

Lowland Photo Contest 2026 - Rules

WHO WILL BE LOWLAND PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR?

General

The Lowland Photo Contest is an organisation of **Landschap vzw**, nature association with registered office at BE-3370 Boutersem, Doornstraat 29, Belgium, www.landschapvzw.com.

The Lowland Photo Contest is open to all nature and landscape photographers. The competition aims to stimulate responsible nature and landscape photography and thus contribute to a broad awareness that should ultimately lead to nature conservation and environmental protection.

The Lowland Photo Contest is organised in close partnership with the Lowland Photo Festival, also an initiative of Landschap vzw.

Basic conditions

The competition is open to **all photographers**, both amateurs and professionals. Only the jury members are excluded from participation.

Submitted **images of landscapes** must have been made **in Belgium or the Netherlands**. Photographs of foreign landscapes will not be considered for judging. **An exception to this rule is made for the category 'The World', where images from all over the world are explicitly welcome.** Images of landscapes may include human elements and infrastructures; images of pronounced cultural landscapes or partly industrialised landscapes can also compete, as long as there is a link with nature somewhere.

Images of animals, plants, mushrooms, ... must relate to **species and subspecies that are native to Belgium or the Netherlands**; they should preferably be made in these countries. If images of species have been taken abroad, they must show the species in an environment and with a status (e.g. winter/summer plumage for birds) that could match a situation in Belgium or the Netherlands.

Images of **exotic species or errant/stray guests** are allowed to the extent that they were made in Belgium or the Netherlands. **Exceptions to these rules are made for the category 'The World', where explicitly images from all over the world are welcome.**

All images of species must be made **in the wild**. Pictures of pets, captive animals and cultivated plants are not eligible for judging. Large grazers and wild animals within vast grazing or safety grids are considered free and wild.

It goes without saying that submitted images must be made with **respect for the subject and its environment**. Images that have potentially given rise to a serious disturbance or damage to the subject or its surroundings, even if effective disturbance or damage has not been demonstrated or has not occurred, will not be considered for judging.

If the basic conditions have been violated, disqualification follows automatically. It is possible that the jury asks for proof that the basic conditions were respected to make a certain image. The organisation and the jury do not discuss the interpretation of the basic rules.

Additional conditions and technical requirements

Images that are fresh and innovative and that are submitted exclusively for this competition, have a step ahead. Images that have already won prizes in prestigious international competitions, that have already been shown in other major competitions within the nature sector – regardless of whether they won there or only received a mention – or that have already been repeatedly published in leading nature or photography magazines or books, are excluded from this competition.

The competition is open to both digital and analogue images, but entries are made exclusively digitally. The **original images** must have a **minimum resolution of 4,000 pixels on the longest side** (which, for example, corresponds to 8 megapixels in case of a 3/2 ratio).

Participating images should only be submitted in **jpeg format**. Only images with a resolution of **at least 4,000 pixels on the longest side** are eligible. Photos with a higher resolution are preferably submitted with the **original, highest available resolution**; they should certainly not be rescaled.

It is highly recommended to describe the **subject** and **location** in the **EXIFs**. The **name of the photographer** may also be mentioned there.

The photographer is free to choose the **file name** of his image. The photographer's name or other author's attribute may but must not appear in the file name. The organisation takes measures to ensure that the original file name and the EXIFs are under no circumstances shown in projections for judging.

Before the judging, each image is **automatically anonymised**; the file name is overwritten, and the image is given a unique number that allows the identity of the submitter to be determined after the judging.

In principle, raw files or negatives of the submitted photos must be submitted if the jury asks for them. However, jpegs straight from the camera are also accepted as entries.

Photographers who do not have RAW files or negatives can participate but must be able to demonstrate in another way that their image is truthful and does not violate reality, for example by presenting other images from the same series, citing testimonies from third parties, making images

of the 'making of' available, etc.

