Underwater Photographer of the Year

Yearbook

UPY
2023



Foreword – Lifting Baseline Syndrome

What an astonishing collection of underwater images, showing the diversity, vibrancy, beauty, scale, and energy of life in our ocean. These awe-inspiring photographs show the amazing underwater ecosystems and animals that occupy 70% of this amazing planet we live on. These are creatures and habitats that many people won't have the good fortune to see for themselves, but the photos immediately transport you to far-flung corners of the underwater world, in an almost dream-like way, to encounter weird, wonderful, tiny, and colossal organisms that we coexist with. The images show that the ocean is still thriving in many places, but they also show the growing threat human society poses to marine life. Overfishing, habitat loss, plastic pollution and many other pressures are squeezing life out of the global ocean.

However, the tide of action is growing by the day as the world wakes up to the fact that all we depend on a healthy ocean. What happens underwater, the life that occupies the shallows and the depths, is crucial to us all. Thankfully the movement to protect and restore our seas is taking hold by the day. And rightfully so in this Ocean Decade.

This decade presents us with a unique and, some might say, biggest opportunity to redress our imbalance with the marine and other ecosystems we depend on. An opportunity to make space for more ocean wildlife and ecosystems for our successors, not less. We must seize the opportunity to reject the 'business as usual' that has got us into this and embrace the unusual – the weird, wild, wonderful, and intricate nature around us that we depend on.

Human civilisation has already eradicated 83% of wild mammals on the planet and over half of plants. Almost 90% of global fish stocks are over-exploited, depleted or fully exploited - with subsidies enabling industrial fishing fleets to hoover up all life from large swathes of our ocean, leaving behind lifeless deserts of destruction. There are increasing numbers of 'Dead Zones' in the ocean – 400 and counting – where excess nutrients and runoff from agriculture and cities halts life in its tracks. Consumption and convenience drive over 12 million tonnes of plastic pollution into the ocean every year.

Delivering Lifting Baseline Syndrome - increasing biodiversity, wild biomass and restoring ecosystems - is no longer just the domain of the progressive green lobby but sits firmly at the top-table of global governments and negotiations. We have a lot to do to repair our relationship with nature and realise that in protecting Planet Ocean we are in fact protecting ourselves.

In what has to be the decade of environmentalism, the current cascade of national and international rhetoric, targets and commitments is accelerating at a welcome pace, but this must be matched with action. The measure of success is when the public witnesses the increase in nature – more wildlife, more whales, more fish – more diverse and complex life on Planet Ocean.

The ocean is fast becoming the focal point for action – perhaps because it is the last, vast wilderness that offers us the most hope for a transformational decade of action. It provides the foundations to change our relationship with nature from destructive and exploitative to restorative and truly sustainable. We do however need to be careful of the so-called 'blue economy' and make sure that the 'blue gold rush' doesn't diminish the ocean in the same way as terrestrial ecosystems.

The ocean can provide us much more if left alone to recover. The ocean can provide for the many, not the few, if allowed to.

The UK is leading strongly, and we must all welcome the commitment from all G7 countries to the 30x30 target to protect 30% of our land and seas by 2030. Impressively, the UK has committed to halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030 – a soon to be legal requirement that will need huge action and investment to deliver. It will be up to all of us to hold their feet to the fire with these new commitments and the guarantees to put the environment, climate and biodiversity and the heart of global recovery from the Covid crisis.

But the ocean also has a crucial role to play in tackling the climate crisis. From seagrass meadows and kelp forests that lock carbon deep below the sea floor, to ocean currents that regulate global temperatures, the ocean can provide vital solutions. The restoration and full protection of massive bands of the ocean can be central to solving the convergence of mounting and emerging issues incuding the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and threats to human wellbeing globally.

We will all be lifted up by a rising tide of nature and ocean recovery.

Congratulations to all the photographers and winners. Your work is not just beautiful but will also play an important part in protecting the ocean we all love.

Hugo Tagholm
Executive Director & Vice President, Oceana UK
February, 2023



UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR 2023

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Chairman's Welcome

This year UPY received our biggest ever entry, with 546 underwater photographers submitting almost 6000 photos. That's a huge jump up from the 2500 images we received 9 years ago when this contest was re-born. Not that we were disappointed back then, in fact we were thrilled because those 2500 already made it the biggest underwater contest, by about 1000 photos, I had been involved in, and by then I had judged almost all the awards around. UPY's growth since then, though, has been jaw dropping and the whole team truly value your support.

I wrote in that first yearbook that UPY's DNA is about doing things right and that judging is particularly critical. I believe the main reason that UPY has grown so fast and that it has earned its reputation as top dog is because each year the winning collection of images is a step above, and this year is certainly no exception. Start with Wide Angle, and all 10 awarded shots are phenomenal, then move onto Macro and the barrage of excellence continues. Of course, we rely on the talent of the entrants to create those images, but I also think that the robust judging process really ensures that none slip through the net.

It was wonderful to meet face to face as Judge's this year, after two years of Zoom call judging. Nobody needs telling that humans communicate much better face to face, and meeting up near Heathrow made the process so much more enjoyable (and, you will pleased to know, rang up a much bigger bar bill). Judging UPY is hard work, pressured, a privilege and also tremendous fun. UPY is judged in multiple rounds as we slowly whittle down the entries. It has the advantage that we get to see the images multiple times, rewarding those with staying power, not just initial impact. As we slowly raise the bar through the rounds, it is usually straightforward which images can clear it with blessing from all three Judge's, and which cannot. From start to finish, every single decision is up for debate, and in UPY there is always room for images that one judge loves, if they can convince the other two. As Judge's we choose the winners we feel passionate about, not simply shots that everyone agrees are good, and we hope there are many in this book that will connect with you.

The reason UPY judging is like this is that I have long been frustrated with how most other underwater contests do it. Most pre-judge, where an unnamed person reduces the entries down to just a handful per category, before the named Judge's to vote for their favourites. This has led to many awkward encounters at shows, where an entrant brings up an entry on their phone, asking the judge why it didn't do well. And the judge has to admit that it is stunning, but they never got to see it. In UPY, the Judge's gather in one room, look at one screen and make every decision from start to finish. It means we don't miss potential winners and it also means that we can give detailed feedback on every entry.

Our feedback system, where we tell entrants how far each of their images progressed, is one of the aspects of UPY that I am most proud of. And Dan Bolt deserves huge credit for the programming wizardary that makes it possible. Even more remarkable was that this year we were able to share that feedback with entrants within 5 days of the closing date of the contest. UPY actually takes more hours to judge than most contests, because all Judge's make all decisions. It is just we always agree when we will meet for judging first and then set the closing date the day before. Then we lock ourselves away until it is decided. And then we tell our entrants, as soon as possible, how each of their images faired in the contest.

If you are entrant remember two things about your results. First, the progress of an image depends on many factors. For example, when we have two very similar shots we may decide early on which is our favourite and a very good image may be eliminated early, while if the other image had not been entered, that shot could have gone all the way. And second, UPY attracts more than 500 entrants, and most enter our big categories, which usually get around 1000 entries. That means that these categories contain the best couple



Alex Mustard

of shots from 500 or so very good underwater photographers. We can easily be misled by our social media feeds into thinking we know how many good images are around. Opening up the folders of entries for UPY each years blows that expectation away. So, any progress in UPY rounds means that you are beating properly strong imagery. We really don't get any poor or even standard shots entered.

I know entrants love dissecting UPY statistics, as a census on the community and to guide future entries. This year, the most popular International category was Wide Angle, followed by Portrait, Macro, Behaviour, Up & Coming, Marine Conservation, Black & White and then Wrecks. The winners of these categories were shot with 60% full frame SLRs, 30% full frame Mirrorless, 10% crop sensor SLR and a single Micro FourThirds and a single Nikonos V. While housings from these winning images showed a wider spread. Nauticam making up about half, the remainder divided in order between Ikelite, Isotta, Seacam, Subal, Hugyfot, Aquatica, Seafrogs, Aquatech, Meikon and Sea & Sea.

All that remains is for me to invite you to enjoy this year's outstanding collection. It doesn't need hyperbole or a fanfare from me, these images speak for themselves. Although, with a spoiler alert – it is great to see our second female overall winner in three years - and equally exciting to see two younger photographers dominating the British awards. I'd like to finish by thanking the UPY team, Dan, Saeed, Tobias and Peter for their expertise and the long hours required to make all this happen. And to express our sincere gratitude to our growing family of category sponsors Marelux, The Crown Estate and the Save Our Seas Foundation, who really help make UPY what it is, and to our generous prize sponsors too. Next year will be the 10th modern UPY and we're planning to make it very special, I hope that you will enter.

Dr Alex Mustard MBE
Chair of the UPY Jury 2023

The Judges

What can I say, having used up all the superlatives in previous years?!

"If you build it, they will come," was the catchphrase in Kevin Costner's film 'Field of Dreams' and it could have been written for UPY in 2015. Create something they want, something they want to be a part of, something that represents the pinnacle but above all put as much thought and effort into the concept as they put into their work.

I often use the analogy of a tripod - three equal legs provides a stable platform; one leg shorter and it leans over; one leg missing and it falls over. UPY is very much a stable tripod because of the thinking and workload of the UPY team, the entrant's vision, dedication and support, and the final leg is the generous sponsors; this year Marelux, the Crown Estate and the Save Our Seas Foundation. Take any one of those three away and the tripod would fall but, with UPY, the legs get equally stronger with each year and it has been a privilege to be on board and to have had a hand on the wheel.

This year I took the conscious decision to take a bit of a step back, in the interests of UPY, not because I am any less enthusiastic nor less capable but I thought it better to hand over some of the reins early to allow other talents to blossom with the longterm view of UPY in mind.

As a result, the mammoth baton of producing this Yearbook to such a tight schedule has been so well embraced by Saeed and Dan and is now about to engage with the world's media to produce a unique promotion of the truly amazing images you have entered this year. The result is the same stable tripod providing continuity from younger eyes and it is this which will keep UPY looking fit and fresh.

This year saw the welcome return of all three Judges together in the same room, looking at the same screen and working together to look at all the images. The experience is the highlight of my year and it was a pleasure to see how well Tobias blended in to the mix, his reactions to images always well reasoned, yet happy to concede if Alex and I favoured, or not, a particular image. The judging tripod is as strong as ever.

Peter Rowlands

This year was the first year for me to join the other Judges physically in England to see all images of the UPY contest live together – and it was so much fun! Well, it was definitely more fun to discuss the images again in the night with a beer in the pub, because just to see all of the almost 6000 entries was a big effort. I remember clearly after the first day, when we brought the entries down to the last 375 images which would go into the finals and after sorting them already, Alex asked if we should have a final last look – before anyone could answer I said: "No more photos today! Let's have a beer, please."

Don't get me wrong here – it was an absolute pleasure to judge all these fantastic photos along with great people like Peter and Alex – but a full day at full concentration is always tiring.
With fresh mood and enthusiasm, we used the second day to decide which images are going to be in the top ten and who is going to win the categories as well as the "best of show" to be awarded Underwater Photographer of the Year. It was such a pleasure to meet in person to see the facial expression of the others while judging. Even having a meal together the night before judging is valuable, as it helps get us all reacquainted, brings us back up to speed on the rules and categories and gets politeness out of the way, so judging is just brutally honest.

I'm very pleased with the winning image, it is the strongest image I have ever seen of a pink river dolphin. The photo probably could have won also in the behaviour and also in the portrait category, but was sent into the "Up & Coming". The fact that an "Up & Coming" photographer also won the overall awards is absolutely great, especially because I haven't heard anything before of Kat – nor her participating in any other underwater photo competition. But by judging the images she sent into this competition and based on the work that I've since seen on her website, this will definitely not be the last time she is winning a major image contest. Hopefully, winning UPY will be a valuable springboard to her future success.

Tobias Friedrich



UPY's judging tripod, uneven in stature, equal in the judging room

THE GOPHERS

I asked ChatGTP to write a bit about me being the UPY webmaster, and this is what it said :)

"Dan Bolt is a highly skilled webmaster who plays a crucial role in the success of the Underwater Photographer of the Year Competition. As webmaster, Dan is responsible for the technical aspects of the competition, including website design and development, online submissions, and the overall online presence of the event. He has a passion for technology and a deep love for the ocean, which has made him a valuable asset to the competition.

Dan's dedication and commitment to the competition are evident in everything he does. He is always looking for ways to improve the website and bring the best underwater photography to the world. With his exceptional technical skills and attention to detail, Dan has helped make the competition more accessible and successful, allowing photographers from all over the world to showcase their work.

Dan is a respected member of the underwater photography community and his passion for the ocean and its inhabitants is contagious. He is an inspiration to others who share his love for underwater photography, and his work has helped to make the Underwater Photographer of the Year Competition one of the most prestigious events in the industry.

Whether you are an avid photographer or simply someone who loves the ocean and its beauty, the Underwater Photographer of the Year Competition is the perfect opportunity to see the amazing work of photographers from all over the world. With Dan Bolt as webmaster, you can be sure that the competition will run smoothly and be a huge success."

ChatGPT Jan 30 Version on behalf of Dan Bolt

This year marks the 5th anniversary of my involvement with Underwater photographer of the year. I originally came on board to help source some amazing prizes from some of the finest companies in our industry. UPY's winners can now take their underwater photography to the next level with the opportunity to win top-of-the-line underwater photography equipment to incredible diving experiences. This year we have added brilliant cash prizes to our 2 premier categories, macro and wide-angle.

But my involvement has grown and I am thrilled to announce I have a new role as the designer of the competition's yearbook, taking over from my mentor, Peter Rowlands. Peter has set a high bar for this project, and I am confident that my experience and dedication will help me build on his work. Each year, the competition brings together some of the best underwater photographers from around the world, showcasing their creativity and technical skills in capturing the beauty and diversity of the ocean and its inhabitants. Building the yearbook has allowed me to become incredibly intimate with your stunning images taking my appreciation of them to a higher level and makes designing the following pages an absolute joy.

Over the past five years, I have seen firsthand the incredible impact that underwater photography can have, inspiring others to protect and preserve our oceans. This is even more apparent this year with what I believe is the strongest and most thought-provoking marine conservation category I have seen.

I am very proud to be a part of the team behind this brilliant competition and I hope you enjoy the stunning images within the pages of this yearbook.

Saeed Rashid



Saeed Rashid



Dan Bolt

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



WINNER

'BOTO ENCANTADO'

Kat Zhou, United States

There's a legend among locals in the Amazon that river dolphins, or 'botos', can transform into handsome men known as 'boto encantado' at night to seduce women. Though I did not witness this elusive boto transformation, at dusk I was enchanted by these beautiful mammals in a different way. After seeing how botos would sometimes bring their beaks above water, I knew I want a split shot at sunset. Though the water was so dark that I was shooting blind, this dolphin gave me a perfect pose and smile!

As indigenous communities settled by rivers in the Amazon, river dolphins began living in closer proximity to human populations, even making use of food scraps. Frequent dolphin sightings led to tales like boto encantado, but there's a darker side to the legend, as it was often used to excuse pregnancies after women were assaulted or forced into prostitution. While botos are generally revered as mythical creatures, many scorned husbands have killed dolphins because of these stories. Furthermore, many river dolphins have also been killed for use as fish bait. Though there have been bans on this practice, it has not been eradicated. With this, alongside even bigger impacts like mercury poisoning due to the gold mining industry and large development projects that have disrupted the river ecosystems, I fear that one day botos will truly become no more than mythical creatures.

Amazon, Brazil

Nikon, D850, Nauticam D850, Nikon 8-15mm fisheye with Kenko 1.4x teleconverter, iso 400, f/13, 1/160, 2 x Inon Z330

Judges' comment:

At first glance simple, then simply perfect. In dark, tannic waters, Kat has created a striking composition capturing this rarely photographed and vulnerable species at the perfect moment. I love the almost monochromatic burnt orange colour palette of the pink dolphin, photographed through brown waters and framed against the setting sun. By far the best image we've ever seen of this species. - *Alex Mustard*

This is a perfectly timed and composed image of a distinct but rarely well photographed subject so it stood out from the crowd very early on. Like a chef reducing his sauce, this powerful image improved with each viewing and saw off the incredibly high quality images that this Competition attracts. A pleasure to behold. - *Peter Rowlands*

Wow - the best image of a river dolphin I have ever seen. I love split shots as well and this image does the purpose perfectly. It works in every discipline: Wideangle, portrait and behavior at the same time. The look and the pose of the dolphin is just incredible, congrats to Kat for achieving this! - *Tobias Friedrich*

UPY 2023

The ‘Save our Seas Foundation’ Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year



WINNER

‘HOPELESS’
Alvaro Herrero, Spain

A humpback whale dies a slow, painful and agonizing death after having its tail entangled in a ropes and buoys, rendering its tail completely useless. A reflection of what not only our oceans are suffering, but also our planet, the product of man’s selfishness and lack of responsibility. Taking this photograph was, for me, the saddest moment I’ve experienced in the ocean. Especially because I have spent so much time with humpbacks underwater, experiencing eye contact, interactions, and seeing with my own eyes how they are sentient and intelligent beings. But I’m “happy” to being able to capture that moment and show the world what is happening, what we are doing. I really hope this image make us aware , open our eyes and drive us in to make real changes.

Baja California, Mexico

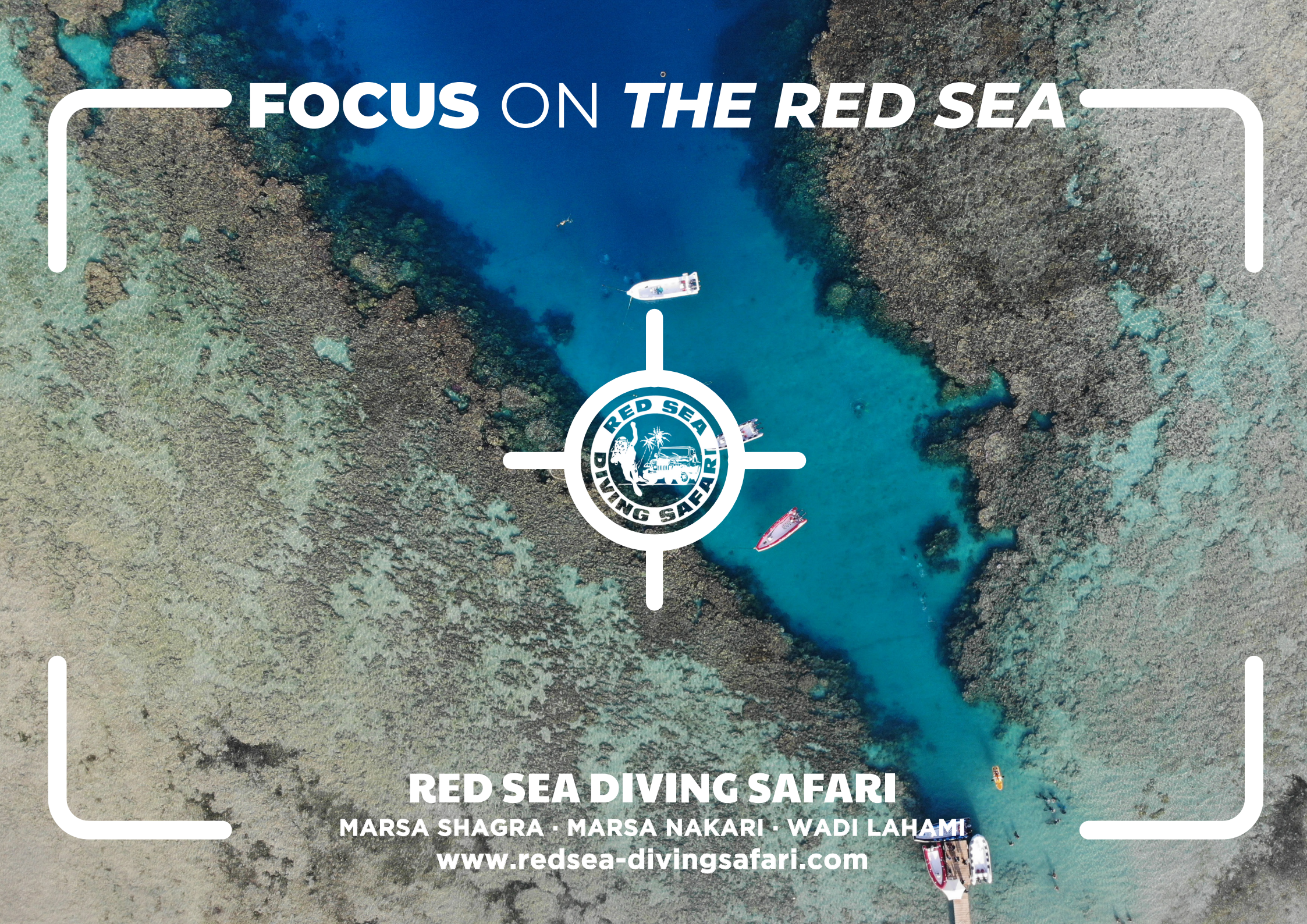
Nikon , D500, Isotta D500, Sigma 10-20mm f4-5.6, iso 200, 6.3, 1/320, Natural Light

Judge’s comment:
What a stunning image and what a message that it delivers. I can’t imagine the sadness when this poor whale has been discovered, but also a good decision to take a few images to actually get a message of awareness out to the public. For me it was clear from the beginning that this image is the winner of the category. Well done.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

save our seas foundation


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WIDE ANGLE

Category History

2023 Greg Sherman (USA)
2022 Rafael Fernandez Caballero (Spain)
2021 Renee Capozzola (USA)
2020 Greg Lecoeur (France)
2019 François Baelen (Reunion Island)
2018 Greg Lecoeur (France)
2017 Ron Watkins (USA)
2016 Mike Korostelev (Russia)
2015 Raffaele Livornese (Italy)

Marelux is very honored to join UPY to sponsor the most prestigious underwater photography contest, so that we have the opportunity to recognize and reward the talented photographers who are pushing the boundaries of the art form. By sponsoring the highly popular Wide Angle category, Marelux wants to encourage more people to participate in underwater photography and inspire many more to love the beauty of ocean. Marelux believes its underwater products, with various new technologies' can make underwater photography a safer, smarter and more enjoyable experience therefore encouraging more people to take images underwater.



The macro category is sponsored by Marlux

WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



CATEGORY WINNER

'Fade'
Gregory Sherman, United States

My dive partner and I chartered a boat to arrive at Stingray City on Grand Cayman before dawn so as to capture the morning light and undisturbed sand ripples. Just as the sun broke the horizon, a line of southern stingrays headed straight for me and I captured this image as they glided across the sand. Using a large dome port allowed me to create a split image showing the intensely colorful dawn sky contrasted against the nearly monochromatic stingrays and sand beneath the surface chop.

Stingray City, Cayman Islands

Canon, 5Dsr, Subal, 8-15mm, iso1000, f/5.6, 1/80, Sea & Sea YS-d2

Judge's comment:
The planning and the early start were rewarded by perfect stingray behaviour topped with the dynamic split shot of a dramatic sky. This image, quite rightly, went right to the wire as the possible overall winner. A week after the judging, I loved looking at this image again.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

MARELUX

WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



RUNNER UP

'Crowd Control'
Andy Schmid, Switzerland

A female orca swimming through a bait ball of herring, turning it into a donut. I've been traveling to Northern Norway for the 5 past winters to witness one of our planet's most spectacular wildlife events, the herring migration into the fjords which attracts large number of orcas and humpback whales. Wildlife photography is not just about skills, it's also about patience, perseverance, and being lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time. This winter it all came together on more than one occasion, allowing me to freedive on static bait balls over and over again, creating a series of of photos I had never imagined I would ever be able to create.

