



GDT European Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2026

The English translation of the competition rules is supplied for the purpose of guidance only. The GDT or their translators cannot be held responsible for misunderstandings or mistranslations. **In case of doubt, the German version will prevail and is legally binding.**

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Picture below: © Tobias Gjerde (NO)

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Rewilding Europe

zeitweise

Welcome to the GDT contest

European Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2026!

Join us ...

... and take part in one of the world's most prestigious nature photography competitions!

For the 26th time, the German Society for Nature Photography (GDT) invites photographers from all over Europe to submit their strongest work. The competition stands for an exceptional visual language, uncompromising quality, and photography with a clear attitude. It is a place where artistic vision, technical excellence, and a precise eye for nature in all its facets come together.

The aim of the competition is to showcase the diversity and unique style of European nature photography through outstanding images from Europe and around the world, and to sustainably strengthen the idea of nature conservation through the power of photography. Your images celebrate the beauty of our planet, reveal its vulnerability, and send a clear message for its protection. They touch, inspire, and draw attention to what must be preserved.

All award-winning photographs will be presented as large-format exhibits in an exhibition that premieres **at the International Nature Photography Festival in Lünen from October 23 to 25, 2026**. After that, it will tour for several years through museums, galleries, and festivals across Germany and Europe, reaching an audience of millions. A strong presence on the GDT website and social media channels, a high-quality exhibition catalog, and an international press campaign will ensure maximum visibility for the awarded photographers and their work.

The new competition round begins on January 15, 2026. Submit your entries **by March 1, 2026**, and have your work judged by an international jury of renowned experts from photography and journalism. Show your best images. Show your signature style. And give nature a strong, unmistakable voice through your photography.

Prizes

There will be cash and material prizes in the amount of **45,000 EUR**.

Award Ceremony

All winning participants will receive an **invitation** to the **award ceremony, free tickets** to the GDT International Nature Photography Festival 2026 in Lünen, a **certificate** as well as the **exhibition catalogue**.

European Wildlife Photographer of the Year

- **3,000 EUR** – donated by Canon
- A special wildlife photography safari for two people in Maasai Mara in Kenya, valued at **over 10,000 EUR**, to Oltepesi Tented Safari Camp (incl. return flights from Nairobi to Maasai Mara) – donated by Oltepesi Tented Safari Camp**
- travel expenses, costs for the buffet and accommodation for the award-winning ceremony in Lünen*
- trophy

* Cash equivalents as a substitute are not available

** The trip can take place between January and June in 2026, 2027, or 2028. The prize is non-transferable.

In brief

- » Closing date: **01 March 2026**
- » Entry fee: 35 EUR
- » Entry in category K9 – Youth (up to and including 17 years) is free of charge
- » Payment via PayPal
- » Entry Fritz Pölking Junior Prize (for photographers 26 years and under)
- » **max. 40 photos / 25 photos K1-K8;**
max. 10 images Fritz Pölking Prize
max. 5 images Rewilding Europe Award
- » Image size: 1920 px longest side, JPG (may be moderately sharpened) + IPTC contact details
- » RAW control takes place, rules for image editing on page 6
- » Multiple exposures ONLY in category K8 - Nature's Studio
- » Participation online only:
www.gdtfoto.de

Fritz Pölking Prize

- **2,000 EUR** – donated by Tecklenborg publishing house
- trophy
- costs for the buffet and accommodation*

Fritz Pölking Junior Prize

- **1,500 EUR** – donated by Tecklenborg publishing house
- merchandise voucher worth **500 EUR** – donated by AC-Foto *
- trophy
- costs for the buffet and accommodation*

Rewilding Europe Award

- Winner: **1,000 EUR** – donated by Rewilding Europe
- trophy
- travel expenses, costs for the buffet and accommodation*
- Runner-up: **500 EUR** – donated by Rewilding Europe

Category winner

- K1 – 8: winners: **800 EUR**
- K1 – 8: runners-up: **500 EUR**

Youth category

- K9: winners: **500 EUR** – donated by AC-Foto and Zeitweise.art
- travel expenses, costs for the buffet and accommodation (including a parent or legal guardian if applicable)*
- K9: runners-up: **400 EUR**

Highly commended

- invitation to the award ceremony, free ticket for the festival*

Timeline

15 January 2026	Start submissions
01 March 2026 at midnight (CET)	Closing date for entries
from 13 April 2026	Request for RAW files, original JPG / DNG files and high resolution files
30 April 2026 at midnight (CET)	Closing date for RAW files , original JPG / DNG files and high resolution files
from 18 May 2026	Notification of prize winners and request of image descriptions
31 May 2026 at midnight (CET)	Closing date for image descriptions
from 08 June 2026	Notification of all participants about the placement of their images
23 October 2026*	Award ceremony and announcement of winners during the <i>International Nature Photography Festival</i> at the Heinz-Hilpert-Theatre in Lünen

Entry Fee K1 – K8, K10 – Rewilding Europe Award and K11 – Fritz Pölking Prize and Fritz Pölking Junior Prize

- **35,- EUR** – payment via PayPal

Entering **K9 – Young Photographers** is free of charge.

