

Underwater Photographer of the Year



U P Y
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Yearbook

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Underwater Photographer of the Year 2025

UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR 2025

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Chairman's Welcome

Welcome to the Underwater Photographer of the Year 2025. The whole UPY Team is thrilled to share the very best of underwater photography with you.

It is 60 years since Phil Smith was named the first Underwater Photographer of the Year, in 1965. Back in the swinging 60s this contest was very much focus on British photographers. Today our entrants come from all over the world, and our winning pictures show scenes from the poles to the tropics, and some pretty incredible wet places in-between. We are proud to celebrate our 60th anniversary collection and our link with the pioneers, on whose shoulders we all now stand.

As it says on our tin, we're an underwater photography contest and we love celebrating outstanding images from every genre of submerged snapping! So in these pages you will find natural history images of incredible ocean behaviour sitting alongside swimming pool shots of Olympic athletes. You will see a unique view of camels slurping from a water butt and rarely seen, let-alone photographed, shipwrecks more than 100 metres below the surface of the ocean. You can even enjoy newts photographed through a murky liquid, I can't call it water, that derives its atmosphere (and particles) from being used by cows as a latrine! Ahhh... the intangible secrets of photographic success. But what unites all these images is that they are simply the best in the business.

It was another record breaking year for UPY!

When we passed 4500 entries a few years ago, I was convinced that we'd reached the limit of underwater shooters who want to take part in contests. Over the last 25 years I've judged just about every photo contest open to underwater photos, and that number was already two or three times what I had ever seen entered elsewhere. And yet, our numbers keep going up: 6752 photos this year from 602 photographers. We are so grateful that so many of you keep supporting UPY with your fabulous images.

There many reasons for UPY's popularity. The prestige of winning the Big One, our record-breaking roster of 56 prizes, the quality of our previous winners, our unique press coverage, the fact you know that all the named judges will see your each of your entries,

just to name a few. But one factor that I remain particularly proud of is our results system. Because the UPY judges gather in the same room and make every decision together, while all looking at the same screen, we are able to give detailed results for each of the 6752 images entered in the contest. And we share that with the entrants a little over a week after the closing date. This means that every entrant, every image, gets something valuable from taking part in UPY, even when they're not a winner.

That said, please don't confuse this quick turnaround with a rushed judging process. Our philosophy is not to procrastinate - we start judging immediately after the contest is closed. Flights, travel and hotels are booked long before we are due to meet so the UPY entry deadline will never be extended, even if, one year, we only got a few entries. So, despite our time efficiency, the judging process is never hurried. I know for a fact that we actually spend many, many more hours deliberating and discussing your images than any other comparable contest.

I would like to congratulate our incredible awarded photographers. Your talent and your dedication are truly inspirational. And importantly, I would like to thank all of our entrants for supporting the contest. We really do value every single image that is put in.

I would also like to thank our three big category sponsors: The Save Our Seas Foundation support our Marine Conservation category, both ensuring it is totally free to enter (these important images should have no barriers to getting out there) and providing cash prizes for the winners. The Crown Estate sponsor the popular British Waters Living Together category and host our special Awards Evening in central London, where the results are first revealed and winners get to celebrate properly together. And PADI, arguably the biggest name in diving, who sponsor the important Up & Coming category that shines a light on new talent. I would also like to send a massive thank you to all the amazing companies that offer prizes to our entrants (you can see them on page 3). If you like what we're doing with UPY, then please support them when you have the chance.

Above all, UPY would not be possible without the



Alex Mustard

tremendous team behind it. Our three judges, Peter Rowlands, Tobias Friedrich and me, tend to hog the spotlight, as we do the heavy lifting during the many hours of judging; shouldering the pressure of making the big decisions. But most of the UPY workload occurs away from those judging days, when the wider team of Dan Bolt, Saeed Rashid and Shannon Moran make it all happen. So from me and, I know, on behalf of all the entrants - a massive thank you to the whole UPY Team for all the hard work you do. In UPY, you really have created something very special, the most important underwater photography contest and one that is uniquely loved by our community.

Finally, some news for next year. Given that most photos around the world are taken with smart-phones, we will introduce a Smart-Phone category for 2026. This will sit alongside our existing Compact category and will also be open to all photographers. We hope to see some of our most talented shooters taking on the phone challenge this year to show what can be achieved with this technology. To make space for this new category we plan to reduce the number of awarded images per category from 10 to 8 across the whole contest.

For now, we really hope you enjoy looking through the photographs and reading the photographers' stories in UPY 2025.

Dr Alex Mustard MBE – chair of the UPY Jury.

The Judges

January, here in the UK, sees us in the middle of our winter when the temperatures are low and the nights long, but the gloom is always lifted at the prospect of judging the UPY competition and this year was no exception.

With a record number of images entered from an even bigger number of underwater photographers in 2025, UPY must be the most prestigious competition in the underwater photography calendar. That's because the judging process is unique - we all gather for three days of hard, but most enjoyable, work to view each and every image... and there were over 6,700 this year. Another record. This isn't a remote zoom meeting looking at images that have already been culled by the organisers; every entered image is discussed and considered because that's what your hard earned efforts deserve.

The results system, superbly arranged by Dan Bolt, is another unique feature of UPY where you can see exactly how each of your images fared on their journey towards the top. This is invaluable feedback for those who want to study and learn from their progress.

Three final features set us apart: Firstly the Yearbook which presents all of the winning images for you to download and keep as a permanent reference work. Another valuable tool to see how and why the images made their way into the winners' enclosure with individual comments from the judges revealing exactly what it is about the winning images that appealed to them and set them apart from the rest of the field.

The second piece of the quality jigsaw is the Awards Ceremony in Central London at a prestige venue, generously provided by our longest running category sponsor - The Crown Estate. It really provides the icing on the cake each year and they are the hottest tickets in town.

The final part of the workload is to promote the images to the worldwide press. We have over 300 contacts who love to feature our/your winning images and spread the word to literally millions, if not billions, of people. The images represent us/you, and our

world, to an audience not lucky enough to experience what we take for granted. They provide a vital role in conservation, for you can't love what you can't see. We/you show the world what an extraordinary and vital environment the underwater world is.

I am very proud to be involved in this competition; to be part of a small but efficient team working with incredible and inspiring images and, never forget, that you also are all very much part of this team. A big thank you to all of you. It's been another delight.

Peter Rowlands

It is the fourth year in a row which starts for me with a trip to the UK for the judging of my personally favourite underwater photo competition. I am beyond honoured to be part of the UPY judge panel and I feel extremely privileged to be one of the first people to see the work of so many great underwater photographers. Work, which you haven't seen on social media. Work, which has been kept private and saved for this great contest.

In the last few years it is not only the number of images, which has increased tremendously, but also the quality. We hardly see images, which are merely decent and this is what makes UPY so prestigious and, for me personally, so exciting to judge. The thousands of submissions are already the crème de la crème of underwater photography, so filtering out the best of each category requires comparing images to smallest detail of their execution. It takes us almost three full days of being locked away with a screen, disconnected from everything else, reviewing the thousands of images in multiple rounds.

Despite the top ten images of the categories resembling only around 1% of the submissions, they still show immense diversity. We are, thus, extremely happy to have competitors from all over the world, submitting the most special perspectives from the most interesting encounters and destinations, making the yearbook a delightful inspiration.

For me as a judge the subject of an image is of little importance. As a team, we look for excellence. It is



Even judges need to have fun

not necessary to travel far or to exotic destinations to get a winning shot. It can be an image of a small wreck from the lake in your vicinity, which is executed with a creative idea and a high technical standard. Don't be shy to send in new ideas and creative ways of how you see the world beneath the surface! We will be looking forward to seeing them and giving you feedback!

Tobias Friedrich

THE GOPHERS

Being the human on the end of the info@ email address, all of our competitors will have heard from me over the past few weeks. Most just once or twice, but others many, many times. It is the nature of this competition (as with all competitions) that an email from me doesn't always bring the good news people want to hear. It's never nice to be the bearer of bad news, but I am always heartened by the responses I receive and the enthusiasm with which our entrants embrace the competition. It is clear that results system is highly valued, and everyone who responds to me is excited to see the full results. I have to say a big thank you to everyone who has responded to me for your kind words and high-spirits... in the long hours of hard work they are much appreciated.

UPY2025 is another stunning collection as chosen by our judges, but the images that get awarded only come alive, for me, when you can read the back-story as written by the photographer. Sure, many are taken at exotic, far-away (and not to say expensive) destinations, but the odd gem or two always pops up from far less salubrious locations and situations. These are the ones that interest me the most; true tales of creativity both in artistry, technique and effort. Those are the ones that I also draw more inspiration from when I think how I can try to apply that creativity, or technique to the places that I like to dive. So, to those of you making the most of an odd photographic situation, I say very well done indeed! And thank you too, for making me challenge my own ideas and creativity. - Dan Bolt

My second year as any UPY gopher, they kept me around for another year! All I'm saying is another year as a gopher and another year of record entries...can it be a coincidence?!

Hopefully we can top that number again next year! This year we received 6752 entries from 602 different photographers, what an incredible statistic and celebration of how far underwater photography has come as we celebrate our 60th anniversary.

This year we've gained many new followers on our social channels, new sponsors and new categories! I always enjoy sharing the brilliant winners on social media and particularly enjoy sharing behind the

scenes photos from the judges as they undertake the in person judging. Those photos are always greatly received on social media and I hope it brings a little joy and relieves the tension, whilst our entrants eagerly await their results!

I'm constantly amazed by UPY's influence in the underwater photography community, it brings together some of the best underwater image makers, incredible newcomers and an array of creative photographers.

A huge well done to the team, I never quite realised how much of a well-oiled machine UPY is. There's an incredible amount of hard work that goes on behind the scenes, a huge well done to the team for bringing it all together. And a thank you to all of you, our supporters and entrants for making UPY 2025 another record year. But mostly it was down to the gophers! - Shannon Moran

How is it a year already? It feels like only last month we were celebrating the winners of last year's competition in London and in a few days will be celebrating again. There is something very special about being together with so many winning photographers all chatting about our beloved craft. Although this year, I must remember not to drink so much champagne. :)

As I've said in previous years, when designing the yearbook, I become incredibly intimate with all of the images and truly enjoy having to work with them. Hopefully, you won't notice, but I've tweaked the design slightly this year so it should make for a nicer viewing experience.

As you know, one of my other gopher duties is securing prizes for the competition and this year, I'm pleased to say that we have a record amount. We've never been a competition that just wants any sponsor, we have always carefully picked those we want to work with, many of them being with us from the start. We do also have some fantastic new partnerships with some very exciting news coming for next year's competition. Sorry I can't say any more for now. Anyway if you've got to the end of this, thank you for reading my rambling words and now go and enjoy some incredible images. - Saeed Rashid



Saeed Rashid



Dan Bolt



Shannon Moran

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Underwater Photographer of the Year 2025



'RADIANT BOND'

Alvaro Herrero (Mekan), Spain

A mother humpback whale accompanies her calf to the surface for its first breath early in the morning. The youngster is releasing a few bubbles as it rises, perhaps this is because it is still learning to control its breathing, or it is simply experimenting with its own body.

