

The Atlantic

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The search for the perfect live vulture

1 message

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This is *The Atlantic's* weekly newsletter for subscribers. As always, you can talk with us by replying directly to this email.

This week's edition is about a vulture. Below, our director of photography, Luise Stauss, and our senior photo editor, Christine Walsh, narrate the tale of a weeks-long, multistate search for the perfect live vulture to illustrate our latest cover story, "**A Secretive Hedge Fund Is Gutting Newsrooms**," by McKay Coppins. Stauss and Walsh also talked about how they seek to capture complex reporting through photography, and selected for you a few other recent features from the magazine with noteworthy visual storytelling.



Christine Walsh: Often it takes a while to brainstorm different possible ideas to convey a cover story, but this one was pretty clear from the outset. McKay’s story featured “vulture capitalists” destroying local newspapers, so our team thought, What better way to bring that to life than with a live animal?

We always need the right subject to convey our idea in the right tone. We considered different vultures all over the country—in New York, in Los Angeles, in Georgia—and we finally landed on this one in Texas.



The photographer Dan Winters had previously worked with the falconer Jonathan Wood, the vulture's handler, on a shoot with a bald eagle. So he was a lot more comfortable with the assignment than other photographers might be, Stauss said.

We were looking for the right type of vulture (turkey vultures appeared too demure and meek; king vultures looked clownish with their rainbow-colored faces), as well as the right size vulture. Some were smaller than a chicken you might roast for dinner.

Animals can be unpredictable, and all have their own individual personalities!

Luise Stauss: The falconer, Jonathan Wood, raised our vulture and knew how to work with her. The use of light was an important part of getting her to move or sit still. Our vulture was **molting** during this time of year, and needed vitamin D to do that. She reacted to the studio lighting as if it was sunlight, spreading her wings.



We commissioned the **photographer Dan Winters**, a master in creating graphic and iconic cover imagery who already had experience working with birds, to photograph a live vulture on a stack of newspapers. He got his start as a photojournalist in 1986 at the local newspaper in his hometown, in Ventura County, California, so this story was a great match for him on many fronts.



MORE FOR YOU

[America Has a Drinking Problem, by Kate Julian \(July/August 2021 issue\)](#)



Photograph by Chelsea Kyle; Prop Stylist: Amy Elise Wilson; Food Stylist: Sue Li

A Pro-Trump Militant Group Has Recruited Thousands of Police, Soldiers, and Veterans, by Mike Giglio (November 2020 issue)



Photographs by Philip Montgomery. On Martin Luther King Day in 2020, an estimated 22,000 gun-rights advocates protested outside the Virginia state capitol, in Richmond.

Purgatory at Sea, by Ian Urbina (June 2021 issue)



Photographs by Paolo Pellegrin / Magnum. Red Cross workers counsel migrants aboard the Allegra. The cruise ship is one of nine vessels that the Italian government has used to quarantine migrants.

POPULAR WITH SUBSCRIBERS

1. **Human History Gets a Rewrite**, by William Deresiewicz
 2. **'I Don't Know That I Would Even Call It Meth Anymore,'** by Sam Quinones
 3. **The Great Resignation Is Accelerating**, by Derek Thompson
 4. **The Hidden Costs of Living Alone**, by Joe Pinsker
 5. **The New Question Haunting Adoption**, by Olga Khazan
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