Participation

Please upload your images from **15 January 2026**: www.gdtfoto.de

Entry deadline is 1 March 2026 at midnight – CET (incoming!)

Entries arriving any later than that cannot receive consideration.

Categories

K1 – Birds

K4 – Plants and Fungi

K7 – Humans and Nature

K2 – Mammals

K5 – Landscapes

K8 – Nature's Studio

K3 – Other Animals

K6 – Underwater World

K9 – Young Photographers

(age groups: a) up to 14 years, b) 15 – 17 years)

K10 – Rewilding Europe Award

K11 – Fritz Pölking Prize – story- and portfolio prize

K11 – Fritz Pölking Junior Prize – story- and portfolio prize (aged 26 years and under)

You can submit 40 pictures in total, 25 in the categories K1-K8, up to 5 in the K10 - Rewilding Europe Award and up to 10 in the category K11 - Fritz Pölking- and Fritz Pölking Youth Prize.

K1 – K8: a total of **25 images** may be entered. These can be distributed freely across the categories. The same images cannot be entered in more than one category.

K9 – Youth: a total of **5 images** may be entered. The images can be thematically unbound, they do NOT have to stick to the given categories.

The category **K10 (Rewilding Europe Award)**: a maximum of 5 images may be entered. The submission of one and the same image in several categories is excluded here.

K11 (Fritz Pölking Prize and Fritz Pölking Junior Prize) is dedicated to nature photography stories or portfolios. Here, a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 10 pictures as well as a project description have to be submitted. It is allowed to upload pictures, which are submitted in the categories K1 – K8, also in K11.

File requirements

Image size – longest side **1920 pixels** (may be moderately sharpened)

High resolution files – must be suitable for large format printing (e.g. 70 x 100 cm) and must have **Adobe RGB** or **sRGB** colour space. Do not interpolate data! Please sharpen only moderately!

Image editing within the framework of our guidelines – see section 7 of the competition rules.

**PLEASE PAY ATTENTION. MULTI-EXPOSURES ARE ONLY ALLOWED IN
CATEGORY 8 (Nature's Studio).**

Important information:

- To participate, you will need a **PayPal** account.
- The organising committee will contact you via the email address **contest@gdtfoto.de**. Please add this address to your email address book to ensure security settings and spam filters do not block relevant mails.

The jury

Show your best pictures to our international jury, which is biologically experienced and familiar with contemporary nature photography! The jury will first make a pre-selection in an online process before coming together for the main judging to decide on the final winning images over a period of four days.

You can get to know the members of the jury on our website!

Two additional jurors named by Rewilding Europe will participate in the judging for the Rewilding Europe Award (K10).

For the judging in the K11 - Fritz Pölking Prize / Fritz Pölking Junior Prize, the jury will be extended by two representatives of the prize-giving Tecklenborg publishing house.

Competition management

Competition manager is Marc Hesse.

Please direct your enquiries in writing to: contest@gdtfoto.de

We ask for your understanding that we cannot deal with individual questions on the phone!

If in exceptional cases it is not possible for you to participate online, please contact the competition manager.



COMPETITION RULES

1. Invitation

The GDT competition *European Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2026* is hosted by the German Society for Nature Photography (GDT – Gesellschaft für Naturfotografie e.V.)

2. Competition Categories

The competition is divided in **eleven categories**:

K1 – **Birds**

K4 – **Plants and Fungi**

K7 – **Humans and Nature**

K2 – **Mammals**

K5 – **Landscapes**

K8 – **Nature's Studio**

K3 – **Other Animals**

K6 – **Underwater World**

K9 – **Young Photographers**

(age groups: a) up to 14 years, b) 15 - 17 years)

K10 – **Rewilding Europe Award**

K11 – **Fritz Pölking Prize** – story- and portfolio prize

K11 – **Fritz Pölking Junior Prize** – story- and portfolio prize (aged 26 years and under)

Images in the **categories 1 to 5** should depict the beauty and significance of animals, plants and their habitat. They can display all sorts of subjects: from details to groups, from portraits to overall views, from action-filled behaviour to atmospheric situations, from rare species to common sights, from natural habitats to complete ecosystems. Novel image ideas are welcome!