The following operations and techniques are **ACCEPTED**:

- General adjustments, such as contrast, saturation, sharpening, white balance, local adjustments (such as dodge and burn) and removal of vignetting, if done in moderation and preserving the natural character of the image.
- Removal of sensor stains.
- 'Minor clean up', but very limited, for example the removal of suspended dust particles in underwater images or the removal of disturbing elements of human origin that are only temporarily present, such as aircraft stripes in the air. This is by no means about simply removing other elements in the image 'because they are disturbing'.
- The original image may be cropped, provided that the longest side of the final photograph is at least 4,000 pixels.
- Multiple exposure, HDR manipulation and focus stacking, also through off-camera software, provided these techniques are used thoughtfully. With multiple exposures there is room for creative input, with HDR and focus stacking it is crucial that the natural character of the image is not compromised.
- Panoramic photos taken directly from the camera or compiled using software outside the camera, provided that the individual photos are submitted as soon as requested.
- Conversion to black and white and – only for black and white images – inversion.

The following operations are **NOT ALLOWED**:

- Adding elements in the photo.
- Removal of elements in the photo, other than sensor spots or elements for which *minor clean up* can be justified. Do not fall under *minor clean up* and are therefore NOT allowed: removal of elements that are natural (for example, a blade of grass or a bird 'too much' in the picture), removal of elements that are always present (for example, high-voltage cables or a pole) or removal of elements that are fundamentally part of the image, even if they are temporary (for example, a ship on the horizon).
- Selective changes of colour, saturation and/or contrast.
- Interpolation and AI processing. It is not permitted to add or generate new image information in the original image through interpolation, AI upscaling or other software-based techniques.

- Frames, watermarks, or names in the photo. The jury only assesses photos that are anonymous and therefore do not contain a name or personal characteristic **in the image itself**.

As a reminder, author characteristics may appear in the file name or in the EXIF's, because they are not visible at the judging.

In general, overly manipulated images are mercilessly disqualified. The Lowland Photo Contest focuses on the creativity of the photographer, not the creativity of the software. The jury will determine where to draw the line on a case-by-case basis.

Categories and conditions of participation

The Lowland Photo Contest 2026 has 12 categories. Participants can submit images for multiple categories. **Per set of 10 images, the participant pays a contribution of 15 euros.** The participant may divide the 10 images into the most appropriate categories at his or her own discretion. Each participant is free to submit multiple sets of 10 images.

The categories for the 2026 edition are:

- Portfolio (*coherent visual story of 7 to 10 images*)
- Landscape, weather and natural phenomena
- Plants and mushrooms
- Birds
- Insects and creepy-crawlies
- Mammals
- Underwater
- Other animals (*reptiles, amphibians, snails, starfish...*)
- Abstract, composition and shapes
- Man and nature
- Theme 2026: **Black and White**
- The World (*all images made visibly abroad*)

The jury reserves the right to place a submitted image in a different category from the one in which the participant entered it, but only when there are good reasons for doing so and the reclassification is in the participant's best interest.

For the portfolio category, a participant submits a minimum of 7 and a maximum of 10 coherent images. The coherence is expressed by style or story and will also be judged as such. It is permitted to submit several portfolios; in that case, the entrant must create several accounts on the competition website so that the software does not treat the different portfolios as one portfolio.

Winners and prizes

For each category, the jury will appoint a **category winner**, a **runner-up** and **3 highly commended** entries.

The **category winners** win prizes worth **250 euros to more than 1,000 euros**, depending on the category. The **runners-up** win prizes worth **125 euros to 250 euros**, depending on the category. The prices to be won are indicated for each category, on the website www.lowlandcontest.com.

The **highly commended** is first and foremost an honour and encouragement that the photographer receives. Nevertheless, the *highly commendeds* also win a prize, namely a large format print of their own image as wall decoration.

From the winning portfolio, the jury chooses the strongest individual image. This image will compete for the main prize in the final judging round where the overall winner is indicated.

The winning image in the category 'The World' will not compete for the main prize in that final judging round because the finality of the Lowland Photo Contest is to focus on the nature of the Benelux countries. However, the winner in the category 'The World' can count on a category prize worth at least 1,000 euros.

From 11 of the 12 category winners, the jury will select an **overall winner** who may call himself/herself **Lowland Photographer of the Year 2026**. In addition to the category prize won, the overall winner will receive the **main prize** with a value of **1,500 euros**. Just like the other prizes, the main prize is described in more detail on the website www.lowlandcontest.com.

Judging

The judging is done by a panel of celebrated nature and landscape photographers and professionals from the photography sector or the editing of nature (photo) magazines.

For an overview of **all jury members**, please visit the competition website www.lowlandcontest.com.

The jury procedure – based on completely anonymous images – guarantees that no one outside the jury can have any impact on the final outcome. Therefore, only the judges are excluded from participation in the competition.