Every year, during the southern winter, I travel to French Polynesia to photograph these majestic animals. My favourite time of day is the early morning, because the light is soft and angled, allowing me to find the perfect angle to clearly define the shape of these animals in blue. For me, this photo is one that shows a mother's love for her calf, communicating both the fragility and beauty of our oceans, and revealing one of the amazing species with whom we share our home world.

Mo'orea, French Polynesia

Nikon , Z7 II, Isotta , Nikkor Z 14-24mm 2.8 s,
iso 1100, f/8, 1/640, Natural Light

Judge's comments:

An heartwarming interaction between mum and baby, in a perfectly timed pose of both majestic animals that look so comfortable in their underwater home. The photo invites us to observe, while giving the whales their space, both in the frame and from the photographer. The spearing light is dramatic, while the shadow the calf is casting on its mother is subtle. Mekan won the title of Marine Conservation Photographer of the

Year back in 2022 with the saddest of images of humpback, this uplifting family portrait is a perfect counterpoint. Alex Mustard

The overall winning image represents us as a Competition, and our community as a hobby/sport/profession, to the world at large for a whole year and sometimes it is very difficult to decide between them but this year, for me, this delicate yet powerful study of a mother and calf's bond says all that is great and good about our world. We face our challenges, true, but the increasing populations of whales worldwide shows what can be achieved. Peter Rowlands



The 'Save our Seas Foundation' Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year



CATEGORY WINNER

'1 / 200.000.000'

Robert Marc Lehmann, Germany

This tiger shark is just one of around 200 million sharks that lose their lives every year at the hands of humans.

Since I was six years old (35 years+), I have been intensively studying sharks. In all these years, hardly anything has changed and that is frustrating. Sharks protect their habitat, the sea, through their ecological function as "health police". Over a billion people depend on the sea every day and we all breathe the oxygen that is largely produced in the sea. If we continue to eradicate the animals that guard our largest and most important habitat, we are taking away our own livelihood. And that's why I've been fighting for people to see and understand sharks through my eyes. Every time I take a photo like this, it hurts, but through imagery I can inspire millions of people to understand sharks and their situation and make a difference.

Indonesia

CANON , R5, CANON EF 24mm f/1.4L II USM with EF to RF Mount, iso 1000, 5.6, 1/6400,

Judge's comments: A stunning, story-telling image, with four men hauling this huge ocean predator onto land. The light is beautiful, the composition immersive and the timing, capturing the fisherman's gesture, is perfect. Although an everyday occurrence and legal in most places, the man reaching out to stop the photo reveals what his conscience reckons on what they are doing. Powerful photography.

UPY
2025

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The SeaTouch 4 Max is an innovative, full-touchscreen underwater smartphone housing that liberates your device from the constraints of aquatic environments. With its unique underwater touchscreen membrane, you can access all of your phone's functions seamlessly, whether you are on land or submerged beneath the waves.

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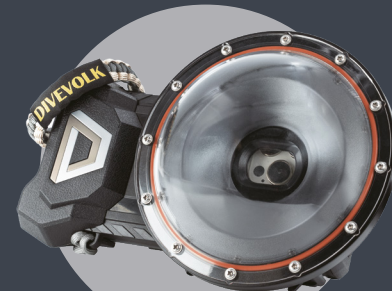
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Macro



Wide-angle



Split-shot



WIDE ANGLE

Category History

- 2025 Alvaro Herrero (Mekan), (Spain)
- 2024 Alex Dawson (Sweden)
- 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)

WIDE ANGLE



CATEGORY WINNER

'RADIANT BOND'

Alvaro Herrero (Mekan), Spain



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Mo'orea, French Polynesia

Nikon , Z7 II, Isotta , Nikkor Z 14-24mm 2.8 s,
iso 1100, f/8, 1/640, Natural Light

Judge's comments: What a shot! We usually see a lot of humpback whale images during the judging of the UPY competitions, but this image made us stop immediately. It really shows the excellence of the photographer seeing the moment and also recognizing the right image afterwards while browsing through them on the computer. The light coming from the left upper corner as well

as the perfect movement of the Humpback whale and calf, in addition to the excellent framing and composition make this a truly deserved overall winner for the UPY 2025 contest. I'm very happy to give this image my final vote as it is an excellent example that a perfectly executed "classic" shot. Well done, Mekan! :-)

Tobias Friedrich

WIDE ANGLE



RUNNER UP

'ETHEREAL MOONSCAPE'

Alvaro Herrero (Mekan), Spain

A diver using a rebreather glides through one of my favorite caves in the Yucatán Peninsula. The rebreather was a critical piece of equipment for this shot. Using rebreathers in the caves allows us to spend much more time exploring their depths, and enhances my photos as it gives us the opportunity to precisely illuminate the scene. By not emitting bubbles, we also help protect the features of the cave features and disturb far fewer particles, which is particularly advantageous when photographing less-frequented spots. Rebreathers also deliver much more efficient decompression times. To illuminate this room, we used 60,000 lumens of warm light from two BigBlue video lights.

Tulum, Mexico

Nikon , Z7 II, Isotta, Nikkor Z 14-24mm 2.8 s, iso 2000, f/5.6, 1/30, BigBlue COB 30.000 PII

Judge's comments: Cenotes create some of the most spectacular scenery in the underwater world but accessing it requires extensive training, specialist diving equipment and real dedication even before you take a photo. We get a lot of cenote shots but this stands apart for both the quality of this exquisite room and the photographic quality of lighting and composition. *Alex Mustard*

WIDE ANGLE



THIRD

'NEW MOON MADNESS'

Joost van Uffelen, Netherlands

Hanifaru Bay is a famed site for manta aggregations which occur around lunar events. The changing currents trap and concentrate plankton in the bay allowing mantas to cyclone feed. Although, in nature, nothing is guaranteed. When I arrived in the area during new Moon, operators mentioned the season seemed to have ended early; schooling mantas had not been seen for weeks. Fortunately, just two days after our arrival we were rewarded with the biggest feeding event of the year with 80 mantas train-feeding on the plankton.

Keeping calm and finding order in the madness was the hardest part in creating this image. While the mantas happily filled their bellies, surrounded by schools of mackerel, a small window opened to shoot them stacked upon each other in a beautiful feeding train. Lesson learned: nature always has a surprise in store and even when you have planned to be at the right place at the right time, you still need a dose of luck!

Hanifaru Bay, Maldives

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, Nikon 28-70mm, iso 500, f8.0, 1/500 , Ambient Light

Judge's comments: Such a nice composition of mantas that just says Hanifaru Bay! The schooling fish on both sides create a frame to the Mantas swimming perfectly in the middle of the image. Very nice visibility and good postproduction as well! *Tobias Friedrich*

WIDE ANGLE



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'UNDERWATER STUDY 104'

John Pfisterer, United States

This image was captured in the early morning at the USAT Liberty Wreck in Tulamben, Bali. Shooting at this hour allowed for maximum visibility and minimized the presence of other divers, helping to convey the profound sense of isolation.

The USAT Liberty was torpedoed by Japanese forces in 1942 and was ran aground on the Tulamben shore before being abandoned. Volcanic eruptions have pushed her underwater and she now rests at a depth of 100 feet. Heavily colonised by marine life, the wreck has been transformed into a stunning reef, spanning nearly 400 feet.

The model, a trained free diver, was carefully positioned on an upright section of the remaining structure at 90 ft. Safety divers helped manage the logistics, supplying her with air from multiple tanks and controlling the unwieldy 30-foot dress. To capture both the grandeur and elegance of the scene Nauticam's water contact FCP port was used.

Tulamben, Bali, Indonesia

Sony , A1, Nauticam Sony A1, Nauticam FCP, iso 640, F9, 1/80, N/A

Judge's comments: Good idea for a different kind

of image of the popular Liberty wreck in Bali. The huge dress of the model floats so nicely, which makes it a big portion of the image, not only literally. Kudos to the model as well for a very nicely maintained position and look, especially at the depth. *Peter Rowlands*



WIDE ANGLE



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'FLIGHT IN THE GOLDEN FOREST'

Kate Vylet, United States

Cormorants are masters of air and water, capable of flying both above and below the kelp forest. Propelled by powerful finned feet, they're also incredibly agile, making them a challenge to photograph as they zoom through arches of algae to hunt fish. It was a beautiful winter day in Monterey Bay, and the first test dive with my upgraded camera rig. I spent most of my bottom time fumbling with the controls and getting acquainted with the new system, snapping haplessly at kelp and sunbeams. Suddenly a dark flash caught my eye - a Brandt's cormorant had dove down just to the side of me. We were equally surprised to see each other, and I caught this frame as she buzzed by and into the kelp forest. While the shot was all luck, for me it captured the seabird in her element - a feathered torpedo in the golden forest.

Monterey Bay, US

Sony, a1, Nauticam NA-a1, Canon EF 8-15mm f/4L Fisheye USM, iso 800, f/16, 1/160, Sea & Sea YS-D3 MKII Lightning

Judge's comments: A comparatively unusual subject perfectly timed and lit, framed by golden kelp fronds with the sunburst not too distracting and providing lovely rays. Lovely. *Peter Rowlands*

WIDE ANGLE



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'BLANQUITO OVER/UNDER'

Dawn McDonald, United States

Shooting under special government permit with Ocean Souls Films, we had spent 6 days looking for one of the four elusive white calves. There are about 500 calves in the bay, so they are hard to find. After being forced to spend a day out of the water because of a serious eye infection, I woke up great conditions and everyone determined to find a white calf.

It did not take too long for this beautiful baby, affectionately called "Blanquito", to approach us. While mom rested below, Blanquito was intensely curious, coming very close to check out the strange squealing creature who was telling herself, "don't screw up this shot!" As it turns out, he stayed for quite a while, spyhopping and coming right up to the camera, allowing me to attempt a split shot. With perseverance, I finally got one that worked. It was an amazing experience I will never forget.

Peninsula Valdes, Argentina

Nikon , D850, Nauticam NA D850, Sigma 15mm fisheye, iso 400, f /11, 1/200,

Judge's comments: An amazing moment, with an incredible individual, wonderfully photographed. It had to be a winner. *Alex Mustard*

WIDE ANGLE



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'SPINNER DOLPHINS OF THE SATAYA REEF'

Mehmet A. Gungen, Turkey

This image was shot during a morning snorkeling session in Sataya reef, in the southern Egyptian Red Sea, during a liveaboard scuba diving trip with fellow underwater photographers. Our aim was to photograph the resident spinner dolphin pod and I visualized the image I would like to achieve - a photograph of a tight pod of dolphins swimming towards the camera to give plenty of eye contact. Sataya is a popular place and I want to create an image free of other snorkellers. This meant lots of swimming to be in the best spot, and freediving down ahead of the dolphins to be at their side as they swam past. I used the Nikonos 13mm fisheye that kept my camera small and easy to swim with. And I avoided blur by shooting above 1/250 and using higher than usual ISO to compensate when shooting in the early morning.