Category 6 is reserved for images depicting the world under water – this may be plants, animals or habitats in both salt water and fresh water environments.

The topic in **category 7** addresses positive or negative aspects of human interaction with nature.

Category 8 deals with images that focus on colours and shapes in nature above mere documentation purposes. This category is open to photographs in which the photographer shows his or her individual point of view, aesthetic considerations and photographic experimentation.

Category 9 invites young photographers in two age groups to enter their best nature images; topics may be chosen freely and do not need to correlate to one of the other categories).

K10 – Rewilding Europe Award

Are you ready to make a difference with your lens? The Rewilding Europe Award, part of the prestigious GDT European Wildlife Photographer of the Year contest, is your chance to shine by showcasing Europe's wilder side and inspiring change.

Rewilding is more than a conservation approach; it's a bold vision for the future—a movement that allows nature to reclaim its vitality, restores natural processes, and redefines the relationship between people and the wild. It's about witnessing forests regrow, rivers run free, wildlife thrive, and humanity rediscover its place as part of nature's intricate balance. This year, we're inviting photographers to capture the essence of rewilding in action —images that go beyond scenic beauty and tell powerful stories of revival, resilience, and hope.

For more information, please visit the [competition page of the Rewilding Europe Award](#) or www.rewildingeurope.com.

K11 – Fritz Pölking Prize / Fritz Pölking Junior Prize

The influence of GDT founder member and honorary member Fritz Pölking on wildlife photography in Germany is unrivalled. His work received international recognition on numerous occasions and many of his photographs have found their way into a collective memory. His work remains a source of inspiration and motivation for many photographers.

In appreciation of the merits of the GDT founding member Fritz Pölking, who died in 2007, the GDT together with the Tecklenborg publishing house awards the Fritz Pölking Prize as well as the Fritz Pölking Junior Prize. Both awards are given for an outstanding photographic work. This may either be a special wildlife photography project or a portfolio of individual photographs. Judgement will focus on photographic performance as well as the overall conception, idea and creative execution.

K1 – K8: a total of **25 images** may be entered. These can be distributed freely across the categories. The same images cannot be entered in more than one category.

K9 – Youth: a total of **5 images** may be entered. The images can be thematically unbound, they do NOT have to stick to the given categories.

Category **K10 (Rewilding Europe Award):** a maximum of 5 images may be entered.

The submission of one and the same image in several categories is excluded here.

The category **K11 (Fritz Pölking Prize and Fritz Pölking Junior Prize)** is dedicated to nature photography stories or portfolios. Here, a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 10 pictures as well as a project description have to be submitted. It is allowed to upload pictures, which are submitted in the categories K1 – K8, also in K11

3. Prizes

Cash and non-cash prizes totalling **over EUR 45,000** are on offer.

A first and second prize will be awarded in category K1 – K9. In addition, the jury will determine an overall winner.

In category 10 (Rewilding Europe Award), also a first and a second prize will be awarded.

In category 11 (Fritz Pölking Prize and Fritz Pölking Junior Prize) one first prize each will be awarded.

- The overall winner will receive a prize money of **3,000 EUR**. The overall winner will also be invited to the award ceremony (travel expenses, costs for the buffet and accommodation).*

- The overall winner will also receive a special wildlife photography safari for two people in Maasai Mara in Kenya, valued at **over 10,000 EUR**, to Oltepesi Tented Safari Camp (incl. return flights from Nairobi to Maasai Mara) *; **
- The winners of the categories K1-K8 will receive **800 EUR** and the runners-up **500 EUR**.
- The winners of both ages groups in category nine will receive **500 EUR** - donated by AC-Foto and Zeitweise.art - and an invitation to the award ceremony (travel expenses and accommodation, including a parent or legal guardian if applicable)*, and the runners-up will receive **400 EUR**.
- K10 - Rewilding Europe Award: the winner receives **1,000 EUR**, the runner-up **500 EUR** in cash - donated by Rewilding Europe.
- Fritz Pölking Prize, **2,000 EUR** – donated by Tecklenborg publishing house
- Fritz Pölking Junior Prize, **1,500 EUR** – donated by Tecklenborg publishing house as well as a merchandise voucher worth **500 Euro** – donated by AC-Foto*
- All successful participants (winners, runners-up, highly commendeds) will receive a **free ticket** for the *International Nature Photography Festival* 2026 in Lünen and a free copy of the **exhibition catalogue**.*
- In addition to the photographs that receive a prize money, eight additional images in the categories K1 - K8 will be awarded „Highly Commended“.
- In addition to the photographs that receive a prize money, eight additional images in the category K10, three additional images will be awarded „Highly Commended“.