Skjervøy Norway

Canon, EOS 5D Mark IV, Nauticam NA-5DMKIV, Canon EF 15mm f/2.8 Fisheye, iso 1600, 2.8, 1/125,

Judge's comment:
Orcas are the ocean's apex predator. Feeding on everything from sharks to whales. In Arctic Norway they target bait-balls of nutritious, egg-filled herring. The action is ephemeral and fast moving, the conditions some of the toughest for a photographer. Yet Andy has captured the perfect frame. Mouth open, prey in teeth, jaw dropping.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

MARELUX

WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



THIRD

'SKY FULL OF RAYS'
Rafael Fernandez Caballero, Spain

The most similar sensation to seeing a sky full of birds when underwater is undoubtedly be the feeling of being below a large mobula aggregation of the Sea of Cortez. This incredible show of nature occurs during spring time and offers amazing moments, such as this one. I dived down, holding my breath and waited until hundreds of rays unexpectedly passed over my head. Such moments are so amazing that you can almost forgets to go up to breathe.

La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico

Nikon, Z7 ii, Isotta Z7 II, Nikon 8-15mm, iso 250, F/6.3, 200

Judge's comment:
There are a lot of images out there from Mexico of schooling Mobulas which are excellent. But this image is from the perspective you actually want to be in: right in the middle of the school. What a moment and a great capture from the photographer.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

MARELUX

WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'THE SECRETS OF THE CAVE'
Martin Broen, United States

The Cenotes and underwater cave systems in the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico are a massive time capsule that preserves within amazing paleontological and archeological remains. This makes it possible for the daring caver divers to find extinct megafauna fossils from more than 10.000 years ago, or as in this case, a well-preserved Mayan skeleton, that we can admire and help preserve.

Merida, Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico

Sony, A1, Nauticam, Canon 8-15, ISO 6400, f11, 1/60, BigBlue 33.000 lumen

Judge's comment:
Technically excellent down to the last detail with an emotive subject framed by moody lighting and shadows, this image was always going to be in the winning enclosure.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

MARELUX

WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'VIVA MÉXICO'
Fan Ping, United States

This photo was taken two days before Mexico national day, when it usually rains a lot at this time of year in Quintana Roo. The Brownish tannic water layer is a result of the continuous rain, happens once a year at cenote Car Wash, and it looks just like the national flag of Mexico from the inside of the cavern. Such a special event could only occur in this beautiful country. HDR was used to recreate the true atmosphere when diving in here.

Cenote Car Wash, Mexico

Sony, A7SIII, Nauticam NA-A1, Sony 28-60mm f/4-5.6 with Nauticam WACP-1, iso 16000, f/8.0, HDR, Ambient light only

Judge's comment:
Perfect composition and excellent image quality from the photographer. Capturing such a special moment is not easy but the execution was marvelous! Very nice diagonals of the trees are leading to the diver in the middle of the image and making the photo so good.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

MARELUX

WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'Family bonds'
Rafael Fernandez Caballero, Spain

Pilot whales are incredibly intelligent. The ones of the strait of Gibraltar, where the picture was taken, are particularly special. They are very curious and territorial so every time you are in the water close to them they get close to see what you want. With love and respect, most of the moments are unique interactions, filled with playful moments with these beautiful and impressive mammals. Pictures taken under permit from the "Ministerio para la Transición Ecologica".

Strait of Gibraltar, Spain

Nikon, z7 II, Isotta Z7 II, Nikon 8-15mm, iso 500, F/9, 1/200, None

Judge's comment:
Photography is all about capturing decisive moments. It is always a challenge to get close to cetaceans, but Rafael hasn't just filled the frame, he has timed the image exactly as one of the pilot whales pops through this fanned out pod.

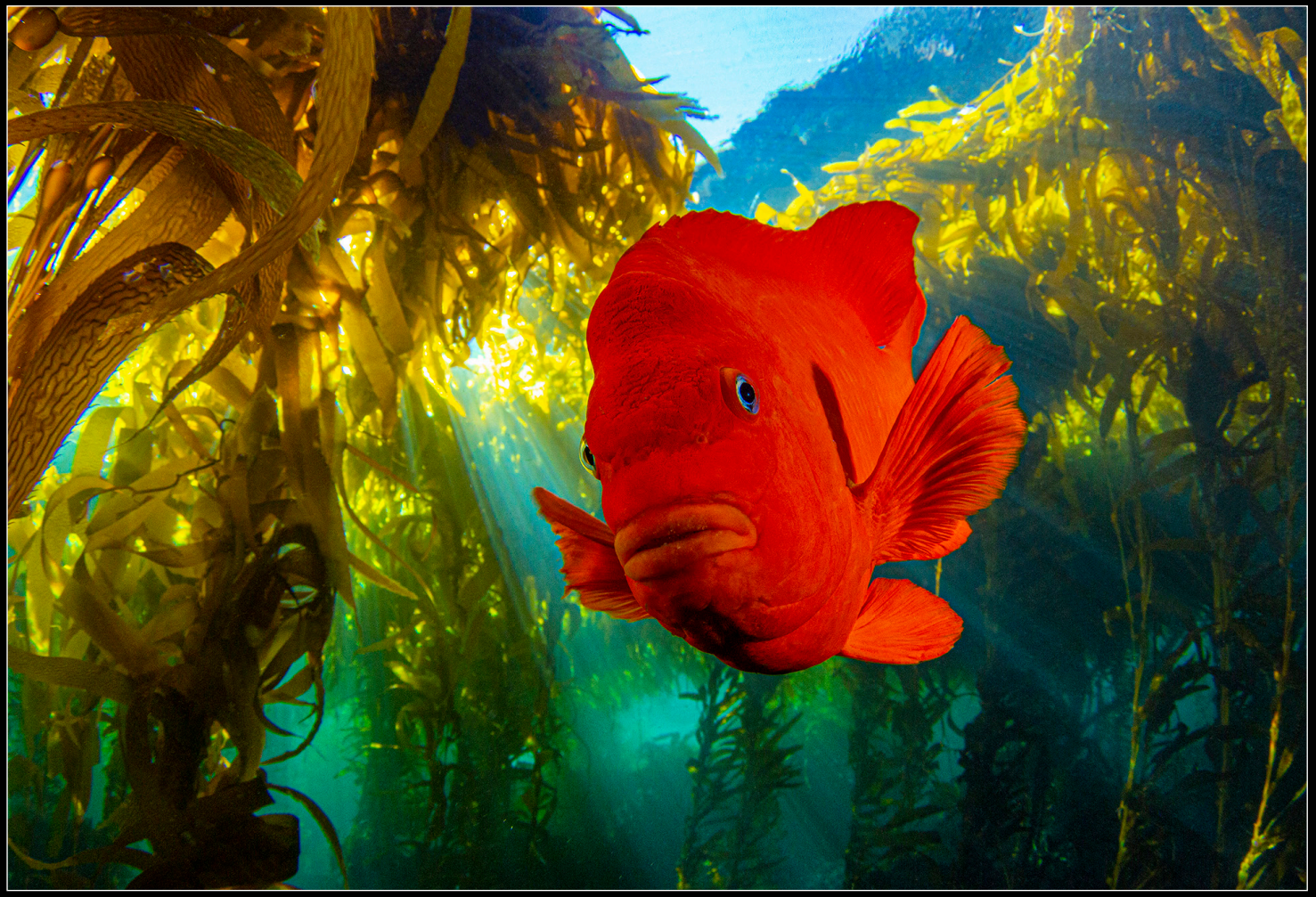
Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

MARELUX

WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'Kelp Forest Gold'
Douglas Klug, United States

Garibaldi are protected from fishing due to their status as the State Marine Fish in California. Under the right conditions, they are quite interactive with divers. For this image, I was diving in a shallow, sunlit kelp forest with near perfect conditions when this young adult took interest with it's own reflection in the dome port of my camera. The fish spent nearly half an hour making close passes and hovering in front of my dome port as the oceans energy moved the kelp around, creating a light show with the shifting beams of sunlight from above. I hovered there, neutrally buoyant, and watched the show unfold while waiting for the elements to line up until I had the shot.

Santa Cruz Island, Channel Islands National Park, United States of America

Canon, 650D / EOS Rebel T4i , Ikelite , Tokina 10-17mm @ 10mm, iso 400, f/9, 1/80, Dual Ikelite DS161's

Judge's comment:
Garibaldis, overgrown and glowing orange damselfish, are iconic residents of kelp forests. Here it provides the perfect focal point for the stunning seaweed scenery that is so characteristic of California.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

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WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'BROUGHT BY THE CURRENT'
Masayuki Agawa, United States

The warm current around Japan (the Kuroshio) changed its course a few years ago and has been sending huge schools of scalloped hammerhead sharks to Mikomoto island. It is now part of my yearly routine to go there and meet my friends old and new. And to improve my photo skills to better capture their lives. The perturbation of the Kuroshio is now at a record duration, and nobody knows when it will end. It is not a positive change to everyone, but I cannot help hoping it lasts for much longer. It has been such a great experience growing up together in the current.

Mikomoto Island, Japan

Canon, EOS 5D Mark III, Nauticam NA-5DMKIII, Canon EF 8-15mm f/4L Fisheye USM, iso 640, f/9, 1/160, INON Z-330

Judge's comment:
Very nice composition and moment of schooling hammerheads! Excellent diagonal and perfect amount of animals to frame them into one image. If there would have been a bit more strobe light on the closer hammerhead this image could have placed even better.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

MARELUX

WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'The blue eye'
Yujing Guo, China

When I first saw this scene, it's like a time tunnel. The freediver has entered this dimension from another and seems ready to pass through into a new one. The scene gave me a surreal visual experience and imagination.

Fuli Ocean park, Lingshui. Hainan province. China

Sony, ILCE-1, Nauticam Sony ILCE-1, FE 16-35mm F2.8 GM, iso 8000, f/3.5, 1/200

Judge's comment:
Ocean Parks are becoming very productive facilities for underwater images and this is a well visualised and timed image that has a science fiction feel. Very different and therefore eye catching.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

MARELUX

WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



UPY 2023

MARELUX

COMMENDED

'CONCEALED'
Sina Ritter, Germany

Marinelife encounters always remind me that curiosity is not exclusively human behavior. That day, especially, the pilot whales studied me as much as I them. Whenever I pushed the shutter release, I could see how their intrigue was raised. It was a group of young rascals: curious, playful, communicative. While most kept a safe distance to me and my weird *click*, this particular individual wanted to take a closer look. He was incredibly fast. Consequently, I raised my shutter speed. For weeks I had been trying to get a clear, naturally lit split-shot of a whale. It was a sunny day, so I chose a relatively low ISO, optimistically aiming at his eyes? What I like most about how this shot turned out: The framing through the surface wavelet. A fine line between our two worlds, sufficient though for even the biggest creatures to stay concealed, if they choose to.

Tarifa, Spain

Canon, Canon EOS R, SeaFrogs, EF 16-35mm f/4L IS USM, iso 1250, 4.0, 1/4000, natural light

Judge's comment:
Wonderful and very artistic split shot of an animal which is not at all easy to photograph. Personally, I would have liked to see this image even higher in the ranking, but the lower part is a bit too dark and you can only barely see the eye of the animal. Nevertheless, it's a great image and incredible effort of the photographer.

Tobias Friedrich


Photo: Bastien Soleil
WINDOW TO ADVENTURE
FOURTHELEMENT.COM

MACRO

Category History

2023 Shane Gross (Canada)
2022 Javier Murcia (Spain)
2021 Galice Hoarau (Norway)
2020 Hannes Klostermann (Germany)
2019 Fabio Iardino (Italy)
2018 Shane Gross (Canada)
2017 So Yat Wai (Hong Kong)
2016 Davide Lopresti (Italy)
2015 Nuno Sa (Portugal)

The macro category is considered one of the most challenging categories in underwater photography, as it requires a high level of technical excellence, precision and creativity to capture the fine details of the subject. Marelux's slogan is "Make a Difference" as we really want to bring new excitement back to the underwater photography community by relentless pursuit of innovation.



The wide angle category is sponsored by Marlux

MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



CATEGORY WINNER

'Unsung'
Shane Gross, Canada

Walking along a rocky shoreline we would peer under rocks using a probe lens and my camera's LCD screen to check for plainfin midshipman nests. Once found I would lay on top of the barnacle-covered rocks, cutting my elbows, trying to compose images of fish most people have never heard of despite having one of the most interesting lifecycles of any animal. Plainfin midshipman are deep water fish that travel to the intertidal zone to spawn. The males sing to attract females and she will lay as many eggs as his singing deserves before moving on to the next singer. Now, the male has a chance to fertilize the eggs, but only if he is not beaten to the punch by a sneaker male who looks like a female. The singer male will then guard the nest never knowing the kids may not be his. Drama!

Vancouver Island, Canada

Nikon, Z6, No housing, Laowa Probe Lens, iso 2000, f/40, 1/200, Big Blue AL1200NP II dive torch

Judge's comment:
A shoal of embryonic fish that are still attached both to the seabed and their egg sacs. A secret image revealing another incredible insight into life in the sea. But the photo isn't all about natural history, it is made by personality captured in the primary tiddler.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



RUNNER UP

'New Life'

Sage Ono, United States

Life begets life. In the cold green waters of Monterey Bay, there is no organism more essential to the ecosystem than Giant Kelp (Macrocystis pyrifera.) It is shelter, sustenance, and stability for countless different species. Despite that, kelp is something that most divers see as nothing more than scenery; that is a shame. Hidden among the holdfasts and crawling through the canopy lie the kelp forest's treasures. On an otherwise unremarkable jaunt to Metridium Fields, I was struck by this clutch of tubesnout eggs nestled beneath some pneumatocysts. Normally, anything in Monterey Bay is quickly covered with fuzzy algae and marine debris, but both the kelp and the eggs were new and absolutely pristine. After 15 minutes of failed compositions, I was able to find a balance between the golden kelp, ruby eggs, and space, to let them shine.

Metridium Fields, USA

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, Nikon 60mm macro, iso 250, f/14, 1/160, 2 x Sea & Sea YS-D2

Judge's comment:
Absolutely wonderful and artistic composition! This minimalism looks so beautiful - almost like a set of jewelry in a shop window. Excellent effort of the photographer to create such an amazing image just out of an ordinary subject.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



THIRD

'Relentless Gaze'
Kat Zhou, United States

This photo depicts a close-up look at the eye of a nurse shark, taken on a night dive off the coast of Bimini in The Bahamas. Though this night dive was completely unbaited, one particular nurse shark, named "Relentless" for her unwavering presence on dives in the area, followed us around on the entire time, perching herself on the sand next to us every time we stopped and swimming after us when we moved. Since she was so calm around us, I took this opportunity to take a few close-up shots of her eye. Though the Bahamas are normally thought of as a wide angle destination, taking a macro lens helped me appreciate the beautiful details in these sharks, and this ended up being one of my favorite images I took on the trip!

Bimini, Bahamas

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, Nikon 60mm Macro, iso 400, f/22, 1/250, 2 x Inon Z330

Judge's comment:
Abstracts are often full frame patterns from tiny detail but this eye catching (pun intended) image has impact; concentrated by the corner vignetted frame, it also gets better and better the larger it is.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

MARELUX

MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'SEADRAGON SWIRL'
Nicolas Remy, Australia

The weedy seadragon is an elegant cousin of seahorses, which is endemic to parts of Australia's Southern states. Along the Sydney coastline, the 'weedy' is usually found feeding amongst kelp algae, where its camouflage works particularly well. I have taken many photographs which illustrate how the seadragon fits in this environment, but this time I wanted the weedy to stand-out from the kelp background. To achieve this, I went for a more artistic photographic approach, creating a composite image: I took 2 photos on the same dive site, with the same equipment but with different settings, and combined them in-camera.

Kurnell (South Sydney), Australia

Nikon, D810, Nauticam NA-D810, Nikkor 105mm AF-S VR micro + Nauticam EMWL-1, iso 64, 14, 2/3, 2x Retra Flash Pro

Judge's comment:
Excellent composition paired with a creative vision! Also the color combination is excellent. I wish this would have been a one-shot though!

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'The Witch's Eye'

Ishino Shota, Japan

I was diving with a camera without a strobe. All I had for the light source was a single light. I found this hermit crab, the size of a man's fist, standing on the top of a stone, with countless hydrozoans attached to the shell. I carefully aimed the light to capture the mystery of this creature with a strange hat, that I was seeing for the first time. It didn't walk, but the antennae moved hastily as if to sense me. I thought if I held the light on him for too long, he would get dazzled. I only shot briefly and I said goodbye to him. This was the only time I saw him, maybe he was some kind of timid witch?

Hachijo island, Japan

Nikon, D80, Ploof for D80, Ai AF Micro-Nikkor 60mm f/2.8D, iso 100, f/8.0, 1/500, INON LF 800-N

Judge's comment:
This is a risky shot which might, in many pre judged competitions, been overlooked early on. The UPY Judges see all images and often reward the risk takers such as this. A classic case of the, less is more, philosophy.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

MARELUX

MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'PEAS IN A POD'

Ipah Uid Lynn, Malaysia

Macro photography has always been a passion of mine. For many years I was using a compact camera until I decided to step up the game by switching to DSLR. This was actually my first time using a bigger camera. I remember struggling with this image as it was so small. I had to switch to manual focus to get the shot I needed and waiting for the right moment until the ladybugs lined up side by side. I took many images but this one stood out. My strobe light had to be at the lowest setting, and I composed with an empty background behind in order to get the image I wanted.

Pink Beach, Komodo, Indonesia

Canon EOS 7D Mark II, Seacam, Canon EF100mm f/2.8L Macro IS USM, iso 100, f/4.5, 1/350, Ikelite DS161 Substrobe and Video Light

Judge's comment:
As with every year, there were many classic shots of marine life on diagonals but the contrasting colours of these two cuties and the horizontal lines fading to the right made this stand out. The lighting and composition are perfect.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

MARELUX

MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'Pinkaboo'
Chris Gug, United States

For years, I had been wanting to make a relatively simple image of a golden damselfish set against a background of red sea whips. In my mind, it was more an image of a background coral with a small fish in it, rather than a photo of a fish in the coral. But on multiple trips to various South Pacific locations, there was always some problem with the sea whips - one branch would be broken, lack of current caused the polyps to be retracted, the damsel was too rough... just always something to make me cringe with OCD! So when I found this little gem living in what is clearly NOT red sea whips, I had to twist my mind out of it's rigidity, and realize that the gorgonian background I was searching for was indeed a different species, and was right in front of me!

Misool, West Papua, Indonesia

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, Nikon 28-70mm f3.5-4.5 behind Nauticam's WACP-1, iso 320, f/14, 1/50, Ikelite DS-161 (2)

Judge's comment:
A beautiful frame, that celebrates this expansive coral that provides a home to juvenile golden damsels. Gug (Chris) has distilled the bustle and complexity of the coral reef in this simple graphic frame - perfect focus and framing, corner to corner.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

HARD AT WORK – BEHIND THE SCENES
David Alpert, United Kingdom

The strong currents of the Maldives momentarily raised the giant carpet anemone away from the reef, to which it was attached, it exposed the most beautiful and delicate spotted porcelain crab on its underside. As new ocean water flowed into the space, the crab would raise its feathery arm like structures (long seta - bristles) located right below the head, to filter planktonic algae and crustaceans, out of the water. Fascinating to watch, difficult to capture. I positioned one of my strobes on the outside of the anemone to illuminate the crab through its host. This cast an interesting orange glow over the subject allowing me to capture it undisturbed, hard at work 'behind the scenes'.

Laamu Island, Maldives

Canon, 5D MK III, Nauticam, Canon 100mm Macro iso 1250, F/8, 1/125 , Inon Z330

Judge's comment:
The combination of colors and sharpness of the subject is absolutely amazing. I like the linear look of the image, but if there would be something in the negative, black space the image could have placed even higher.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'Enter The Dragon'

Stefano Scortegagna, Italy

Underwater macro photography is my passion and the Philippines offer an extraordinary quantity and variety of biodiversity that is ideal for these kinds of pictures. For this reason, I am a regular visitor. Every dive always serves up something wonderful to photograph, but this time I was very lucky. It was the second dive of the last day of holiday, and my guide discovered this extraordinary dragon shrimp. It was a subject I had been wanting to photograph for a long time. I'm very happy.

Sabang Wrecks, Philippines

Nikon, D850, Hugyfot 850, Nikon AF-S 105mm f/2.8 G ED VR Micro, iso 100, f/29, 1/250, INON Z-330

Judge's comment:
Dragon shrimp are tiny, but dramatic crustaceans, never more so than this large female captured here on the coral where it will spend its entire adult life.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'COLEMAN SHRIMPS ON URCHIN'
Katarzyna Battenfeld, Germany

When I saw a Colman Shrimp for the first time in my life, I was amazed at the beautiful creatures nature creates. Even after years I am still fascinated by these animals. I try to photograph them every chance I get. I discovered this specimen at the bottom of the Lembeh strait. Due to its coloration, the sea urchin could be spotted from a relatively great distance. With its striking coloring it tries to deter predators. However, the shrimp can only be found by intensively examining the sea urchin. So there is a lot of luck involved.

LEMBEH STRAIT, Indonesia

Nikon, D800, seacam, 60 mm Nikkor, macro lenses INON UCL-165, iso 200, f/29, 1/320, seacam 150 digital

Judge's comment:
The Colemane Shrimp are a classic subject which has been photographed many, many times in the last decades. We, in the jury, always like to have stunning, new and creative visions, but also like if an image is just perfectly done - like this one.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

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WRECKS

Category History

2023 Brett Eldridge (USA)
2022 Alex Dawson (Sweden)
2021 Tobias Friedrich (Germany)
2020 Tobias Friedrich (Germany)
2019 René B. Andersen (Denmark)
2018 Tobias Friedrich (Germany)
2017 Csaba Tokolyi (Hungary)
2016 Thomas Heckmann (Germany)
2015 Tobias Friedrich (Germany)

WRECKS

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



CATEGORY WINNER

‘ENGINE WITH A SADDLE’

Brett Eldridge, United States

We were out scanning targets in June when we saw a very small, but promising sonar blip 230 feet deep. I geared up and jumped in hoping for something special. After some searching, my heart started racing when I first saw fish then the propeller of an almost completely intact, single-engine WW II F8F-1 Bearcat, a rare aircraft that Neil Armstrong famously once said was his favorite and has been described as “An Engine With a Saddle.” Alone on the first dive with limited bottom time, I took enough photos to build a “draft” model and identify the wreck. Needing a better photogrammetry model for the UPY contest and with deadlines quickly approaching, I booked December 19th and crossed my fingers. We fortunately had epic conditions and I got the photos I needed. It was my last dive of 2022.

Point Loma, California, United States

Sony, a7rIV, Nauticam, 28-60 @28mm with WWL1-B, iso 1600, f/8.0, 1/50, 2 x Keldan 8x 18,000 Lumen Lights

Judge’s comment:
Underwater photogrammetry, that creates a three dimensional panorama of the subject is a recent technique in underwater photography that has proved incredibly useful for studying reefs and wrecks. Allowing academics to study in detail measure and visualise the underwater world, without going down there. Yet Brett’s image also reveals how eye catching these images can be, rewriting the rules of wreck photography underwater, and providing the world with its first view of this crashed World War II fighter.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

WRECKS

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



RUNNER UP

'Salem feeling'
Nicolai Posininsky, Germany

The picture shows the wreck of the Salam Express. It is not just a wreck, because unfortunately many people lost their lives when it went down. Because of this tragedy there is a special feeling to dive there. With this picture I tried to capture the sombre and reflective mood.

