

Rocky Mountain Outdoors

the newsletter of Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers & Photographers, Inc.

May – June 2020

2020 Conference Still On, We Hope

By Don Laine

RMOWP's 47th annual conference is scheduled in **Alamogordo, New Mexico October 5-8, 2020**. However, as we are all aware, the Coronavirus pandemic remains active, causing many 2020 events nationwide to be canceled or postponed.

At this time, Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers & Photographers is taking a wait-and-see position on our October conference.

We hope that you will keep the conference in your plans and on your calendar, but suggest that you don't make any non-refundable travel or lodging arrangements. We'll let you know sometime this summer whether the Alamogordo conference will take place as scheduled this year.

The highlight of the conference is to explore **White Sands National Park** (nps.gov/whsa), which was elevated from national monument status to become America's 62nd, and newest, national park, last December 20th. We plan a barbecue supper in the and will join a guided sunset walk with a park ranger.

The conference runs from Monday evening through Thursday evening (10/5-8), but a **day-and-a-half pre-conference photography workshop with Bill and Kit Horton** is planned Sunday and Monday morning (10/4 and 5). See "Take Control of Your Photography" in the January-February newsletter or <https://rmowp.org/annual-conference/> for photography workshop details.

For those who want to see where the world's first atomic bomb was exploded there is a tour to nearby Trinity Site on Saturday (10/3). Trinity Site, located on White Sands Missile Range, is open to the public only two days a year – the first Saturdays of April and October – and you'll be taking the tour on your own with a caravan organized by the Alamogordo Chamber of Commerce.

But back to the conference itself.

In addition to seeing and shooting White Sands National Park, we'll go to nearby **Oliver Lee Memorial State Park**, with both desert scenery and a riparian nature trail, wildlife, a museum, and a restored ranch house. There's also the remains of an 1800's cabin, the site of a still-unsolved murder. Other nearby attractions include the Bureau of Land Management's Three Rivers Petroglyph Site, with over 21,000 ancient petroglyphs; New Mexico Museum of Space History; a small zoo; and a toy train museum.

Workshops are still in the development stage, but we're expecting to have a panel discussion on the constantly changing world of self-publishing, a program on sand dune photography, a writing workshop to help us bring characters to life, and a program on planning our articles, books, and photo essays. In addition,

we'll have the showcase of selected members' photography, presentation of contest submissions with winners announced at the banquet, the writers forum, photo critique, and sunrise photo shoot. A tentative schedule is on page 3 of this newsletter and online (<https://rmowp.org/>).

Conference registration forms are on hold while we wait and watch what happens with the Coronavirus pandemic, but we expect the registration fee to be \$50 per person and meals to be similar to recent years.



Snow and dust discolor the gypsum sands of White Sands National Park. © William Horton

Contest Reminder

Entries for RMOWP's annual contest must be submitted or postmarked by **July 8, 2020**.

There are no changes to the contest rules from last year.

Both **rules and entry forms** are available for download at <https://rmowp.org/annual-contest/>.

Jack's Jaunts

Sweetheart of the Himalaya



Text & photo by Jack Olson

In 1977 we began our Nepal trek, and for the first few days we were in the foothills, maybe the 5,000-foot range. Since we were the only trekkers, we created quite a stir. We would almost

always camp near a village. Children would come rushing out screaming "Mithai" (candy). That might not be welcome these days, but our trek organizer recommended that we carry some candy. It was hard candy, not Milky Ways.

Anyway, the kids would flock around us. Except this little girl stood apart, not just physically, but in the way she was dressed. The other kids ignored her.

So many things occurred that I had no answer for. But one idea was that she might be a Living Goddess.

The Living Goddess is called a Kumari, and is considered the sole embodiment of pureness by both Buddhist and Hindu. She would appear on a balcony, was worshipped, and never was among the people. When she reached puberty she was out, reunited with her family, and the community had to find a new Living Goddess. Areas all over the country would promote one of their girls. I wondered: had she been promoted as a Living Goddess?

It touched me deeply but I only know what I saw. There was no one for me to ask why she was different.



A little girl apart - Living Goddess?

President's Column

The Gift of Culling

Text & photo by Virginia Parker Staat

The time has come. David and I have begun culling through 45 years of slides and photos. We began with our thirty carousels of slides. Each carousel holds 100, making 3,000 slides total. And that's just the slides in the carousels. I admit that the process feels overwhelming.

