, and I set up my scope. There were seven cormorants that were alternately feeding and then drying their wings in preparation for their next dive. I waited to get a good photograph of these birds in this unique position. I like this photograph because in the shot you can see the cormorant’s brilliant green eye, with the bird’s head turned. Windsor, Colorado; 3 October 2004. © Elise M. S. Becker, Age 12.
I signed up for the Norton Puffin Tour to Machias Seal Island, which ferries you to the island and allows you to stand in blinds and observe the nesting seabirds. This picture was taken through an open slot of the blind. I was about ten feet away from this adult Atlantic Puffin, but not disturbing it at all. Machias Seal Island, Nova Scotia; 27 July 2004. © Erik Enbody, Age 14.

This Grasshopper Sparrow landed on a fence post only 20 feet away from me. I stopped walking and the bird became less nervous as I stood there. It started singing with its beak opening only a little bit, but gradually threw itself more and more into full song. The sparrow flew off when I had to call my dog, who had been wandering off. Wise County, Texas; 8 May 2004. © Claire Curry, Age 16.
While I was walking along the boardwalk at Kensington Metropark, I saw this bold **Great Blue Heron** fishing very close to the boardwalk. It was a very cooperative bird, as it waited until after I'd gotten several photographs to fly away. Kensington Metropark, Michigan; 24 June 2004. © Neil Gilbert, Age 11.

Two **Ruddy Turnstones** were working the washed-up debris at the base of a rock jetty, when several of us approached them and knelt with our tripods retracted all the way to minimize height. The birds slowly worked their way toward us, poking among the debris until they had gotten so close that our scopes wouldn't even focus on them anymore! I caught this bird with its head up looking right at me only 20 feet away. To me, this shot really captures the personality of the beachcombing Ruddy Turnstone. It also highlights how effective its camouflage is in its preferred habitat. Douglas County, Wisconsin; 24 September 2004. © Sean Fitzgerald, Age 17.

On 10 October 2004 I was birding at Lake Henry with three other birders, and we were out to find a juvenile **Red Phalarope** that had been spotted there two days earlier. This is a good bird for Colorado, rarely found inland anywhere, and just about once a year here. At first, we saw four Sanderlings, and our bird had been sighted with Sanderlings before. After a short while we spotted it! The reason we hadn't seen it right away was because it was moving secretively in a deep tire rut in the mud. We could tell that this was a juvenile by the buffier plumage on its neck and body as well as the time of year that we found it. On its back were the beginnings of its basic winter plumage. I crept up on the bird quietly, hoping fervently not to disturb it. After setting my scope down, I focused on the bird that was now moving back into the water. I snapped the shot just as it turned its head toward me. This is one of my favorite photographs because the bird's reflection is so clear on the water and also because I won't get many chances to see a Red Phalarope in Colorado again. Crowley County, Colorado; 10 October 2004. © Elise M. S. Becker, Age 12.
I spent four months in 2004 living and working in central Panama, birding a lot and working on my bird photography skills in a new setting. This particular morning, on my day off, I had walked about six miles along Pipeline Road, the area’s most famous birding hotspot, and was headed home for lunch. I spotted this Broad-billed Motmot sitting silently on a branch just off to the side of the road. It was unwary and allowed close approach for about ten minutes, when it spotted an insect and darted off into the shadows of the undergrowth. I was able to take a couple of rolls of photographs of the bird in various poses. Of all the shots I took that afternoon, this one stands out to me because (1) it is nicely composed in a vertical format, with the branches making a strong diagonal “Z” pattern, (2) it is well-lit against a dark background, lifting the bird into the foreground and highlighting details such as the rackets on the tip of its tail, and (3) it is crisp and sharp-looking around the eye.

Pipeline Road, central Panama; 21 May 2004. © Noah K. Strycker, Age 18.

While attempting to photograph these juvenile Sanderlings feeding, I walked way around in a big semi-circle, not flushing them, ahead of the small flock and then waiting for them to wander by. Much to my disgust, a dog came howling down the beach, closely followed by small and very loud children. The birds flushed, and I took the opportunity to snap a picture of the birds in flight as they zipped by me.