All awarded images will be shown in an exhibition at the *International Nature Photography Festival* (23 to 25 October 2026) in Lünen, and afterwards in exhibitions throughout Europe. The award ceremony will take place during the *International Nature Photography Festival* on Friday, **23 October 2026** at the Heinz-Hilpert-Theatre in Lünen.

4. Participants

The competition is open to photographers resident in Europe as well as GDT members, who may or may not be resident in Europe.

Young photographers, who will not have turned 18 when the competition closes on **1 March 2026**, can enter category nine (K9).

Participation in the Fritz Pölking Junior Prize is restricted to photographers who are not older than 26 years at the time of entry - **1 March 2026**.

Members of the GDT board of management or the jury as well as employees of the companies Canon, Tecklenborg publishing house and AC-Foto are not eligible for participation. To ensure fairness, staff and board members of Rewilding Europe are also not eligible to enter

5. Participation, fees and communication

The competition can be entered online.

The fee for categories K1 - K8, K10 and K11 is **35 EUR** irrespective of the number of entered photographs. There is **no fee** for category nine (K9) – Young Photographers. Payment will be made through the online money transfer system PayPal.

Communication in competition matters takes place primarily by e-mail. Our email is **contest@gdtfoto.de**. For urgent queries, we will try to communicate via telephone. Participants are therefore required to provide a correct and complete telephone number.

6. Entries

Images displaying domestic animals or pets and cultivated forms of wild plants are not permitted. The same applies to images which have been taken violating current conservation or animal welfare regulations and/ or have been taken in an irresponsible way.

We value new images and fresh ideas. For this reason, we strongly request you do not enter images that have already been awarded in the GDT's internal competition (*GDT Nature Photographer of the Year*) or in any other significant photography competition.

* Cash equivalents as a substitute are not available

** The trip can take place between January and June in 2026, 2027, or 2028. The prize is non-transferable.

7. Technical requirements and digital guidelines

Permitted are images from digital cameras (digital images) as well as high quality scans of transparencies and negatives. Analogue images (e.g. transparencies, paper prints) will not be accepted.

After a pre-selection procedure, the jury will check the authenticity of digital images by reference to the original image files. In the case of scans, authenticity checks will be conducted using the original analogue transparencies / negatives.

As original image files we accept all RAW files (e.g.: *.NEF, *.CRW, *.CR2, *.PEF) and original JPGs. Only JPG files straight out of the camera are accepted as originals. Any kind of image processing (compressing, re-saving with an image editing software) leads to the file being considered not original. DNG files are only eligible if this is the original camera format.

We attach great importance on authentic nature photography, but do not ignore the technical possibilities of digital image editing within the framework of our guidelines. For us, awarding the photographic achievement has priority.

Within the framework of digital image editing, the following is PERMITTED:

- moderate adjustments of contrast, tonal values, gradation, white balance, colour and saturation
- moderate use of the shadow/highlight tool, dodging/burning and digital graduated grey filters
- removal of sensor dust, marginal „clean-up“ if this does not change the statement of the image
- cropping – longest side of the image must have at least 3000 pixels (squares must also have a minimum of 3000 pixels), not interpolated
- moderate (selective) sharpening and (selective) noise reduction
- HDR images, stitched panoramas and images using focus stacking
- **ONLY IN CATEGORY 8** – in-camera multiple exposures
=> for multiple exposures: allowed settings are ADDITIVE and AVERAGE

=> For all these techniques the requirement is that all images were taken at the same location at approximately the same time. With multiple exposures this means that the viewer should not be misled by the combination of two or more images.

- removal of chromatic aberrations and vignetting as well as lens distortions
- black&white and infrared rendering (incl. filter and tonal adjustments)

Within the framework of digital image editing, the following is NOT PERMITTED:

- adding or removing objects (e.g. animals, plants, people, items of civilization and traces thereof), digital collages
- AI-generated photos
- Post-processing methods, content-based fills, enhancements, etc. that add new image content to the photo through AI algorithms or manual intervention
- => for multiple exposures: Not allowed are the settings BRIGHT and DARK

PLEASE PAY ATTENTION. MULTI-EXPOSURES ARE ONLY ALLOWED IN CATEGORY 8 (Nature's Studio).

8. File Naming

**When entering online, the name of your files is entirely up to you.
But please when entering online, make sure to tick the corresponding boxes for multiple exposure, HDR, Captive, etc.**

In order to ensure anonymity, the photographer's name must not be part of the title or the photograph itself (e.g. like in a digital watermark).