The first cold and rainy day of winter, we set up our old projector and began advancing through the carousel dated 1975. We soon discovered an amazing truth: RMOWP has changed us. What we have learned over our years of membership has made the culling process much easier than expected. As we clicked through each slide, we would often laugh and say, "Tom would hate this one." Long time photo judge Tom Ulrich had a fetish for level water lines.

Some of our early photos had water that defied gravity.

"This one would make Jack tense." During his photo critiques, Jack Olson often told us he felt tense when an object was too close to the photo's border.

Blurry subjects, photos too bright or dark, too much sky, crooked buildings, crooked horizons... we have them all. In one carousel, we found eleven photos of a single mountain, and we have no idea even where that mountain exists except that it's somewhere between the Sierra Madres and Sandia Crest. We are embarrassed to even count the number of photos with blurry bottoms from snapping the picture out the window of a moving vehicle.

We were most definitely photo neophytes back in 1975. Now because of what we have learned attending RMOWP conferences, we think before we click by checking backgrounds and empty space and composition. We pay attention to lighting and horizons and shadows... and so much more.

After reviewing our first carousel, we kept only seven slides out of the hundred. Now, fifteen carousels into the process, we have culled down to less than six carousels full. That's better than a fifty percent reduction on the initial culling round.

Thank you, RMOWP!



Round one...

2020 RMOWP Calendar

July 8 ~ Contest submission deadline

October 5-8 ~ Annual Conference —
Alamogordo, New Mexico, and White
Sands National Park

See www.rmowp.org for details.

RMOWP's 47th Conference

Mon.-Thu., Oct. 5-8, 2020 ~ Alamogordo, New Mexico

Headquarters: Holiday Inn Express & Suites

Tentative Schedule

Saturday, October 3

Pre-Conference Field Trip (on your own): Open House at Trinity Site, drive yourself or carpool with Alamogordo Chamber of Commerce

Sunday & Monday, October 4 & 5

Pre-Conference Workshop: "Take Control of Your Photography," a day-and-a-half photography workshop with Bill and Kit Horton

Monday, October 5

2:30pm Board of Directors Meeting (open to all members)

6:00pm Registration, Opening Reception, Light Buffet (included in registration fee)

7:30pm Presentation of Contest Submissions

Tuesday, October 6

8:30am Welcome, Handouts & Announcements

9:00am Carpool to Oliver Lee Memorial State Park for guided tour of restored Oliver Lee Ranch House; explore park museum, historic buildings, riparian nature trail

12:00pm Meet at state park's group picnic area for lunch

1:00pm Free time to explore local attractions on your own.

5:00pm Showcase of Selected Members Photography

6:00pm Dinner

7:00pm Sand Dune Photography Workshop

Wednesday, October 7

9:00am General Membership Meeting

10:00am Break

10:15am Self-Publishing – A Panel Discussion

11:45pm Lunch

12:45pm Bringing Characters to Life, writing workshop

1:45pm Break

2:00pm Carpool to White Sands National Park, explore the visitor center and head into the dunes

4:00pm Meet at White Sands Group Picnic Area for BBQ supper

5:30pm Meet at the "Sunset Stroll Meets Here" sign in the dunes to join the park's leisurely sunset walk with a park ranger. (Sunset 6:44pm, park closes 8:00pm)

Thursday, October 8

6:00am Sunrise Photo Shoot (sunrise 7:05am)