Sataya Reef, Red Sea, Egypt

Nikon, D850, Subal, Nikonos RS 13mm Fisheye, iso 500, f/11, 1/320, Available light shot

Judge's comments: A very well timed image to capture the 'swim past' in lovely soft light. Well chosen camera settings freeze the action in detail and entertain the eye more and more with each viewing. *Peter Rowlands*

WIDE ANGLE



COMMENDED

'AGGREGATION OF MOBULA RAYS IN BAJA CALIFORNIA'

Vanessa Mignon, Australia

I was travelling to Baja California, Mexico, hoping to witness the mobulas ray aggregation. We had seen a few groups migrating in the bay, but the visibility was not great in the shallow waters. So one day we decided to head out at sea, looking for deeper, bluer waters. Soon enough we saw what we were hoping for. Mobulas jumping out of the water. We got in and found a tight ball of Mobulas circling and swimming in union. It felt like a beautiful, hypnotic danse.

Seeing big aggregations like the ones in Baja California at certain times of the year can lead to thinking that the mobula rays populations are doing well. Unfortunately, the IUCN red list indicates that the overall population is decreasing and lists the mobula rays as vulnerable.

La Ventana, Mexico

Canon , 5D Mark IV, Nauticam NA-5D MKIV, Canon 8-15 mm fisheye, iso 500, f/4, 1/500,

Judge's comments: Excellent capture and the best Mobula image we have seen in the competition this year. The postproduction is on point which is also not always the case. The only point which we didn't like is the person in the top right corner, without this distraction the image would have finished higher. *Tobias Friedrich*



WIDE ANGLE



COMMENDED

'SHARK BALLET'

Fabrice Dudenhofer, France

This photo is titled 'The Shark Ballet' to highlight the graceful movement of these predators. It was taken in Wayag, in the northern part of the Raja Ampat archipelago, Indonesia. Wayag is the iconic postcard image of the region, with its chain of karst islets covered in lush vegetation, scattered across turquoise lagoons bordered by pristine white sand.

On this beach, you only need to wade in up to your waist to see blacktip reef sharks swimming around you. Initially, I envisioned a split-shot image, inspired by Polynesia, but I chose instead to play with the reflections on the surface, enhanced by the overcast sky that accentuated the contrast.

It was an unique and unforgettable experience, and another opportunity to show that it is possible to share a moment with these wild animals without any danger!

Indonesia, Indonesia

Olympus, OM-D E-M1 Mark II, Isotta OM-D E-M1, Olympus, iso 100, 1/250, f/11, RETRA 1st Generation

Judge's comments: Raja Ampat was once rife with shark finning. On my early visits there I never saw a shark. Seeing these blacktips thriving in the shallows is such an uplifting sight. We loved the reflection and the timing of shot, capturing this compelling composition exposure to open up the details in the sky would have made this image irresistible. *Alex Mustard*

WIDE ANGLE



COMMENDED

'CIRCLE OF LIFE'

Chong Wan Yong, Malaysia

I first experienced Moalboal's sardine run 8 years ago, but without an underwater camera, I couldn't capture the magic. After years of perfecting my underwater photography, the memory of those sardines lingered. This year, I finally returned. Although the weather was overcast and the shoal seemed smaller than before, my dive guide Tata worked his magic. With a torch in hand, he swam through the sardines, coaxing them into breathtaking formations. Thanks to his expert guidance, I was able to capture the spectacle in all its splendour. It was an unforgettable experience.

Moalboal, Cebu , Philippines , Philippines

Sony, A7r4, Nauticam NA-A2020, SE 12-24G, iso 250, 7.1, 1/200, Inon Z330

Judge's comments: A beautiful image full of mood and depth through the frame. Personally, the model's torch would have been more effective pointing towards a part of the shoal but the shape of the shoal creates a visual spectacle and I would love to have been there. *Peter Rowlands*

The main image is an underwater photograph. A large whale shark is swimming horizontally across the frame, its white underbelly and spotted grey top clearly visible. A large school of smaller, silvery fish is swimming alongside the whale shark. In the background, there are dark, tangled structures that look like seaweed or coral. Sunlight is streaming down from the top right, creating bright rays and illuminating the scene.

UPY
2025

Triton Bay Divers

Everything from Whale Sharks to Pygmys

Murad Yazid

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MACRO

Category History

2025 Paolo Bondaschi (Italy)
2024 Talia Greis (Australia)
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)

MACRO

CATEGORY WINNER

'MAGIC BACKLIT'

Paolo Bondaschi, Italy

At the end of this dive, I spotted a couple of underwater photographers focused on shooting and it piqued my curiosity about what they were photographing. I signalled to my guide to check what they were shooting. After realizing that it was one of my favourite subjects, a hairy shrimp, I waited patiently for my turn and used the time to plan and prepare for the shot. I chose to shoot it in profile, backlight with a snoot. My guide and my buddy played a fundamental role in expertly managing the light of the snoot. After a few test shots to find the right setting, I finally got the photo I was looking for.

Secret Bay, Anilao, Anilao, Philippines

CANON, EOS R7, MARELUX MX-R7, EF-S60mm f/2.8 Macro USM + wet lens AOI UCL-90PRO, iso 100, f/16.0, 1/200, Backscatter MF-1 + Backscatter snoot OS-1

Judge's comments: Perfect execution and image! What a nice winning shot for this strong macro category this year. I love the minimalistic approach to a subject which is tiny and not easy to get a crisp shot of. The perfect position of the hairy shrimp is almost too good to be true, but these animals are very skittish and we concluded this is natural perfection, which is also emphasized to the maximum by the very selective lighting by the photographer. *Tobias Friedrich*



MACRO



RUNNER UP

'DAZZLING DONUT DOTO'

Bryan H. Blauvelt, United States

Bali, Indonesia, is a stunning tropical paradise known for its lush rice terraces, vibrant culture, pristine beaches, and sacred temples. A perfect blend of natural beauty and spiritual charm on this special island encourages creativity, and the muck and rubble slopes of Tulamben produce a steady stream of mind-blowing critter encounters to the delight of any underwater photographer.

I wanted to leave this inspirational place with a unique image of *Doto greenamyri*, one of the most striking subjects in Tulamben. I created a dramatic glowing effect on the nudibranch with my strobe and snoot, and completed the frame by backlighting the host hydroid with subtle blue light to balance the composition. Thank you to my incredible guide Rudolfi Sikome at Alam Batu for holding a torch in position for the backlighting effect on this image, and for a productive and fun week of photography!

Tulamben, Indonesia

Sony, A1, Nauticam NA-A1, Sony FE 90mm f/2.8 Macro G OSS, iso 160, f/22, 1/200, Backscatter MF-2 w/ OS-1 Snoot, Torch w/ Blue Gel

Judge's comments: The detailed patterns of this nudibranch are only matched by the precise control of light and composition in this picture. The sea slug is sitting on a delicate hydroid that moves in the current. It must have taken tremendous dedication to craft such a perfect frame.

Alex Mustard

MACRO



THIRD

'DISCO LION'

Nicholas More, United Kingdom

As I back-rolled into the Lembeh Strait, the first thing that came into view was a table coral in 8-10 meters of water. Atop the coral was a cloud of small baitfish surrounding a very pretty Lionfish. An open aperture reveals detail in the Lionfish's face but renders the small silvery fish as defocused, bokeh disco balls. The lionfish was in bait ball heaven, I was in photographers heaven. The only difficulty was waiting for a gap in the baitfish melee to frame the lionfish. Opportunity knocks and when it does hit the shutter!

Coral Garden, Lembeh Strait, North Sulawesi, Indonesia

Sony , A1, Nauticam NA A1, Sony FE 90mm F2.8 Macro G OSS & Nikon 5T diopter, iso 50, f/3.5, 1/400, 2 X Iron Z330 with Jon Barron Beam Restrictors

Judge's comments: A lionfish image has to be pretty special nowadays and this one, messy at first viewing but with great eye contact, had an extra vibrance which grew through the rounds. Well chosen camera settings and great composition.
Peter Rowlands

MACRO



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'DONALD DUCK VINTAGE STYLE'

Paolo Isgro, Italy

I like to use vintage lenses in underwater photography because it is possible to obtain images with a strong character, where the background is as much of a protagonist as the subject. This image of the Donald Duck shrimp caught among the crinoids is a perfect example of the type of image I am trying to produce.

Tulamben, Indonesia

Canon , 80D, Sea&Sea, MGO Oreston 50 mm F1,8, iso 100, f1,8, 1/250, Inon Z330

Judge's comments: An excellent subject and background choice to emphasise the effect this lens creates! The subject is well placed leaving the negative space to be filled with the subtle colour and patterns of the lens effect on the crinoid, well done! *Tobias Friedrich*