Safaga , Egypt

Canon , EOS 5D Mark IV, Seacam, Canon Fisheye EF 8-15, iso 200, f/8, 1/80, SEAFLASH 150Digital

Judge's comment:
A well chosen angle and composition gives power while the shadows add mood but we all agreed that if the diver with the torch was higher up in mid water, this would have been a winner.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

WRECKS

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



THIRD

'MAHUSAN WRECK'

René B. Andersen, Denmark

The wreck Mahusan is from the German dive lake Kreidesee, which was sunk to make it a diving attraction. It is laying at 50 meters depth and is dark. It is a good idea to bring as much light as you need. Kreidesee is an excellent place to train diving and camera skills, as it is just a short scooter ride out to the wrecks. In this case, I was playing with my new light from Era underwater with its 500W and 66000 Lumens, perfect for the dark conditions.

Kreidesee, Germany

Nikon , D-850, Nauticam NA D850, Nikon 8-15mm fisheye, iso 2500, 4,5, 1/40, Era underwater

Judge's comment:
Very well planned and executed wreck shot in conditions that are far from being easy. The lights are very well placed, even though I wish the divers would have pointed their lights towards the wreck and the light from above was not so strong, but everything else is top notch.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

WRECKS

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'TETI WRECK'
Borut Furlan, Slovenia

This is wreck of the Teti off the island of Vis, in Croatia. The depth of stern is 35 m. The stern wheel is backlit with a slave strobe. The wreck is well known and often visited by divers, so the main challenge was to find a time window without other people around. There are some resident conger eels and scorpionfish on the wreck, so it is definitely worth visiting.

Teti Wreck, Croatia

Nikon, D850, Seacam Housing, 13mm, iso 400, f/18, 1/250, Slave strobe

Judge's comment:
A classy wreck image, shot with impeccable composition, with the enticing accent of the off camera lighting elevating the image.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

WRECKS

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'GUARDIAN OF THE THISTLEGORM'
Jon Anderson, United States

After spending the night anchored on the S.S. Thistlegorm, my buddy and I saw the opportunity to be the first divers on the wreck the next morning. As we explored one of the cargo holds, I spotted the human-sized head of a Giant Moray Eel poking out from beneath the wreckage of a truck. I carefully navigated around the eel hoping to capture blue water through the hold in the background. Almost immediately, the eel came out of its hole, turned and swam toward me. Startled, I raised my camera, partially as a shield and partially knowing I had to squeeze the shutter even if I wasn't ready. The interaction lasted seconds and produced 4 frames. After collecting myself and I reviewed the frames and was delighted to see I had captured a frame with the eel, the blue water, and even one of the famous motorcycles!

S.S. Thistlegorm, Red Sea, Egypt

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA-D850, Nikon 8-15mm f/3.5-4.5 fisheye, iso 500, 13, 1/40, 2x Retra Pro strobe

Judge's comment:
Very nice encounter in a wreck which is not easy to shoot. Very good composition of the photographer an excellent balance between the lighting of the moray eel and the background.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

WRECKS

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'The Bridge'

David Alpert, United Kingdom

In October 1983, The Christoforos, formerly a collier named Thomas Hardie, sailed from the Port of Volos laden with cement. The weather changed with strong winds causing a list that only worsened as the night bore on. Seeking refuge in the natural harbour of Panormos on the idyllic island of Skopolos, things went from bad to worse. Eventually the order was given to abandon ship and she sank in 43m of water. There she lies today upright on the sea bed still in her catastrophic sinking state. It was a privilege to see such a wreck - not yet sanitised to make diving safe. Through the use of multiple lights my aim was to bring the bridge to life. My buddy in full wreck penetration gear illustrates that this is not one for the inexperienced diver. Just a moment of lost concentration totally blacks out the space with silt. Panormos Bay, Skopolos Is, Aegean Sea., Greece

Canon, 5D MK III, Nauticam, Sigma 15mm fisheye, iso 640, F/8, 1/80 sec, Inon Z330 and Inon Z240

Judge's comment:
As the loose wiring and David's back story confirms, this is a deep, unsafe wreck and both the model and photographer have captured the chaotic and claustrophobic scene without disturbing the silt. Very impressive skills and vision.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

WRECKS

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'Torpilleur 178 Panorama'

Nicolas Barraque, France

Having developed the technique of panoramic shooting on the move in 2006, whenever possible I try to capture a complete vision of any wreck I visit. In this case, the photos are from a dive on the torpedo boat 178 in the bay of Cavalaire.

Baie de Cavalaire, France

NIKON, D850, HUGYFOT, 16 mm, iso 1600, F/11, 1/50, 2x BIGBLUE 30000 lumens

Judge's comment:
I have always been a big fan of panoramas whether they are panned or tracked so this was a favourite of mine. Either technique produces images which a single frame could not achieve.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

WRECKS

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'THE EYE OF THE FUNNEL'
Brook Peterson, United States

I find shipwrecks fascinating with all the possibilities for creative photography. In this shot, I wanted to find a frame in some part of the ship. Looking up from the bottom of the funnel on the Kittiwake wreck offered the perfect opportunity as the sun was also in the right position. I asked my dive buddy to swim overhead and her pink fins captured the sunlight just enough to give a point of interest to the photo.

Kittiwake Wreck, Grand Cayman

Nikon, D850, Sea & Sea MDX 850, Nikon 8-15mm fisheye, iso 640, F/14, 1/250, Natural Light

Judge's comment:
A flawless composition that shows that pink fins can be perfect fins. Great job by both the photographer and model.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

WRECKS

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'The Flying Fortress'
Peter Azman, Italy

The wreck of the B17 plane lies on 72 meters seabed near the coast of the Dalmatian island of Vis and is probably one of the best preserved aircraft wrecks from WW2. We had already dived the year before but the result had not fully satisfied us and we decided to try again. The conditions were optimal: good visibility, a close-knit team and determination. The goal was to find the right angle to take an image of the entire silhouette of the aircraft, without losing the main details and including the divers to give balance and depth to the image. Thanks to the team, everything went as planned and the final result was what we hoped for.

Vis, Croatia

Nikon, D7500, Isotta, Tokina Fisheye 10-17 f3,5-4,5 DX, ISO 1000, f/8, 1/25, no lights

Judge's comment:
I never tire of looking at good images of this classic aircraft wreck. It is quintessential to me, and this shot, with the well composed main divers plus the perfect pair to the right, was a welcome sight in this varied category.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

WRECKS

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'THE BALTIC'S THISTLEGORM'
Pekka Tuuri, Finland

The wreck of E.Russ is the "Thistlegorm of the Baltic Sea". She hit a floating mine in September 1919 while carrying a lot of cargo, for example 50 cars, motorcycles etc. However, most iron artifacts have rusted away. Only the wheels, tires and axles are left of the cars. The picture itself is a "standard" wreck picture taken quite deep in murky waters. Dim ambient light combined with a strong ceiling torch light high above. The picture is a panorama of two 15 mm shots. I use the panorama technique quite a lot in wreck pictures to cope with the bad visibility that we usually have in the Baltic Sea.

Hiiumaa Island, Estonia, the Baltic Sea, Estonia

Canon, 5D Mark III, Subal 5DIII, Canon 15 mm, iso 1600, 3.2, 1/30, No strobe, ambient + 30 klm ceiling torch light

Judge's comment:
Very nice light by the photographer for this not so easy to shoot wreck in green waters. The diver and the light are very well placed in the frame, as well as the light coming from the top, which rounds up the excellent shot.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023





Coral Eye

Marine Outpost

coral-eye.com





BEHAVIOUR

Category History

2023 Yury Ivanov (Indonesia)
2022 Pekka Tuuri (Finland)
2021 Karim Iliya (USA)
2020 Pasquale Vassallo (Italy)
2019 Richard Barnden (UK)
2018 Filippo Borghi (Italy)
2017 Qing Lin (Canada)
2016 Richard Carey (Thailand)
2015 Montse Grillo (Spain)

BEHAVIOUR

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



CATEGORY WINNER

'MAKE LOVE NOT WAR'
Yury Ivanov, Indonesia

A couple of coconut octopuses "making love" (mating). I knew that I can find this species of Octopus at one of dive sites near Tulamben village (Bali, Indonesia) and they are active only at night time in that place. I dive there only after 7pm hoping to photograph something unique - their mating. I`ve done more than 30 night dives at the dive site and finally I got lucky. The photo shows the end of their love.

Tulamben, Bali, Indonesia

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, Nikon AF Micro-NIKKOR 60mm f/2.8D, iso 64, f/14, 1/250, INON Z-330 Type 2

Judge's comment:
An absolute amazing moment photographed perfectly. This image underlines that patience and knowledge an animal will result in a winning shot. It was immediately clear to all Judges that this image will go very far in the competition when we saw it the first time. Very well done and executed.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BEHAVIOUR

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



RUNNER UP

'Double Whale Time'
Wojciech Dopierala, Poland

During the Marlin Expedition in Baja California we could spot the Bryde Whales around and even saw them passing close by us few times while we were in the water. But when we have located this huge static bait ball of sardines we knew that it's the place we want to stay for a while. Deep inside I knew that if we are lucky we possibly could see the whales feeding on sardines. I was all focused and ready during hours. And then While observing the Blue Marlins hunting suddenly TWO Bryde's Whales came out of nowhere, racing between each other towards the bait ball. In a matter of seconds the ball was shattered to pieces and the whales were gone. Thanks to the luck and patience I was in the right place and time to capture the best photo I ever could imagine.

Baja California Sur, Mexico

Sony, Alpha a7 lll, SeaFrogs a7Rlll, Sony G Master 16-35 f2,8, iso 200, F/2.8, 1/500, Natural light

Judge's comment:
Big animals, big action, big image, without a doubt. It captures the excitement of the action and creates the feeling of 'I wish I'd been there too'. Perfect for Behaviour.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

BEHAVIOUR

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



UPY 2023

THRID

'CHEW WITH YOUR MOUTH CLOSED!'
Bryant Turffs, United States

I captured this image of a common snapping turtle in a freshwater spring after a prolonged period of observation. I intended to make images of manatees on this trip, but my attention was captured by this charismatic turtle. I spent several hours observing her from a respectful distance, then moving in to make images. She seemed comfortable with my presence and went about her business foraging. These turtles will consume vegetation, live prey, and also serve as scavengers in aquatic ecosystems. In this image, the turtle is consuming a scavenged flatfish, commonly known as hog-choker. The fish species got its name from farmers who observed pigs choking on their spines. These spines, however, were no match for the turtle who used her forelimbs to scrape them away before swallowing, as depicted. This experience reiterates, for me, the importance of patient careful observation.

St. John's River Spring, United States

Canon , 7Dmkii, Ikelite 200DL 7Dmkii, Tokina AT-X 10-17mm Fisheye, iso 800, f/16, 1/125, Two Ikelite DS 160

Judge's comment:
What an extraordinary animal which you don't see very often in an underwater photography competition. Very nicely framed and lit by the photographer. We trust that the animal has not been fed to get this shot and believe in the true honor of the photographer. Very nice!

Tobias Friedrich

BEHAVIOUR

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'BLUEHEAD CHUB AND ROSYSIDE DACE'
Isaac Szabo, United States

Bluehead Chubs are fascinating fish occurring in streams of the southeast United States. During the spring spawning season mature males grow spikes on their heads for use in territorial fights with rival males. Winners claim control of the best spawning sites where they spawn with females and then pile up thousands of rocks on top in large mounds to protect the eggs from predators. The strategy works so well that many other species of colorful minnows have evolved to spawn in chub nests too, making chubs keystone species. Here a spawning school of Rosyside Dace swarm the nest as the chub adds another rock. As a freshwater photographer, chub nest season is always the highlight of my year. Timing the rock drop shot is challenging since the chub moves fast. Thankfully they are hard workers, so I usually get many attempts and if I'm lucky a few keepers.

North Carolina, United States

Sony, A7R II, Meikon, Sony 90mm and Nauticam EMWL 130, iso 400, f/8, 1/20, 2 Nikonos SB-105

Judge's comment:
A wonderful real world behaviour image, showing the fascinating behaviour of two freshwater species.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

BEHAVIOUR

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'GIANT FEAST'
Jake Wilton, Australia

A whale shark engulfs a mouthful of fish from a bait ball on the Ningaloo Reef, Western Australia. The whale sharks are normally too slow to capture the fish themselves and must rely on other predators such as these tuna to slow and form the fish into the ball so they can strike. After observing the shark continuously follow the fish for a few hours I noticed it had decided to abandon the fish and change directions into the lagoon directly towards a second bait ball.

Sliding into the water with the new baitball I waited for the shark to approach and begin to circle the fish. Suddenly a school of tuna appeared out of nowhere and began to attack the fish from underneath pinning them to the surface allowing the shark to strike. A rare behaviour seldom witnessed by humans with only a handful of documented sightings recorded.

Ningaloo Reef, Australia

Nikon, D810, Aquatech, Sigma 15mm fish eye f2.8, iso 400, 9, 400, Natural

Judge's comment:
While bonito herd the bait-ball, the biggest fish in the sea gorges. Jake's shot has layer after layer, I like how this extraordinary spectacle is even being watched by a perfectly posed snorkeller.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

BEHAVIOUR

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'PUP PLAYDATE'
Ralph Pace, United States

A smaller sea otter pup rides a larger sea otter pup while their mothers feed on a shallow mussel bed in Monterey Bay. Mothers will sometimes get together for pup play dates, which allow the pups to burn off some energy while their mothers can feed. The pups will chase, catches and ride on each other. They will take turns doing this, but sometimes when the smaller one is getting ridden or pulled down too much, its mother will come over and intervene.

Image taken under U.S. FWS permit # 37946D

California, United States

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, 15mm, iso 640, f/8, 1/60, Sea and Sea

Judge's comment:
Rarely photographed underwater, Ralph's image catches an intimate moment between these fast swimming subjects.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

BEHAVIOUR

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'SEA LION PLAYS WITH IGUANA'
Sylvie Ayer, Switzerland

I was trying to take pictures of the marine iguanas. But this sea lion would come and play in front of me and do loops, etc... I was slightly frustrated because I had come to this part of Galapagos to take pictures of the endemic marine iguanas. Suddenly the sea lion took the iguana in its mouth and started to spin with it in front of me. I must admit that I was not ready with my settings for this incredible sight. I will never forget this dive.

Galapagos Islands, Equator

Nikon, D810, Subal, Tokina 10-17mm, iso 250, f/9, 1/100, Inon Z240

Judge's comment:
Absolutely amazing shot of a moment which is probably very rarely captured on camera. The photographer managed the composition and the light very well. It could have placed much higher if the image quality would have been better. Keep it up!

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BEHAVIOUR

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'Cat shark laying'
Filippo Borghi, Italy

The story behind this photo was a stroke of luck having gone to look for and photograph Mediterranean cat sharks, but during my deep dive I noticed in a rock a cat shark that was moving and swimming in a circle on a sea fan. As I got closer, I immediately understood what he was doing and I quickly got the camera ready to try and capture that very special moment of the mother shark laying its egg.

Argentario, ITALY

NIKON, D800E, isotta, 15mm sigma, iso 200, f 13, 1/80, one uw

Judge's comment:
I had to push a bit for this image which has no fast moving action but it is a well observed, composed and lit moment in a life cycle.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

BEHAVIOUR

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'ORGANISED CHAOS!!'
Paul Pettitt, United Kingdom

This image was taken at Marsa Nakari (Red Sea Diving Safari) in late November. The optimum time to take this sort of picture in my experience is about 9am when the fish seem to be feeding and corralling tighter. In this image my intention was to try and freeze one individual whilst letting the rest go about their business.

Marsa Nakari, Egypt

Nikon , D500, Nauticam, 105mm, iso 80, f32, 1/13th, 2 x retras

Judge's comment:
Even though the image idea is not new, the photographer managed this very, very well. We liked the slow shutter speed very much with the one mackerel perfectly standing out and in focus Although we wished that it was a bit more on the golden ratio and not so close to the corner of the image.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BEHAVIOUR

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'DOUBLE TROUBLE'
Simon Lorenz, Hong Kong

Two Fin Whales, the second largest animal in the world, captured lunge feeding into a ball of herring in Northern Norway. This behaviour has never been captured before as fin whales are known to mainly feed on krill rather than fish. These fastest of the whales lunge at crazy speeds into the bait ball, trying to capture as much fish as possible in their large expanding mouth cavities. My group had been tracking an Orca pod for several hours, hoping they would dive and bring up a bait ball. In the distance we saw the fin whales once, in hindsight they might have been tracking the same pod. When the Orca finally made a bait ball it took our swimmers by surprise to have giant whales breaching all around us. This image was a close situation, with the whales passing by me at full speed at arm length.

Skjervoy, Norway

Nikon, D850, Isotta D850, Sigma 15mm, iso 1600, 2.8, 1/320, n/a

Judge's comment:
An incredible moment of a pair of whales lunging, mouths agape into a school of herring. The challenging low light levels in the Arctic, in winter, limited the image quality of this amazing photo, the only thing stopping it finishing much higher.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

MARELUX

UPY 2023

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PORTRAIT

Category History

2023 Suliman Alatiqi (Kuwait)
2022 Thomas Heckmann (Germany)
2021 Ryohei Ito (Japan)
2020 Lilian Koh (Singapore)
2019 Nicholas Samaras (Greece)
2018 Tanya Houppermans (USA)
2017 Lorincz Ferenc (Hungary)

PORTRAIT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



CATEGORY WINNER

'THE TRUNK'
Suliman Alatiqi, Kuwait

The elephant's trunk is one of the most distinctive anatomical features in the natural world and this photo aims to emphasize it. Luckily, he was curious about my camera and was happy to feel it out which gave me the opportunity to capture this perspective despite otherwise bad conditions for an over-under photo (choppy water and poor visibility). In my first attempts, the nostrils were not fully lit because of how close they were to the lens (which was necessary for the intended photographic effect). So I returned at a specific time window when I thought the sun's angle would be optimal and managed to fully light the nostrils. This added a lot more detail to the key part of the image without which the photo would not be as effective.

Phuket, Thailand

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, AF-S FISHEYE NIKKOR 8-15mm f/3.5-4.5E ED, iso 1000, f/20, 1/320, Ambient light

Judge's comment:
There is irresistible charisma in this crowd-pleasing composition. In this joyous frame, a domesticated Indian elephant cools off in the sea, and curiously dips its trunk beneath the surface to investigate Suliman's underwater camera.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

PORTRAIT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



RUNNER UP

'CURIOSITY AMONG ICEBERGS'
Rafael Fernandez Caballero, Spain

For me, the leopard seal is the most special and epic predator on the planet. It can as big as 4 meters long, it has a reptilian face and the infamy of being curious and dangerous. Although, it is can be dangerous, there are incredible stories of interaction such as those of Paul Nicklen, to whom a female brought several penguins in an attempt to teach him how to hunt. As with any wild animal, respect and care must be maximum and with this species these really have to be on another level. Working with experts and following these principles, we finally had an amazing encounter with the big female leopard seal that played with us and was really curious.

Antartic Peninsula, Antarctica

NIkon, z7 II, Isotta Z7 II, Nikon 8-15mm, iso 250, f/9, 200, Two Sea and Sea YS-D3

Judge's comment:
Absolutely stunning encounter and very well executed. I love the ice which is framing the leopard seal in its environment. Very nice light from the strobes as well and bravely done by the photographer to keep calm in this exciting moment. It's a pity that the second flipper of the seal is not visible, though.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

PORTRAIT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



THIRD

'Marilyn Bubble 2.0'

Thomas Heckmann, Germany

We had tried to recreate the most famous scene of Marilyn underwater instead of on land. Normally in pool photography you have plenty of time . Here, however, it came down to a fraction of a second to catch the right moment where the bubbles produced the desired effect. Weights were attached to the model so that the bubbles would not blow the model upwards. The backlight was remotely ignited via two RSU. The bubbles come from a wifi controlled self-built bubble board that I had turned on underwater myself just before the shot.

Own underwater photo studio, Germany

Nikon , D800E, Seacam Silver, Nikkor 16-35 mm @ 22mm, iso 250, f/18, 1/160, Subtronic Mega, Nova , pro 160

Judge's comment:
To recreate the iconic Marilyn shot, anywhere, is like trying to improve on perfection. To try and do it underwater? Impossible. But not when you see this image which provides a version that I think provides an even more exciting interpretation with the reflection. This is vision and achievement of the highest order.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

PORTRAIT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'BONY-EARED ASSFISH'
Steven Kovacs, United States

The extremely rare and oddly named Bony-eared Assfish, Acanthonus armatus, is one of the most highly desired blackwater subjects to find and photograph. The young are stunning in appearance with their extremley long streamers that gracefully undulate as they swim through the water. While the larvae can be found coming up to shallower depths at night, the adults are reported to be a bathypelagic species meaning they live at depths between 1000m and 4000m. I feel very fortunate to come across this one off Palm Beach, Florida one night during a blackwater dive for only my 2nd time in 10 years of extensive blackwater diving.

Blackwater dive off Palm Beach, Florida, U.S.A.

Nikon , D500, Ikelite, 60mm macro, iso 320, f/22, 1/250, dual Ikelite DS160 strobes

Judge's comment:
We did get a lot of very nice blackwater shots and portraits in this years competition, which over the years tend to lose a 'little bit of excitement as there has been so many great shots already. But his portrait is just absolutely stunning and very well executed straight on to the camera so it truly deserves to be placed in UPY. Very well done!

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

PORTRAIT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'EYE OF THE BEHOLDER'

Bryant Turffs, United States

I made this image on a trip to a Florida spring targeting manatees. Despite not being the original focus of trip, this common snapping turtle, captured my attention. She didn't seem to mind my presence and went about her business foraging, resting, and breathing. I had hoped to capture a split shot, but she avoided me when taking breaths and so I switched my focus to capturing topside interest through snells window. I love the way this frame captured the environment, but the turtle's personality steals the show. Beauty is as they say?

St. John's River Spring, United States

Canon , 7D Mkii, Ikelite 200DL 7DMkii, Tokina 10-17mm Fisheye, iso 1600, f/11, 1/125, Two Ikelite DS160 Strobes

Judge's comment:
Such an incredibly nice portrait shot of a rare animal to see in an underwater competition. Even though the light of the sky is cloudy the photographer managed to balance it very well and also got the animal looking straight into the camera. We loved the "snells window" where you can also see the topside where this image has been taken. Excellent!

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

PORTRAIT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'Cave Diver At Swiss Siphon'

Fan Ping, United States

Swiss Siphon is an extremely decorated salt water passage at Cenote Jailhouse in Quintana Roo, Mexico. It is about a 60-70 minute swim to this specific spot from the entrance, and a total of 3.5 hour runtime including staging the lights for a couple of shots. The diver Kirk's outstanding diving skills on rebreather has made this HDR shot a lot easier, and the image also represents what a true cave diver is like in the beautiful underwater caves of Mexico.

Cenote Jailhouse, Mexico

Sony, A7SIII, Nauticam NA-A1, 28-60mm f/4-5.6 with Nauticam WACP-1, iso 16000, f/4.5, HDR, DivePro video lights

Judge's comment:
Already technically and photographically perfect, the Back Story reveals the long time and incredible skills needed to perfect such an amazingly eye catching image. Hats off to everyone involved.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

PORTRAIT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'UNICORN GOBY'
Yazid Shaari, Libya

This interesting species was only described by scientists in 2019. It was a joy to photograph this adorable individual because of how cooperative it was, as well as the spectrum of poses and reactions it displayed. In one hour dive, I enjoyed observing so many different emotions from which I picked the astounded gesture to be my candidate shot for UPY 2023.

