The Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont is a wonderful resource to have in our area. This summer it hosted an exceptional program established by the North American Nature Photography Association (NANPA) to help high school students learn more about nature photography. This high school program complements a similar program focused on college students that the organization has run for several years.

I was fortunate to meet the students while they were in Townsend. I enjoyed a lunch with the participants in the Tremont cafeteria and attend their wrap up presentations at the end of the week. The quality of their work was impressive and their enthusiasm was contagious. These students came from all over the United States and Canada which resulted in some interesting differences in backgrounds and goals. They may be the future of nature photography and the environmental consciousness of our country. If the success of the past participants is a guide, this current crop will not disappoint.

I thought our readers might be interested in this program and in NANPA, if you are not familiar with it. Maybe you are or have a budding nature photographer at home that
NANPA brings together its diverse membership to learn from each other, network professionally, and share their photography and inspiration with multi-day Nature Photography Summits (19 and counting), Regional Events, one-day seminars and local Meetups. And it celebrates nature photography and its member talent through various written and electronic publications and photo contests.

**Tyson:** How did the high school and college scholarship programs get started and why does NANPA believe it is important to sponsor them?

**John and Alice R:** The NANPA high school program began at NANPA’s founding in 1994. One of the core “tripod legs” that the founding board established for the new association was education. It was decided in an early meeting to select a number of high school students, who were interested in nature photography and nominated by charter members, to attend NANPA’s first nationwide forum in Ft. Myers, Florida. The students loved it and the NANPA members were impressed with their enthusiasm and creativity. Since then, members and others have supported the program through their donations to the NANPA Foundation. Last year the program was redesigned for the gathering at Tremont.

The NANPA College Program was presented to the foundation in 2002 by Alice Robertson. The foundation board was enthusiastic about the idea since very few college students attended the NANPA Summits. NANPA tested the idea of organizing a college program at the 2003 Summit in Albuquerque, NM. The Summit in 2004 in Portland, Oregon, was the official launch of a fully functioning College Scholarship Program. Students join with a...
Gabby: Working with young photographers is one of the most fulfilling parts of my work. I have seen how photography can bridge the widening gap between young people and the natural world and I take every opportunity I can to spend time in the field with young people. I particularly love the NANPA student program because we focus on photography and natural history education. I like that our students walk away from the program with more technical knowledge and with an appreciation for the importance of natural areas like the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Gabby: What will the students take away from the program as they become adults for you to know your goals for the program were met?

Tyson: I hope that the students from the program incorporate photography and storytelling in their future careers. It is my hope they all lead creative lives, where they are immersed in some type of creative pursuit that brings them personal

Tyson: What will the students take away from the program as they become adults for you to know your goals for the program were met?

Gabby: I hope that the students from the program incorporate photography and storytelling in their future careers. It is my hope they all lead creative lives, where they are immersed in some type of creative pursuit that brings them personal

Tyson: Gabby, you were a participant in the program and now you are the lead faculty member. How did participating in the program as a student influence your career in photography?

Gabby: I participated in the program when I was 14 years old and it was truly a life changing experience. I met peers who shared my interest in nature and photography and I also met many NANPA members who have served as mentors over the years. The program exposed me to the world of nature photography and conservation and it provided me with the encouragement, connections, and tools to pursue a career in nature photography.

Gabby: I participated in the program when I was 14 years old and it was truly a life changing experience. I met peers who shared my interest in nature and photography and I also met many NANPA members who have served as mentors over the years. The program exposed me to the world of nature photography and conservation and it provided me with the encouragement, connections, and tools to pursue a career in nature photography.
fulfillment and that helps make the world a better place. I don’t expect all of them to become professional photographers, but, like many of our program alums, they may go on to use photography in their careers as biologists, park service employees, or educators.

I always enjoy talking with young people to see how the way they think is different from the way I remember thinking at their age. Some things change and others don’t. Maybe it’s just that I don’t really remember what I thought that many years ago. At any rate, what these kids thought about nature photography is interesting.