MACRO



HIGHLY COMMENDED

**'AN ARTISTRY CORAL HOME FOR
SCORPION SHRIMP'**

Weiwei Zeng, China

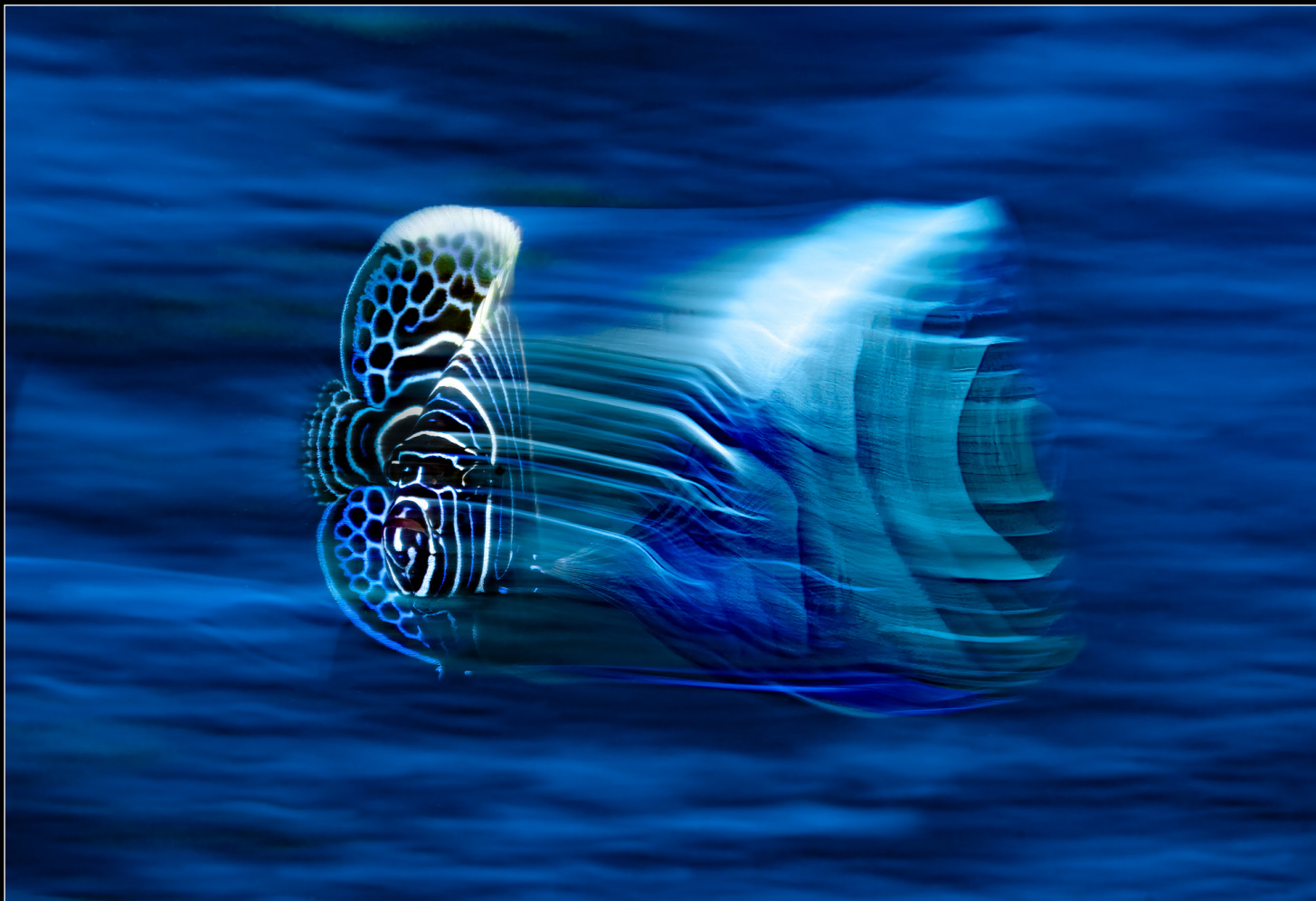
Diving off the island of Romblon, Philippines, I found a tiny scorpion shrimp around the size of 5 millimeters long. It blended itself in so well into an oval-shaped opening of the hard coral where it was sheltering. To protect itself from predators, the shrimp sometimes hid effectively by hooking the coral tissue with its legs and drawing it over its backs like curtains. I was very pleased to find and frame this super camouflaged shrimp in its natural habitat.

Romblon Philippines, China

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, 105mm, iso
ISO100, f/18, 1/250, Ikelite DS161

Judge's comments: The repeating pattern on the coral polyps is only broken by the tiny shrimp sheltering in one of them. We love the graphic strength and the limited colours in this frame that invite you to explore the shapes and discover the shrimp. *Alex Mustard*

MACRO



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'JUVENILE EMPEROR ANGELFISH'

Adam Martin, United States

During a macro dive in Bali, I set out to capture slow shutter images of a juvenile emperor angelfish. Its striking colours and patterns seemed perfect for creating unique, abstract textures with motion blur. I aimed to freeze the fish's face while transforming its intricate patterns and colours into an abstract, dynamic composition. To achieve this, a slow shutter speed was used, a flash was directed at the fish's face (to freeze its motion), and a dive torch illuminated its body (to enhance the sense of movement). The resulting image was supernatural!

Tulamben, Bali, Indonesia

Sony, A7RV, Nauticam NA-A7RV, Sony 90mm Macro, iso 160, f/18, 1/3, Backscatter Mini Flash and a torch

Judge's comments: Very good idea and perfect execution of a beautiful subject ! The blue background fits perfectly to the fish as well and the mirror image of it is a pleasure to look at. If the "main" angelfish would have had a bit more connection with the face, it would have placed even higher. *Tobias Friedrich*

MACRO



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'GHOST OF THE REEF'

Simon Biddie, United Kingdom

Adapted to camouflage amongst coral, gobies have transparent bodies, fins with suction for firm grip, and low set gills to hide any movement from predators. Meanwhile, their large, angled eyes keep a lookout. Small reef fish, like this ghostgoby are ubiquitous but unassuming, and often unseen. They are called 'cryptobenthic' fish for their ability to hide. Their land-based equivalent would be insects, evading predators by being experts in hiding. Their small size, and fast growth, like insects, mean cryptobenthic fish contribute up to 70% of the fish biomass. Of this class of fish, the Gobies are thought to be the most important, making them a critical part of reef food chains.

Marsa Alam, Egypt

Nikon, Z8, Nauticam NA-Z8, Nikkor Z 105mm, iso 160, f/20, 1/200, Retra Flash Pro Max

Judge's comments: Most underwater photographers will have taken a shot like this, but approached this quality of image defined by such beautiful details. The coral looks like an Ishihara colour blindness test chart, no wonder the ghost goby disappears like a phantom on this background. *Alex Mustard*

MACRO



COMMENDED

'OCTOPUS RIDING A SOLITARY SALP' Magnus Lundgren, Sweden

On this night the ocean was full of gelatinous organisms. Thousands of jellyfish drifters (like genuine jellyfish, medusa hydroids and salps) were passing through the light coming from our "downline" in Balayan bay, off Anilao, Philippines. I was in casual test shooting mode, trying out the Sony's 50mm macro lens more than anything else. Then in the last minute of the dive this tiny octopus (an unknown species to me) showed up riding a solitary glass-like salp (basically a pelagic tunicate). I was very excited to see it and it took a short while for me to cool down and be able shoot some decent frames!

Anilao, Mabini, Luzon, Philippines

Sony, A1, Nauticam NA-A1, Sony FE 50mm 2.8 Macro, iso 500, f/16, 1/250, Sea&Sea YS-D3 & Scubalamp' focus and search lights

Judge's comments: Blackwater photos once dominated this category, but the more we've awarded the harder it is to impress the judges with something new. We love the animation of this octopus clinging onto the salp, the action really elevates this image. *Alex Mustard*



MACRO



COMMENDED

'YAWNING BANGAI BABY'

Patrick Neumann, Indonesia

This is a photo of a young Banggai cardinalfish yawning. These guys are all over the place in the Lembeh Strait, but are actually an invasive species that do not belong there. The good thing is you can find them everywhere in anemones, stone corals and black sea urchins, and photographers do not need a dive guide to find them.

They came to Lembeh by accident when a ship sank that had them as cargo and they escaped. Within 20 years there are now thousands of them. Mostly they are fighting with clownfish over a habitat. Nevertheless, they are an amazing, popular and beautiful fish.

Lembeh Strait, Indonesia

Canon, 5DMKIV, Nauticam NA D850, 100mm
Canon Macro, iso 160, f7.1, 1/250, 1/250

Judge's comments: Subtlety can be dangerous in the early rounds when decisions are needed in an instant but this grabbed us visually and made us appreciate the well chosen, natural background and the, almost too subtle for it's own good, swirl. This is a great example of why the UPY judging process is so unique. *Peter Rowlands*

MACRO



COMMENDED

'SEEHORSE SHADOW'

Doris Vierkötter, Germany

My image was taken with another dive guide close to Alam Batu, Bali, Indonesia. The idea was to give the bubble bokeh a shadow of the sea horse or of another animal. It needs a lot of luck plus the precise positioning of all lights and flashes. It took me almost 2 years to complete this idea, so I am delighted to be recognised in the contest with this shot.

Alam Batu Resort Bali Indonesia, Deutschland

Canon, 5D mark IV, Seacam, canon EF 100mm F2.8l Macro IS USM, iso 200, f/4,5, 1/200, Seacam 2 X Miniflash MF-2 Snoot

Judge's comments: Such a great idea and perfect execution! This images is truly something new and not seen in this way before. Nice balance of the colors as well as the light on the seahorse. It must have taken some time and dedication to execute this idea. Well done ! *Tobias Friedrich*





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WRECKS

Category History

2025 Alex Dawson (Sweden)
2024 Martin Broen (United States)
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



CATEGORY WINNER

'DEEP WRECK'

Alex Dawson, Sweden

The wreck sits on the reef at around 104m depth. When she sank she got wedged between the reef wall and a small reef so there is a swim through under the wreck. We did 25 min bottom time and about 2 1/2 hours of deco to produce this image.

Gulf Fleet No 31 wreck at Shaabruhr Umm Qammar, Egypt

Nikon, Z9, Nauticam Z9, 8-15 fisheye, iso 800, 4,5, 1/80, ambient light

Judge's comments: Without a doubt one of my favourite photos in the whole competition. And also, as I learn now, one of our deepest. This image is packed with the feeling of adventure, in a finely crafted composition that draws you in with layer upon layer of interest, from foreground corals to the clouds of fish above the wreck. Understandable quality, once you know it was taken by last year's Underwater Photographer of the Year! *Alex Mustard*



WRECKS



RUNNER UP

'DEEP SEA BIRDS'

Wojciech Dopierala, Poland

Aqaba is well known among most divers and was high on my wish list for years. Finally, a perfect opportunity was created by Carlos Diesel (the agile freediver you can see on this photo) in collaboration with Diverse Divers Diving Center. We were lucky to freedive all around Aqaba wrecks for the week. This photo was made on our second visit to this particular dive spot. The idea came suddenly at the very end of our time. We only made one attempt at this shot. Fortunately, Carlos did amazing job. Looking at the scene, before I even pressed the shutter, I already had the feeling that it's probably the best shot of the trip.

Lockheed L-1011-500 TriStar, Jordan

Sony, A1, SeaFrogs A1, Sony 12-24 f4, iso 250, f/6.3, 1/125, ambient light

Judge's comments: I love the fresh images that freediving photography is bringing to underwater photography as a whole. Creating such a perfect composition and moment takes particularly high skills when both photographer and model are on breath-hold dives. *Alex Mustard*

WRECKS



THIRD

'COAST GUARD SG115'

Alex Dawson, Sweden

Wreck diving is one of the top things to do in Kas, Türkiye. This is the wreck of Sahil Guvenlik SG115 a former coast guard boat that was sunk at an appropriate depth for recreational divers - a maximum depth of 35m. It is a beautiful wreck close to town, one I highly recommend!

