

FROM FIELD...

HIS BEST SHOTS

SPORTSMAN, WILDLIFE
PHOTOGRAPHER GARY KRAMER
INSPIRES OTHERS WITH HIS PASSION

By Scott Haugen

It takes a lot for a person to inspire me. Usually it's their performance or accomplishments that catch my eye. Then, if I'm really interested, I might try learning more about what makes that person tick.

If I'm truly moved by a person's work and their story, I might hope our paths cross. Or, as is the case with Gary Kramer, I make a conscious effort to meet them.

In my opinion, Kramer is the best waterfowl photographer there is. Sure, there are many great photographers these days, but the globe-trotting Kramer has more species of waterfowl to his credit than any other

photog around. And his are not just images he snapped to say "I got it."

PICTURE PERFECT

When you see a Gary Kramer image you know it's his, as many shots of even the simplest species will be jaw-droppers.

"For me, wildlife photography is all about lighting and timing," says Kramer. "When it comes to photographing waterfowl, I'm in the blind well before daylight, then I'm waiting for the sun to come up behind me to offer the perfect lighting. I'm usually done shooting by late morning, as the sun is directly overhead casting unwanted shadows. In the right situations I'll shoot again late in the afternoon or early evening."

A white-fronted goose comes in for a landing. This is one of the classic poses shot by professional photographer Gary Kramer, who is known for consistently capturing waterfowl, no matter where in the world he's photographing. (GARY KRAMER)

In other words, Kramer's world-class photos don't come by chance or through luck. I first learned of Kramer in the late 1990s, when I saw his photographs used to supplement many of my magazine articles. I'm a writer first, a photographer second. To spruce up a writer's story, magazines often purchase outside photography from professionals like Kramer. Much of the time these outside photographers are not writers, but that's not the case with Kramer.

MULTI-MEDIA STAR

You see, Kramer's background makes him a one-of-a-kind outdoorsman. He is gifted with a camera as well as the written word. He's authored numerous

magazine articles, professional papers and some of the most highly acclaimed upland bird and waterfowl coffee table books ever written.

Kramer attended Arcata's Humboldt State University, where he earned a bachelor's and master's degree in wildlife management. Before retiring in 1999 to pursue a full-time photography and writing career, Kramer served as a waterfowl biologist and refuge manager for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Ten of those years were spent as manager of the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Northern California. On top of all that, Kramer is a lifelong hunter.

STILL GOING STRONG

Combine the experiences Kramer has accumulated, both in the formal sciences and afield, and it's easy to see how he's positioned himself for success, even after retirement. But what really struck me about Kramer after having spent a couple days getting to know him at his home in Northern California is his drive.

At an age when most think of retiring for good, Kramer has a laundry list that makes even acclaimed world travelers look like they're standing still. No doubt, it's Kramer's drive to succeed – not to mention his ability to work a camera – that allows him to capture images that will take the breath away

of the world's most avid waterfowl hunters and upland birders.

Wingshooting the World, Game Birds: A Celebration of North American Upland Birds and *Flyways: A Celebration of Waterfowl & Wetlands* are three books written and photographed by Kramer that, once you see them, will make clear what level this man operates on.

SHOOTING BIRDS ... WITH A CAMERA

While Kramer is an avid wingshooter and waterfowler, as he put it to me, "It's much harder capturing a good photo of a bird than dropping it from the sky."


While Kramer has multiple game bird images appearing in hunting and birding magazines the world over each month, his latest book project is what will take him to a whole new level. Kramer's passion is in photographing waterfowl. Since 1988 he's had at least one photo appear in every issue of *Ducks Unlimited*, and in 2007 he reached a goal of photographing every waterfowl species in North America. Now he's about to complete the world slam of waterfowl photography: snapping photos of each of these birds in their wild habitats.

"In all, I'll have 167 species of ducks, geese and swans highlighted in this book, *Waterfowl Of The World*, due out in 2021," Kramer says.

At the time of this writing, he had two species left to go. "I've been traveling the world since November 2017, when this project began, and while it has been endorsed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, International Wild Waterfowl Association and more, I'm largely funding it on my own."

