

Nature comes into



in museum exhibits

STAFF REPORT

Willis Peterson's photographic career began on his 14th birthday. A camera was given to him, in hopes that it would distract him from his then-current hobby — collecting wild animals. Instead, he began photographing the inmates of his backyard zoo.

J.L. Wade is a successful industrialist who has shifted all of his energies and resources in the last 40 years to the cause of wildlife conservation in America.

In the 1960s, his concern about the collapse of interest in wildlife led him to commission nature artist Richard Sloan to paint a series of 50 North American birds.

Of the 50 paintings, 28 were state birds. The response to the paintings by public officials led to the creation of the "Governors' State Bird Print" program in 1969.

These two stories are the foundation of two exhibits that will open July 22 at West Valley Art Museum in Surprise.

"It's Only Natural," featuring the nature photography of Peterson, will be on display in the Hoover Room through Sept. 25, while "A Bird's Eye View," the J.L. Wade collection of state birds, will be exhibited in the Jensen wing through Sept. 7.

Peterson

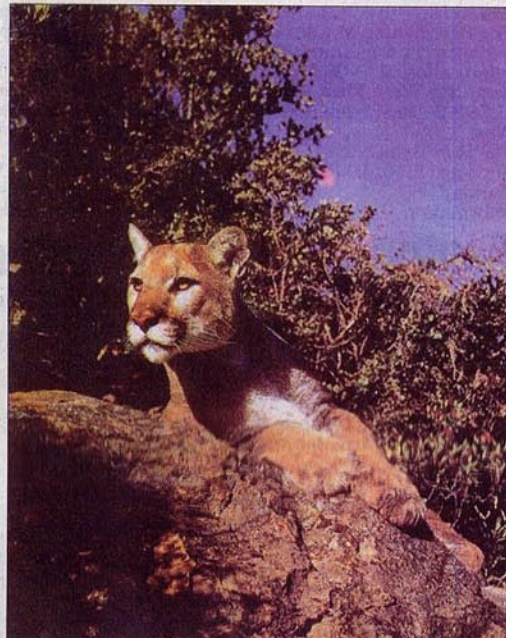
As a youth, equipped with only a box camera, Peterson would travel into the mountains of Colorado to try and match the majestic beauty he found in the photos of the Denver Post's rotogravure section.

He says of this time: "My first picture of note featured three horses on a hillside. The image seemed to relate more than just figures of the animals. I had caught on to finding a deeper

meaning."

Having worked for both the Arizona Republic and KAET-TV, Channel 8, Peterson also was selected to start a Photography Program at Glendale Community College. Arizona Highways magazine recognized him for his teaching as well as utilizing him as a free-lance photographer. He also received a Distinguished Service Award from Maricopa County Community College's Chancellor in 1986.

Many of his students have gone on to successful careers as photographers. His search for deeper meaning in photographs makes his work all the more intriguing.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

"It's Only Natural," nature photography of Willis Peterson, is one of the exhibits opening July 22 at the West Valley Art Museum in Surprise.

The West Valley Art Museum is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. The museum is at 17420 N. Avenue of the Arts, Surprise. There are five exhibition galleries, a museum store, Classic Café, and regularly scheduled education programs. Admission for nonmembers is \$5 for adults, \$2 for students, ages 5 and under are free. For information, call 972-0635.



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