Kas Coast Guard SG115 wreck, Türkiye

Nikon, Z9, Nauticam, 14-30, iso 64, f4, 1/60, Big Blue Dive Lights VL65000P

Judge's comments: A simple image with strong composition leaves the subject to create the power while the simple divers' lights lead the eye through the frame and then three small fish call you back to provide important balance. A joy to look at every time it came on the screen. Quality photography.
Peter Rowlands



WRECKS



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'WW1 WRECK'

Alex Dawson, Sweden

SS Carthage is one of the most well-preserved wrecks in the Mediterranean, characterised by its tall super structure and all its detail. She rests at the depth of 84m (276 feet). She was 122m long with a beam of 15,6m and a gross tonnage of 5600. She was sunk by the submarine U-21 on July 4th in 1915.

SS Carthage wreck, Türkiye

Nikon, Z9, Nauticam Z9, 8-15mm fisheye, iso 500, f4.5, 1/25, Big Blue dive lights VL65000P

Judge's comments: What a nice wreck! We were very impressed of the kind of wreck and the ambience of that shot. A very rare horizontal shot of the photographer though, which I would love to see more of in the future. The image quality is a bit lacking (what I can see from the preview), but I guess it was very deep as well. Nicely lit by this bit of light from inside as well. Very well done.

Tobias Friedrich

WRECKS



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'JURA WRECK'

Frank Aron, Germany

The wreck of the steamer Jura is one of the most famous freshwater wrecks in Europe and lying in Lake Constance in a depth of about 36 m. After a collision with the ship 'Stadt Zürich' in 1864 she sunk in just a couple of minutes. Even 150 years later this wooden wreck is nearly completely preserved, giving divers a clear idea of what happened during the collision. Obviously, the crew tried to steer the ship hard to starboard, as can be seen from the rudder. My goal was to emphasize the wooden rudder blade with a strong video light behind. My buddy Lars swam towards the light to give a sense of scale to the scene.

Wreck Jura, lake constance, Switzerland

Sony, A 7 C, Nauticam NA-A7C, FE 28/2.0 /
Nauticam WWL-1, iso 6400, F/7.1, 1/30, custom
made

Judge's comments: What a nice shot of this rarely photographed wreck of the JURA in Germany / Switzerland. It's been taken in very good visibility and we loved the simplicity of the shot. The light that has been placed carefully behind the rudder adds so nicely to the silhouette of the stern. The cherry on the cake is the reflection of the diver in the mask. *Tobias Friedrich*



WRECKS



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'TRUK TRUCK'

Rick Ayrton, United Kingdom

This is a Nissan Flat bed truck in hold No.2 of the Nagano Maru, sunk during Operation Hailstone in February 1944. One of the deeper wrecks in Truk Lagoon, the truck is at about 55 meters. Fellow photographer Kieran Hatton had kindly agreed to set aside his own camera for this dive, offering to place and use video lights to illuminate the truck. I had to get into position to capture the image and was using settings that would allow ambient light to be a large part of the scene, showing the wider hold away from the truck. Silt was a problem here and I did not get long to take the shot before the visibility deteriorated. My strobes were set on the minimum in reduced power mode and used to light Kieran and the hold walls. Kieran's hand held videolight is obviously lighting the main subject.

Truk (chuuk) Lagoon, Federated States of
Micronesia

Nikon, Z9, Nauticam NA-Z9, 8-15mm @ 15mm, iso
5600, f10, 1/50, Retra Pro Max plus off board video
lights

Judge's comments: An evocative image of wreck
exploration, that shows the value of teamwork in
producing quality wreck photos at depth. Great
work Rick and Kieran. *Alex Mustard*

WRECKS



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'IN THE TORNADO'

Jean-Baptiste Cazajous, France

The Togo was a coal transport ship which was sunk by a mine explosion at the end of the World War I in May 1918. It lies on the sand at a depth of 59m in the bay of Cavalaire-Sur-Mer.

With my friend Florian, we planned to take a photo of the front of the wreck. On the day of this dive we barely had time to finish our descent to arrive on the deck at around 45m, when a huge school of fish arrived and started swirling around the hull. I just had time to adjust my settings and take a few shots. Although not technically perfect, the image that finally caught my attention is this one, with a few slow shutter speed which brought a slight motion blur to the school of fish.

Togo Wreck, Cavalaire-sur-mer, France

Sony, A7RIII, Nauticam NA-A7RIII, Canon 8-15 f4 Fisheye, iso 800, 11, 1/15, 3x BigBlue dive lights

Judge's comments: A graphically simple image, not overlit, which captures the feeling of the moment and the circling shoal of fish add vibrancy and life. A classic image.

Peter Rowlands



WRECKS



COMMENDED

'SUNBURST SHIPWRECK'

Renee Capozzola, United States

This half and half image was shot just before the sun went down behind this shipwreck off Brisbane, Australia. I had spent all afternoon taking images in the shallow waters with the sun overhead and thought it would make a nice picture later in the day when the sun was going to drop behind the wreck. On this particular evening, I was fortunate to have calm water and a clear sky. By using a very small aperture and flash, I was able to capture both the sunburst forming as the sun dropped in the background and the fish in the foreground.

Queensland, off of Brisbane, Australia

Canon, 5D Mark IV, SEACAM, Canon EF 11-24mm f/4L USM, iso 250, f20, 1/200, SEACAM Seaflash 160

Judge's comments: A former, Underwater Photographer of the Year, Renee is celebrated for her mastery of the split-level image. This image transports me straight to this wreck, with the distinctive bow bathed in evening light, with an attractive school of monos beneath the surface, adding additional interest to the scene.

Alex Mustard



WRECKS



COMMENDED

'CONTROL ROOM OF THE RIO'

Martin Broen, United States

Truk Lagoon is certainly a shipwreck paradise, and a true playground for panoramic photography. In the control room of the Rio De Janeiro wreck, I photographed this flooded maze filled with machinery and gauges. The atmosphere of the image is accentuated by the orange and green tones from the rusty metal.

Rio De Janeiro Wreck, Truk Lagoon, United States

Sony, a1, Nauticam, Sony 28-60 + Nauticam FCP, iso 6400, 5.6, 1/40, X3 BigBlue Light 33.000 Video Lights

Judge's comments: A modest backstory from last year's winner of this category, making light of the planning and the technical exercise operating in a tight, silt strewn compartment at who knows what depth. Photographically mirrored and a very effectively lit, well chosen powerful subject.

Peter Rowlands



WRECKS



COMMENDED

**'TWO WORLDS COLLIDE -
SKY AND WATER'**

Jantina Scheltema, Netherlands

This image was taken in Kreidesee Hemmoor, a favorite spot for both training and fun dives. The diver is my trusted buddy Marco, who's always a willing and patient model. I had captured this scene before with my previous camera, but the quality wasn't quite there. Using the Nikon Z8 with a 15mm lens, I could work with natural light and reduce the water distance between the camera and the subject, achieving the clarity and depth I envisioned.

I love how surreal this scene feels - the airplane flying through the water column, paired with a diver. It invites you to question: which one doesn't belong, the plane or the person? This is the paradox that I hoped to capture.

Kreidesee Hemmoor, Germany

Nikon, Z8, Nauticam, Nikon 8-15mm, iso 2000, 18, 1/125, None

Judge's comments: This graphically simple image certainly stood out from the crowd and kept up its appeal throughout the rounds. Unusual images can fade with viewing but we all felt that this deserved promotion into the winners enclosure.

Peter Rowlands



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NA-A9III for Sony A9III
NA-Z6III for Nikon Z6III
NA-R1 for Canon R1



Nauticam

BEHAVIOUR

Category History

2025 Shunsuke Nakano
2024 Rafael Fernandez Caballero (Spain)
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



CATEGORY WINNER

'FACE OFF'

Shunsuke Nakano, Japan

This is a photo of two male Asian sheepshead wrasse fighting. The unique form of this species is characteristic of males, who form harems and claim territories during the breeding season. The one on the left in the photo is the harem king, who has defended his territory for more than 10 years and is estimated to be over 30 years old, while the one on the right is a young challenger.

Although I had planned carefully to capture the images, the 2024 season was more difficult to predict than usual, and despite staying there for a week during the breeding season, I was only able to observe this scene once, for just 10 seconds. And this was the only photograph I was able to take. The sight of them fighting in their flashy white outfits was so magnificent I can still remember it vividly.

Sado Niigata, Japan

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, af nikkor 28-70mm f3.5-4.5 d with Nauticam WACP-1, iso 200, f/16, 1/250, INON Z330

Judge's comments: Perfectly timed to capture the moment of the contender challenging the king. The fight for hierarchy is the strongest form of behaviour. Well lit with no distracting background, this image leapt out immediately and continued to be the one to beat off the challengers.

Peter Rowlands

BEHAVIOUR



RUNNER UP

'THE MOMENT'

Eduardo Acevedo, Spain

November-December at Magdalena Bay in Baja California, are the best months to try and get good encounters with blue marlin. However, getting strong images of these fish in wild life is very difficult because they attack the sardines and mackerels and very high speed, making it extremely difficult to capture this behaviour in a photo.