The IPTC data (in Photoshop → File → File Info) should contain complete information about the contact details of the photographer.

9. Data transfer for online participation

For online entries initially only a preview file in JPG format has to be uploaded onto the GDT server for each photograph. These JPG files should be submitted in highest possible quality. Preview files may be sharpened. The longest side of each image must be **1920 pixels**. This value is absolute and must not be deviated from.

An uploaded preview image can be deleted and replaced by an alternative image until the **entry deadline 1 March 2026**. The same applies to image titles and descriptions.

The jury will request the RAW files or original JPG / DNG files as well as the high-resolution data of all photographs that have passed the first round of judging. Analogue originals of scanned transparencies/negatives will be requested after the final decision of the jury. If requested original image files or analogue originals are not provided by the set deadlines, the relevant images will be excluded from further participation, i.e. awards and commendations. In this case, no refunds of the entry fee will be made.

10. Description of project (K10 – Fritz Pölking Prize/Fritz Pölking Junior Prize)

Only K11: The photographer is required to give a short description (8-10 sentences) of origin, execution and objective/intention of his/her selection of photographs. This description can be submitted online.

Participants in the Rewilding Europe Award are asked to explain the Rewilding aspect in the requested captions.

11. Entry deadlines

You can send in your images by post or submit them online from **15 January 2026**.
Closing date is **1 March 2026**

12. Jury

Competition decisions will be made by an independent expert jury.

The judging for the Rewilding Europe Award (K10) will involve two additional jurors named by Rewilding Europe.

For the judging in category K11 – Fritz Pölking Prize / Fritz Pölking Junior Prize, the jury will be extended by two representatives of the prize-giving Tecklenborg publishing house.

In case an individual member of the jury is prevented for any reason, he / she may be replaced by another suitable person at short notice.

13. Competition management, enquiries

Manager for the GDT competition *European Wildlife Photographer of the Year* is Marc Hesse.
The competition management's address is:
Marc Hesse, Zum Jagenstein 1, D –14478 Potsdam, Germany.

Please direct your enquiries in writing to **contest@gdtfoto.de**.

We ask for your understanding that we cannot deal with individual questions on the phone!

14. Copyright and right to one's own picture

By entering the competition, the photographer confirms that the entered photograph is his / her original work and the photographer is the sole owner of the copyright and that there are no third-party claims. It is the photographer's responsibility to obtain releases and consents in written form for publishing, exhibiting and using the awarded image if any persons appear in the photograph or if objects in the photograph are subject to the rights of third parties; it is the photographer's responsibility to obtain official permits where applicable. The photographer is held liable for all damages that the GDT or third parties, to whom the GDT legally granted usage of the image, may experience due to the lack of necessary release forms or missing permits.

15. Usage rights

Photographs awarded with a prize or highly commended may be used in the context of the competition *GDT European Wildlife Photographer of the Year* and its related public relations. The GDT is in particular entitled to publish the photographs on their website, their social media accounts and to pass the images on to newspapers and magazines for the purpose of news coverage of the competition. The GDT has also the right to use the images for marketing purposes and finding sponsors. In addition, the GDT is entitled to exhibit the photographs in Germany and abroad, to reproduce and distribute them in the form of print media and to use them to advertise the exhibitions and publications. With all of the stated usage, the connection of the images with the GDT competition *European Wildlife Photographer* must be clearly marked. The GDT is entitled to transfer these usage rights to third parties. For the above stated usage rights the photographer cannot claim compensation or a fee of any kind.

In case of enquiries concerning the purchase of usage rights of the awarded photographs, the GDT will forward the relevant photographer's contact details to the interested party. The required prints for the exhibitions will be made on the GDT's own expenses, or that of third parties eligible for using the photographs. After the exhibitions have concluded, the GDT is authorized to sell the prints to interested members of the public provided the proceeds of this transaction are assigned to charitable projects, in particular nature conservation projects. Unsold prints will be destroyed.

16. Post-contest handling of images

Submissions that have not been awarded a prize or highly commended will be deleted after the close of the contest.

17. Liability

The risk of damage or loss of submitted photographs, negatives and transparencies in transit lies with the participant. The GDT cannot accept any liability or responsibility.

18. Final clause

Submissions that do not fulfil all or some of the competition's requirements in terms of content, technical or any other aspect cannot receive consideration and will be excluded from the competition. It is the jury's decision to admit images whose fulfilment of the necessary requirements may be considered ambiguous. The jury's decisions will be final. Legal proceedings are eliminated. By submitting images to the competition, the participant consents to the above competition rules.