



OLE MISS

A L U M N I R E V I E W

Winter 2006

On Location

A Woman's Touch ♡ A New Place to Call Home

A cold winter morning breaks, and daylight seeps into Joe Mac Hudspeth Jr.'s duck blind. Patches of ice around the slew begin to release steam as the sun rises past the old cypress trees. Soon Hudspeth is surrounded by mallards and takes careful aim at a very fine looking drake with a shining green head and vivid white collar. The quiet click that follows is not from a shotgun misfire. It's from Hudspeth's 35-millimeter camera.

Hudspeth (BBA 75), who lives in Brandon, has seen countless sunrises since he decided to seriously pursue nature photography 20 years ago. A self-taught photographer who turned his hobby into a successful part-time career, his images have been published more than 900 times in national, regional and statewide publications. He is quick to point out, though, that nature photography wasn't nearly as easy as he thought it would be.

"I saved money and bought an automatic camera with a 100-300-millimeter zoom lens and bought a tripod and took off riding around in my Toyota Corolla," he says. "I figured in just a few months I would have the cover of *Outdoor Life*."

Hudspeth quickly learned that taking photos of wild animals was much easier said than done. Getting extremely close to the wildlife was vital. After much trial and error with locations, lenses and homemade blinds, it started to come together. His images first appeared in magazines in 1987.

"I went to the post office one day and there was a *Turkey Call* magazine and *Mississippi Outdoors*," he says. "Low and behold I had the front cover on *Turkey Call*, and I had a full page in *Mississippi Outdoors*."

Hudspeth hasn't looked back. His photos have now appeared on every Mississippi Duck Stamp since 1999 and all of the Mississippi Sportsman's Licenses since the credit card style was introduced in 1997.

Though he enjoys photographing many species of wildlife, Hudspeth's true passion is waterfowl. In 1993, he received national recognition when his image of an immature least bittern was selected from more than 2,000 wildlife calendar photographs and awarded the Grand Prize for Wildlife by the Roger Tory Peterson Institute for Natural History.

Hudspeth, whose day job has been as an advertising agent with RPM for *Truckers* magazine since 1994, primarily pursues his craft locally—mostly around Ross Barnett Reservoir, Oxford and the Noxubee Wildlife Refuge. He is often back home from his shoots before most folks are up and out the door for the day.

Wild THINGS

Joe Mac Hudspeth turned his hobby into a passion and has made a name for himself as one of the premier waterfowl photographers in the region—all while keeping his day job.

BY JIM URBANEK



"It's pretty neat to be able to spend that kind of time that close to a wild animal ... in their space," he says. "They definitely know you're there."

In 2003, the University Press of Mississippi released Hudspeth's first venture into publishing, *In The Southern Wild*, a coffee-table book showcasing his best work. For more information about Hudspeth and his photography, visit his Web site at <www.southernfocus.com>.

Prints of this image, "Top of the Morning," (right) were purchased by Ducks Unlimited for fund-raising banquets in Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas. Swamps are among Hudspeth's favorite places to photograph wildlife and landscapes.



In 1993, Hudspeth received national recognition when his image of an immature least bittern (below) was selected from more than 2,000 wildlife calendar photographs and awarded the Grand Prize for Wildlife by the Roger Tory Peterson Institute for Natural History.



While a thistle (top) is a prickly nuisance in a cow pasture, it can become a work of art when the seed head opens prematurely and falls to the ground. The sun rises over Ross Barnett Reservoir (bottom left). Getting close enough to capture the wood duck (bottom right) on film is the main reason Hudspeth says he bought a "big glass" lens.



The alligator (above), estimated to be 12 feet long, made its displeasure clearly known with aggressive behavior toward Hudspeth. Perhaps it was protecting the catfish in its mouth. The image was taken on Ross Barnett Reservoir. A branded water snake (right) suns on a log.



A raccoon (top) hides in a cypress tree, while a green heron (bottom) struggles to swallow a small bream. Green herons migrate north during the spring and summer to nest and raise their young.

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The water lotus (left) appears in the shallows of Ross Barnett during the summer. Red-winged blackbirds, gallinules and moorhens hunt for bugs in the seed head. A purple gallinule (below) is a common site around Ross Barnett Reservoir in the summer. First cousin to the American coot, gallinules arrive at Barnett in April, then build their nests and raise their young in the cattails before leaving in September. *AR*