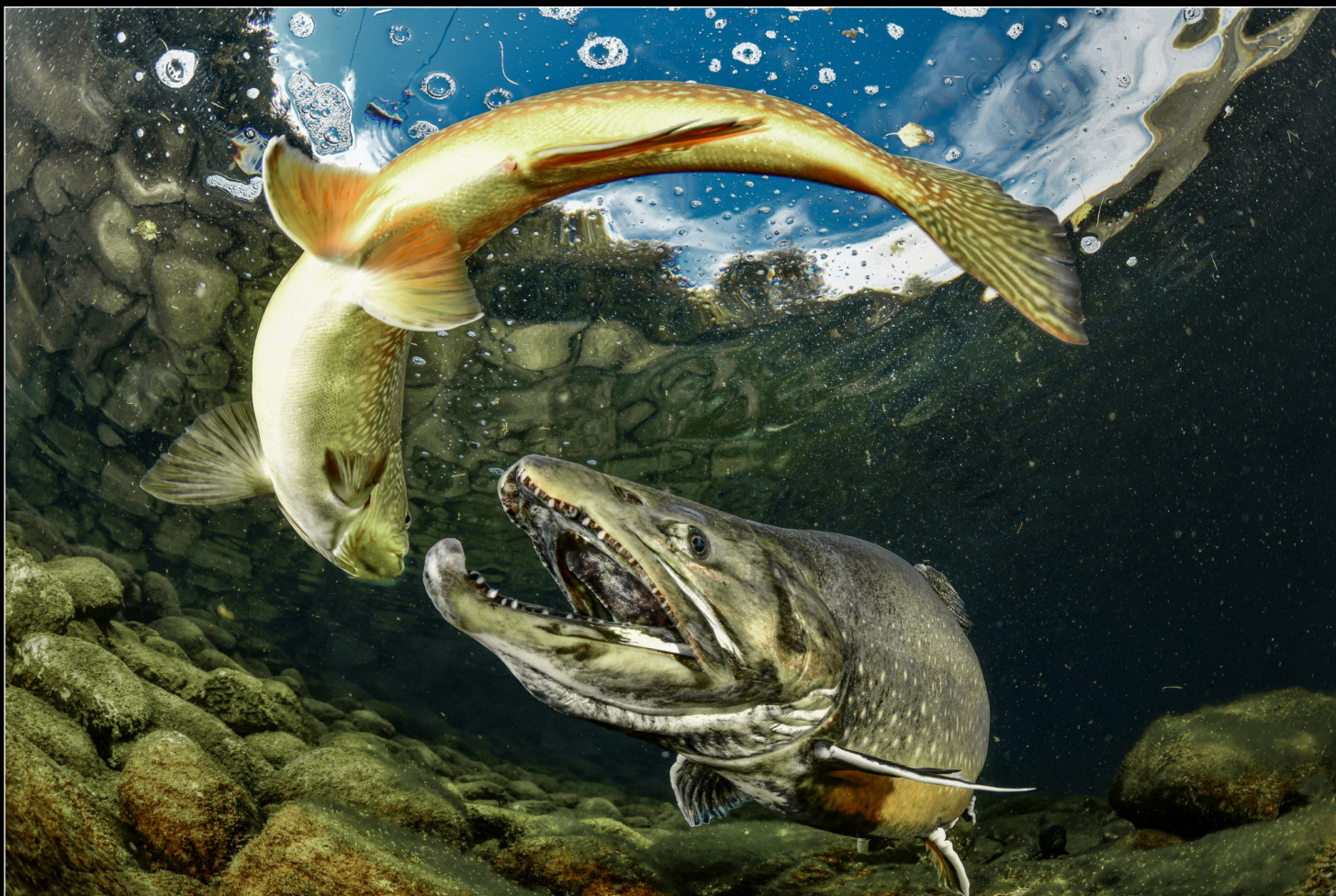
Magdalena Bay, Baja California, Mexico

Canon, 5D MARK IV, SEACAM, 15mm, iso 400, f/9, 1/500, No strobes

Judge's comments: This photo is all about moment, as the blue marlin pounces and the terrified school scatters. We loved that the photographer was mindful to include such a beautiful reflection in the composition, despite the briefness of the photographic opportunity.

Alex Mustard

BEHAVIOUR



THRID

'THE MACH'

Lorincz Ferenc Lorinc, Hungary

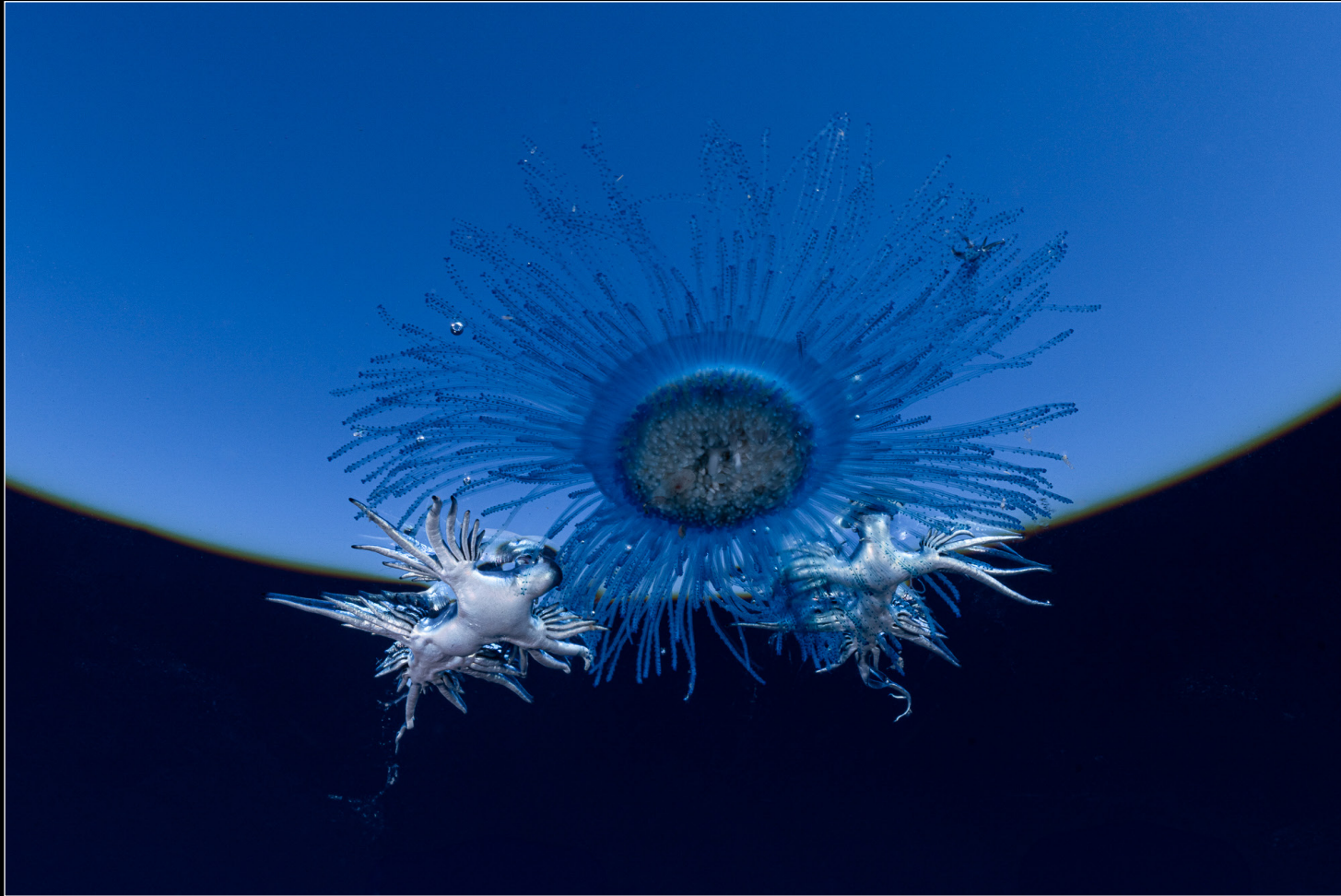
Trout and salmon interact with each other in the Austrian mountain lake. It was interesting to see two different types of fish interacting with each other. The picture was taken in the lake Gröblsee, Austria, located at an altitude of 1160 meters.

Gröblsee, Austria

Nikon , D850, SUBAL ND850, Nikkor 8-15mm f/3.5-4.5 Fisheye , iso 200, f/10, 1/250, IKELITE DS160X2

Judge's comments: Such a nice overall composition of the image. The low perspective of the photographer really captures the swing of the fishes that almost make a circle. A bit much light from the left strobe and the backscatter prevented it from placing higher, though. *Tobias Friedrich*

BEHAVIOUR



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'ATTACK OF THE BLUE DRAGONS'

Henley Spiers, United Kingdom

In a rarely witnessed and fantastical scene, two blue dragon sea slugs feed on a blue button hydroid colony. As a young dive professional, downtime was spent scouring marine identification books to create a bucket list of encounters. My aspiration was to meet a blue dragon, an impossibly ornate pelagic sea slug, but it would take 13 years for it to be realised.

These small yet magnificent creations live in the open ocean, and are at the mercy of wind, tide and currents. Meeting dragons remained a pipe dream until last year. I was on assignment for a story on whales, but with a rich plankton bloom in the area, we temporarily abandoned ocean giants to search for 1 inch dragons. It seemed an impossible task, but fate was on our side and I could scarcely believe my eyes as I finally gazed at a blue dragon underwater.

Gulf of California, Baja California Sur, Mexico

Sony, Sony A7RV, Nauticam, Sony 28-60mm
@49mm with Nauticam WACP-C, iso 400, f/22,
1/250, Retra Pro X

Judge's comments: Otherworldly, almost mythological in its beauty. I love underwater images that seem to take you to an alien planet. A real favourite image of mine from the category, that didn't have enough action for all the judges! Henley is one of my regularly awarded photographers and his quest for hidden dragons has definitely been worth the wait. *Alex Mustard*

BEHAVIOUR



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'THE SURVIVORS'

Richard Barnden, United States

The spawning of the moorish idol is still a bit of a mystery! Every year hundreds of Moorish Idols gather together in large schools around a few sites in Palau. They spend hours schooling together during the day time, attracting hundreds of sharks as they dance up and down the reef. At some point when the timing is right, they form a yellow and black tornado swirling upwards towards the surface being chased by every shark in the area. Most of the school will be decimated within minutes, except a few survivors, who just continue swimming far into the open ocean on what looks like a one way ticket!

In the open water at Blue Corner , Palau

Nikon , D850, Nauticam NA D850, Sigma 15mm,
iso 400, 10, 1/160, Ambient light

Judge's comments: I love the surprise that people get when they spot the shark! Although this behaviour has been on the telly, this is the only still photo we've seen capturing the action, showing the dangers these fish face to spawn the next generation. *Alex Mustard*

BEHAVIOUR



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'CALIFORNIA NEWTS LAYING EGGS'

Anton Sorokin, United States

Every year in early spring, California newts migrate to nearby water sources to mate and lay eggs. This pond in the rolling hills of California supports an exceptionally strong population but the site is far from pristine. Herds of cattle visit the pond to drink and use it as a latrine. Upon arriving at the site, I was disheartened to find the water clarity to be particularly bad due to heavy recent rains, limiting visibility underwater to a finger's length. However, looking down into the water I was just barely able to discern hubs of newt activity as they attached their eggs to vegetation. Dodging floating cow pats and crouching in the murky water, keeping my head elevated above the surface - I photographed this scene mostly blind. Occasionally checking the results and readjusting my approach until I had the desired composition.

California, USA

Nikon , D810, Nauticam NA D810, Nikon 8-15mm fisheye, iso 200, f18, 1/25, Dual Seacam strobes

Judge's comments: Oblivious to the clarity and quality of the water, the behaviour and composition is unambiguous and the photographer's instinct and perseverance, in far from ideal conditions, paid off.

Peter Rowlands

BEHAVIOUR



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'ENTWINED IN BLUE'

Yazid Shaari, Libya

Ascending from my first dive of the day, I encountered an astonishing sight—two Arabian Gulf sea snakes intertwined in an intricate dance. Fate had placed me in the right moment to witness this rarely seen mating ritual, their bodies coiling and gliding in perfect harmony beneath the water's surface. The seamless flow of their movements, set against the endless blue, created a spectacle both captivating and surreal. Moments like these are a testament to the ocean's endless wonders, unfolding unexpectedly for those who venture into it with curiosity and patience.