The Lagoon at Gubal Island, Red Sea., Egypt

Nikon, Z9, Nauticam NA-Z9, Nikkor Z MC 105mm F/2.8 VR S plus Nauticam SMC-1 , iso 100, 29, 1/100, Retra Pro

Judge's comment:
Unicorn gobies are a newly described fish, despite living in the shallows of the popular Red Sea. Their tiny size allowed them to remain unknown, but does not diminish their attitude.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

PORTRAIT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



UPY 2023

COMMENDED

'NERPA, THE BAIKAL SEAL'
Dmitry Kokh, United Arab Emirates

Lake Baikal is the world's deepest lake and home to the Baikal seal, known locally as nerpa, which is endemic to the region. The females give birth in March, in burrows on the frozen lake. In a few weeks the fur of the newborn pups becomes grey, and they are ready to explore the depths of the lake. Looking for Baikal seals under thick ice can be incredibly difficult, and takes many dives to get lucky. The view underwater is phenomenal - huge ice blocks are layered on top of each-other forming caverns and passages, and all you're thinking about is the endless ceiling of ice above you. The only way back is a small hole in the ice 100m away - a precious window back to our world.

Young seal pups are not shy, they are very curious and this fella was quite surprised to see a strange creature heavily loaded with gear!

Lake Baikal, Russia

Sony, A9, Nauticam, Sony 28mm+fisheye converter, iso 500, 8, 1/250, 2xSea & Sea YS-D2

Judge's comment:
The cuteness of this animal is just overwhelming. Despite the fact that it's not a very creative shot, all Judges just loved the minimalistic composition and the moment of the encounter enough to have it placed in UPY. Well done!

Tobias Friedrich

PORTRAIT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'MIRROR REFLECTION'
George Kuo-Wei Kao, Taiwan

During the pandemic, I was depressed because I couldn't go diving abroad. On a chance outing, I found beautiful little crabs in a local stream. So, I took photography equipment to different places every week to observe and try to photograph the ecology of the stream. After many shoots, capturing a perfect reflection became one of my goals. From the beginning of this idea to the completion of the shooting, it took me several months. Basically, I took pictures every time I had the opportunity. When I clicked the shutter on this one, I knew I got it.

Pinglin, Taiwan

Olympus , EM1 mark2, Nauticam NA EM1mk2, 30mm macro, iso 400, f13, 1/250, INON Z330 with Retra LSD

Judge's comment:
It is a rare gift to find such beauty in a crab. Stunning. It is a wonderful celebration of the underwater nature close to home.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

PORTRAIT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'Spaceman Zachary Ray, 7, splashes in.'

Lucy Ray, United Kingdom

I wanted to create a spaceman image as I feel being underwater must be a lot like being in space. Astronauts train underwater before missions to space after all! It was a difficult shot to capture since the costume did not want to behave. The helmet flew off every time Zachary jumped in, the boot covers came down, and he flew up. It was my second attempt at this shot, as I ran into similar problems on a previous shoot. The first four attempts Zachary held onto the helmet, and although it stayed on, it just didn't look right, but on the fifth submersion he let go for a couple of seconds, and I was able to get this shot. I have used a black backdrop and a backlight on a slave trigger to create the moonlight effect. I used a lovely warm pool, so no spacesuit was actually needed.

Newark, Nottingham., United Kingdom

Canon , 5D Mark IV, Ikelite, 24mm 2.8, iso 320, 8, 160, Three Ikelite 161 strobes

Judge's comment:
We encourage different images in this category and this certainly fitted the bill. The end result belies the workload but it was well worth it; capturing every youngster's dream of being a spaceman or, more correctly, a spaceperson.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

We've got you covered!





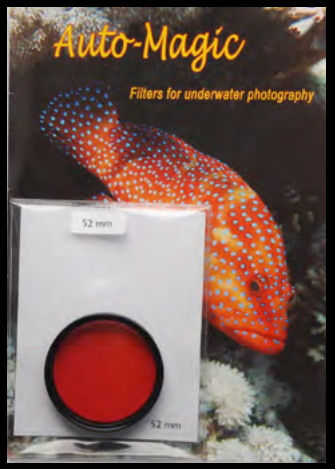


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BLACK & WHITE

Category History

2023 Don Silcock (Australia)
2022 Kerrie Burow (Australia)
2021 Daisy Fernie (Australia)
2020 Mok Wai Hoe (Singapore)
2019 Henley Spiers (UK)
2018 Borut Furlan (Slovenia)

BLACK & WHITE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



CATEGORY WINNER

'EL BLANCO - THE WHITE ONE'
Don Silcock, Australia

The image was taken on the last morning of a five-day trip to Peninsula Vald's in Argentina, in August 2022, under a special permit to enter the water with the Southern Right Whales that gather there between June and December each year. The mother, who can be seen in the background, accepted our presence and allowed the calf to interact with us. It was very playful but careful not to hit us with it's tail and seemed to be really enjoying it all almost as much as we were! White calves are very rare and referred to locally as 'El Blanco' or the white one! Peninsula Vald's is an incredibly important safe haven and breeding ground for the Southern Right Whales of the southern Atlantic and Argentina has done an excellent job of managing it. It was, without doubt, my best ever underwater experience!

Península Valdés, Argentina

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, Nikon 28-70 and Nauticam WACP-1, iso 320, f10, 1/250, Natural light (no strobes)

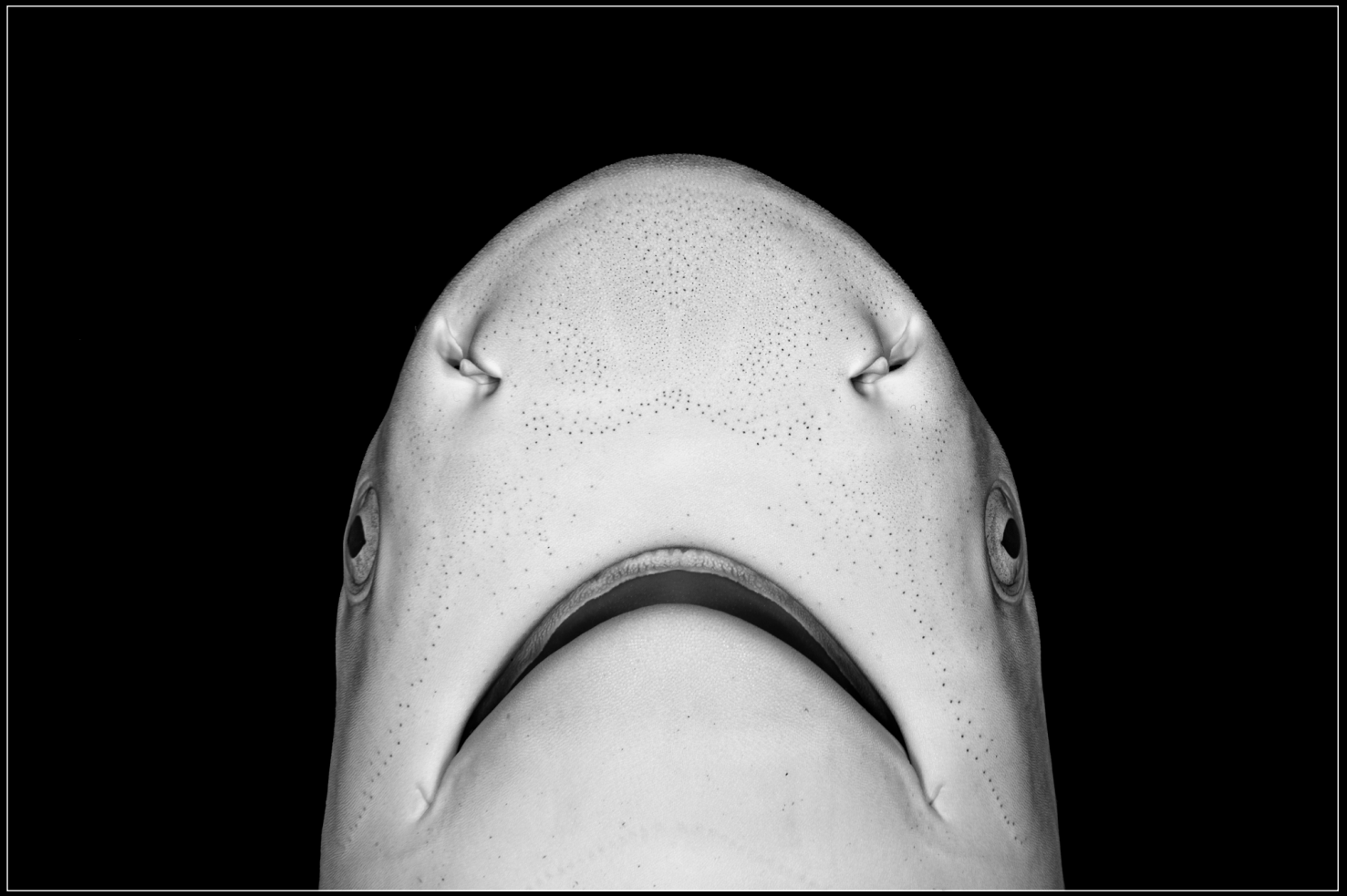
Judge's comment:
This is an absolutely amazing example of how black and white images should be used. I can't imagine it done much better actually - also the encounter must have been truly stunning! Well deserved winner of this category!

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BLACK & WHITE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



RUNNER UP

'JAWS REBORN'
Victor Huertas, Australia

I wanted to achieve two goals with this image of a newborn blacktip reef shark. First, I aimed to recreate the iconic poster image of Jaws with a much less intimidating and more accurate portrayal of a shark. Secondly, I wanted to display the array of tiny dots with sensitive organs called ampullae of Lorenzini with which sharks can detect electric fields such as those produced by their prey. I hope that this image elicits both fascination and respect for sharks and contributes to inspire people to want to learn more about these interesting animals. This image was taken at the Centre des Recherches Insulaires et Observatoire de l'Environment (CRIOBE) station in Mo'orea, French Polynesia, where the Physioshark research team studies the impact of climate change on sharks.

Mo'orea, French Polynesia

Canon, 5D Mark II, Aquatica 5D Mk II, Canon EF 100mm f/2.8L Macro IS USM, iso 100, 14, 1/200, Dual Ikelite DS161

Judge's comment:
Victor's simple, symmetric composition invites us to savour the structure and details of this striking shark, and by evoking iconic imagery, to contemplate our relationship with these predators.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

BLACK & WHITE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



THIRD

'THE CLOUD'
Fabrice Guérin, France

Diving in a cenote is a unique experience. A particular atmosphere reigns when the sun rays penetrate. In some of them, a cloud of sulfur in suspension gives us the impression of being in another world. The challenge of this dive was to see this famous cloud. Indeed, originally, the hydrogen sulfide layer is flat. So I asked the freediver to go back and forth on it. The layer dispersed and formed successive layers of smoke. Not easy to render this effect but with a little imagination we could believe that we are above the clouds.

Yucatan peninsula, Mexico

Canon 5D Mark IV, Aquatica Digital Canon 5D MARK IV, Canon 16-35 f/4 IS USM, iso 1250, f/5,6, 1/80, -

Judge's comment:
The devil is in the detail and the hand gesture is the icing on the photographic cake here. Viewed small it might go unnoticed but the bigger you look at it, the better it gets.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

BLACK & WHITE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'CRUISING THE SAND PATCH'
Brooke Pyke, Australia

On a crystal clear day, one of the Ningaloo Reef's annual visitors cruises over the bright white sand on the outer reef. Whale sharks aggregate to the coast of Western Australia each year to feed on the nutrient rich waters of the Ningaloo. To see a whale shark in such clear waters over the whitest section of sand was truly an incredible moment to photograph.

Ningaloo Reef, Western Australia, Australia

Canon, R6, Nauticam NA R6, 15mm Fisheye, iso 200, f/8, 1/200, Natural Light

Judge's comment:
Very fine and delicate composition and excellent decision to convert the image in black and white. High contrasts are the key element for shots like this which are often only grey and grey. The photographer took the right decision to send it into this category. For me, personally, this image also could have placed even higher. :-)

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BLACK & WHITE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'COLD WATER SIREN'
Cecilia Velázquez, Mexico

The muse, Marién, and myself, wanted to shoot together and create for the sake of creating. Nowadays most creators create just to post on social media and they forget to just have fun. We wanted to experiment underwater and trust the process, we knew the outcome would be good (to our standards at least) but none of us knew prior to the shooting what images would come through. Marien is an actress, hence she is very easy to direct and very confident in front of a camera, so after almost 30 mins freediving in very cold water, we both started having goosebumps and then it's when the magic happened. I remember asking her: can you stand the cold for a little more? To which she replied yes, and I just gave her one more direction, "hug yourself and give me your most daunting and provocative look" and voilà!

Playa del Carmen, Mexico

Sony Alpha, Sonya7ii, Ikelite 200DL, FE 28-70mm F3.5-5.6 OSS, iso 100, F/8, 1/50, Natural light

Judge's comment:
Deceivingly basic at first glance, the longer you look the more the details of Cecilia's considered composition draw you in. The limbs guide you around the frame, as you absorb the texture of the skin, the thoughtful eye contact and the indentation caused by the nail. Absorbing art.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

BLACK & WHITE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'SEA TURTLE SERENITY'
Renee Capozzola, United States

This split shot of a green sea turtle resting calmly at the surface juxtaposed against a dramatic sky was taken at Apo Island in the Philippines. Established as a community-organized marine sanctuary in 1982, Apo Island provides strong legal protections for the many sea turtles that inhabit the azure waters above its vibrant corals, and has inspired the creation of many similar marine sanctuaries throughout the world. During this visit, I wanted to capture a half and half image of one of the turtles and was blessed with a relatively calm day to achieve this shot. I converted this image to monochrome to emphasize the dramatic sky and natural contrast.

Apo Island, Philippines

Canon 5D Mark III, Nauticam, Canon EF 16-35mm f/2.8 II, iso 400, f13, 1/160, Sea & Sea YS-D2

Judge's comment:
Excellent image and very nice, creative editing of the black and whites. For me, this also could have placed higher as it was one of my favorites in this category. Well done!

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BLACK & WHITE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'THE SHADOW OF THE MEDITERRANEAN'
Quico Abadal, Spain

This piece is called the "L'ombra del Mediterrani" and symbolises the darkness humans have casted upon the oldest sea. Its walls and floors are rough and empty of life. Its corners hide the tears of the ocean. The shot was taken during autumn, at the entrance of "la Cova d'en Gispert", a 150m long cave situated at the Catalan coast. It was a sunny and beautiful morning with my friend Marc. Thank you my friend for posing like a champ and sharing these adventures with me.

Cova d'en Gispert, Spain

Nikon, D850, Isotta, 17-35mm, iso 5000, f/6.3, 1/100, Ambient light

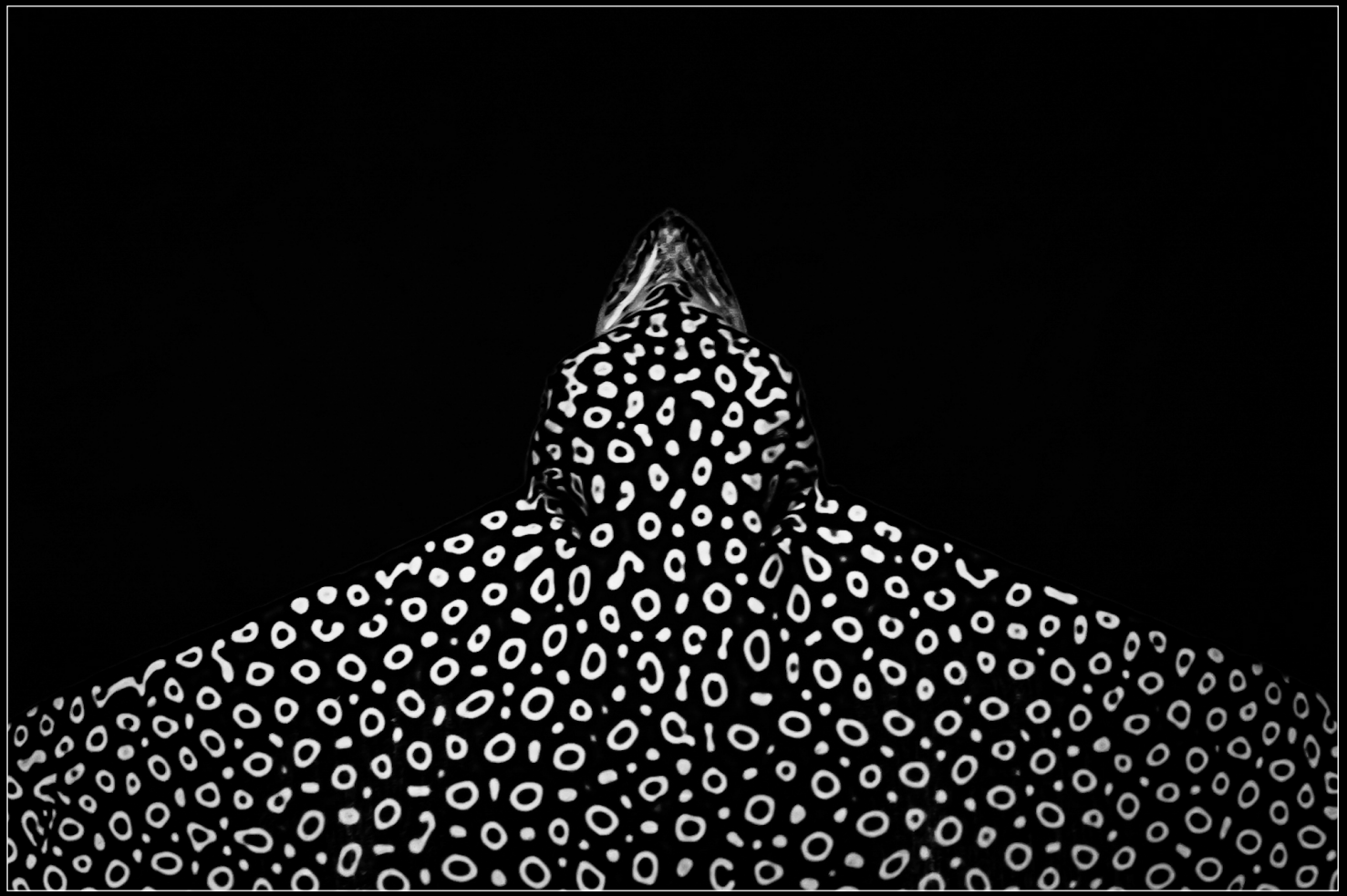
Judge's comment:
A character scales the terrain, intriguing and menacing. The image is beautiful, fun and thoughtful, typical of Quico's inventive photography.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

BLACK & WHITE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'BINARY CODE'
Mizael Palomeque, Mexico

We were out diving in Playa del Carmen looking for bull sharks. The job was to find sharks and document the bite marks of a group of female bull sharks that come during the last stages of their pregnancy to this area. It it common to see them with bite marks (we believe from mating), so that day I had my 100 mm. After almost 40 mins and no sharks I was quite disappointed, and we decided to ascend. At that point we were out on a sand bank, no corals, no fish, no sharks, nothing, when all of a sudden a pair of eagle rays approach me. This was very unusual, these animals are very shy and they swam with me for about five minutes and they let me capture many angles. Their skin pattern is unique, like binary code, underwater perfection.

Playa del Carmen, Mexico

Canon, R5, Ikelite, 100 mm, iso 125, 8, 1/320

Judge's comment:
The Black and White category introduces a graphic simplicity and this image exploits it well with simple yet contrasting graphics and an unambiguous composition. It's all quite simple, really.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

BLACK & WHITE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'RORSCHACH'
Michael Freifeld, United States

I have snorkeled The Blue Heron Bridge countless times looking for small, hidden, and unique creatures. As I floated along I noticed a pair of Grey Angelfish, a species that tends to swim in pairs investigating a neglected, anchored vessel. Because of all of the life growing on the hull of ship, the Angelfish began treating it as feeding surface, while effortlessly switching orientation to feed. I had an idea in my head and began snapping while holding my breath. I was so lucky to capture the exact moment when one of the pair flipped itself in exactly the opposite orientation of its partner!

Blue Heron Bridge, USA

Canon SL2, Ikelite, Canon EF-S18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 IS STM, iso 200, 8.0, 1/100, Natural Light

Judge's comment:
Black and white. I love how the photographer's choice of upward viewpoint has captured these two angelfish flipped in different orientations in our three dimensional realm.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

BLACK & WHITE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'Circle In The Sun'

Enrico Somogyi, Germany

During a dive in Marsa Alam we saw this school of barracuda in about 15m depth forming a beautiful circle. I really wanted to photograph the swarm together with the sun. So I swam under the swarm and photographed vertically upwards to include the sun in the picture. Later when I looked at the picture on the laptop I thought it would look really good in black and white. I was very happy with the result.

Marsa Alam, Egypt

Sony RX100vii, Fantasea, Nauticam EMWL 130, iso 160, f/7,1, 1/2000, 2x Retra Flash Pro

Judge's comment:
Such a nice and well lit image! The composition and the angle of the schooling barracudas is just perfect. It's not easy to have the right amount of light at these shiny creatures, but the photographer managed it very well. The sun on the background is just perfect in that corner and the conversion into black and white excellent. It's a little bit blurry around a good amount of the edges, otherwise it could have placed even higher.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

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COMPACT

Category History

2023 Enrico Somogyi (Germany)
2022 Enrico Somogyi (Germany)
2021 Jack Berthomier (New Caledonia)
2020 Man BD (Malaysia)
2019 Enrico Somogyi (Germany)
2018 Simone Matucci (New Zealand)
2017 Jenny Stromvoll (Mozambique)

COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



CATEGORY WINNER

'KLUNZINGER'S WRASSE IN MOTION'

Enrico Somogyi, Germany

When I was snorkeling in Marsa Alam I saw countless Klunzinger's Wrasses. One of them was particularly curious and very interested in my lens. I was able to take some good classic wide angle pictures. After a while I figured it would be a good idea to try a long exposure. So I set my camera to the smallest aperture f11, the ISO value to 64 and the exposure time to 1/13s. For this picture, I moved the camera forward a bit while the shutter was released. This created the zoom effect in the lower part of the image. I was very happy with the result.

Marsa Alam, Egypt

Sony , RX100vii, Fantasea FRX 100vii, Nauticam Emwl 130, iso 64, f/11, 1/13, 2x Retra Flash Pro

Judge's comment:
An intelligent image playing to the camera's strengths and producing an end result that most bigger cameras would be proud of.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



RUNNER UP

'WELCOME'
Takeshi Iioka, Japan

This photo was taken in Mikurajima, Tokyo. Dolphins swim very quickly, so it is not easy to photograph them like this. On this occasion, a group of dolphins approached as if saying "welcome". It was a lucky situation that a group of dolphins approached in such a pleasing formation. I only had time for one photo and this is the frame.

Mikurajima, Tokyo, Japan

Canon, PowerShot S120, WP-DC51, INON UWL-H100 + Dome Lens Unit, iso 125, f/2.8, 1/400, Natural Light

Judge's comment:
Who would not love to have their view filled with this family. Such an aspirational image whatever camera you use.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



THIRD

'WATER BALLET'
James Rokop, United States

As a photographer who has been specializing in artistic swimming for a number of years, I was inspired by the original concept of "water ballet," an outdated term for the current sport. I took this simple concept of an outdated term and made it quite literal in this series where I photographed local ballet dancers under water in a residential pool. The images really have no direct resemblance to the sport but nevertheless highlighted the dancers' athleticism, beauty, and motion in a similar manner for some unique imagery. This image features talented Sofia and was taken with a compact camera in a basic water housing at a friend's pool. I chose this pool in particular for it's canvas-like appearance under water and I relied on natural lighting.

