

Beauty through the camera's lens

By SUSAN de STEIN

What began as a hobby developed into an "uncontrollable" passion for Mississauga's Barry Ranford.

Photography is his love.

"Give me 1,000 rolls of film, three months, a camera, and I'm off," he laughs.

One of the few photographers whose work has been displayed in the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto, Ranford is actually a graphic designer by profession.

His interest in photography, however, goes far beyond that of a dedicated amateur or even a competent professional. In the sense that his work reflects his attitudes and philosophies, photography represents a way of life for the 35-year-old Mississauga resident.

APPETITE WHETTED

While a graphic design student at the Ontario College of Art, Ranford's appetite was whetted during an introductory course in photography in which he had enrolled merely "out of interest."

It became a consuming interest. While photography does not provide a living for him today, it's become one of the most important aspects of his life.

In his work Ranford combines a life-long interest in natural history and wildlife with an innate sense of graphic perfection. Wildlife photography, considered the most difficult of all types of photography, "is what I do best," says Ranford. And it's what he likes doing best.

Where studio photographers deal with models, lighting, and positioning in a controlled environment, "I have to deal with the elements" — variables over which he has no control. There's a challenge.

Patience is not the first virtue with wildlife photographers, Ranford notes. "You just need determination."

The photograph — the time, place and subject — are "all planned ahead of time... it's not just potluck." In most cases, "I know what I want... and I get it."

ONCE A HUNTER, NOW A NATURALIST

Once interested in hunting and fishing, Ranford says he "grew up". Hunting "was such a ridiculous male ego thing... and I finally saw that."

On top of the fact hunting means "killing something for no reason", Ranford questions the right of anyone to kill anything. "Ask any hunter what purpose it serves... he can't answer you."

He began to stalk his prey with a camera. "I said to myself, 'If you're so smart, get it down on film.'" There's more challenge photographing wildlife, he says, and there's no killing involved.

STYLE REFLECTS PHILOSOPHY

His photography reflects his philosophy towards natural history. "I want to capture something in its natural environment, while not jeopardizing its life." The subject must be "relaxed" at all times.

Ranford won't photograph animals on game farms, in cages, or in a zoo environment. It goes against his grain. "The safety of the subject and natural setting are of prime importance."

Like all art forms, his photography is intended to communicate his thoughts and philosophy. Through his work Ranford is hoping to instill a "sensitivity and awareness" of the natural environment in the public.

People must realize that these animals exist, often in their backyards, he says. And they don't realize that destroying these animals' environment will destroy the animals.

DESTRUCTIVE ATTITUDES

Developers and city planners are often unaware of the natural environment. "To city planners, a park means a manicured lot," he says ruefully. "Trees to planners are dwarf maples."

What is often referred to as the "Mississauga marsh", where Ranford has spent much time with his camera, is gradually being filled in. "It's criminal."

Wildlife photography "is what I do best" — Ranford

Tractors, a gas line and power transmission line are virtually destroying the natural habitat of several species of animal and plant life.

"Anything that's natural can't be left alone." Many people, he says, don't realize "how long it takes to replace trees, marshes and creeks." And much of the damage can't be corrected.

As a boy growing up in Mississauga he remembers "orchards, woods, fields"... the Etobicoke creek that now "isn't deep enough to swim in" and contains "processed sewage."

THERE'S NO LIMIT

The fact that an artist can "saturate his own home ground" led him to travel. Ranford, who has journeyed extensively in Canada, the U.S., South America and England, doesn't want to limit himself. Diversification ensures his mind and creativity "doesn't stagnate."

No matter what the location or subject, his photographs reflect his personal relationship with the unspoiled world around him. "I just don't try to record

it... I want to get close, get the feel of the thing... get right in there."

He gives 150 per cent of himself when he's shooting. If he's going to do something, "I'm going to do it right."

NOT A FULL TIME JOB — IT'S STILL A PLEASURE

Ranford has worked on occasion as a photographer for a Toronto newspaper and magazine. While "it's nice to see the photo credit line", he says he'd rather "photograph what I want and hope that I can market it."

To try to earn a living through photography might take away the pleasure... "it would become nothing but work."

It's not a particularly lucrative profession. The costs are high. He says he could never make a living at it.

The pleasure is still there and will be, as long as he has a camera around his neck.



Barry Ranford is happiest with a camera around his neck. A Mississauga resident, Ranford is one of the few photographers whose work has been displayed in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. (Staff photo by Fred Lock)



The red-winged blackbird is a common sight in Mississauga during the spring.

(Photo by Barry Ranford)

Until March 6

“Reflections” at the ROM

Barry Ranford's current exhibition *Reflections of Nature* at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto is his first exhibition.

Featuring 35 color prints photographed in 27 U.S. and 2 Canadian states, the show is not to be missed.

Included in the third floor rotunda display area are several photographs taken in the Mississauga area.

Two great horned owls and an immature horned owl were shot in the marsh area north of Burnhamthorpe Rd., just west of Hwy. 10. Entitled *Vertical Reflections*, another photograph depicts the Etobicoke Creek in Mississauga.

His subjects range from snow geese rising over Cape Tourmente in

Quebec to a prairie storm over Saskatchewan, from the tiny hawkweed flower to a black bear in Wyoming. Two white pelicans photographed against a deep blue Montana sky, a yellow-headed blackbird feeding its young, Canada geese finding refuge near a wheat field, common puffins standing on Newfoundland shores are all captured by Ranford's camera.

Every print reflects his personal relationship with nature and his understanding of the unspoiled world around him.

A graduate of the Ontario College of Art, Ranford has lived in Mississauga for over 20 years. He now owns a design and photography studio in Toronto.

Art director for the Ontario Naturalist Magazine, he sits on the board of directors for both the Toronto Field Naturalist Club and the South Peel Naturalist Club. A well-known lecturer on wildlife photography, his work has appeared in the Canadian Magazine, Globe and Mail, Ontario Naturalist, in several international magazines, and in National Film Board productions.

While he has given hundreds of lectures, his work has never been presented in a one-man exhibition before now.

Pleased with both the display and the response of the public, Ranford says he has never had “a tangible thing” to look at and bring his work together.

The 35-year-old Kendall St. resident conducts a summer course in wildlife photography at Sheridan College in Oakville. He hopes to start a small nature photography school on a trial basis near Bolton this summer, where he owns a six-acre farm complete with farmhouse.

Ranford, who has traveled in Canada, making several trips to the Arctic, hopes to be able to squeeze in a photography expedition before the end of the year.

Sponsored by Asahi-Pentax, *Reflections of Nature* appears at the museum until March 6.

Ranford's photographs are available in limited edition. Prices range from \$100 to \$400.