**Tyson:** How did you become interested in nature photography?

**Patrick:** I became interested in nature at a very young age because of my mother. She loves to go hiking and birding, so when I was little, she would take me to parks or other natural areas to hike with her and explore. My grandfather is big into photography and I’ve aspired to try and take pictures like he does. I got my first digital camera in 2008 and focused on taking pictures of nature, but I was already a budding birder, so most of my pictures were of birds. In 2010 he sold me his trusty Nikon D70, and I’ve been shooting with a Nikon ever since.

**Emma:** My dad has always taken photos on our family trips— which are based around nature, wildlife and photography—and soon I began to follow in his footsteps and take pictures, too. I practiced more, on our trips, and also at home photographing in my community as well as taking pictures of my dog and chickens. I then began creating photobooks to share with my friends and family and started taking photography classes in school. My younger sister has also been bitten by the photography bug, so with three photographers in the family we learn and build upon one another to make ourselves better photographers. In general, we seek photography opportunities everywhere we go, and look for the beautiful in both ordinary and special.

**Briana:** I became interested in photography through 4-H, a program in which youth complete hands on activities in areas such as agriculture, citizenship, homemaking, and science. The 4-H County Extension Agent invited me to attend a photography camp at the Texas Photo Ranch with professional photographer Karine Aigner. Since then I have attended camps with Karine Aigner and continue to learn more...
Emma: The selection process for the NANPA high school scholarship was a competitive scholarship because only 10 students would be chosen to go on the trip to the Smokey Mountains. The process involved answering several questions about myself and my photography. For example, “describe the breadth of your photographic experiences, your short-term and long-term career goals and how do you see photography supporting these goals, how do you approach capturing a photograph, etc.” We also submitted 10 of our favorite/best photographs along with a description about why we chose the image for submission. When I was selecting my photos for submission, I wanted to include all the aspects of my photography to show my breadth and that I’m versatile. I included animals/birds in actions, landscapes/sunsets, animal close ups, and my dog and chickens as my non-wild animals. I also believe the pictures I have captured show the subjects’ emotion, and the interactions between multiple subjects. Lastly, I think my emphasis on nature is another quality that made my work stand out.

Briana: The selection process for the high school scholarship program included an essay submission describing myself and my photography accomplishments, ten wildlife photos, two letters of recommendation, and a letter of recommendation from a NANPA member. I believe that my work stood out to the ones selecting the and more about all the different aspects of photography.

Garrett: I became interested in photography through an ornithology class my brother took. I began to catch on to his habits of waking up at six to study our feathered friends visiting the feeders in our backyard. After birding became more serious and our trips more elaborate we got a simple point and shoot so that we could document the birds we were seeing. I spent the next few years getting used to using the camera and working hard to improve my photos. Soon I realized bird photography was something that I very much enjoyed doing and that I wanted to upgrade my camera and take it to the next level. After countless hours of working for my neighbors and around the house, I had saved up enough for a decent setup and continue to use the same camera and lens to this day.

Tyson: What was the selection process for the high school scholarship program and what do you think made your work stand out to the ones selecting the participants?
of intense education, I mastered the basic skills. Then, through each successive day, my skills increased incredibly. Access to skilled instructors, to professional-level equipment, and to the wonderful setting all contributed to this improvement. By the end of the week, I was quite proud of my work product. I never dreamed I could learn so much and improve my skills in such a short amount of time!

Garrett: Some new things that I learned about photography during the trip is that I should always strive to make my photos tell a story as well as impact the viewer. A photo showing emotion, human-nature connection, and action will catch the eye better than say a photo of a subject standing all by itself. I also became more comfortable with photographing macro and landscape which was all new for me because I used to mainly photograph birds and mammals. The instructors were unbelievably helpful and supportive and always challenged me to think outside the box. I learned a tremendous amount that I am doing my best to incorporate into my shots.