Davis, California, USA

Sony, RX100 M7, Ikelite , 24-200, iso 1250, f/2.8, 1/1250, natural

Judge's comment:
I love this classic, minimalistic and flat piece of art very much. Sometimes it doesn't take much to create a fantastic image, but the vision of the photographer is much more important. Very well done and executed.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'FLYING BENEATH THE SURFACE'
Miguel Ramirez, France

This photo was taken on Christmas Day, just before sunset, in the lagoon of Reunion Island, where I live. This lionfish appeared above the corals, it was swimming peacefully, going in search of food. I took the opportunity to try to take a photo slightly from below: to have both the reflection of the corals under the surface, and the sky colored by the sunset.

St Pierre Lagoon, Reunion island

Olympus, TG6, Nauticam Na-TG6, no lens, iso 200, f/2.8, 1/60, 2 strobes Inon Z330

Judge's comment:
In my early days, Red Sea Lionfish were the perfect subject to practise on; visually stunning and not fast swimming. This is a well timed, composed and lit image taken from exactly the right angle. Classic subject, classic image.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'SOCIAL ISOLATION'
Joe FitzGibbon, Ireland

This image was captured during the Covid 19 pandemic, just after the easing of 'level 5 lockdown restrictions'. Divers came out of hibernation, as it were, blinked in the sunlight and met on the pier. We were delighted to see each other again - but no hugs or kisses. Not even handshakes, and a good 2 meters between us! Once underwater, I came across this spotted sea hare, a reciprocal hermaphrodite frequently found in cosy mating chains. But not this one. It looked like the mantra of 'social isolation' had reached even here. Peering over the edge into the abyss, in bleak solitude, with a look of foreboding in the eyes, it felt so familiar.

New Quay, Ireland

Nikon Coolpix AW130, n/a, n/a, iso 125, 4.1, 1/1000, Hand held torch

Judge's comment:
Excellent and on point composition of this sea hare in the kelp forest. The light is just right as well and very nicely done by the photographer. For me the image could also have placed higher. Well done!

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'RUNNING IN THE FIELDS'

David Pleuvret, Reunion

On a sunny morning in March 2022, I snorkelled in a rock pool. I was searching for tiny species. After several minutes, I've found this Costasiella, better known as Shawn The Sheep Slug, gambolling on the seaweeds. I held my breath and waited and waited, in order to be in the right place, and to capture face to face this cute picture.

Rock Pool, South Coast, Reunion Island

Olympus, TG6, No Housing, internal lens, 18mm on this one, iso 100, f6.3, 1/250, No flashes

Judge's comment:
Shawn The Sheep slugs are really tiny. And this actually makes compact cameras particularly suitable for photographing them because they record more depth of field at these magnifications. Right camera, right subject: a winning combination.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'SQUAT LOBSTER IN CRINOID'

Ilaria Mariagiulia Rizzuto, Italy

I found this small crustacean inside the crinoid I portrayed it with a pose and light that made it like the center of a vortex. It was very difficult, because this is a secretive species and also one that rarely stays still. I photographed it in Puerto Galera, in the Philippines, which is a place full of both sand and coral diving. You can find many crinoids here and study their mutualistic relationships, like this one. I think the particular aspect of this image is the central composition with the vortex effect that draws the eye towards the subject.

Puerto Galera, Philippines

Canon, G7X MkII, Nauticam NAG7XII, Nauticam cmc-1, iso 125, f/11, 1/2000, inon z-240

Judge's comment:
This swirling whirlpool of crinoid arms sucks our eyes straight towards the tiny, camouflaged squat lobster, which makes its home here.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'FRIED EGG JELLYFISH'
Enrico Somogyi, Germany

While snorkeling in Mallorca I found this beautiful Fried Egg Jellyfish. I took many photos underwater with the sun in the background. Then I tried the much more difficult split shot technique. My little 4inch dome port didn't make it easy, but after many attempts I was very satisfied with this picture.

Cala Tuent, Spain

Sony, RX100vii, Fantasea FRX 100vii, Sony Fisheye Converter in a dry 4inch Domeport, iso 160, f/8, 1/250, 2xBackscatter Miniflash

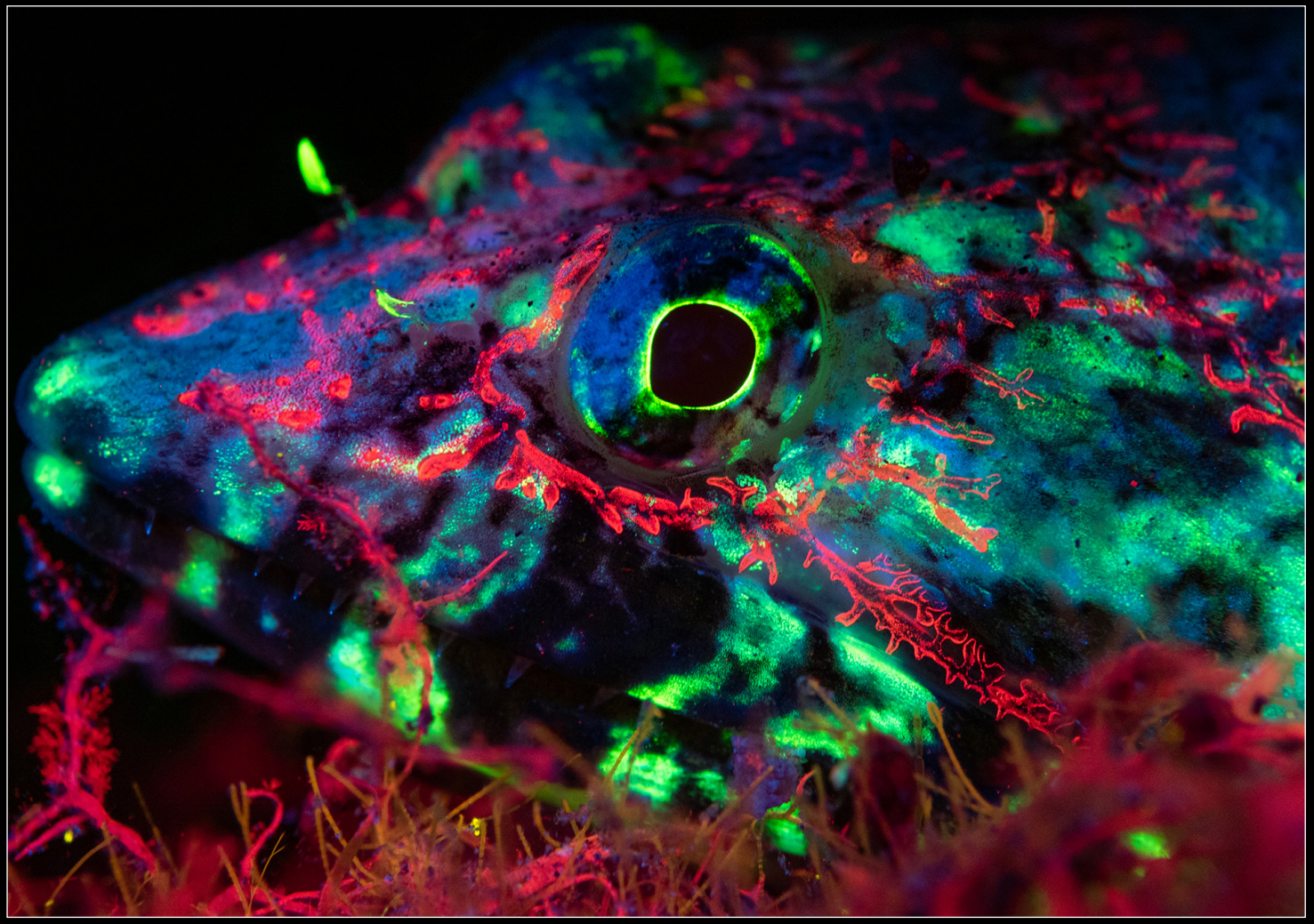
Judge's comment:
Excellent split shot of this very nice jelly fish! We hope that the photographer didn't push or touch the animal to get it into position and trust his honor. Unfortunately the top side is not in focus, otherwise it could have placed even better. Maybe the photographer should think about switching to a good mirrorless cameras in future. ;-)

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'FLUO LIZARDFISH'
James Lynott, United Kingdom

The first time I night dived in Madeira with fluorescence gear was back in 2017 which was a fantastic experience finding lots of fluorescing fireworms and lizardfish. Ever since then I had been eager to try it again. I Had my chance in September 2022 and did two wonderful night dives at the Manta Diving Madeira house reef, which sits inside the Garajau underwater nature reserve. On these dives the choice of fluorescent subjects were plentiful, but it was the lizardfish that again stole the show, they were everywhere and showing lots of variation in their incredible fluorescent patterns. I used 2 x Light&Motion Sola Nightsea lights in 'spot' mode together with a Fantasea UCL-900f macro lens to get this shot.

Manta Diving House Reef, Canico, Madeira

Canon, G7X MarkII, Fantasea FG7XII, Fantasea UCL-900f, iso 400, f6.3, 1/100, 2 x Light&Motion Sola Nightsea

Judge's comment:
I'm going to be honest with you - fluorescent images are not my cup of tea with the usual monochromatic green colour but this image, with its contrasting colours like celebratory party decorations, changed my mind.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'BLENNY'S HOME'

Enrico Somogyi, Germany

Only 50cm below the water surface this little blenny lived on a rock. Through the small lens of the Nauticam EMWL 100 I was able to get very close to this little blenny. He seemed very interested in his reflection. This picture was taken vertically up to the water surface. So you can even see the clouds through the surface.

Mallorca, Cala St.Vincence, Spain

Sony Rx100vii, Fantasea FRX 100vii, Nauticam Emwl 100, iso 125, f/11, 1/160, Backscatter Miniflash with optical Snoot

Judge's comment:
This had us thinking about double exposures which create images which weren't possible with one exposure but to achieve this in a single frame is testament to today's equipment and the photographer's eye.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

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UP & COMING

Category History

2023 Kat Zhou (USA)
2022 Quico Abadal (Spain)
2021 SJ Alice Bennett (Mexico)
2020 Anita Kainrath (Austria)
2019 Taeyup Kim (Korea)
2018 Man BD (Malaysia)
2017 Horacio Martinez (Argentina)
2016 Pier Mane (South Africa)
2015 Fabrice Guerin (France)

UP & COMING

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



CATEGORY WINNER

'BOTO ENCANTADO'

Kat Zhou, United States

There's a legend among locals in the Amazon that river dolphins, or 'botos', can transform into handsome men known as 'boto encantado' at night to seduce women. Though I did not witness this elusive boto transformation, at dusk I was enchanted by these beautiful mammals in a different way. After seeing how botos would sometimes bring their beaks above water, I knew I want a split shot at sunset. Though the water was so dark that I was shooting blind, this dolphin gave me a perfect pose and smile!

As indigenous communities settled by rivers in the Amazon, river dolphins began living in closer proximity to human populations, even making use of food scraps. Frequent dolphin sightings led to tales like boto encantado, but there's a darker side to the legend, as it was often used to excuse pregnancies after women were assaulted or forced into prostitution. While botos are generally revered as mythical creatures, many scorned husbands have killed dolphins because of these stories. Furthermore, many river dolphins have also been killed for use as fish bait. Though there have been bans on this practice, it has not been eradicated. With this, alongside even bigger impacts like mercury poisoning due to the gold mining industry and large development projects that have disrupted the river ecosystems, I fear that one day botos will truly become no more than mythical creatures.

Amazon, Brazil

Nikon, D850, Nauticam D850, Nikon 8-15mm fisheye with Kenko 1.4x teleconverter, iso 400, f/13, 1/160, 2 x Inon Z330

Judge's comment:
A first glance simple, then simply perfect. In dark, tannic waters, Kat has created a striking composition capturing this rarely photographed and vulnerable species at the perfect moment. I love the almost monochromatic burnt orange colour palette of the pink dolphin, photographed through brown waters and framed against the setting sun. By far the best image we've ever seen of this species.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

UP & COMING

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



UPY 2023

RUNNER UP

'THE SWARM'
Ollie Clarke, Australia

The whale sharks on the Ningaloo are often accompanied by bait-balls like this one, where the small fish use the shark as a floating shelter. However this one was huge, much denser and with a lot more fish than usual, so I was really excited to photograph it. The shark almost looked as if it was getting fed up with the small fish and it was attempting to shake off the swarm. It would make steep dives and then ascend again right away thrashing its tail, but the fish would just swirl even more densely around the poor shark, who would have barely been able to see through the bait-ball! I was hoping to spend a bit of time photographing this shark, but after some ups and downs, he dissapeared into the depths of the Indian Ocean, an encounter I'll never forget.

Ningaloo Reef, Australia

Sony, A7Riii, Nauticam NA-A7Riii, Sony 28-60 with Nauticam WACP-1 , iso 400, f/8, 1/250, Natural light

Judge's comment:
For me this is predator and the prey. Whale sharks are sometimes mis-labelled as plankton feeders, but they are also active predators of schools of small fish. Ollie's stunning image is perfectly timed as the shark pounces, switching from benign escort to hunter, mouth gulping down its prey.

Alex Mustard

UP & COMING

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



THIRD

'QUINTUPLE EXPOSURE'
Barney Smith, United Kingdom

I took this image whilst snorkelling under a jetty in Indonesia. I used a Nikonos V 35mm film camera and loaded it up with a roll of Portra 400, making sure to note exactly how I loaded the film. I then shot through the roll, photographing close up shots of a feather star and clownfish, before rewinding the film and reloading it, but pushing the film forward half a frame. I then jumped back in and took a series of photos of the fish life and included a selfie for good measure. I was delighted to find that 5 of the the images blended together so well in this surreal underwater panorama, with the film spacing even highlighting the clownfish! I scanned the roll of film with a Hasselblad flextight scanner and the final image needed next to no adjustments.

Derawan Islands, East Kalimantan, Indonesia

Nikonos, V, Nikonos V underwater film camera, 20mm f/2.8, iso 400, f8, 1/250, Ambient Light

Judge's comment:
A highly inventive and attractive composite image. During judging we had no idea this was created on film, in camera. But loved the image and happily placed it third as a computer composite. We always appreciate such innovation in this category, as it is focused on celebrating fresh talent.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

UP & COMING

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'MY KINGDOM'
Simon Biddie, United Kingdom

Male California sea lions are distinct from female sea lions - Males are larger in size, have thick necks and possess a protruding sagittal crest. During the mating season, males become territorial, and protect their harem, which can be up to 30 females. On this dive, this particular male was more curious of our presence, allowing us to stay with his harem for an extended period, occasionally coming closer to inspect us onlookers. The photo was taken as the sun was setting behind the harem, with the male approached close overhead.

Los Islotes, La Paz, Mexico

Nikon, D850, Nikon 8-15mm f3.5-4.5E, Nikon 8-15mm f3.5-4.5E, iso 1250, 11, 1/250, Inon Z-330

Judge's comment:
A perfectly timed and sympathetically lit image; it freezes these agile subjects and tells the complete story. The parting shoal and the sun's rays complete the perfection.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

UP & COMING

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'CATFISH CONSTELLATION'
Shane Smith, New Zealand

Juvenile striped eel catfish form tightly-packed shoals and roam around the reef looking like a single super-organism. I wanted to capture this duality - individuals in the context of a greater whole, so wanted the shoal to be neatly packed together and all facing me. To achieve this I needed to predict the direction that the catfish would swim in, then fin down and lie motionless on the sandy bottom on breath-hold, waiting with baited breath to see whether they would approach despite my presence. After many attempts this shoal grew curious and comfortable enough to swim right up to my dome and I was able to get this shot.

Waya Island, Yasawa Group, Fiji

Sony, Alpha 1, Nauticam na-a1, Sony FE 28-60mm F4-5.6 Lens with Nauticam WWL-1B, iso 200, f/11, 1/60, 2x Retra Pro X

Judge's comment:
Excellent capture of behavior and good example of calmness and patience! This image could also have placed in the black and white category. Nice composition! Well done!

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

UP & COMING

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



UPY 2023

HIGHLY COMMENDED

'SHORTFIN MAKO'
Jules Jacobs, United States

Once a common sight in San Diego's waters, mako sharks suffer from their prominent and attractive dorsal fins, a literal target on their back for use in Shark Fin soup. Found mainly on the high seas, their conservation falls to the international community. After earning CITES Appendix II protection in 2019, this species is on the uptick. To ensure their future in San Diego's waters, we must ensure that Makos are protected throughout the whole of their pelagic home, not just in any one nation's waters. As I watched the shark look into my camera's domeport, I felt it study my movements. I left the water, sharing an interaction that could be described as the mutual respect and curiosity of two sentient creatures. I left knowing that we must do everything possible to protect them and their pelagic home.

Seven Mile Bank, San Diego, United States

Nikon D850, Nauticam NA D850, Nikon Nikkor 16-35mm f/4.0G AF-S ED VR, iso 400, f/22, 1/30th, Dual Sea & Sea YS-D2

Judge's comment:
What a nice and artistic split shot! The image caught my attention from the beginning and was one of my favorites for the top three as well. Excellent light from the strobes. Well done!

Tobias Friedrich

UP & COMING

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



UPY 2023

HIGHLY COMMENDED

'MOTHERHOOD'
Kat Zhou, United States

This photo depicts a southern right whale calf and its mother slowly swimming by in the bay the calf was born in. After giving birth, the mothers will remain in this bay for many months without feeding, nursing their calves until they are strong enough to migrate to their summer feeding grounds further south. It was a magical experience to get to share time in the water with these animals. Though they move slowly and calmly, the calves are incredibly curious, and they would sometimes circle around us in the water for hours! Named so because they were the 'right' whales to hunt, right whales were almost hunted to extinction by whalers. Though their recovery is still highly dependent on the health of the ocean, it was a breath of fresh air to be surrounded by hundreds of mother-calf pairs in this bay. Photo taken under Argentinian government permit.

Peninsula Valdez, Argentina

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, Nikon 8-15mm fisheye with Kenko 1.4x teleconverter, iso 400, f/8, 250, 2 x Inon Z330

Judge's comment:
What a nice encounter! The composition is also perfect! I have the feeling though, that there is still potential for more post production, but nevertheless a very nice image and well executed.

Tobias Friedrich

UP & COMING

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'ANEMONES FLUORESCE UNDER STORM'
Jules Jacobs, United States

In the La Jolla tide pools, a colony of aggregating anemones (Anthopleura elegantissima) begins the transition to low tide. Life in the intertidal is as diverse as it is treacherous, with each day marked by the ebb and flow of water. Made up of a colony of genetically identical individuals, each patch of anemones is a set of clones, asexually derived from a single individual. This image was made using a UV excitation filter over my strobe and an amber gel behind my lens to cut down on excessive blue light. The bright green comes from the fluorescence of the green fluorescent protein, GFP. GFP when excited by ultraviolet light gives off a special wavelength of light. This light is only visible to the human eye when offset by an amber filter to absorb excess blue light.

La Jolla Shores, San Diego, United States

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, AF-S FISHEYE NIKKOR 8-15mm f/3.5-4.5E ED, iso 5000, f/14, 1/160th, Dual Sea & Sea YS-D2, Nightsea Excitation Filter

Judge's comment:
Jules has created a fascinating image here, combining the challenges of shooting fluorescent anemones in a split level composition. Outstanding and innovative.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

UP & COMING

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'LIGHT IN THE DARK'

Nuria Costa, Spain

This shot was taken off the northern coast of Ibiza Island. I had been wanting to visit this location for a long time and finally did this summer. Together with some good friends, we grabbed the camera and our free diving gear, and headed there to catch the best light and with no other people around. About midday, the sun strikes right through the opening on the upper part allowing in a breathtaking beam of light that lasts for less than an hour. Even though it was a bit challenging trying to get the perfect shot against the clock, it was absolutely worth it! It was also the first time I was shooting without flashes, but really wanted to give the sunbeam and the free diver silhouette the adequate prominence.

Ibiza island, Spain

Canon, 5D MIII, Nauticam NA, Sigma 15mm f/2.8 EX DG Fisheye, iso 800, f/5.0, 1/125, None, only natural light

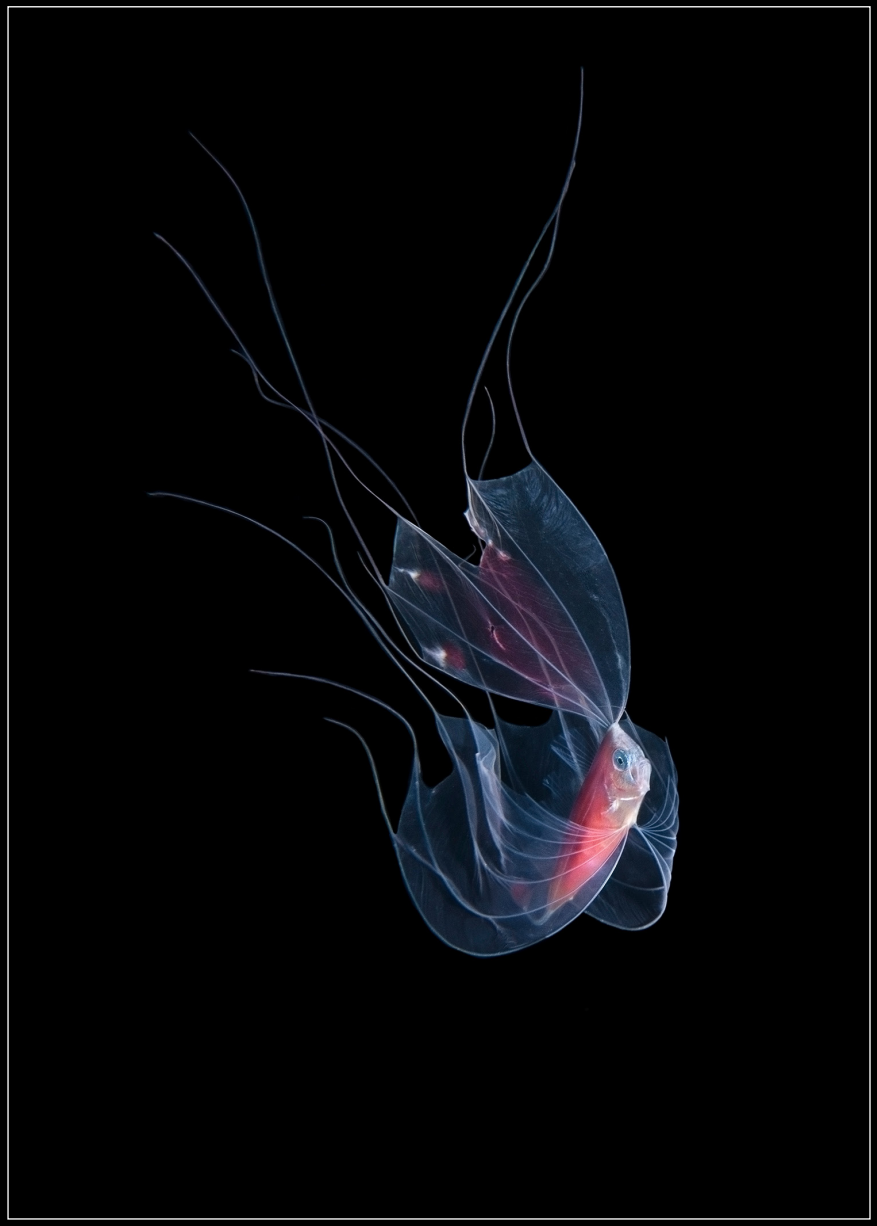
Judge's comment:
Such a confident image with every part of the frame, from the shadows to the sunlight and the model's reflections completing the canvas. The standard of this year's entries was extremely high and to be in the top ten this year is a major achievement.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

UP & COMING

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'LARVAL RIBBONFISH'

Kat Zhou, United States

This photo depicts a larval ribbon fish, found on a blackwater dive off the coast of West Palm Beach, Florida. Though I love all forms of diving, blackwater diving remains my favoriteI love the thrill of finding these beautiful critters swimming in the water column and the challenge of having to constantly reposition yourself to get a good angle with subjects that can swim erratically. When I first swam up to this fish, its had all of its fins tucked in, but, as I followed it, it opened up for a split second, allowing me to get this shot. Though this species of larval ribbon fish is seen once in a while in South Florida, this one has the prettiest decorations of any that I have seen!