SELF-FUNDED PASSION

Indeed, if most photographers knew how much Kramer was investing out of pocket for this endeavor, few would even consider attempting it. Travel, food and accommodations are just the beginning, as gear, color printing and publishing quickly cut



Kramer is regarded by many as the best waterfowl photographer out there. The Humboldt State University grad and retired federal wildlife biologist is an accomplished international hunter as well as a leading conservationist. (GARY KRAMER)

HUNTING

deep into funds.

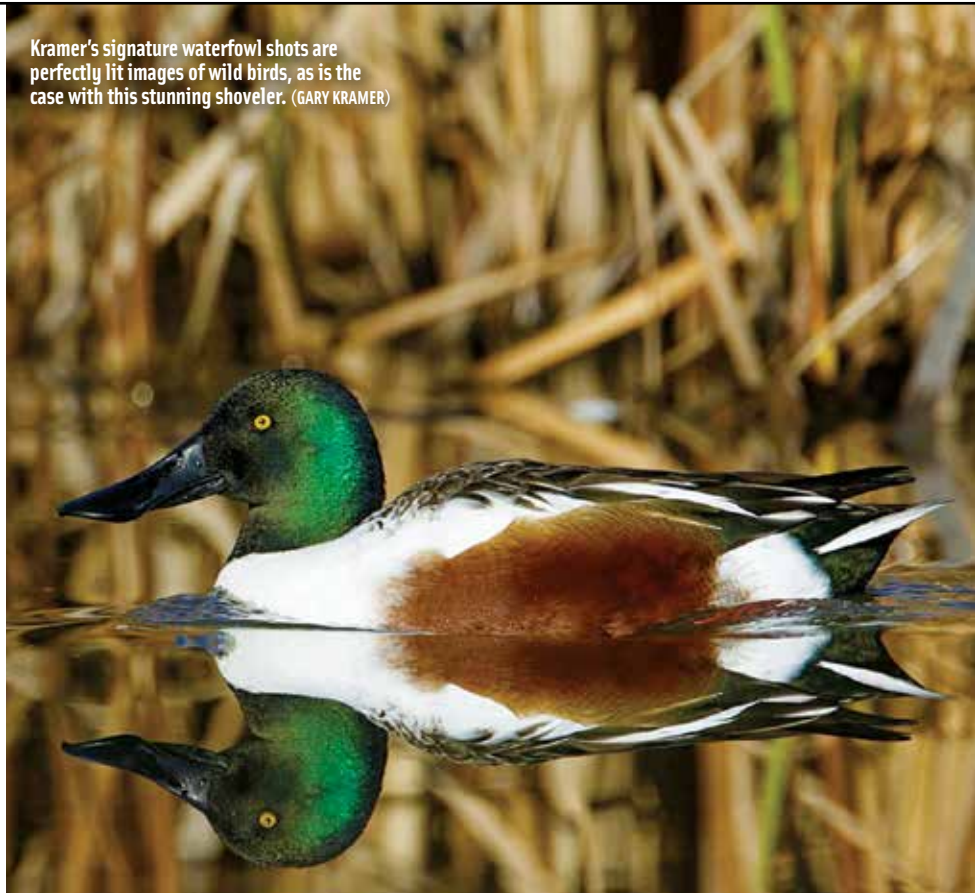
When I asked him why he's doing it, he looked into the bright green leaves backlit in his yard on a sunny day in August, and thought it over. Then he looked me in the eye and cracked a hint of a smile.

"If I don't do it, who will? There are so many beautiful ducks, geese and swans, and it'd be a shame not to have them all highlighted in a single, high-quality coffee table book," he says. "If I can find funding that helps me break even on this project, I'll be happy,"

That's what kind of man Gary Kramer is. A hunter, conservationist and professional photographer who wants to educate and motivate people to enjoy all the world has to offer. **CS**

Editor's note: To order signed copies of Gary Kramer's latest books and see more of his work, visit garykramer.net.

Kramer's signature waterfowl shots are perfectly lit images of wild birds, as is the case with this stunning shoveler. (GARY KRAMER)





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