9:00am Anne Sullivan Writers Forum

11:00am Photo Critique

12:00pm Lunch

12:45pm The Nitty-Gritty of Planning Your Article or Photo Essay, workshop

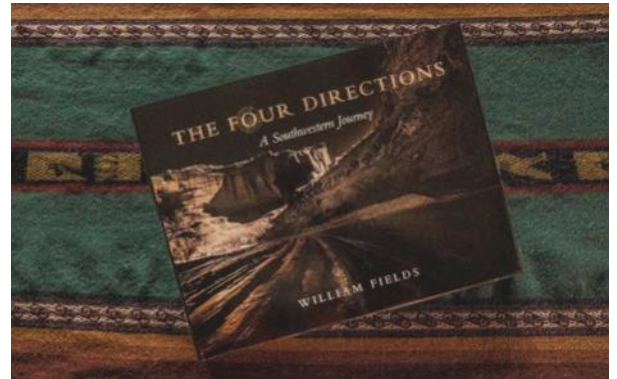
1:45pm Break

2:00 Auction

6:00 Banquet and Awards Ceremony

Member News

Freelance photographer and RMOWP member **Bill Fields**, from Hermann, Missouri, has published a new book, "The Four Directions, A Southwestern Journey." Offered as a small, signed and numbered limited-edition, it contains images from the Four Corners states: Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. Bill tells us that the photographs were shot in infrared and processed in sepia and black and white, to highlight the stark beauty of the southwestern landscape and its people.



To see some of the images in the book see Bill's website, www.williamfieldsartphoto.com (or click the photo), where you can also check out Bill's other book, "Hermann, Missouri – One of the Prettiest Towns in America," and see some of his other photographic work. Bill also presents photography workshops and field trips and is currently working on two additional books, one on the Santa Fe Trail and another on a Tennessee distillery.

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"Orange Lily on Black"
© Kent Taylor
Honorable Mention, Flora Category, RMOWP 2019 Photo Contest

Social Distancing

By Cecilia Travis © 2020

*"Then stirs the feeling infinite, so felt in solitude,
where we are least alone." ~ Lord Byron*

I have always preferred social distancing while hiking. My treasured outdoor memories are mostly of solo hikes, my companions limited to rocks, trees, flowers and possibly a few animals.

Now that I am old, I am constantly warned not to hike alone, which might as well be, "Don't hike!" I tried a group outing of fellow slow hikers a few years ago. They were a friendly bunch of people who jabbered all the way in and all the way out. I longed for solitude.

But now, with the corona virus pandemic raging, many of us are escaping the confines of our dwellings for a little time in nature, and that is bringing new challenges such as the stay-six-feet-away-from-everyone rule. This morning's experts were quoted in the Denver Post as saying that six feet away is probably too close!

How do you stay six feet or more away from other hikers on a mountain trail? This rule for "social distancing" to protect ourselves and others from COVID-19 is a sensible practice that will be impossible to implement.

Many trails are narrow cuts on steep hillsides. Even if you do find a spot to step to the side, other hikers are likely to be no more than three feet away at best. When I see someone approaching on a narrow path, I nod, but these days instead of greeting them, I hold my breath until they are well away, hoping any expired viruses have dispersed.

In flatter, more open areas, hikers are achieving this distance by edging along the outer perimeter of trails. This, coinciding with mud season, will turn trails into wide swaths of trampled, dying vegetation.

But what instead? Bushwhack? Go off the trails entirely, hoping we don't do too much damage? We are too many for that. Damage is inevitable.

Because of the pandemic so many hikers, all coming in cars, have created such a problem that now most of the national parks have been closed and many national forest trail heads are cordoned off. At first the closures seemed primarily related to traffic and potential damage to the

trails, but now it is apparent that park employees have no way of controlling the crowds without endangering their own lives. We are urged to stick to local parks and trails, but these, serving denser populations, are dangerously overcrowded.

The strain of staying at home is creating some hard feelings. One Summit county resident wrote a letter to the Denver Post telling Front Range visitors to stay away. "... this is not your backyard. Please stop using the mountains as your weekend getaway." He goes on to say that the mountains are his home, and we are not "entitled to be a tourist when all other aspects of the tourism economy have shut down." He says we will be welcome when businesses are open, in other words when he can make money off us.

I owned property in Summit County for forty years, but never in that time did I think I had an exclusive right to the surrounding federal lands. I started paying state and federal taxes with my first job in 1956. The federal and state parks and forests ARE my backyard.

We really do need to stay away, but not because this man can't take our money right now. My friend Maryann puts it well, "The real reasons Summit County is discouraging visitors is because a backcountry emergency might expose rescuers to coronavirus and because our small hospital can't handle a lot of patients at a time. I think it has 35 beds. Those reasons are pretty valid for people staying away from the backcountry where I live. Colorado Avalanche Information Center and Open Snow's Joel Gratz are requesting people stay closer to home and minimize risk if they do ski."