The jury will be assisted by **ecologists** who – for 11 of the 12 categories – must remove any doubt about the indigenous or exotic character of a species, subspecies or image. The ecologists will take a critical look at images that have potentially been made abroad and that would show a species in a situation that cannot match a situation in the Netherlands or Belgium. Of course, the latter does not apply to the category 'The World'.

The decisions of the jury are irrevocable and not questionable. The deliberation itself is not communicated, neither by the jurors nor by the organisation. When announcing the finalists, the jury will explain its choices and decisions, as a college.

Submit / participate

The entry period starts on September 11th 2026 and **ends on November 2th 2026 at 23h59**. Images can only be submitted via the website www.lowlandcontest.com.

As a reminder, images cannot be uploaded and eligible to participate until they meet a few technical requirements. Only the **jpeg format** is accepted and the uploaded image must have a resolution of **at least 4,000 pixels on the longest side**. Upload per set of 10 images is only possible after paying online for the participation at a rate of 15 euros per 10 images.

In order to make the threshold for participation as low as possible, the organisation will strive for a maximum range of online payment options (bank cards, credit cards, others).

Announcement of finalists and winners

The jury will deliberate on November 11th 2026. The **60 finalists** – one category winner, one *runner-up* and 3 *highly commendeds* per category – will be **contacted personally, no later than November 14th 2026**, but without disclosing which qualification they have achieved. The finalists then have **until November 16th 2026** to send the RAW files or analogue images or to demonstrate the authenticity of their image in another way.

Those who are absent during this period must take precautions in advance so that the proof can be provided, for example by transferring the files to the office of Landschap vzw (info@landschapvzw.be) before departure. If the files are not handed over in time or the proof of authenticity is not provided, disqualification follows.

The **highly commended** entries, **the runner-up in each category, the category winners and the overall winner** will be announced during the **Lowland Photo Fair in Brecht (eventcenter eTien) on Saturday November 28th 2026 between 9h30 and 10h45**. All participants in the competition are invited to this festive gathering.

The overall winner of the Lowland Photo Contest 2026 can call himself/herself **Lowland Photographer of the Year 2026**.

All category winners and the overall winner – along with all speakers from the Lowland Photo Festival – are invited to the walking dinner on Saturday, December 13th, at approximately 6 PM: this will take place after the lecture program and before the exclusive Benelux preview of the film 'Le Chant des Forêts' by Vincent Munier.

If it only appears after the award ceremony that one of the finalists has nevertheless violated the ethical rules of conduct or has edited and/or manipulated an image in an unacceptable manner, the jury can still disqualify the participant and withdraw the awarded qualification(s) or title(s), and this without limitation in time. In that case, the organisation will communicate openly about this and will not hesitate to mention the name of the disqualified participant. However, the organisation and the jury will do everything in their power to uncover participants who do not respect the rules at an earlier stage. Of course, the organisation trusts that such a thing will not be necessary because all participants have a minimum of ethics.

In the very exceptional case that a finalist would be disqualified after the award ceremony, this will not change the qualifications obtained by the other finalists. No new finalist will be appointed, nor will the qualifications of other participants be reviewed at this stage.

Copyright and rights of use

By submitting an image, the photographer declares to be the author and legal owner of the image in question. If it appears that rights of third parties are violated, the participant is responsible for this himself or herself and will bear the consequences. The blame is not to be put on the contest organisation.

The organisation can use the **photos of the finalists** (category winners, *runners-up* and *highly commendeds*) in the context of the promotion of the Lowland Photo Contest and the Lowland Photo Festival (also future editions), in particular in the magazine LANDSCHAP, in exhibitions, in leaflets, on websites and social media, always mentioning the name of the photographer. **The finalist retains the copyright on his image at all times and can freely exploit it**; however, he will not charge a fee for the use of the image by the organisation of the competition.

By participating in the competition, each entrant declares in principle that he agrees with the possible inclusion of his image in a **projection during the Lowland Photo Festival**, of course with the name of the photographer. However, each participant can report via info@landschapvzw.be that he does not want to see his image included in a projection; the organisation will then respect that wish.

The organisation **does not** acquire **any right of use to the non-winning photos** and will always ask the authors' permission before using them.

The organisation of the competition will **never provide the images to third parties** and will always refer them to the photographer.