Alice S: Although I learned a lot about photographic techniques and skills during this program, one of the main things I learned was what photography can do. I learned that photography was not just about getting "the shot", but to convey a message of greater importance, opening my eyes to the possibilities that are yet to be explored.
Great Smoky Mountains National Park. My home is in Stokes County, North Carolina, at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. In fact, I have two state parks near me, Pilot Mountain and Hanging Rock, and I am a quick car trip from the Blue Ridge Parkway. Consequently, the landscape, flora, and fauna were very much like what I see on my hikes at home. Nevertheless, I noticed something interesting about the Great Smoky National Park: everything is on a grander scale. Greens are greener, mountains are higher, fogs are more mysterious, storms are more furious, and creatures are more plentiful. Because I was familiar with the area, I particularly enjoyed comparing and contrasting my familiar landscape and experiences with the other participants. For example, one individual had never seen fireflies. What an incredible experience to be with someone observing this wonderful creature for the first time! The NANPA program was like that every day because we came to it from so many interesting places and shared these references with each other. In fact, I was able to see familiar landscape through my friends’ eyes, a new perspective for me and one I will never forget.

Victoria: Almost every aspect of the Smoky Mountains contrasts from the places I normally shoot. The scenery, wildlife, climate, and plant life were like nothing I had ever been to or seen before. The Rio Grande Valley is a delta with flat...
lands with the exception of Starr county which has hills and the highest elevation in the area. Though the Rio Grande Valley may not be as classically appealing as the Smoky Mountains, it does happen to be one of the top birding locations in North America and beautifully unique.

Tyson: What influence do you think nature photography will have in your life going forward?

Patrick: I think nature photography will have a very large influence in my life going forward. I love doing it and I think as I grow older my passion for it will likely expand and grow. I am also thinking about starting a small business and selling my pictures on cards or calendars. I also hope to travel worldwide when I get older, and it’s a new world when you look through to your camera lens.

Emma: I want to build a career in sustainable agriculture and wildlife conservation. I am currently studying ecosystem science and sustain-

believe this business could definitely expand significantly, especially if I am able to add more local produce and local, grass fed meats. My photography will always be a part of my work so that I can use pictures as a way to educate people about the importance of treating animals humanely along with protecting our natural environment, which we so greatly depend on, and the animals it supports. I believe pictures have a special power to deliver a message to people in a way that amplifies the power of words. Photographs put you in a place. They inspire emotion. Pictures move people, educate people, and can help influence change. And I believe change is what needs to happen in order for our future generations to prosper.

Briana: Nature photography will have a positive impact on my future. Nature photography has taught me the importance of respecting nature and how to teach others to do the same. Therefore, in my future I plan to continue nature photography and promote the welfare of the environment and wildlife to others.
people involved with nature and photography by getting them outdoors more often. I think that sometimes little time outdoors in nature equals less connection with nature. I know that my parents were key in my interest in the outdoors and my curiosity of nature by teaching and showing me things about the outdoors that I live in. I think that educating young people and making them aware about photography and nature might help to spark a potential interest. Programs, like the NANPA high school scholarship program also help to get people more involved with nature and photography. Nature photography groups can reach out to the younger generation. I think that overall, if we can get adults, teens, and kids today interested in nature, it might create more of an interest in conserving the nature around us. I also believe that ethics and conservation with nature photography should be strengthened, and not forgotten in this day and age where there are so many nature/wildlife photographers.

**Ana:** Too much education is indoors and online. Of course, there are wonderful things to learn from classroom experiences and computer research, but young people need to get outside and into nature! This is the only way to do it! Once there, it is captivating and you can’t get enough. Making photographic equipment and instruction more accessible would also help young people get engaged in nature photography.

**Alice S:** I think that nature photography will have a huge influence on my life going forward, as it has already become such an important part of it. Due to nature photography, I’ve learned so much about our natural world and it has inspired me to pursue an environmental biology degree in university to further gain an understanding on the ecological issues facing our world.

