

Robert Miller uses a Nikon body with a 600mm lens to capture the many seasons of Caddo Lake. PHOTO BY KATHRYN PEDROZA

Capturing the Mystery

Massive lens in hand, Robert Miller documents the natural beauty of Caddo Lake

By Franklin Thurlow

Robert Miller has been capturing the mystifying nature of Caddo Lake for the better part of four years, although he has lived in the area for closer to 21.

“It’s just one of those things that you live here and don’t realize the resources that you have,” he says. “It’s absolutely amazing.”

Situated on the border between east Texas and Louisiana, Caddo Lake is home to the largest cypress tree grove in the world, as well as a plethora of wildlife. It is the only naturally occurring lake in Texas.

For Robert, the natural resource of the lake is what draws his eye.

“I don’t shoot a lot with manmade structures,” he says. “I try as much as possible to capture things without them.”



Robert Miller

“As you get into the older trees, they vary so much from base to base, with different arches and shapes.”

But it is not just the trees he captures with his camera.

“I usually come out for one or two of three things,” Robert says. “During the fall especially, there’s a lot of run-around photography where you just try to see what’s presented to you that day, so you’re constantly on the move. I also come out once in a while to see what wildlife I can shoot.”

The lake is a yearly migration stop for many species of birds, making it a destination for those interested in bird

The towering cypress trees are some of the most striking natural structures in the lake, which is not lost on Robert.

“You could almost do a book on the trees themselves,” Robert says.

watching and photography. There are also beavers, raccoons and a favorite of tourists lucky enough to spot them: alligators.

Robert has photographed them all, although animal photos are not his goal.

“I enjoy the skill of photography as opposed to the luck of it,” he says. “People who specialize in animals have to know their habits, where they’re going to be and when. My skill has more to do with the lighting, weather, etc. All of it comes into play in any shot. I don’t expect to get wildlife. It’s a happy bonus when I catch them.”

Some of Robert’s favorite pictures come from his third reason for his sojourn into the cypress jungle, which requires planning and technical maneuvering.

“I do specific shots where I come out at night and use a drone to light up the area,” he says. “I am very much into night photography. It is my favorite because it’s different. Drone lighting is unique because no one really likes to come out at night, but I do, which probably makes me a little crazy.”

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PANOLA-HARRISON ELECTRIC



Ring of Warmth, November 22, 2021



Harvest Moon, September 21, 2021



The Journey, November 22, 2021

Capturing the Mystery

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In one of his early experiences with drone lighting in the section of Caddo known as The Cathedral, Robert's drone had a battery issue. He was able to get it back to the edge of his boat, but the battery finally gave out and the drone hit the boat, falling into the dark water.

"I have insurance on my second one," he says. "Didn't take long to figure that out."

With a lake as unique as Caddo, and its varying water depths, challenges extend beyond flying a drone through cypress branches. Weather is a factor.

"Storms and cloudy conditions make for unique moments," Robert says.

The variety in water depth highlights

the lake's false bottom, which is made up of old living vegetation. This sucks up the sunlight that reflects off the lake, giving it a murky, moody and mysterious hue.

"It's kind of spooky, but that's what makes it cool," Robert says. "If you can capture some of that mystery, that's a success. All the elements—the weather—that adds to it and makes it feel that way."

Robert has come up with his own techniques to navigate the elements so he can capture the enigma that is Caddo Lake. He ditched his kayak for a larger boat to carry his equipment.

"I have three anchors so I can secure myself down, and I have a 13-foot tripod I set in the water," he says.

Because many of his images require long exposures, it is critical the camera not move.



The Fallen, October 13, 2021



Foggy Morning, December 3, 2021



Caddo Fall, September 21, 2021

Robert shoots with long lenses, which he says are particularly effective for weather shots—especially foggy mornings.

“It looks foggy far away but not right next to you,” he says. “By shooting with a long lens, I am able to capture the atmosphere. It almost looks glassy. You don’t get that unless you’re shooting long, which most people don’t do on landscape.”

Robert enjoys taking bridal pictures and senior portraits at the lake. One senior portrait session was particularly memorable.

“We were shooting at night,” he says. “I had the drone lighting up the girl, who was wearing a dress. I was taking pictures from a distance when a boat passed by.”

As a young girl suddenly appeared in the thick of the cypress trees—lit up by a drone in the dark of night—“he must have

thought he saw a ghost!” Robert says. Robert says his most popular pictures are of favorite spots locals know. “People enjoy seeing things that remind them of the lake, so sometimes I’ll post those pictures online,” he says. “They may not be a fine art piece, but everything’s not about selling. You want to make people happy if you can, and if those pictures help with that, that’s awesome.” ■

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Swamp King, November 9, 2021



Caddo Morning, September 8, 2021



Tea Room, August 22, 2021