I am lucky. I live in a house with a yard and can step outside, feel and smell spring's approach. I can walk to the closed golf course nearby and hear the spring territorial songs of the redwing blackbirds and robins. I can choose unpopular hours to walk my relatively wide neighborhood streets. I am hungry for nature, but not yet starved. I look forward to returning to my larger backyard when I can do so without endangering other people. Social distancing and its attendant solitude will once more be by choice.



"Fire in the Flat Tops" © Ron Belak, 1st Place Natural Phenomena Category, RMOWP 2019 Photography Contest

Believing in Fairy Tales



Virginia with her beloved
Roxanne

By Virginia Parker Staat

"Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten." ~ Neil Gaiman

I suppose some may consider it an odd place for a nonfiction writer to begin, but for me, the fairy tale structure is the one I use most frequently. Fairy tales use a narrative

structure, which lends itself well to nonfiction. I'm not talking about fairy tale formula. I can't recall a single piece of nonfiction that includes magic beans or a pumpkin turning into a carriage. Rather, a fairy tale narrative structure uses specific building blocks to tell a story. This narrative structure determines how our plot is unveiled to our readers.

The fairy tale narrative structure encompasses three distinct parts. Fairy tales begin with a confrontation, some problem that must be resolved, or some violation that leads to a fall. In literary terms, this is called an inciting incident.

The inciting incident is the most critical aspect in the fairy tale's narrative structure. We can each recall our favorite fairy tale and its inciting incident. The Ugly Duckling's inciting incident begins when his egg rolls into a duck's nest. Pinocchio's begins when a toymaker creates a wooden puppet and wishes it to life. Snow White's begins when her beauty surpasses that of her wicked stepmother. These inciting incidents quickly thrust our protagonist into the main action of the story. They provide a sense of urgency and make the story interesting. They hook our readers.

The need to hook our readers is also applicable in nonfiction. J.S. Lenore writes, "A story that goes nowhere is pretty dull. Even simple fairy tales like *The Three Little Pigs* or *Little Red Ridinghood* [sic] move forward in a predictable, understandable way. Complex stories follow this same progression, with Shakespearean plays serving as a good example. This narrative structure is critical to understanding how and why stories work, and how to improve your own storytelling skills." She continues, "By understanding structure and conflict, you can get the bones of your story together."

Creative nonfiction writer Lee Gutkind explains the importance of the inciting incident when writing personal memoirs. In his book, *You Can't Make this Stuff Up*, he writes, "The stronger the scene and the faster you involve readers in the scene, the more successful you'll be. So when writing a scene, think about thrusting your reader into the heat of the action as quickly as possible. Action

comes before place and characters."

Examples of inciting incidents in nonfiction writing abound. Sy Montgomery begins his biography of Temple Grandin with an inciting incident describing her autism. Rebecca Skoot's essay on the growing need for pet-fish veterinarians begins *Fixing Nemo* with surgery on a goldfish. A history book may begin with a spy's betrayal; a scientific discovery article may begin with a child's battle with a deadly disease; an essay about the dangers of pesticides may begin with an endangered animal's plight. These inciting incidents provide the trajectory that ties our readers to the core value of our story.

The second or middle portion of the fairy tale's narrative structure weaves the reader through trials and lessons or the changes and transformation the protagonist must endure in order to overcome the inciting incident. The focus of this middle section of the fairy tale structure is to create the tension necessary to resolve the issue and lead readers to the story's climax. In *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim writes that the most important idea in fairy tales is that we see ourselves in their pages. They educate us, support, and help us sort through emotions. These are the driving goals for the middle portion of our nonfiction stories also. In essence we want our readers to see themselves within the pages and lead them to a greater understanding of our subject matter.

The conclusion of a fairy tale's narrative structure contains the story's resolution, usually with the protagonist achieving or surmounting the goal introduced in the inciting incident. The story rises to a climax, most often with a single defining choice or challenge that determines the outcome. The ending focuses on the protagonist and his or her transformation or redemption. Fairy tales are known to hit a crescendo and resolve quickly: The ugly duckling discovers he is a swan. Pinocchio turns into a real boy. The wicked witch is dead. End of story. They live happily ever after.