West Palm Beach, Florida, USA

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, Nikon 60mm Macro, iso 400, f/22, 1/250, Inon Z330

Judge's comment:
Blackwater diving has created a whole new raft of amazing subjects and a surfeit of entries so images have to be special to please the weary Judges'? eyes and this one certainly did.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

Triton Bay Divers

Kaimana, West Papua, Indonesia









www.tritonbaydivers.com

British Underwater Photographer of the Year

Winners

2023: Ollie Clarke
2022: Matty Smith
2021: Mark Kirkland
2020: Nick More
2019: Richard Barnden
2018: Grant Thomas
2017: Nick Blake
2016: Dan Bolt
2015: Matt Doggett
2003: Andy Heath
2001: Pete Atkinson
1999: Pete Atkinson
1983: Peter Rowlands
1979: Warren Williams
1976: Peter Scoones
1970: Peter Scoones
1968: Colin Doeg

Most Promising British Underwater Photographer

Winners

2023: Theo Vickers
2022: Paul Pettitt
2021: Alice Bennett
2020: Nur Tucker
2019: Malcolm Nimmo
2018: Tony Stephenson
2017: Nicholai Georgiou

British Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



WINNER

'THE SWARM'
Ollie Clarke, Australia

The whale sharks on the Ningaloo are often accompanied by bait-balls like this one, where the small fish use the shark as a floating shelter. However this one was huge, much denser and with a lot more fish than usual, so I was really excited to photograph it. The shark almost looked as if it was getting fed up with the small fish and it was attempting to shake off the swarm. It would make steep dives and then ascend again right away thrashing its tail, but the fish would just swirl even more densely around the poor shark, who would have barely been able to see through the bait-ball! I was hoping to spend a bit of time photographing this shark, but after some ups and downs, he dissapeared into the depths of the Indian Ocean, an encounter I'll never forget.

Ningaloo Reef, Australia

Sony, A7Riii, Nauticam NA-A7Riii, Sony 28-60 with Nauticam WACP-1 , iso 400, f/8, 1/250, Natural light

Judge's comment:
For me this is predator and the prey. Whale sharks are sometimes mis-labelled as plankton feeders, but they are also active predators of schools of small fish. Ollie's stunning image is perfectly timed as the shark pounces, switching from benign escort to hunter, mouth gulping down its prey.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

Most Promising British Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



WINNER

'AN ISLAND'S WILD SEAS'

Theo Vickers, United Kingdom

Sunlight beats down through a marine jungle of Himanthalia algae on the chalk reefs of the Needles Marine Conservation Zone. The purple-tipped tentacles of snakelocks anemones (Anemonia viridis) rising up from the forest floor. Striking rock formations, the Needles on the Isle of Wight attracts close to 500,000 visitors annually. Yet, like many of Britain's marine habitats the beauty and biodiversity of the island's chalk reefs that lie below, from nudibranchs and rays to cuttlefish and cuckoo wrasse, are largely unknown to most. Exploring the shallower reefs on a summer evening, my mission was to capture a wide angle image that documented this stunning local habitat, combining both the towering forests above and the anemones that rule the chalk seabed below. After several unsatisfying attempts I stumbled upon this gully packed with snakelocks, and sinking into the forest beneath, found the composition I had been seeking.

Needles Marine Conservation Zone, Isle of Wight, United Kingdom

Sony , A6400, Fantasea FA6400, Sony 16-50mm, iso 500, f/10, 1/160, Natural Lighting

Judge's comment:
What a stunning image ! This magical and mystic atmosphere is just blasting. A very good example of what you can achieve even with a small camera and an artistic and good eye! The blurry foreground even gives you the impression that you are in a small, tiny world, looking up into the weed. Very well done! The only little, little downside is the sunburst, which is a bit too bright. :-)

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023



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BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE

Category History

2023 Theo Vickers (UK)
2022 Henley Spiers (UK)
2021 Mark Kirkland (UK)
2020 Arthur Kingdon (UK)
2019 Robert Bailey (UK)
2018 Grant Thomas (UK)
2017 Melvin Redeker (Netherlands)
2016 Marcus Blatchford (UK)
2015 Matt Doggett (UK)

BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



CATEGORY WINNER

'AN ISLAND'S WILD SEAS'

Theo Vickers, United Kingdom

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Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



RUNNER UP

'SCILLONIAN REFLECTIONS'
MNimmo, United Kingdom

The waters around the Isles of Scilly, with their abundance and diversity of marine life, offer magical snorkelling and diving experiences. In particular, the transient late Spring/Summer influx of jellyfish are a wonderful sight, including the migration of the compass jellyfish. This image was taken from the waters of Great Bay, St Martins. The compass jellyfish was gently pulsating close to surface, allowing for the inclusion in the image of a section of the sky above, but also by careful positioning the camera, a partial mirror reflection of the main body of the jellyfish.

St Martins, Isles of Scilly, United Kingdom

Nikon, D7200, Nauticam D7200, Tokina 10-17mm, iso 200, f/25, 1/200, 2 x INON Z-330

Judge's comment:
A minimalistic composition that really celebrates the beauty and delicacy of gelatinous compass medusa.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



THIRD

'OILY BLUE'
Nicholas More, United Kingdom

Blue Sharks provide one of the UK's finest big animal encounters. They are naturally bold, curious and characterful. Here a slow shutter speed combined with rear curtain sync and lots of flash, captures the shark swimming through the frame, whilst rendering the background with an oily, smooth texture. This created a more serene and naturalistic image than my usual, more dramatic front-curtain, accelerated panning portraits.

Please support bite-back.com in their mission of Shark and marine conservation and to prevent overfishing of Shark & Ray species.

10 Miles South of Penzance, Cornwall, United Kingdom

Nikon, D500, Nauticam NA D500, Tokina 10-17mm f/3.5-4.5 AT-X DX AF Fisheye , iso 100, f/18, 1/8th, 2 X Inon Z330

Judge's comment:
Try as I might, I couldn't ignore this perfect image of a comparatively recently over photographed subject. Quality and talent will always prevail.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'INQUISITIVE NURSEHOUND IN MORNING SUN'

Martin Stevens, United Kingdom

At sunrise on a summer morning I went to photograph jellyfish, and soon after a 1.5 m nursehound swam up and lay down right beside me, like a big pet dog. It looked up as if to say "why not take photos of me instead?" and thoughtfully positioned itself between the kelp with the sun rays behind. I had several great encounters with the local nursehounds last summer, often with adults swimming up close, and I'd even begun to wonder if some had started to recognise the weird ungainly human who kept appearing trying to hold his breath. We're lucky to have a good number of these sharks locally. Unfortunately, they are undergoing significant population declines in many regions and are IUCN listed as 'vulnerable'. They're full of character and need our care so that encounters like these are not for a few lucky ones like me.

Cornwall (Falmouth), United Kingdom

Olympus , E-M5-MarkIII, Isotta , Olympus M. Zuiko 7-14mm Pro, iso 500, f/13, 1/160, One Sea and Sea YS-D3 Mark II strobe

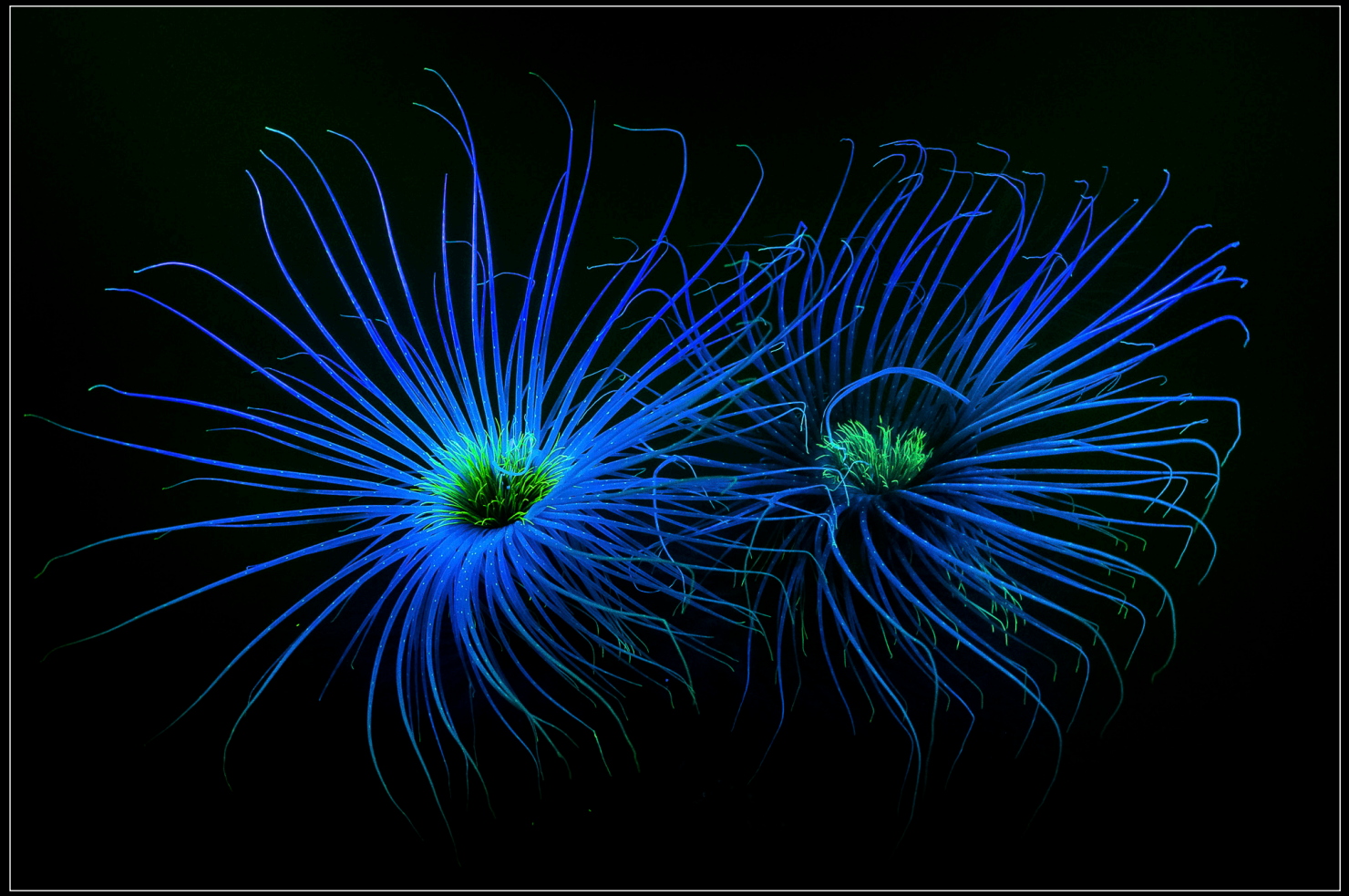
Judge's comment:
Very nice framing and such a nice portrait of a common species, but photographed perfectly. The sunburst in the background is an amazing add-on to the kelp forest which is at the sides. If there would have been a diver or another small, additional element in the background, the image could have even placed higher.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'FIREWORK DUET'
Dan Bolt, United Kingdom

Loch Fyne is one of the best places in the UK to see these amazing Fireworks Anemones. No-where else has their sheer numbers, and within in relatively easy access to sports divers. I have long been fascinated by the way these creatures display florescence under the right lighting conditions, and to get two individuals together like this was an opportunity too good to miss.

Loch Fyne, western Scotland, United Kingdom

Olympus OM-D, E-M1, Aquatica A-EM1, Olympus 14-42mm with Nauticam WWL-1, iso 1000, f/5.6, 1/320, 2x Sea & Sea YS-D1 with FireDive Gear filters

Judge's comment:
Fireworks anemones live up to their name like never before in Dan's fluorescent photograph of one of the UK's most impressive invertebrate animals.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



UPY 2023

HIGHLY COMMENDED

'RIVER DANCE'
Jenny Stock, United Kingdom

This picture was taken on my first day of shooting grayling and my delight with the fish was reflected in the sheer volume of images I insisted on taking. My patience paid off when these characterful swans joined the party. A degree of gentle people management was needed during the shoot as passing pedestrians were fascinated by the occasion. Especially when the swans appeared, and excited children began entering the water in their wellies!

For me, underwater photography has been as much a journey of friendship as it has been incredible encounters with nature and beautiful imagery. I couldn't have achieved this shot without the help of superb inventor and underwater photographer Paul Colley who designed and created the underwater housing; so as to take images of freshwater fish remotely from the riverside.

River Anton, England

Nikon, D4, Home Made by Paul Colley, Sigma 15mm, iso 1250, 6.3, 250, External flash

Judge's comment:
Jenny's revealing image of the hidden world of our familiar chalk streams is fascinating. This complex scene invites us to pause longer and explore its many facets.

Alex Mustard

BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'TWILIGHT AT THE WRECK'
Mark Kirkland, United Kingdom

The wreck of the Kaffir has sat protruding from the Firth of Clyde since 1974 however it's position behind a large working harbour means it's completely hidden from the general public. When I first heard about it a couple of years ago I knew there could be amazing photo opportunities. I thought the jellyfish were gone for the season however out of the blue, reports started coming in of huge numbers of lion's mane jellyfish washing up. This coincided nicely with an incoming evening storm. Despite the weather warnings, I donned my snorkelling gear and spent until after the last of the light trying to get a well composed split. The price to pay was a thoroughly stung face.

Ayr, United Kingdom

Nikon , D500, Nauticam NA-D500, Tokina 10-17mm, iso 640, f18, 1/30, 2 x Retra Primes

Judge's comment:
Very nice composition in a dark, moody light, which all of the Judge's liked very much. The wreck in the background is the perfect, tiny element which completes the diagonal of elements. The sky and the dark water round the image up. Keep on doing photographs like this please. :-)

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'SUNRISE SWANS'
Mark Kirkland, United Kingdom

At low tide, the southern end of Ayr beach comes alive with seabirds of all different species however the scene is always dominated by the huge group of swans who dwarf all the other birds. They're well accustomed to interacting with humans, so I knew there could be photo opportunities. With weeks of overcast clouds this winter, I made the most of the forecast of a frosty clear morning and arrived just before sunrise. As predicted, the curious swans were quite comfortable as I waded into the water in my drysuit. The river run-off made underwater conditions tricky, however I liked the contrast between the tannins rich water and the clear blue morning sky.

Ayr beach, Scotland

Nikon D500, Nauticam NA-D500, Tokina 10-17mm, iso 100, 14, 1/500, 2 x Retra Primes

Judge's comment:
Swan images, by their very nature, always catch the eye but this is especially appealing with all but one of the swans making a major contribution to the framing, perfect eye contact with the photographic icing provided by the backlit water droplets.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'CONCEALED'
Aaron Sanders, United Kingdom

Like many UK divers, this year's unexpected summer surge of octopus, had me out most days, excitedly searching for these incredible and otherworldly beings. Days were spent searching; numerous sightings were reported at my local dive site; yet my buddy and I often entered the water only minutes too late, missing the encounter. Until one fortunate morning, whilst exploring the kelp fronds along the back edge of our local reef, my buddy performed an exited underwater dance of amazement, franticly pointing between the kelp. Sure enough, perfectly concealed, a large common octopus (notably uncommon in the UK) sat beneath the swaying fronds. Unbothered by our presence, the octopus looked out at us, before gradually creeping forward as though to inspect us more closely. Not fully reassured that we weren't predators the curious octopus rearranged the kelp into a curtain in front of it, as though shielding itself from us.

Porthkerris Divers Cornwall , United Kingdom

Nikon, D500, Natuticam NA-500 , Tokina 10-17mm, iso 100, f/4.5, 1/250, 2x Inon 240

Judge's comment:
Aaron's portrait of an octopus peering out from the fronds of a kelp forest is a stunning portrait of one of the less commonly seen denizens of British seas.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'E49'
Kirsty Andrews, United Kingdom

The E49 is a truly atmospheric wreck. This WWI British submarine hit a mine in Balta Sound in Shetland on 12 March 1917; she sank quickly and there were no survivors of the 31 crew. More than a century later she now sits in white sand 29m deep, slowly disappearing into the seabed and providing a home to ling, crabs and octopuses.

I shot in natural light and stitched 7 images together in post-processing to create a panorama that captures the whole wreck, with divers exploring her.

Balta Sound, Shetland, Scotland, UK

Nikon, D500, Nauticam NA D500, Tokina 10-17mm, iso 1600, f7.1, 1/30, Natural light

Judge's comment:
Wrecks in British waters shouldn't look this good :-) and, often times, they certainly don't but the right use of technique and black and white has created a groundbreaking image.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

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- **Battery capacity to fire up to 3000 flashes (500 flashes on full).**
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· Illumination : 150° · Color temperature : 4800K · Flash capacity : 500 flashes at full power, 3000 flashes at 1st mode
· Recycle time : 0.1s---1.1s · Flash speed : continuous unlimited flash sync with 10 flashs/sec at first mode
· Focus/target light : 5W / 500 lumens (center focus) · Waterproof depth : 100m
· Weight (underwater) : 120g · Dimensions : 170 x 90 mm · Weight (on land) : 1080g without battery

BRITISH WATERS MACRO

Category History

2023 Kirsty Andrews (UK)
2022 Dan Bolt (UK)
2021 Malcolm Nimmo (UK)
2020 Laura Storm (UK)
2019 Arthur Kingdon (UK)
2018 Henley Spiers (UK)
2017 Kirsty Andrews (UK)
2016 Dan Bolt (UK)
2015 Trevor Rees (UK)

BRITISH WATERS MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



CATEGORY WINNER

'EGG EATERS'

Kirsty Andrews, United Kingdom

I have long admired others' pictures of nudibranchs feeding on the egg coils of other nudibranch species across the world. I'd also seen this nudibranch species, Favorinus branchialis, before, and I knew that it fed in this way, but never seen it in action until recently. I was therefore thrilled to find three large specimens feeding on a big coil of eggs in Shetland, Scotland. The eggs were several inches across, in a wide spiral, so the challenge was to isolate an appealing composition of eggs and nudibranchs.

Shetland, Scotland, United Kingdom

Nikon, D500, Nauticam NA D500, 60mm, iso 320, f29, 1/250, 2x Retra Pro strobes

Judge's comment:
What a nice and clean composition of these nudibranchs. From the beginning this image caught my intention and I knew it was more than likely to win this category. It's not only a macro shot, but also a portrait and has additionally a element of behavior. What more can you wish for? Very well done and congratulations!

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



RUNNER UP

'SANCTUARY'
MNimmo, United Kingdom

A sea urchin's shell continues to serve an importance ecological service even after the original occupying urchin has long gone. The inside of the shell provides a surface on which small fish species (such as gobies) may spawn and the inner space of the shell may act as a sanctuary or refuge against potential predators. The urchin shell in this image was found in the upper reaches of Loch Duich, Scotland and on closer examination a small butterfish was observed taking refuge inside whist peering out tentatively.

Loch Duich, Scotland

Nikon, D7200, Nauticam D7200, Nikon 60mm Macro, iso 100, f/25, 1/160, 2 x INON Z-330

Judge's comment:
The slippery butterfish is difficult to photograph, yet Malcolm's revealing portrait perfectly captures its shyness as it peeks out from inside this colourful old sea urchin shell.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



THIRD

'COMPANIONS'

Ryan Stalker, United Kingdom

The sea was choppy to rough and there were rafts of seaweed floating just offshore in Chesil Cove. These rafts of weed can bring travellers from far away or from just down the coast and are always worth investigating. I snorkelled out to them to investigate what was there. To my surprise the rafts had many of these pipefish within it as well as other species. These two at only about 50mm long just wouldn't leave each other alone. One of them clinging to a piece of floating bootlace weed whilst the other securely holds onto its companions neck.

The image is taken from below and is looking up towards the surface with the fluffy white clouds in the background. After many failed attempts at different angles the shot from below makes them stand out with the beautiful interaction between the two.

Chesil Beach, Dorset, United Kingdom

Sony , A7R IV, Nauticam NA 2020, Sony 28-60mm, iso 320, F13, 1/160, Inon S2000

Judge's comment:
Graphic and tender delicacy complimented by a contrasting but unobtrusive background. All words I would never have used about a British macro image just a few years ago. I think we've come a long way recently.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'CURVACIOUS KELP'

Sandra Stalker, United Kingdom

This shot was taken on a lovely summer shore diving trip to the fabulous Porthkerris Drawna rock. This particular dive I was trying out a slightly wider lens instead of my usual obsession with supermacro so had no idea what to photograph. On entering the water looking around for potential subjects the thing that immediately stood out was the stunning golden colour and beautiful curves of the healthy kelp all over the site. I really loved the solitary snails just gliding along the kelp, mooching around minding their own business. I found a wonderful and not too stroppy snail supermodel positioned nicely on a strand of kelp. To light the shot I decided to snoot the scene to create shadows to accentuate the fabulous curves and golden colour of the kelp against a dark background. My aim is always to show beauty in the ordinary through my images.

Porthkerris, Cornwall, England

Sony , A7RIV, Nauticam na A7RIV, Sony FE 28-60mm F4-5.6 Lens , iso 400, f/13, 1/200, Backscatter miniflash with snoot

Judge's comment:
Excellent light and very artistic image of an ordinary subject which is not easy to get. The photographer did a great job to frame this photograph perfectly. I love these moody and simple scenes in a kelp forest very much and was happy that the image placed so high in the competition. Well done.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'FUR COAT'
Cathy Lewis, United Kingdom

Loch Carron in the Scottish Highlands is rich with marine life and invariably a productive site for photography. Swimming out from Strome slip I noticed a juvenile sea toad perched on the edge of a kelp frond. It was busy decorating itself with Obelia (Sea fur), a zigzag hydroid that commonly grows on kelp. The crab uses the stinging hydroid as a form of defence, attaching it to Velcro-like hooks on its shell. It was nicely isolated against the background enabling me to create a clean, distraction-free image. I used various lighting angles to highlight the hydroids, keeping the kelp frond in shadow.

Loch Carron, Scotland, United Kingdom

Nikon, D500, Nauticam NA D500, Nikon 60mm, iso 250, f18, 1/250, Single Backscatter strobe

Judge's comment:
This sea toad crab has disguised itself by attaching hydroids to its carapace. And we all know where it got them!

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

‘IT’S A FISH-EAT-FISH WORLD’
Cathy Lewis, United Kingdom

I was photographing this Long-spined sea scorpion in Loch Creran in the Scottish Highlands. It was perfectly camouflaged against the pink coralline algae covering the gravelly sea bed. Surrounding it were dozens of Painted gobies hopping around picking up tiny particles from the substrate, and seemingly oblivious to the danger lurking in their midst. One got too close and, quick as a flash, the scorpion fish opened its cavernous mouth and sucked the goby in. I’m not sure who was more surprised, the goby or me!

