



GDT

Nature Photographer of the Year 2026

Take part ...

... in the competition

GDT Nature Photographer of the Year 2026!

The competition is open to all members of the GDT.

Why participate?

The overall winner as well as the first- and second-place recipients in each category can look forward to valuable prizes. The award-winning images will also be presented as an exhibition at the annual general meeting and showcased at our International Nature Photography Festival. All images will be published in a large photo feature in the magazine *GDT Forum Naturfotografie* and on our website at www.gdtfoto.de. Public media interest in this competition is also very high internationally.

Categories 2026

The competition is divided in seven categories:

K1 - Birds	K2 – Mammals	K3 – All other Animals
K4 - Plants and Fungi	K5 – Landscapes	K6 – Nature's Studio
K7 - Special category under the patronage of the Heinz Sielmann Foundation: Biodiversity – The Beauty and Significance of Natural Diversity		

Jury 2026

Each jury member will first make a pre-selection with the help of an on-line tool before all jurors come together (online) in a process lasting several hours to make the final selection per category. We were able to win the following GDT members for the judging this year:

- Silke Hüttche
- Svenja Schneider
- Niklas Banowski

Would you like to get to know our jurors better? You can find out more soon on our website www.gdtfoto.de!

Impressum:

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Competition management

Competition manager 2026 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!

Participation

will be open **from 15th December 2025** at www.gdtfoto.de

Closing date

Entry deadline is 1st February 2026 at midnight (incoming!)

Entries arriving any later than that cannot receive consideration!

Important information

To participate, you will need a valid email address.

The organizing committee will contact you via the email address contest@gdtfoto.de. Please add this address to your email contacts to ensure security settings and spam filters do not block relevant mails.

Summary of dates and deadlines

Start online:	15 th December 2025
Closing date:	1 st February 2026 at midnight (incoming)
Request for RAW files, original JPG / DNG files, analogue originals and high-resolution files:	from 20 th February 2026
Deadline for RAW files, original JPG / DNG files, analogue originals and high-resolution files to arrive at the competition management:	27 th February 2026 at midnight (incoming)
Notification of the winners and request for image descriptions:	from 13 March 2026
Deadline for image descriptions:	18 th March 2026 at midnight (incoming)



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Course of the competition

In a pre-jury process a competent expert jury will choose from all entries those images that they would like to assess again in another joint jury meeting. From these images we will require the RAW files AND the high-resolution data! Both files need to be with the competition management until **27th February 2026**. The jury will then select the ten best images in each category during main jurying.

Due to the good experiences in the last years and to meet the wish of some members for „elections for all“, we will continue to offer them virtually for all members! The elections will again be held in two rounds: the first round will be online and open to all, the exact times will be announced in due time. The second round of voting (election of the overall winner from all category winners) can unfortunately only take place live for organisational and technical reasons - i.e. it is reserved exclusively for those who will be at the members' meeting.

Again this year, we will take care of producing the prints of the winning images.

Awarding points

For all new members here is a short explanation of the GDT General Score List and the GDT Three-Years-League. Points will be awarded for participation, number of submitted photographs and achieved placing in the competition. For information on the current state of the tables please check our website.

And this is how points are awarded:

You will receive some points for your participation; one point for each submitted photograph but overall not more than five. More points will be awarded for each placing, as follows:

46 (1st place), 37 (2nd place), 29 (3rd place), 22 (4th place), 16 (5th place), 11 (6th place), 7 (7th place), 4 (8th place), 2 (9th place) and still 1 point for 10th place.

File requirements

- **Preview files** – 1920 pixels wide or high (may be sharpened)
- **High-resolution files** – data volume must be suitable for large format printing and must have a clearly specified RGB colour space. Depending on the workflow, the most suitable are Adobe RGB or sRGB colour space. Do not interpolate data and please sharpen only moderately!
- **Image editing** within the framework of our guidelines – see point 7 of the competition rules.



GDT *Nature Photographer* of the Year **2026**

COMPETITION RULES

1. Invitation

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

2. Participants

All GDT members are eligible for participation. Members of the jury are excluded from the competition.

3. Competition categories

The competition is divided in seven categories:

- | | | |
|---|-----------------|------------------------|
| K1 – Birds | K2 – Mammals | K3 – All other Animals |
| K4 – Plants and Fungi | K5 – Landscapes | K6 – Nature's Studio |
| K7 - Special category under the patronage of the Heinz Sielmann Foundation: | | |
| Biodiversity – The Beauty and Significance of Natural Diversity | | |

PLEASE PAY ATTENTION: MULTI-EXPOSURES ARE ONLY ALLOWED IN CATEGORY 6 (Nature's Studio).

In the **categories K1-K3, K6 and K7** animals may be shown whose natural freedom of movement was restricted. These files have to be marked with „C“ in their file names.