Offering readers a sense of transformation is also compelling in nonfiction. Jill Swenson writes, "Plot is the sequence of events. Story is the consequence. One thing should lead to another. A memoir is more than a string of vignettes. History is more than a chronicle of chronological events. Scientific inquiry is not merely a series of loosely related experiments. Across the vertical access of *fictio* time, from the first page to the last, the reader should feel movement, change, transformation; at least in comprehension of the subject matter."

Our job as writers is to find the components that build upon our story's plot. We begin our narrative with an inciting incident that ties our readers to the core value of our story. We weave our readers through trials and lessons. We rise to a climax for the challenge at hand that leads to resolution. This, in essence, is the fairy tale narrative structure. It hooks our readers, leads them to discovery, and ultimately transforms their thinking. Isn't that any writer's goal?

Fog Light in Antarctica

Text and photos by Ian King

You're going to Antarctica, what many refer to as the "seventh continent," as if it's a collector's item accrediting them with significant prestige in a time of global travel. But the first two days of your trek are not particularly auspicious. You've spent them forging a labored trail through the infamous Drake Passage, rolling from side to side in the heaving swell of the Southern Ocean, the forbidding gateway to this "last and final continent."

The weather's making you increasingly anxious; you fear you've made a bad call: what if it's going to be like this for the next six days? The sea stretches to the almost imperceptible horizon, whichever way you look. It's a great perpetual motion machine, one heaving lurch followed by another, relentlessly. It's a dull, monochromatic dark gray, too, which doesn't do anything to ease the mind-numbing monotony, except where the whitecaps blink momentarily. The cloud-banked, leaden skies more than match the ocean; they hang low, sunless, almost even lightless, as if they are trying to suffocate everything below them. The three-sixty grayness seems irrepressible, so vast and all-enclosing that you fear you'll never escape this dour cocoon. *Vastness*, A sheer, overwhelming vastness.

You offer a little prayer that the weather will change by the morrow, and, as if on fateful cue, a great wandering albatross suddenly appears. He's long been known as a trusted avian almanac for seafarers. You watch the bird glide effortlessly, capturing its own perpetual motion from that of the incessant polar wind on which it free rides. Sporting some ten feet of majestic wingspan, he swoops and dives like a daredevil just above the whitecaps, tempting calamity, while also looking out for prey. You wonder, though, whether he's a doom-laden character from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* or, preferably, "a pious bird of good omen." He's leading you south, you choose to believe, *surely* to better climes.

...

Somewhere on the Trinity Peninsula you make landfall, and anchor in a quiet cove of the Erebus and Terror Gulf. You ponder the portent: Erebus, born of Chaos and the "personification of darkness," according to the ancient Greeks. *Indeed*. Although the waters are calm now, and the wind has died, the sun's light is still mostly AWOL, shrouded behind a veil of thick, vast, fog.

The fog is almost suffocating, and its dense humidity condenses on your skin. Sunless *and* horizonless now, you feel as if you're in a dimensionless universe, ill at ease in the discomfiting lack of clear coordinates as to where exactly you are. It's not beautiful as such, but the vast silence added to the feeling of suspended animation gives you a sort of out-of-body sense of weirdness, angst and a touch of nervous exhilaration, both at the same time.



Maybe the albatross has given you false hope, but he hasn't. The fog magically begins to lift, along with your spirits, and the weirdness gives way to increasing wonderment. A slither of clear sky breaks through close to the horizon, letting the pale morning light of the absent sun penetrate the gloom. A half-light glimmers, picking out the vast ice sheet that forms the coastline. Then, as the fog dissipates even more, several icebergs appear, sculpted by the wind and the waves and the chaotic melt they've slowly endured over the millennia. Here and there, they emit a startling turquoise blue, a property of the way their physical and chemical composition plays with the light waves that strike them. The icebergs remind you of ghost ships, crewless and marooned in the still waters. But the half-fog gives you a half-hope that there may well yet be more to come.

...

Cont. on page 7, see *Fog Light...*

Fog Light..., cont. from page 6

It's late afternoon morphing into early evening and the fog has come back with a vengeance. It seems as if it's intent on ruining things once again, renegeing on its earlier promise.

So, you've just about given up for the day, your camera hanging forlornly around your neck. You take what you think will be your last strained look at the shrouded western horizon in order to give yourself permission to call it a day.

But you can't—*literally*—believe what you see.