Coral Garden dive site, Dimaniyat Islands, Muscat, Oman, Libya

Nikon , Z9, Nauticam

Judge's comments: What a nice encounter and witness of behavior. The snakes are perfectly framed against the water surface and technically on a very high level as it's crisp sharp. We would have wished that the second snake would also look into the image, but of course the situation not always gives you the perfect shot. *Tobias Friedrich*

BEHAVIOUR



COMMENDED

'GIANTS OF THE DEEP'

Jonas Beyer, Denmark

In the vast blue depths, an extraordinary moment unfolds as a humpback whale dives into a frenzy of fish, feeding with powerful grace, while an orca glides nearby. These two ocean giants, each a master of its own survival strategy, share the same waters yet pursue entirely different paths. The humpback, a filter feeder, expands its massive jaws to engulf thousands of fish in one gulp, while the orca, a keen and agile predator, remains alert and observant. This rare encounter highlights the complexity and wonder of the ocean's ecosystems, where creatures coexist in a delicate balance of power and purpose.

Kvænangen, Norway

Sony, A1, Nauticam for Sony A1, 16-35mm f/2.8, iso 4000, 2.8, 320, none

Judge's comments: Wow, what a moment ! This perspective and encounter is truly unique and amazing ! To have both, an Orca and a Humpback whale, feeding on the same herrings is truly amazing. In these situations it is very hard to get the right composition, but if the image would have been vertical and the head of the Orca a bit lighter, it could have placed even higher. *Tobias Friedrich*

BEHAVIOUR



COMMENDED

'EXPECTANT PARENTS'

Mark Chang, Philippines

Two whip coral gobies were running up and down the coral across their eggs, I believe to aerate them. They did this for quite some time, taking turns on opposite sides, alternating, then together, and back again. We observed this behaviour for several minutes, until they suddenly stopped to rest. It looked as if they were in a loving embrace, completely exhausted from caring for the eggs, but happily looking forward to the time their struggles will be rewarded when they finally hatch.

The Asri Dive & Leisure Resort, Anilao, Philippines

Canon, 5D3, Nauticam NA5DIII, 100mm 2.8, iso 320, f18, 1/200, Backscatter Miniflash and Snoot

Judge's comments:

Such a perfect, classic and well done shot ! I loved the sharpness and clarity of the image immediately when I saw it. To get that close to these to Gobies is truly not easy and well done by the photographer. Excellent shot! *Tobias Friedrich*

BEHAVIOUR



COMMENDED

'LITTLE MONSTER IN THE MOUTH'

Wen Chou Wu, Taiwan

I believe most of divers have read about tongue-eating parasites on social media. It passes through the gills into the fish's mouth, eventually replacing the fish's tongue and becoming part of the fish. How terrifying!

In August 2024, when I was doing my five meter safety stop, I spotted a blenny hiding in a hole and I took a few photos to pass the time during the safety stop. I didn't find anything "abnormal" about this Blenny during shooting, Blenny was smiling as usual, but when I checked my photos on my computer, I noticed that the blenny also had a "Little Monster" in its mouth. I thought this fish would be tortured by tongue-eating louse, but the two seem to be in some kind of peaceful balance, making this photo cute and scary at the same time.

Northeast corner of Taiwan, Taiwan

Olympus, EM1 mk3, AOI, 60mm F2.8, iso 100, f/18, 1/160, SUPE D-PRO flashes x2

Judge's comments:

Viewing this image takes you on a journey from cute to repulsed. Initially it seems like an engaging portrait of this cheeky blenny, and then as you examine the smile, you spot the eyes of the isopod parasite that has eaten away and replaced the tongue of the fish! *Alex Mustard*





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PORTRAIT

Category History

- 2025 Abdulaziz Al Saleh (Kuwait)
- 2024 Rafael Fernandez Caballero (Spain)
- 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



CATEGORY WINNER

'HYDRATION'

Abdulaziz Al Saleh, Kuwait

I had the idea of photographing the camels drinking water for about one and half a years. I wanted to photograph them drinking water from the underwater perspective because I did not see any images showing this. The weather was a critical, and it took me several weeks to get the best possible shots. The first week the camels were a bit hesitant to drink water while my camera was under the water and only few gathered to drink, which is not what I wanted. But after several days the camels had already accepted to me and my equipment.

After my first week of shooting the Camels, I changed to electronic synch cords for my strobes instead of fibre-optic cables because of problems. And finally the shots came together.

Al Wafra desert, Kuwait

Nikon, Z8, Nauticam NA-Z8 , Nikkor 8-15mm fisheye, iso 100, F/18, 1/100, Inon Z330 (dual)

Judge's comments:

Such a joyous image and a portrait of camels certainly took us by pleasant surprise. Great eye contact, well chosen angle and surface distortions gives you plenty to look at and the lower, childlike, cheeky mouth adds a heartwarming finale to a quality photograph, which is much more than just an eye-catching subject.

Peter Rowlands

PORTRAIT



RUNNER UP

'AMAZON RIVER DOLPHIN SILHOUETTE'

Hussain Aga Khan, Switzerland

I spent two weeks in Manaus – where about 10 operators feed the river dolphins, which are a draw to tourists. We visited a pontoon with 4 resident botos and a beach that draws about 7 in daily. Botos look very unusual compared to other dolphins, with incredibly long rostra – with vestigial hairs on them, tiny eyes and thick bodies. The idea here was to try to get an unexpected view of a surprising animal most people have never heard about. I also wanted to make it apparent that they live beneath the forest canopy in Coca-Cola-coloured water. Seeing these dolphins every day for 2 weeks made taking photographs of them incrementally easier as we became familiar with their shape, movement and behaviour and even, to a certain extent, individual characters.

Manaus, Brazil

Canon, EOS R5, Nauticam NA-R5 , EF8-15mm f/4L FISHEYE USM, iso 1250, f/9, 1/125, no

Judge's comments: Eye-catching symmetry is combined with minimalistic graphic elements and a restricted colour palette to create a powerful composition that clearly communicates the unusual anatomy and habitat of the river dolphin. All this and in beautiful light too. *Alex Mustard*

PORTRAIT



THRID

'A FRONDLY SNOOT BOOP'

Patrick Webster, United States

The giant kelp forests of the Falkland Islands are among the lushest algal amphitheaters anywhere in the coldwater world. Their prodigious productivity supports a plethora of awesome aquatic animals, including this rambunctiously curious South American sea lion (*Otaria flavescens*).

Initially intrigued by this vibrant sea forest tucked away off the West Falkland archipelago, my dive buddies and I quickly found ourselves the center of a passing pride's attention. An exuberant young male, with small scars of missing whiskers, looking so much like adolescent acne, on his face-forward personality, began his investigation slowly. Then suddenly was right in our faces, poking, prodding and jawing his way into figuring out what exactly was this bubbly beast barking in his backyard. I spent the next hour entranced in his analytical dance, this frame capturing the awesome-if-awkward aura of a youngster well on his way to commanding all that the light touches from his far-flung frondly Falklandic fortress.

West Falkland Islands, Falkland Islands, British Overseas Territory

Sony, A1, Nauticam NA-A1, Sony FE PZ 16-35mm f/4 G at 16mm, iso 100, f/11, 1/40, Sea & Sea YS-D3

Judge's comments: Such a quality portrait! It made everyone of us smile when we saw the image. Excellent capture by the photographer and very well lit, which is not easy when the seals are coming so close. The background really completes the image adding overall balanced. Another strong contender in a high quality category.

Tobias Friedrich

PORTRAIT



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'ALPENWATER SALAMANDER'

Matthew Perez, United States

Every year I follow the amphibian migration as I did in 2024 where I searched for salamanders in my favourite freshwater lake.

Of course, this is not an easy pursuit because they are quite shy animals. Finally after spending hours in the water I found one that was willing to pose, and this is the photo.

Freshwater lake Antwerp, Belgium

Nikon, Z7 II, Isotta , Nikon 60 mm, iso 100, f/22, 1/125, Backscatter mini flash + snoot

Judge's comments:

A flawless image of an animal which is not seen very often. Very nice lighting on the little thing and nothing to do better here. The vertical orientation fits so well to the leaf it's sitting on. Well done.

Peter Rowlands



PORTRAIT



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'EYE CONTACT'

Jonas Beyer, Denmark

An intimate moment in the cold waters of the northern fjords of Norway. Making eye contact with a young orca, an apex predator of the ocean. Being so close to this magnificent creature is both humbling and exhilarating—a fleeting connection with one of the most intelligent and powerful hunters of the marine world. A true privilege to witness its grace and curiosity up close in its natural habitat.

Kvænen, Norway

Sony, A1, Nauticam NA-A1, 16-35mm f/2.8, iso 6400, f/3.5, 250, none

Judge's comments:

A view and a level of connection with the ocean's top predator that we've not seen in a photo before. A revealing and intimate portrait combined with an engaging composition. Remarkable work.

Alex Mustard



PORTRAIT



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'SNAPPING TURTLE STARE'

Isaac Szabo, United States

On a brisk March morning, I slid into the warm, clear waters of a Florida spring and spotted a familiar shape: the resident snapping turtle. Though often feared, they are actually rather timid or indifferent underwater, making them excellent subjects. I excitedly snapped shots as it meandered along the springs edges when, suddenly, it led me to an alligator resting in a fallen tree, presenting me with a dilemma: stick with the turtle or the alligator? I reluctantly chose the alligator as the turtle scuttled away but soon realized the alligator shot wasn't ideal. Disappointed, I hurried back in the direction of the turtle and managed to find it again just before it began to extend its long neck to the surface to breathe. Anticipating a good photo opportunity, I quickly positioned my camera low and captured a perfect reflection of its face just as it reached the water's surface.

Florida Spring, United States

Sony, A7R II, Meikon, Canon 60mm with Nauticam
EMWL 130, iso 125, f/8, 1/60, 2x Inon Z-240's

Judge's comments:

A beautiful scene frames a revealing portrait. The snapping turtle is only breathing, but the photo has a tremendous feeling of the moment from its fully extended posture. We loved how the eye is watching us (the photographer) in the surface reflection.

Peter Rowlands



PORTRAIT



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'HARMONY BENEATH THE WAVES'

George Kuo-Wei Kao, Taiwan

Sunlight dances through the water, illuminating a fisherman as he places a bamboo Bubu trap with quiet reverence. This simple act reflects an ancient harmony taking only what is needed, leaving coral and fish untouched to renew.

To capture this fleeting moment, I used dual strobes to enhance the vibrant colours of the coral reef and highlight the fisherman's deliberate movements. Careful positioning and timing were crucial to preserve the natural atmosphere while accentuating the subject. The Bubu embodies mindfulness in practice: crafted to coexist, set and retrieved with care, it honours the rhythm of the sea, within the span of a single breath.