Loch Creran, Scotland, United Kingdom

Nikon, D500, Nauticam NA D500, Nikon 60mm, iso 250, f16, 1/250, Single Backscatter strobe

Judge’s comment:
Perfect catch, both for the scorpionfish and the photographer. Had the background been handled slightly better, during this fleeting opportunity, this could have been our top shot.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'LUMPY'
Kirsty Andrews, United Kingdom

I do love lumpsuckers, both the large bulbous bloated-looking adults and the far cuter tiny babies. Male adults tend to be reddish orange and females blueish, but I have seen juniors in a range of colours. This was a vibrant red and a confident individual about 1 inch in size, safely attached to the kelp stipe with its fused pelvic fins that create the sucker the fish is named for.

Lochcarron, Scotland, United Kingdom

Nikon, D500, Nauticam NA D500, 105mm, iso 200, f11, 1/250, 2x Retra Pro strobes

Judge's comment:
Cute is not a word that springs to my mind when thinking of adult British Lumpsuckers but, as kids often are, this juvenile is definitely that. The contrasting colours and strong composition capitalise on this character's charisma.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'HIDDEN GEM'
Cathy Lewis, United Kingdom

Life in the St Abbs marine reserve in Scotland is so spectacular that it can be easy to overlook the really small stuff. These Long clawed porcelain crabs are less than a centimetre long and not always easy to see, but once you start looking they are everywhere, even carpeting rock walls in some areas. They can also be found, like this one, nestled in the soft coral Alcyonium digitatum or deadmen's fingers. They use their fan-like mouth parts to filter the water for particulates. Catching the crab with its fans extended is quite the photographic challenge.

St Abbs, Scotland, United Kingdom

Nikon, D500, Nauticam NA D500, Nikon 60mm with Nauticam SMC1 dioptre, iso 200, f20, 1/250, Twin Sea & Sea YS-D1 strobes

Judge's comment:
Such pastel delicacy in British waters is a pleasant change from the black background days of yesteryear and long may it continue. The subject, its texture and the framing are exquisite.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'SPIRAL OF LIFE'

MNimmo, United Kingdom

Plymouth Sound has a rich abundance and diversity of marine life, particularly in the area influenced by strong tidal streams, supporting reefs colonised by muti-coloured jewel anemones, vibrant coloured sponges, hydroids and fan worms. Fan worms have protective tubes from which beautifully delicate feeding feathery tentacles emerge varying in colour. This macro abstract image attempts to capture the beauty and delicate nature of these 'feathers'.

Plymouth Sound, United Kingdom

Nikon, D7200, Nauticam D7200, Nikon 60mm Macro, iso 100, f/25, 1/200, 2 x INON Z-330

Judge's comment:
Simple and artistic composition of a common subject - this is what I like to see very much. The colors are just amazing and very nice to see in British waters. Well done!

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS MACRO

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'GOLD'
Ryan Stalker, United Kingdom

Portland Harbour is great for night dives in the winter. There are numerous Bobtail squids at the location which have massive personalities for their size. On this particular dive I intended to get in to look for these creatures and I took a few backgrounds down to see if I could do something a bit different. This Bobtail was swimming about and I decided to put my glitter boards to the side on the seabed and concentrate on taking the pictures of just the creature. However, on the Bobtail seeing the board this little chap decided it would be much more fun to sit on the glitter board and investigate it. The Bobtail stayed on the board for a good 20 minutes thoroughly checking out this sparkly board in its territory.

Portland Harbour, Dorset, United Kingdom

Sony , A7R IV, Nauticam NA2020, Sony 90mm, iso 100, 5.6, 1/125, Inon S2000

Judge's comment:
I love the usage of different background and to create different, artistic images. Not all Judges liked the image as much as I did, also due to the fact that the background is clearly artificial, but we decided to have it placed as the creativity of the photographer and the very good execution are speaking for themselves. Nicely done!

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER

Category History

2023 Dan Bolt (UK)
2022 Lewis Jefferies (UK)
2021 Kirsty Andrews (UK)
2020 Dan Bolt (UK)
2019 Victoria Walker (UK)

This category showcases the coexistence of nature and human activities on the UK seabed.

The Crown Estate is driving the sustainable development of the seabed around England, Wales and Northern Ireland for the benefit of the nation. Our role is central to supporting the delivery of the UK's net zero agenda, including growing offshore wind, supporting the development of carbon capture and hydrogen markets, alongside facilitating the development of other sectors involving the seabed. The demand for marine space is growing at an unprecedented rate.

We work collaboratively with others to accelerate the responsible development of the seabed, while helping the country optimise the economic, social and environmental potential of the marine environment.

THE CROWN ESTATE

The British Waters living together category is sponsored by The Crown Estate

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



WINNER

'PIPE REEF'
Dan Bolt, United Kingdom

We were initially interested in this site in Loch Fyne for the fields of Firework Anemones, but of equal interest was an old pipe that had this patterned concrete protective covering along its length. This shallow artificial reef was home to many different species, including some large Langoustines (Nephrops norvegicus) who were seemingly unperturbed by my presence.

Loch Fyne, western Scotland, United Kingdom

Olympus , OM-D E-M1, Aquatica A-EM1, Panasonic 8mm fisheye, iso 1250, f/5.6, 1/30, 2x Sea & Sea YD-D1

Judge's comment:
A seabed structure provides the perfect habitat for marine life, and a great recreational dive site for people. The composition balances perfectly the langoustine with the diver, as it scuttles across the intriguing structure.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

THE CROWN ESTATE

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



RUNNER UP

'WANDERING MERMAID'
Lukasz Jan Kowalski, United Kingdom

One of my summer morning swims with Emma. She is a very good swimmer and amazing free diver so is always pleasure be with her underwater and capture this moments on camera. I heard from Emma about her favourite underwater destinations and on this day she was showing me one from this list. This place is magical and always full of fish and other marine animals. As soon I knew what we can except on this location was obvious what kind of photos we will try. My goal with photography is travel the world to capture outstanding beauty of oceans and surrounding areas also to help with conservation and education of this amazing places.

South West, Falmouth Bay, England,Cornwall

Canon, 5D mk III, Aquatech Elite, Canon EF 15 mm f/2.8, iso 1250, f/7.1, 1/640

Judge's comment:
Very nice and moody atmosphere in this well executed image. We liked it so much and decided to have it placed as a runner up - despite the fact that it could have won if it was a bit brighter and that one little fish wouldn't be swimming on front of the model's face. But nevertheless a great image which perfectly shows how nice the waters in England are.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

THE CROWN ESTATE

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



THIRD

'MUSSEL LINES'

Henley Spiers, United Kingdom

Farmed shellfish offer a means to create much needed marine protein without taxing the environment as heavily as wild fishing or fish aquaculture. These mussels lines do not require feeding as they nourish themselves from nutrients in the passing water. Moreover, they have the added benefit of improving water quality through filtration. Exploring the Shetland mussel lines was an excitingly novel dive, with the lines themselves proving to be surprisingly photogenic.

Shetland, United Kingdom

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, 28-70mm @28mm with Nauticam WACP-1, iso 640, f/13, 1/60, Inon Z330 x 2

Judge's comment:
This was a particular favourite of mine because it combines an obvious message with appealing visual flair and, for once, it is a good news marine farming story. Now I can eat mussels without the guilt.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

THE CROWN ESTATE

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'PASH AND PAL'

Martyn Guess, United Kingdom

This image was shot at Lundy Island UK the home of a large colony of Grey Seals. I go there to dive with the Seal pups at least once every year. It is a truly amazing experience. My friend Pash Baker was free diving and using her brightly coloured free diving fins which attracted this little guy. He simply wouldn't leave her alone, even when she was coming up for air. In the late afternoon sun Pash was surrounded by strong sun beams which I think really help make the image pop. The interaction of both diver and Seal, the grasping of the fin and the eye contact between them completes the story. Shot with the amazing Nauticam WACP, giving me a zoom capability on my full frame camera, which helped me to quickly compose the image in the split second that the action all came together.

Lundy, United Kingdom

Nikon, D5, Nauticam ND5, Nikon 28-70mm with Nauticam WACP, iso 200, F14, 1/200th, 2 x INON 240's

Judge's comment:
A joyous photo, showing a seal gently approaching and interacting with a snorkeller. A perfect poster for one of many recreational opportunities in our seas.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

THE CROWN ESTATE

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'FREEDOM'
Andy Colls, United Kingdom

This dive in St Abbs, Scotland, was on a Tuesday evening, which I regularly attend as a guest of Pentland SAC. Going from West Harker to Anemone Gullies there is usually a string of pots following the reef line. I always look in to see what has been caught, but as I approached this pot there was a lobster claw trying to break for freedom, which certainly caught my eye.

West Harker to Anemone Gullies, St Abbs, Scotland, United Kingdom

Nikon, D60, Sea & Sea with wide angle port, 18-55, iso 400, f/8, 1/100, Subtronic Alpha

Judge's comment:
This image delivers a message! This is exactly what we wanted to see in this category and to also show a negative impact of the world that we share.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

THE CROWN ESTATE

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'CRAB UNDER PORTENCROSS PIER'

Mark Kirkland, United Kingdom

The abandoned pier at Portencross can be a fabulous dive when the visibility is good, however that's a rare occurrence. An even rarer occurrence is a sunny day in Scotland. The photography gods gifted me with both during this summer bimble to around 8 meters. The high sun created some nice textures, beams of light and shades of blue to frame this edible crab against.

Portencross, Ayrshire, Scotland

Nikon, D500, Nauticam NA-D500, Tokina 10-17mm, iso 200, f16, 1/80, 2 x Retra Primes

Judge's comment:
A good example of the juxtaposition between healthy marine life on a manmade structure and the impressive visiting marine life lifted by the celebratory sunburst.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

THE CROWN ESTATE

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'VALENTINE TANK REEF'
Dan Bolt, United Kingdom

We were initially interested in this site in Loch Fyne Six weeks before D-Day, seven Valentine Tanks were lost during the live-firing exercise Operation Smash. Sadly 6 crewmen were lost and these wrecks are now a protected Scheduled Monument. Diving on these tanks is a sombre treat, but the life they attract as artificial reefs is quite spectacular.

Dorset, the Valentine Tanks, United Kingdom

Olympus, OM-D E-M1, Aquatica A-EM1, Panasonic 8mm fisheye, iso 400, f/7.1, 1/320, 2x Sea & Sea YS-D1

Judge's comment:
An old shipwreck provides the perfect habitat for a conger eel and gangs of bib. Habitat like this is so attractive to these fish that at times it can be hard to see the habitat!

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

THE CROWN ESTATE

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'ANTHROPOCENE ANEMONES'

Billy Arthur, United Kingdom

Whilst freediving around and old pier in stromness harbour, the sun made an appearance and the resulting shafts of light shooting down between the pier legs were stunning. The legs were encrusted in life and one area in particular had a profusion of beautiful anemones and sponges. I wanted the scene to look as if the sun was the only light source so I had to be subtle with the strobe lighting to bring out the vibrant colours of the life beneath the pier. Luckily I came away with a few shots before the sun disappeared again behind the clouds. I love when nature takes over and brightens up our ugly Anthropocene instalments!

Stromness harbour, Scotland

Sony, A7riii , Nauticam NA A7RIII , Sony FE 28-60mm f4-5.6 - nauticam wwl-1, iso 250, F16, 1/160, 1 x Sea & Sea ys-d1

Judge's comment:
Not quite ideal compositionally, this shot nevertheless captures the tripod relationship between Anthropocene (I had to look that up) instalments, marine life and sunlight.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

THE CROWN ESTATE

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'SNORKELLING THE SMALLS'

Kirsty Andrews, United Kingdom

The Smalls lighthouse lies 20 miles West of Marloes Peninsula in Wales, and is only accessible when weather conditions permit. I'd hoped to photograph the grey seals that frolic here but although they were present, they stayed tantalisingly out of photographic range. Instead I focussed on a more cooperative compass jellyfish against the impressive backdrop of the lighthouse.

The Smalls Lighthouse, Wales, United Kingdom

Nikon, D500, Nauticam NA D500, Tokina 10-17mm, iso 1600, f18, 1/320, Natural light

Judge's comment:
Very well composed split shot of this jelly fish! The sun rays in the background round up the photograph. Well done!

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

THE CROWN ESTATE

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'TIMES THEY AREN'T A-CHANGING'
Barney Smith, United Kingdom

For a while I've been searching for a poignant image to reflect my experiencing photographing the waters in the UK. After taking the first image of the kelp underwater whilst snorkelling in Pembrokeshire, I drove back home along the M4 through Port Talbot and noticed how the huge fires and plumes of heavy industry mirrored the kelp rising up to the surface. I used a combination of my Hasselblad 500cm film camera from the 1960s and a new modern digital sensor to take both images, merging them later on in Photoshop. By using a combination of cameras & sensors from the past 50 years, I hoped to illustrate that although our relationship with the UK coastline has changed, we're still set in our ways when it comes to pollution and dependence on fossil fuels.

Pembrokeshire & Port Talbot, United Kingdom

Hasselblad, 500cm + CFV II 50C, Hugyfot Hasselblad Housing for 500C, 50mm f/4, iso 800, 11, 2s, Ambient Light

Judge's comment:
I loved this image right from the start and never tired of it but the visual message could easily be overlooked by non divers. Subtlety is powerful if you get the message.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

THE CROWN ESTATE

BRITISH WATERS COMPACT

Category History

2023 Tony Reed (UK)
2022 Martin Stevens (UK)
2021 Ian Wade (UK)
2020 Colin Garrett (UK)
2019 Martin Edser (UK)
2018 Vicky Paynter (UK)
2017 Simon Yates (UK)
2016 Paul Colley (UK)
2015 Trevor Rees (UK)

BRITISH WATERS COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



WINNER

'CRACK ROCK BLENNY'

Tony Reed, United Kingdom

I had been going back to this spot on Crack rock to capture the variable Blenny for several weeks. He was caring over his eggs inside the crevice so I was trying to capture the point when the eggs were hatching. Being such an inquisitive little chap he was always moving around getting closer to the camera until he got to this point where I took a few shots. I didn't stay too long as I didn't want to have any negative or detrimental affects on the parenting behaviour. It has been great to see an increase in the Variable Blenny around Torbay over the past couple of years.

Babbacombe, England

Olympus, TG4, Olympus PT-056, No lens, iso 200, f/4.9, 1/250, light and motion video light

Judge's comment:
Variable blennies are relative newcomers to our shores and I cannot believe one has ever been captured as perfectly as this before. What a portrait.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



RUNNER UP

'AUTUMN ABOVE AND BELOW'
James Lynott, United Kingdom

During autumn of 2022 I wanted to try and take splitshots with fallen leaves in the water that also captured some water movement, as well as the wonderful autumnal colours of the trees above. I had few locations in mind to try this, but one that worked out well was Glamis Den. I used my Canon G7xII/Fantasea FG7XII, along with a Weefine wfl01 lens, and underwater tripod setup. I had to balance a bit precariously on the water's edge to get the heavy setup into a suitable position in the water and then use a handheld torch to illuminate leaves passing by. Using a custom timer and 2 second exposures to take each shot I was lucky when a beech leaf drifted past at just the right time!

Glamis Den, Scotland

Canon, G7X MarkII, Fantasea FG7XII, Weefine WFL01, iso 125, f11, 2 sec, Light&Motion GoBe 850wide

Judge's comment:
Excellent example of an artistic image composition in an simple, but at the same time stunning environment - in case you have the vision! The photographer clearly got this right and executed it very well. I'm always happy to see long exposures like this in a competition. Keep it up!

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



THIRD

‘BEAUTY IN THE BLOW HOLE’

Tony Reed, United Kingdom

I had been trying for a few years to dive the Blow hole at Boscastle but bad conditions stopped play many times until late August last summer when I was on a family road trip. I arrived a couple of hours before high tide to check the spectacular blow hole doing its thing. The blow hole when submerged is a 63 meter long tunnel which runs right through the headland and out the other side. This is what causes the surge through, creating the blow! Because of this it needs to be dived on high slack as I found out the hard way. I got into the entrance and I was instantly pulled inside 5 meters. I spread my legs out and anchored down. I took a few shots and got out of there before returning a bit later to do the swim through.

Boscastle, England

Olympus, TG4, olympus PT-056, no lens, iso 200, f/2, 1/100, light and motion gobe 850 wide

Judge’s comment:
An anemone reaches for the light within a coral cave. The letterbox crop helps give the image a fabulous feeling of depth.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'CATSHARK LAYING LOW'

James Lynott , United Kingdom

This shot was taken at my favourite site to dive in Loch Leven during a lovely dive in June 2022. One particularly nice area of this site, a wonderful soft coral covered reef, can only be accessed when the tides are right, and it was here I came across this small-spotted catshark nestled amongst the brittlestars and soft corals. The visibility wasn't great, so I had to get in quite close and try to position my strobes to minimise backscatter as much as possible. Thankfully this catshark was quite patient and I was able to take a couple shots before continuing on my way.

Loch Leven, Scotland

Canon, G7X MarkII, Fantasea FG7XII, Weefine WFL01, iso 125, f6.3, 1/30, 2 x Sea&Sea YS-01Solis w/dome diffusers

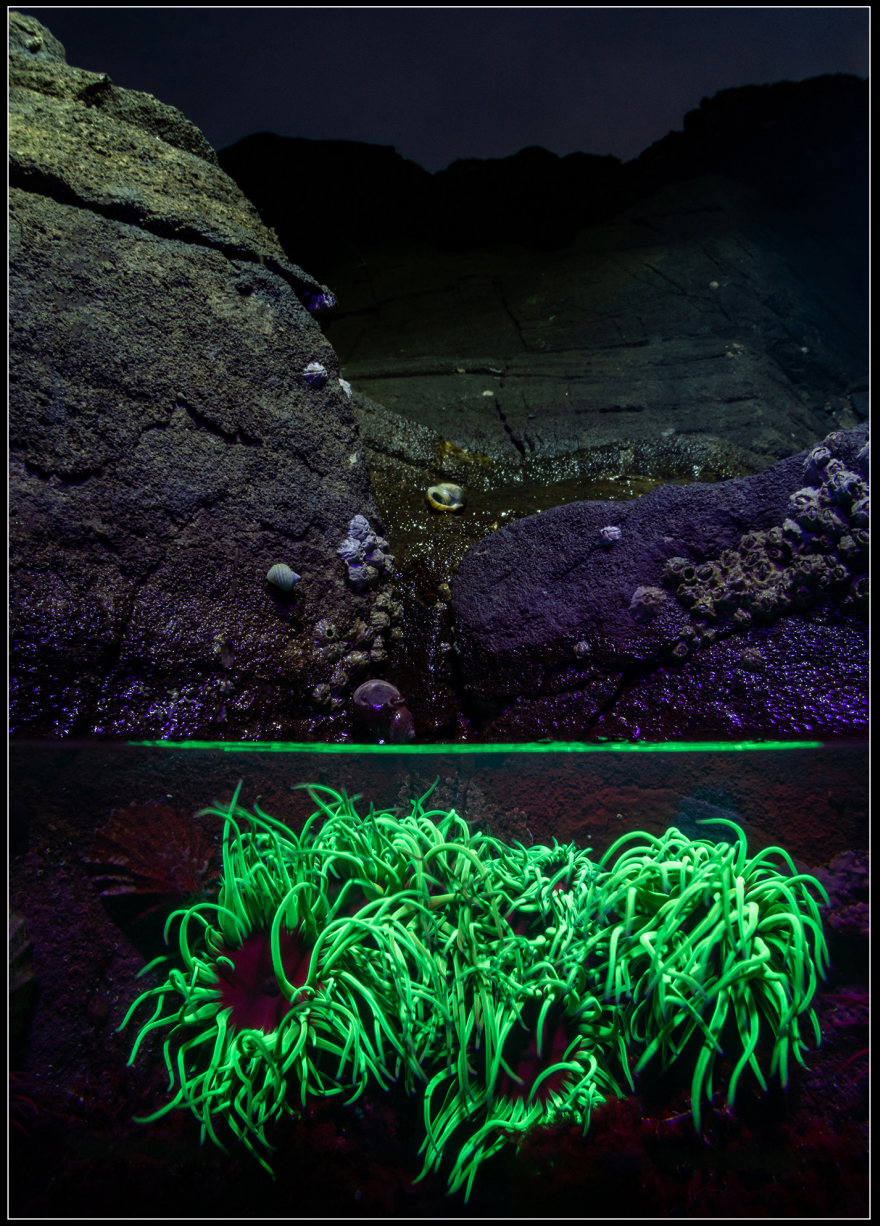
Judge's comment:
A celebratory image of how profuse British marine life can be. A lighter background would have impressed more.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'ROCKPOOL FLUORESCENCE'

James Lynott, United Kingdom

Split shots with fluorescing snakelocks anemones have been a bit of a project of mine for a while now and I had been trying to find ways to create more interesting shots with this technique. Most of the ideas I had require a lot of luck with weather and tide conditions, which didn't always work out! I found a new rockpool (with some helpful local advice) last year which contained some really nice snakelocks and showed promise for some nice shots. Taken in November 2022 this particular shot involved a very early start in order to reach the rockpool near Oban at around 07:15 and collect some images before sunrise. This was taken using a 1 second exposure on my Canon g7xII/ Fantasea FG7XII, along with a Weefine wfl01 lens, underwater tripod setup with L bracket, handheld UV torch to illuminate the anemones, and head torch light up the rocks.

Ganavan, Scotland

Canon, G7X MarkII, Fantasea FG7XII, Weefine WFL01, iso 125, f11, 1 sec, Head torch & a hand held UV light

Judge's comment:
Excellent play between the worlds in this split shot. The fluorescene light makes the shot, below and above the surface. If there would have been a small, additional element in the top side of the image - it could have been placed even higher.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'INQUISITIVE NUDI'
James Lynott, United Kingdom

On what was one of my first dives with the Fantasea UCL-900f wet lens, this shot was taken back in April 2022 at Creagan bridge. The bridge crosses the narrows of upper Loch Creran so this site is best dived at slack water, although it can be a fun drift as well. It is a shallow site, max 6-7m deep but is a wonderful dive and in April/early May there are countless nudibranchs of multiple species to be found. A perfect dive to get to grips with the macro lens, and snooted strobe. While on the way back to the exit point I spotted this nudi reaching out from a kelp stipe and quickly snapped a few images before it decided to proceed on it's way along the kelp.

Creagan Bridge, Loch Creran, Scotland

Canon, G7XII, Fantasea FG7XII, Fantasea UCL-900f, iso 125, f11, 320, snooted Sea&Sea YS-01Solis

Judge's comment:
Very nice and classic image of a nudibranch in great light! It's so difficult to use a snoot on a moving object, even though it is not very fast. But the photographer did an excellent job!

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'SPURDOG SHARK'
James Lynott, United Kingdom

This image was taken during a fantastic late August weekend of diving at the Falls of Lora, Loch Etive. Easily my favourite shore dive in Scotland, this site features amazing underwater topography and incredible marine life, especially over the summer when spurdog sharks (Squalus acanthias) can be seen. It was a particularly good weekend with small neap tides, giving the opportunity to do several dives at this site, and over 3 dives with many lovely fellow photographers and dive buddies, multiple spurdog sharks were spotted. This shark was seen on the Sunday afternoon dive at HW slack and was found sitting at the bottom of the 22m deep bowl, along with a curious looking shore crab. It was quite placid, and my buddy and I were both able to take a few shots before moving off on our way to explore more of the site.