In a matter of seconds, the fog bank has suddenly broken apart, like a vastly improbable *deus ex machina*, creating an opening that reminds you of a giant cosmic letterbox. Through the widening aperture, what looks like a most unlikely parallel universe pops into startling view, as if it's wholly artificial, a trickster's *trompe-l'œil*. But it isn't. What you witness is wondrously *real*.



Through the letterbox, the sunlight is in its fullest glory, low in the sky but casting maximum luminous force. It picks out the mountains' western-facing slopes in a brilliant white, delicately tinted with a shimmer of a golden glow. But the rest of the canvas is in starkly contrasting shadow, as if Caravaggio has executed his *chiaroscuro* technique on the splendid scene. The shadows are long and oblique, delightfully exaggerating the height of the mountains. But even in the dark shadows, there is much to see. In the shadowed terrain, a range of blues emerge, the alchemy of the diffusion of light still in operation even at this late hour. Moreover, the cracks and crevices in the ice sheet are thrown into sharp relief, bringing a 3D clarity to what otherwise might have been a featureless uniformity. And on the nearest peak in the foreground, the wispy beginnings of a katabatic wind have been freeze-framed, as if another artist, from the Impressionist school perhaps, has decided to add a great flourish of a brushstroke to Caravaggio's fine work.

But would any of this be as astounding if not for the retreating fogbanks framing that letterbox opening? You think not. The fog in the end has been your friend, the dull calm before the aesthetic storm, the *yin* to the *yang* of witnessing the ultimate that nature has to offer.

Fog light in Antarctica. *Magnificent!*



Frank Zurey Appointed to RMOWP Board

Longtime member Frank Zurey of Golden, Colorado, has been appointed to the RMOWP board of directors by President Virginia Parker Staat to fill out the term of Tom Rabideau, who has dropped out of the organization.

Frank's photographs have been seen in photography shows and various publications including *Popular Photography* and *Fine Art*. He was a board member from 2003 to 2005, and last year won Best of Show Photography in RMOWP's Annual Contest plus took first place in the members' choice photo contest at the conference.

"Molly" © Frank Zurey, Honorable Mention Fauna Category, RMOWP 2019 Photography Contest

Attention all Instagrammers – @outdoorwritersandphotogs

RMOWP is now on Instagram! To find us, use the Instagram app on your smartphone and search @outdoorwritersandphotogs. You can also find us on your computer at <https://www.instagram.com/outdoorwritersandphotogs/>.



We invite you to follow us. We also invite you to link your Instagram photos to RMOWP’s Instagram account. For example, if you have a stellar photo, a copy of the cover of your newest book, or information regarding an upcoming conference to post, when you add @outdoorwritersandphotogs to your post, you will tag RMOWP’s Instagram account. By adding @outdoorwritersandphotogs, you also promote all of our talented members on Instagram, generate awareness of RMOWP and its mission, as well as attract new members.

If you are not yet on Instagram, it is one of the easier social media platforms to join. Simply download the app to your smart phone. To set up your account, choose an easy tag as your user name, complete the profile information, and begin posting. Instagram is a visual platform, making it perfect for our photographers. Because Instagram is photo-driven, you begin each post with a photo and add a short caption. After adding your photo and caption, your next step is to include hashtags so that others can find your post.

To reach more people when you post a photo, add a variety of hashtags at the end of your caption to broaden your target audience. For example, in addition to @outdoorwritersandphotogs, add the hashtag #rmowp. (Some of our members have already started using #rmowp when they post photos.) Then, include other popular hashtags like #naturephotography, #naturelover, #landscapephotography, or #wildlifephotography. By including popular hashtags, your post will increase its visibility. You can include up to thirty hashtags per photo.

For writers, post photos of your book covers, your office space, sneak peeks of works in progress, or inspirational quotes. Relevant hashtags include your topic (#rescuedogs), your genre (#outdoorwriting), various writers’ groups (#amwriting), or your story’s location (#gilanationalforest). The opportunities are endless.

If you’re interested in learning more about Instagram, just search the Internet for guides concerning your specific needs. And once you’ve started, be sure to add @outdoorwritersandphotogs to your best work. It will help our efforts to promote RMOWP to a wider demographic.



*"Grooming Roadrunner" © Beto Gutierrez
2nd Place, Fauna Category, RMOWP 2019 Photo Contest*

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