



## Western Carolina Magic Karen Kaleta [www.blueridgeartanddesign.com](http://www.blueridgeartanddesign.com)

One of the advantages of living in the mountains of Western North Carolina is my backyard is literally adjacent to acres of National Forest which means lots of wildlife and nature subjects; or I can hop in my rig and drive just a few miles and find myself in a nature photographer's paradise. A favorite haunt for me is Nature Conservancy Land – specifically The Needmore Tract—which is a total of 4,400 acres straddling a 27 mile stretch of The Little Tennessee



River between Franklin and Fontana Lake. While biologists consider this stretch of river one of the most threatened and biologically important because of its status as one of the last Southern Appalachian river systems with native aquatic species, I have found it a great place to capture both Great Blue Herons and Bald Eagles. The river is wide and fairly shallow along the partially paved/partially dirt road that runs through this tract and obviously good fishing for these birds. Another close location is The Little Tennessee River Greenway, currently a 4.5 mile trail which will be 6 miles when completed for hiking and biking that runs parallel to The Little Tennessee River and Cartoogechaye Creek. Native plants, songbirds, river otters, butterflies and beautiful landscapes are all part of the experience. The Great



Smokey Mountains National Park is only 30 miles from home, so the endless biodiversity all within my reach gives me a very large palette for my photography.

I use Canon equipment and have always since my first Canon FT, which I still own but no longer use since changing to Digital. I also use Canon lenses exclusively, two of which I consider to be my workhorses. The 10-22mm EF-S 3.5-4.5 wide angle lens stays on one camera body and the Canon 70-300mm EF 4.5-5.6 DO IS USM lens is attached to the other. The wide angle is great for those sweeping landscape shots as well as up close and personal for native wildflowers which is one of my passions to find and capture. Most of the time I shoot in aperture mode and if my hand-held stance isn't steady enough to get the shot, before I switch to manual, I will try to balance the camera on the nearest rock, tree, root, etc. that I can find. This is all because I rarely carry a tripod when I hike as I am prone to climb vertical at times to capture my vision and it helps to not carry extra weight or bulk. When using my wide angle, the tilt of my lens or where I stand or sit for that matter that can dramatically change the perspective of your view. This lens is great for shots where you want the foreground to really stand out and get the feel of those distant mountain vistas. My 70-300 zoom is a great lens. It is lightweight and small (an added plus) and with two stabilizing

modes for any situation, always helpful for those hand held shots and well worth the extra money.

Most often I will set my camera before I leave my house to coincide with the environment outside. There is no greater feeling of defeat as when you see a great shot, know you can "capture it" and find out you have no film or have not set your camera and the wildlife disappears from view. I often spot wildlife while I am driving and I know that to "get my shot" I have to be ready when I pick up the camera and not worry about the settings, so I can start clicking immediately. These shots are ones I have affectionately named "on the fly" because I am in my car going somewhere. Some of my best shots have come from jumping out of my car. I have also missed some shots because I forgot to clear my images off the card or worse yet, left the card in the computer or forget to change my ISO or settings. Even though I have plenty of backup cards, wildlife doesn't wait for you to load the camera. The western Carolina mountains is my paradise.... always an adventure and I know there will always be a new discovery to capture whenever I venture out my door.