

**Artist-in-Residence: Photography on Kent Island**  
**Matt Keller, Class of 2020**

Nature photography requires constant inspiration, and that is what I found on Kent Island this summer. I came to Kent with more than ten years' photography experience, but with essentially no knowledge of the island itself and a very loose plan for my project; I hoped to form a better understanding of Kent Island before I decided how I wanted to portray it through my photos. My overall goal was to emphasize the incredible diversity of the small island and form some connection between my work on the island and the world outside, whether by finding personal meaning that I could carry into my own future or by inspiring those who view my photos and writing.

For some time, I simply explored the island, familiarizing myself with a new area each day, taking photos of anything that stood out to me. I took thousands of shots in the first few weeks, including hundreds of photos of the trees, birds, and landscapes, as well as flowers, ferns, fog, insects, water, stars, sunsets, and more. Editing all of these photos was both a joy and a struggle. As one of the island's two cooks, a good portion of my time was also spent preparing dinners. While cooking made my overall experience even more rewarding, it created an additional challenge that drew time and energy away from my primary work. I spent a lot of time wondering how my project would finally come together and struggling to give concrete answers to simple questions like "what are you doing with your photos?" As I began to feel more comfortable on Kent Island, I realized that the answers to those questions were not all that important. Attempting such an in-depth portrayal of one place does not necessarily require a specific, detailed plan. Instead, it calls for flexibility, focus, and patience; I needed to be ready to take advantage of what the island had to offer, ready to notice an interesting shape in the clouds or the drops of dew on a leaf, to appreciate everything from a tiny flower to a bright sunrise and to turn that appreciation into a powerful image. As long as I could continue to find inspiration in the subjects I was shooting, I knew the photos would speak for themselves. When I look at them now, I see a full picture – a strong representation of the island as I came to know it.

Towards the end of my time on Kent Island, I started working on (and am currently attempting to finish) a short memoir relating my experience there with other experiences I have had. Switching between my thoughts on the island and memories from my past, I have been able to find many connections that help my photos and reflections become more meaningful and less isolated. To make these connections more visible, I am paralleling the memoir with photos from Kent Island, mixed among photos from California and other locations that I have photographed. So far, the results are coming out well and I am excited about the final outcome.

The thought of fully investing myself in this project, being immersed in the subject of my work, and sharing my results with the Bowdoin community (and beyond) was what originally brought me to Kent Island. In all my years photographing the outdoors, I had never been given an opportunity to spend so much time with one subject, becoming close to a place, witnessing its richness and diversity, and calling it my home for nine weeks. During that time, I learned a lot about the island – its history and ecology – and myself – both as a photographer and as an individual. I am deeply grateful for my experience on Kent Island and hope that my work reflects that feeling.

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