**Tyson:** How can we get more young people involved with nature and photography?

**Ross:** I think that every young person should have the experience of trying nature photography. I think it’s important to make clear that nature photography isn’t something reserved for professionals with expensive cameras and equipment. If you own a smartphone, you have everything you need to get started. Just find a subject that interests you and start experimenting with how you can capture the essence of that subject within your camera.

**Caroline:** We can get more young
Victoria: If we want more young people involved in nature and photography, we need to advertise on social media platforms that they are using. We need to create programs that they will think are worth attending, but above all, we need to make sure it’s their decision. Creating contest with no entry fees, easy digital uploads and prizes for the winners can encourage more youth participation.

Tyson: What would you recommend to young people reading this to improve their photography and maybe get selected for the scholarship program?

Ross: Something I love about nature photography is the fact that nearly anyone can do it. No matter what type of camera you own, you have the tools you need to capture beautiful images of the natural world. Whether you’re using your smartphone, a point-and-shoot, or a professional DSLR, everyone has the opportunity to take part in nature photography. To improve your skills, I would highly recommend taking the time to learn the details of composition and lighting, and how they affect your image. Know that getting the perfect shot doesn’t just mean pointing your camera at the subject and taking a picture. The best photographs are created from the choices that the photographer makes. The subject, composition, lighting, focus, and countless other pieces must be calculated by the photographer and come together at the right moment to create the best images.

Patrick: Practice, practice, practice, it is probably the best thing you can do. Just to go to your local park or backyard and just play around with your camera and experiment with different angles and settings on different subjects. It is also a good idea to try and meet a local photographer of a photography club and ask if they have any tips or can help you with how to take better pictures.

Garrett: One thing I recommend for young people reading this to improve their photography is to challenge themselves to move on past the documentation shot and try to make something more thought provoking. For example: You could take a perfectly fine picture of a bird perched on a stick but that wouldn’t stand out from the other millions of photos other people have taken just like it. You should try to incorporate habitat, food, interaction with other birds or animals, or a flight shot, just to name a few options. Those are the types of photos that could improve your photography and aid you in hopefully applying...
for this scholarship program.

Victoria: My recommendation for young people reading this and who may want to improve their photography skills is to never give up. There will always be another chance to get your “perfect” shot, even if it takes you over a thousand to get it.

Alice S: Experiment. That’s probably the main thing I would tell them. Get inspired through other people’s photography, but find ways to make it your own. Experiment with different angles, take risks, and naturally your own style will develop and your images will stand out. Sometimes it may get frustrating to see that your images aren’t where you want it to be and that’s okay. Take a break, get new inspiration, and fall in love with photography all over again. Photography is definitely a process so it’s important to keep working at it step by step because the results you see in the end will be worth it.

This group of students was so impressive I wondered if they were representative of the previous participants or an extra special group of young people. So I ask the Executive Director of NANPA what had happened to some of the previous participants.

Susan: Many of NANPA’s high school scholarship recipients have gone on to become leaders in our industry or to pursue careers in related fields, from wildlife biology to environmental science. Here are a few examples of some of the program’s outstanding alumni from different years:

- Tyler Evert, 1998: Photographer for the West Virginia Department of Commerce
- Gabby Salazar, 2002: NANPA President and National Geographic Young Explorer’s Grantee
- Lindsey Adler, 2003: Internationally recognized fashion photographer
- Kaitlyn Suter, 2003: Studied Technical Photography and starting an organization to help promote other NGOs through photography
- R.J. Sindelar, 2003: Ph.D. in Engineering; pursuing a degree in Science and Natural History Filmmaking
- Jorel Cuomo, 2003: Full-time photographer; Young Entrepreneur of the Year in Colorado and contest wins in Smithsonian and Nature’s Best Photography
- Mac Stone, 2002: Committee Chair and active NANPA Member; professional nature photographer;
While this current group is special, it seems that NANPA has been adept at picking special groups in the past as well and helped them prepare for meaningful careers using photography. If you know a young high school or college person interested in nature photography, have him/her check out this program at NANPA’s website. You should also check out membership for NANPA educational opportunities, discounts, and its support of responsible and ethical nature photography in a respected environment.