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 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 7 (special category): Biodiversity – The Beauty and Significance of Natural Diversity
Our patron for this year's special category is the Heinz Sielmann Foundation. Everything here revolves around the biological diversity of our natural world. This means much more than just species diversity and its protection. Biological diversity represents quality of life for us humans and is an indispensable



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basis for our survival: air to breathe, clean water, a tolerable climate, and soil on which we can sustainably grow healthy food. All of this depends on a diversity of living organisms – from the smallest microorganisms to the top of the food chain.

We honour photographs that artistically, documentarily, and compellingly convey the interplay of species and habitats, as well as the fascinating beauty and significance of biological diversity. In this way, we help convey the central message of the Heinz Sielmann Foundation: Only those who know and love nature in all its diversity will protect it.

We look forward to your images that showcase the diversity and profound significance of our natural world. Surprise the jury with your interpretation of biological diversity!

4. Prizes

In each category ten images will be awarded. In addition, GDT members present at the general meeting will determine an overall winner. The overall winner as well as the winners and runners-up in each category will receive valuable prizes.

Apart from the photographs that receive a non-cash prize, eight additional photographs will be awarded in each category.

5. How to enter

It is possible to enter the competition online.

It is necessary to register at www.gdtfoto.de with a valid email address.

When registering for online participation, the participant must state a valid email address, at which he / she can be contacted. It is the participant's responsibility to ensure that he / she receives email correspondence via contest@gdtfoto.de by adding this email address to their contact list and making sure that security settings or spam filters do not block relevant mails.

6. Submissions

Each participant may enter a total of **20 images** with no more than **8 images per category**. Individual images cannot be entered in more than one category.

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, images that have already been awarded in the GDT's *European Wildlife Photographer of the Year* competition are not permitted.



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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 (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 or negatives, authenticity check will be conducted using the original analogue transparencies / negatives.

RAW files of any format (e.g. *.NEF, *.CRW, *.CR2, *.PEF) as well as original JPG files will be accepted as original image files. 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 considered not being 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, not interpolated (squares must have a minimum of 3000 pixels), not interpolated
- moderate sharpening (also selective) and noise removal (also selective)
- HDR images, stitched panoramas and images using focus stacking
- **ONLY IN CATEGORY 6:** In-camera multiple exposures (for all these techniques the requirement is that all images were taken at the same location at approximately the same time. With multiple exposure this means that the viewer should not be misled by the combination of two or more images).

=> for multiple exposure: allowed settings are ADDITIVE and AVERAGE

- removal of chromatic aberrations and vignetting as well as lens distortions
- black&white and infrared rendering (includes 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 exposure: Not allowed are the settings BRIGHT and DARK



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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 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 **1st February 2026**.

For all images that have passed the first round of judging, the jury will request the following data:

- RAW files or original JPG / DNG files
- if applicable, analogue originals
- non-interpolated high-resolution files in highest quality as JPG or TIFF
- further information on the image: subject and locality, technical details (see „File Requirements“)

The competition management will dispatch requests for the required data from the **20th February 2026**. The deadline for the required data or analogue originals to arrive at the competition management will end **27th February 2026** at midnight. If requested original image files or analogue originals are not provided by the set deadlines, the relevant images will be excluded from further participation. Information on the winning images will follow after **13th March 2026**.

All online participants will receive information on the placement of their images **after 13th March 2026** via email.

10. Entry deadlines

You can enter your images online from **15th December 2025**.

Closing date is **1st February 2026**. By this deadline, images for the competition must be transmitted online to the GDT.



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11. Jury

Competition decisions will be made by an independent expert jury. For the 2026 members' competition these are:

- Silke Hüttche
- Svenja Schneider
- Niklas Banowski

12. Competition management, enquiries

Manager for the competition *GDT Nature Photographer of the Year 2026* 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!

13. 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.

14. Usage rights

Awarded photographs may be used in the context of the competition *GDT Nature Photographer of the Year 2026* and its related public relations. The GDT is in particular entitled to publish the photographs on their website and in the Social Media and to pass the images on to newspapers and magazines for the purpose of news coverage of the competition. The society is also entitled to use these images for their own marketing purposes and finding sponsorships. 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. In all cases of allowed usage, the context of the competition *GDT Nature Photographer of the Year 2026* must be clearly marked. The GDT is entitled to transfer these usage rights to third parties. For the above stated usage rights the awarded 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.



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The required prints for the exhibition 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.

15. 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.

16. Liability

The risk of damage or loss of submitted photographs during online transfer lies with the participant. The GDT cannot accept any liability or responsibility.

17. Final clauses

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.

We wish all participants a lot of fun and success in our competition
GDT Nature Photographer of the Year 2026!