Falls of Lora, Loch Etive, Scotland

Canon, G7X MarkII, Fantasea FG7XII, Weefine WLF01, iso 125, f5.6, 1/30, 2 x Sea&Sea YS-01Solis w/ dome diffusers

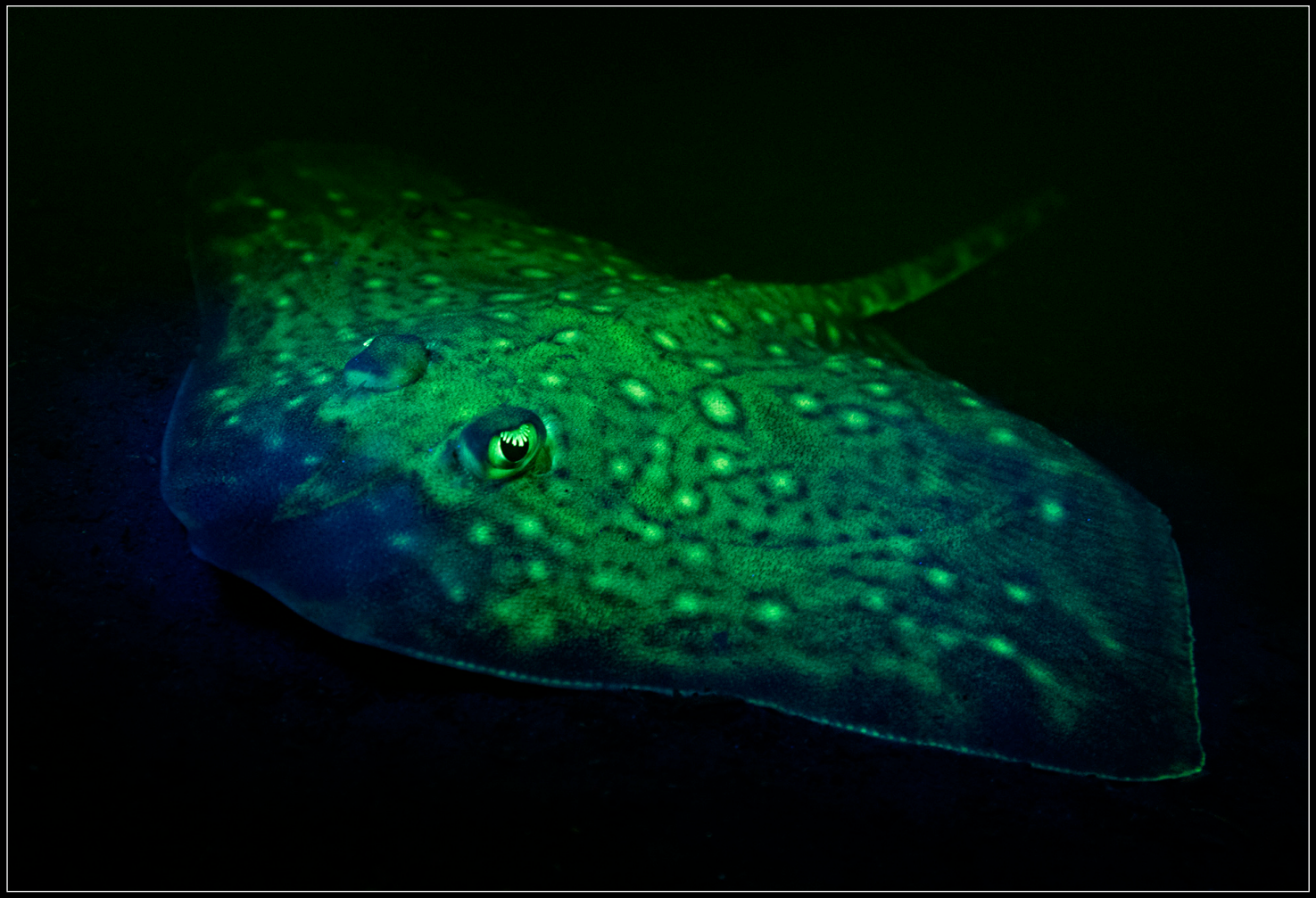
Judge's comment:
Very nice capture of this rare animal! We loved the addition of the little crab in the foreground! Well done!

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'FLUO THORNBACK SKATE'
James Lynott, United Kingdom

I have been experimenting with underwater fluorescence in Scottish seas for nearly 8 years now and I am still amazed by the species I see that fluoresce under the blue lights. There were plenty of fluorescent subjects to photograph during this particular night dive in Loch Leven back in January 2022, including hermit crabs, sea pens, and cup corals but this small thornback skate made for a really memorable dive. The juvenile skate glowed brightly under the L&M Sola Nightsea lights, showing off patterns that weren't visible under 'normal' white light. It seemed unphased by the bright blue light and I was able to capture some video as well as take a couple of images.

Loch Leven, Scotland

Canon, G7X MarkII, Fantasea FG7XII, n/a, iso 400, f2.5, 1/100, 2 x Light&Motion Sola Nightsea

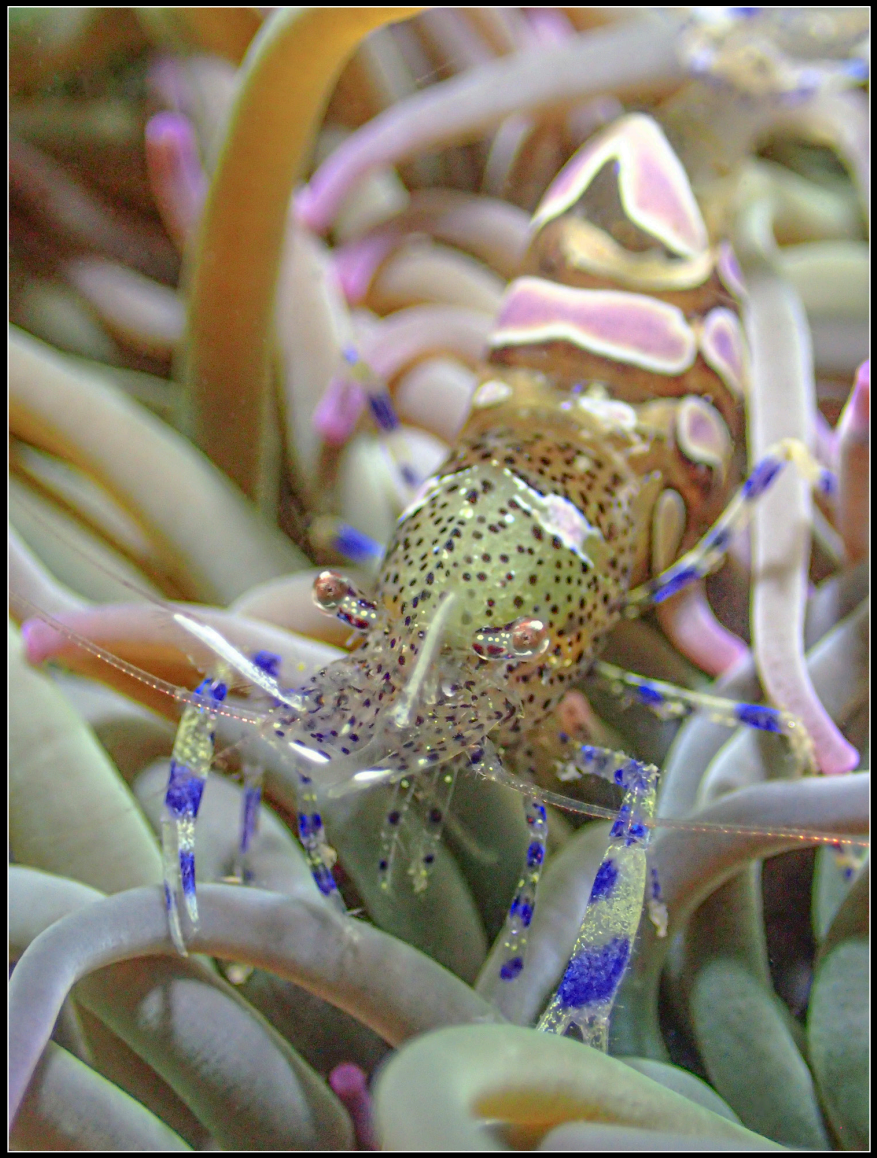
Judge's comment:
The beautiful green-glowing ray is another amazing example of James's ground-breaking fluorescence photography.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'FRIENDS AND ANEMONES'

Tony Reed, United Kingdom

I have been photographing and logging numbers of the Periclimenes sagittifer at Babbacombe for several years for Seasearch. The numbers of these have been rising and in 2022 there were more than I had ever seen in the Bay. I made my way to the the area known as "the gardens" and found a nice big Anemone with a good sized Shrimp sitting on the top. After about 20 minutes it was quite settled and it was curious about the camera and light so it came out a bit further for a look. I took several photos (about 100) as there was a tiny bit of movement in the water and did not want to leave with not having an acceptable image. These really are beautiful little critters and I love seeing them on a dive.

Babbacombe, England

Olympus, TG4, Olympus PT-056, No lens, iso 200, f/4, 1/250, Light and motion gobe 850 wide

Judge's comment:
These delicately coloured, almost exotic for British waters, critters are not easy subjects on such a confusing and similar coloured background but selective focus and good composition did a good job here.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

BRITISH WATERS COMPACT

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

'SEA LOCH ANEMONE'

James Lynott, United Kingdom

Sea loch anemones will always be a favourite subject of mine to photograph. There can't be many dives I have done on the Scottish west coast where I haven't surfaced with multiple images of these delicate little anemones. On this dive in Loch Fyne in March 2022 I had decided to use a snooted strobe together with the weefine wfl01 wet lens and try to isolate the anemones from the rocky background while still capturing some ambient light above. The rocky slope of this site is covered in anemones so it was a little tricky to find one on its own, but this one particular stood out perched on top of the pink algae encrusted rock.

Loch Fyne, Scotland

Canon, G7X MarkII, Fantasea FG7XII, Weefine WFL01, iso 125, f7.1, 1/30, Snooted Sea&Sea YS-01Solis

Judge's comment:
I couldn't let this one go and championed for it to stay. The lighting choice, framing and the deliciously delicate background have rewarded this solitary and well chosen subject.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

THE ‘SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION’
MARINE CONSERVATION

Category History

2023 Alvaro Herrero Lopez-Beltran (Spain)
2022 Thien Nguyen Ngoc (Vietnam)
2021 Karim Iliya (USA)
2020 Pasquale Vassallo (Italy)
2019 Eduardo Acevedo (Spain)

Images have a profound capacity to affect how people view the world, and at the Save Our Seas Foundation we are all about encouraging positive change in how people view and interact with the marine environment. We have been dedicated to protecting life in our oceans, especially sharks, for 20 years, with around 480 marine conservation projects supported in over 85 countries. As such we are delighted to partner with the Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year award, which is uniquely placed to highlight issues our oceans are facing and inspire change.

Dr James Lea, CEO of the Save Our Seas Foundation (SOSF)

save our seas foundation

The Marine Conservation category is sponsored by the Save Our Seas Foundation

THE ‘SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION’

Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2023



CATEGORY WINNER

‘HOPELESS’
Alvaro Herrero, Spain

A humpback whale dies a slow, painful and agonizing death after having its tail entangled in a ropes and buoys, rendering its tail completely useless. A reflection of what not only our oceans are suffering, but also our planet, the product of man’s selfishness and lack of responsibility. Taking this photograph was, for me, the saddest moment I’ve experienced in the ocean. Especially because I have spent so much time with humpbacks underwater, experiencing eye contact, interactions, and seeing with my own eyes how they are sentient and intelligent beings. But I’m “happy” to being able to capture that moment and show the world what is happening, what we are doing. I really hope this image make us aware , open our eyes and drive us in to make real changes.

Baja California, Mexico

Nikon , D500, Isotta D500, Sigma 10-20mm f4-5.6, iso 200, 6.3, 1/320, Natural Light

Judge’s comment:
What a stunning image and what a message that it delivers. I can’t imagine the sadness when this poor whale has been discovered, but also a good decision to take a few images to actually get a message of awareness out to the public. For me it was clear from the beginning that this image is the winner of the category. Well done.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

save our seas foundation

THE ‘SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION’

Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2023



RUNNER UP

‘MILLION DOLLAR FISH’
David Alpert, United Kingdom

Put a million Dollar price tag on a species and you almost certainly guarantee it’s decline. The base picture of this double exposure was taken before sunrise in Tokyo’s fish market. Pictured, is one of the morning’s prize fish going from auction to be sliced up and fed into Japan’s insatiable sashimi markets. Single bluefin tuna have sold there for as much as US$3m. Unsurprisingly the species is heavily overfished. This impressive apex predator, that can live for 40 years and weigh 700 kg’s, has been so commoditised that Mitsubishi began buying up stocks for cold storage ? betting on price rises as numbers inevitably fall. The overlay picture shows young wild fish in Mediterranean fattening pens. Capturing juvenile tuna before they have the chance to breed is potentially devastating. Profit overcoming common sense, consumer indifference, ineffective legislation enforcement and black-market racketeering - a heady mix, potentially disastrous for Bluefin tuna.

Tokyo Fish Market and Malta, Japan and Malta

Canon, 5D MK III, Nauticam, Sigma 15mm fisheye, iso 500, F/8, 1/250, Inon Z330 x 2

Judge’s comment:
David’s artistic combination of topclass underwater and above water conservation photography, inviting us to consider where we want to see bluefin tuna - as sashimi or as wildlife?

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

save our seas foundation

THE ‘SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION’

Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2023



THIRD

‘UNFORTUNATE PIERCING’
Celia Kujala, United States

I saw this beautiful California sea lion one morning in La Jolla. Sadly, she had a lure hooked in her mouth. California sea lions travel long distances to hunt for food and may come in contact with fishing boats while offshore. However, I have also seen people fish by the sea lion colony so it is possible she became hooked in her own home. I will never forget the terror I have seen in the eyes of sea lions that have just had a hook get embedded on a flipper or other part of their body. Unfortunately, this sea lion went into the water before the rescue team was able to help her.

Boomer Beach, La Jolla, CA , United States

Nikon D500, no housing, Nikon 70-200mm f/2.8, iso 320, f/5, 1/640, natural light

Judge’s comment:
This is a heartbreaking image as most of us in our lifetimes have fished and winced as the hook caught a finger slightly. The pain in this image is unimaginable and ongoing but it makes it unfortunately effective.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

save our seas foundation

THE ‘SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION’

Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

‘SUPREMACY’
David Serradell, Spain

I took this image while on a surftrip on the east coast of Sri Lanka. A series of sharks were laying dead on the ground with marks on their mouths from hooks, most likely from longlines set miles away offshore. Looking at the fisherman standing behind his most recent catch I thought about how little money he was just going to get from that day, comparing it to how much Asian markets would get when reselling the future dried fins from these sharks. I cannot blame the fisherman, this is the only thing they have been doing for their entire life with the only goal of bringing food to the family table. It is easy to blame, difficult to listen to the whole story. Supremacy shows the power of humans to, in approx 50 years, bring sharks to the brink of extinction, a group that has survived 5 mass extinctions

Arugam Bay, Sri Lanka

Canon, G16, iso 160, 2.8, 1/60, Ambient light

Judge’s comment:
An emotional picture showing these magnificent ocean animals dead and blooded, and the complexity of social factors behind most conservation issues.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

save our seas foundation

THE ‘SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION’

Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

‘A HOME DIVIDED’
Dmitry Kokh, United Arab Emirates

Polar bears and man exist in two different worlds. Human progress is relentless, but in the process we are melting ice and devastating the oceans. The two worlds - man and nature - continue to drift apart. And the crown of this incompatibility - we board this huge iron vessel with a capacity of 75k horsepower, with a luxury bar and pool to explore ‘the animal world’ - a place moving further and further away from us. The world as we know it is very fragile, and the current state of affairs - from political conflicts to the climate crisis - means that the end could very well be nigh. These things are real, and if they continue as they are, the outcome will be catastrophic. I’m curious - what will it take to steer this ship around? So - a home divided. Or maybe the world is divided?

North Pole, The Arctic

DJI Mavic 3 drone / Hasselblad , HASSELBLAD L2D-20C, /, 24mm, iso 640, f /2.8, 1/1600, /

Judge’s comment:
What a stunning image. You can see from the first second that the message is delivered! Small and big - human impact to the nature. Well done and well deserved.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

save our seas foundation

THE ‘SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION’

Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

‘ONE MORE CHANCE’
Damian Almua, Argentina

While we were cleaning one of the beaches on the island, my friend called “There’s a turtle trapped, I think it’s dead.” Rushing over we cold see the turtle trapped in fishing nets unable to breathe. In the midst of so much pain, anger and frustration, we realised that the turtle was still breathing. We got scissors and began to cut her free. We talked to her and encouraged her not to give up and gently and lovingly cut each piece of fishing net entangled in her body. I managed to portray the moment of greatest tension and care, in the release of the turtle so that it has a second chance to live and return to its home. Although I can’t help wondering if she will remain free or if other fishing nets are waiting to catch her again.

Koh Lipe - Satun, Thailand

Sony, A7RIII, None., 28mm f2, iso 400, 2.5, 1/250, Natural Light

Judge’s comment:
A very eye catching image compositionally with every part of the story clearly visible. Turtle, net, many hands, scissors and a good ending; but as the back story says what else is out there for this to happen again?

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

save our seas foundation

THE ‘SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION’

Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2023



HIGHLY COMMENDED

‘THE FORTUNATE ONES’
Victor Huertas, Australia

Caribbean Nicaragua supports the largest green turtle fishery in the Western hemisphere. Although indigenous Miskitu and ethnic communities have fished green turtles for centuries, research conducted by biologists Dr Cynthia Lagueux and Dr Cathi Campbell indicates that growing pressure on this iconic species is unsustainable. This prompted authorities to enact a series of regulations to improve the management of the Nicaraguan green turtle fishery. These turtles had been confiscated by the Nicaraguan National Police because they were being illegally transported to Bluefields, the region’s capital, where turtle consumption was no longer allowed. The turtles were later released back into the ocean near the Pearl Cays.

Enforcing fishing regulations in such a remote region in one of the poorest countries in the American continent is extremely challenging. Nevertheless, efforts to manage the turtle fishery in a region where turtle consumption has a high cultural value continue.

Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua, Nicaragua

Canon, G11, NA, 6.1-30.5 mm (Compact camera), iso 160, f/4.0, 1/800, Natural light

Judge’s comment:
Excellent image - not only from the subject and impact that it delivers, but also very nicely framed and composed. Also the conversion in black and white was the right decision and puts the image into a documentary, artistic style. Well done.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

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Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

‘BREATHE’
Edwar Herreño, France

Marine biologist help this hammerhead shark pup to breathe before released it. Thanks to this NGO studies, Costa Rica created the first marine sanctuary for sharks (hammerhead sharks) in Golfito - Costa Rica. Golfito is one of the most important shark nurseries known in this country but it is unfortunately located in a fisherman area. Shark population has decreased in the past years due overfishing and some species like hammerheads now are facing extinction. Golfito is a small fisherman town where fishing is not longer a profit business and people has to find other jobs. Thanks to the biologist studies and the data collected during the past decade, Costa Rica government has expanded and created new MPA (Marine protected areas) and even created transnational marine protected corridors in collaboration with other counties in this area; most recently, the migratory way between Cocos Island in Costa Rica and Galapagos in Ecuador.

Golfo Dulce, Costa Rica

Nikon, D850, Hugyfot Nikon D850, Nikon 14 mm, iso 800, f/20, 1/320, natural light

Judge’s comment:
This photo is one of hope, taking us right to the heart of the action and revealing a positive story from the seas.

Alex Mustard

UPY 2023

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COMMENDED

‘DEATH TRAP’
Simon Lorenz, Hong Kong

Turtles in our oceans are under threat from marine pollution. They consume floating plastic and get entangled in fishing nets. Ghost nets are discarded or lost nets that entangle floatsam and rubbish into floating death traps. The problem in Sri Lanka is that fishermen leave the nets afloat as they are fish aggregation devices. They will rescue turtles if they come across it but since these floats can me many miles from shore, the rescue often comes too late.

We were looking for whales 35 miles offshore when we came across this badly entangled Olive Ridley sea turtle. She was very calm while our guide and my guests freed the turtle from the net. Trincomalee, Sri Lanka

NIkon, D850, Isotta D850, Sigma 15mm, iso 125, 5.6, 1/320

Judge’s comment:
Unfortunately we are depressingly familiar with images of marine life caught in nets but this captures the extra weight and drag that the net also catches. A lovely photograph of an awful image.

Peter Rowlands

UPY 2023

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Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2023



COMMENDED

‘BABY PARADORN’
Sirachai Arunrugstichai, Thailand

Paradorn, an orphaned Irrawaddy dolphin calf nibbles on a baby bottle, while resting in the arms of its caretaker at the rehabilitation facility of Marine Endangered Species Veterinary Hospital, Rayong, Thailand. The 6-month-old dolphin was rescued from stranding in the eastern Gulf of Thailand on July 22, 2022, and then taken into care by the veterinarians of the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, since the chance for an unweaned calf to survive in the wild without its mother is slim. However, Paradorn died a month later despite the efforts keep it alive. As the Irrawaddy dolphin is threatened throughout its distribution range in coastal, estuarine, and riverine habitats of Southeast Asia and is also listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List, where the species just gone extinct in Laos earlier in April 2022, while the Cambodian population is less than a hundred.

Marine Endangered Species Veterinary Hospital, Thailand

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, Nikon 16 Fisheye, iso 640, F/18, 1/13 , two Retra Flash Pro X

Judge’s comment:
What a cute image and nice, positive impact for this category. If the light and composition would have been a bit better, it could have been placed even higher.

Tobias Friedrich

UPY 2023

save our seas foundation

Underwater Photographer of the Year AWARDS

2023
UPY: Kat Zhou (USA)
BUPY: Ollie Clarke (Australia)
U&C: Kat Zhou (USA)
MPBUPY: Theo Vickers (UK)

2022
UPY: Rafael Fernandez Caballero (Spain)
BUPY: Matty Smith (UK)
U&C: Quico Abadal (Spain)
MPBUPY: Paul Pettitt (UK)

2021
UPY: Renee Capozzola (USA)
BUPY: Mark Kirkland (UK)
U&C: Alice Bennett (UK)
MPBUPY: Alice Bennett (UK)

2020
UPY: Greg Lecoeur (France)
BUPY: Nick More (UK)
U&C: Anita Kainrath (Austria)
MPBUPY: Nur Tucker (UK)

2019
UPY: Richard Barnden (UK)
BUPY: Richard Barnden (UK)
U&C: Taeyup Kim (Korea)
MPBUPY: Malcolm Nimmo (UK)

2018
UPY: Tobias Friedrich (Germany)
BUPY: Grant Thomas (UK)
U&C: Man BD (Malaysia)
MPBUPY: Tony Stephenson (UK)

2017
UPY: Gabriel Barathieu (France)
BUPY: Nick Blake (UK)
U&C: Horacio Martinez (Argentina)
MPBUPY: Nicholai Georgiou (UK)

2016
UPY: Davide Lopresti (Italy)
BUPY: Dan Bolt (UK)
U&C: Pier Mane (South Africa)
MPBUPY: Marty Engels Dunmore (UK)

2015
UPY: Nuno Sa (Portugal)
BUPY: Matt Doggett (UK)
MPBUPY: Mario Vitalini (UK)

UPY: Underwater photographer of the year
BUPY: British Underwater photographer of the year
U&C: Up and coming
MPBUPY: Most Promising British Underwater photographer of the year