Alor, Indonesia

OM , EM1 Mk2, Nauticam, 8mm, iso 200, 11, 1/250, 2 SUPE D-MAX

Judge's comments:

Good idea for a portrait shot! The expression of the fisher is so nice to look at and it fits very well in the shallow water with the sunrays from behind. Good light on everything, maybe a tiny bit too much. I think it could look very nice even without artificial light, too. *Tobias Friedrich*



PORTRAIT



COMMENDED

'STRIKE A POSE'

Fabrice Dudenhofer, France

During a dive trip in Safaga, Egypt, I encountered a hawksbill turtle that was unusually curious. I quickly realized she was fascinated by her own reflection in my dome port. For a few moments, she literally seemed to strike a pose, motionless in front of my lens. I hadn't planned this encounter, but I immediately knew it was a unique opportunity to capture a perfectly symmetrical portrait. My goal was to create a balanced and graphic image, giving the impression of an underwater photo shoot. It was a fleeting yet mesmerizing moment, where this turtle seemed as intrigued by me as I was by her.

Safaga, Egypt

Olympus, E-M1 Mark II, Isotta OM-D E-M1,
Olympus 8mm f/1.8 Fisheye Pro , iso 250, f/9,
1/200, RETRA 1st Generation

Judge's comments:

Very good portrait shot of a common subject. The perfect symmetry of the turtle combined with the two fins straight up create an unforgettable image, well done! The shot is a little be bright and a bit less light from the strobes would have seen it place higher, in this strong category. *Tobias Friedrich*

PORTRAIT



COMMENDED

'SCAR FACE'

Yinan Liu, China

Shortly after heading out to sea on this day, I spotted the dorsal fin of this mako shark breaking the surface. It was swimming very slowly and relaxed. Our boat slowly approached the shark and we tried to go into the water to take pictures. It was not afraid, but swam towards us curiously. It had a deep wound on its face, which was certainly caused by a fish hook. After I took a few photos, it slowly disappeared into the sea. After our encounter, I wish it well and hope that it is not hurt by humans again.

Baja, Mexico

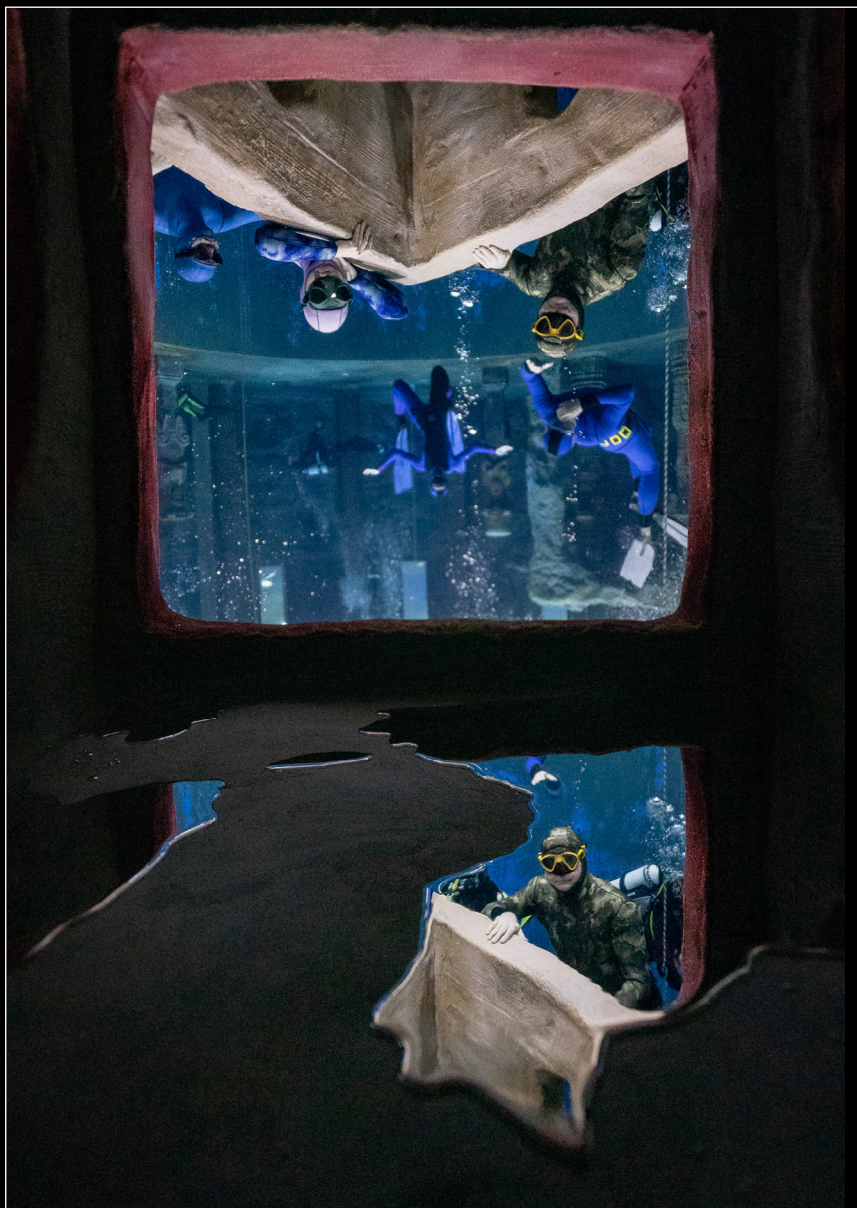
Canon, 5DSR, Nauticam NA 5DSR, Canon 8-15mm F4 Fisheye Lens, iso 320, F/4, 1/250, No strobe
Nature light

Judge's comments:

An excellent full on, powerful portrait. Perfectly timed and lit both above and below with the sad wound being the last to get noticed but hopefully it healed. See you next year fit and well, hopefully.
Peter Rowlands



PORTRAIT



COMMENDED

'INSIDE-OUT & UPSIDE-DOWN'

Marcus Greatwood, United Kingdom

I found this bubble in the ceiling of the concrete boat in Dive4Life, Indoor Diving Centre. I was drawn to the idea of seeing the reflection as reality, before realising that the reality is thought the through the window. I like that all the other people only join the composition when we look closer. It is only then we try and work out how the shot was taken... I still do this every time I look at my shot!

Dive4Life, Germany

Sony, A6700, Nauticam NA-A6700, Sony 11mm, iso 8000, f/1.8, 1/400

Judge's comments:

A clever portrait that plays with our expectations. By presenting the original shot upside down the photographer conjures a false reality, which then evaporates as our eyes wander through the rest of the frame. Original and highly effective. A worthy award. *Alex Mustard*



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www.magic-filters.com

Coral Reefs

Category History

2025 Catherine Holmes, (UK)

CORAL REEFS



CATEGORY WINNER

'KALEIDOSCOPE OF COLOUR'

Catherine Holmes, United Kingdom

Raja Ampat, Indonesia, is a magical destination where the colour, beauty, biodiversity and dense fish life can almost be an overload on the senses- a celebration of healthy reef life. I was lucky to find perfect conditions with clear water and schooling baitfish swirling amongst the canyons of a large coral bommie, adorned with verdant soft corals.

I aimed to capture the reef teeming with life and colour to inspire us all to protect this valuable habitat. All around the world, our oceans, and in particular the coral reefs, are under threat. They are vital habitat for the myriad of species they support, and critical for the oceans health. Climate change, pollution, overfishing and destructive fishing all threaten this environment, and the devastating outcomes are seen worldwide with bleached and dying reefs, with dwindling fish life. Awareness is essential to protect and sustain these precious environments for the future.

Gorgonian Passage, Wayil Batan Island, Misool, Raja Ampat, Indonesia

Nikon , D500, NA-D500. Nauticam, Nikon Fisheye. 8-15 (3.5-4.5) @12mm, iso 320, f/11, 1/160, Retra Pro strobes- with diffusers

Judge's comments:

This image just screams "coral"! It's also rare to see a vertical image which works well of a coral reef. The light distribution on the image is absolutely beautiful and the reef full of colour. A very well deserved winner of this category. *Tobias Friedrich*



CORAL REEFS



RUNNER UP

'GARDENS OF THE CARIBBEAN REEF SHARK'

Jenny Stock, United Kingdom

Filling my frame with purple sea fans and porous sea rod, I settled low on the seabed, concealing myself and my camera as much as possible in the hope of a close pass from the circling Caribbean reef shark. Hunkered down, I waited for the perfect moment. Finally, this creature elegantly swam into my frame, its shiver visible in the background, adding dramatic depth to my image.

Jardines de la Reina has been a successfully protected national marine park since 1996. Today fishing and visitor numbers are restricted and its ninety mile long archipelago of reefs are renowned for pristine corals and flourishing marine life.

Caribbean reef sharks can grow up to three meters long and are one of the largest apex predators in the reef ecosystem.

Jardines de la Reina, Cuba

Canon, 5D IV, Nauticam, 16 - 35mm , iso 800, f/14, 1/125, Retra

Judge's comments:

A great example of how the apex predators flourish in a protected marine park. The dramatic low angle emphasises the power of the main subject and the additional light freezes the action and brings out the healthy colours. *Peter Rowlands*



CORAL REEFS



THRID

'BEAUTIFUL SEA FOREST'

Hitomi Tsuchiya, Japan

On Le Island in Okinawa Prefecture, there is a forest of thriving coral reefs. This photo was a miracle that came together with several conditions. I waited for the wind to die down and the tide to go out so that the sea and the coral could be closer together. I swam for nearly an hour looking for a spot where the coral, semi-mirror sea, and blue sky could all be seen at the same time, and used the distorting properties of a fisheye lens to capture this beautiful coral forest. Also, because the sea and the coral reefs were so close, I was careful not to damage them when taking the photo.

I would be happy if people who see this work would think about marine conservation, global warming, and the vitality of coral reefs.

Le Island, Okinawa, Japan

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, 8.0-15.0mm fisheye f/3.5-4.5, iso 640, f/16, 1/320, Natural Light

Judge's comments: A creative twist on the coral garden shot. The details really make this shot a winner, with the photographer including the fluffy cumulous clouds in Snell's window and choosing to shoot in front of the purple Acropora, which contrasts brilliantly with the beige hues of the other corals. *Alex Mustard*

CORAL REEFS



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'SLENDER FILEFISH IN A GORGONIAN'

Sage Ono, United States

A slender filefish glides in between the branches of a gorgonian in Bonaire. These small fish are incredibly shy often hiding in sea grass, coral, or sponges to avoid detection. When I saw this individual camouflaging among the golden soft coral, I waited for it to pass into clear view to show a glimpse of the elusive critter.

Salt Pier, Bonaire

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, Nikon 60 mm Macro, iso 125, f/16, 1/30, Retra Pro Max

Judge's comments: Macro pictures that make macro subjects look small are amongst my favourites. This shot does more than tell us how small slender filefish are, it also speaks to their secretive personality, as they live out their lives mostly unnoticed on coral reefs. *Alex Mustard*



CORAL REEFS



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'MANGROVE CORAL PARADISE'

Renee Capozzola, United States

This half and half image was shot along the mangrove shoreline in Raja Ampat, Indonesia. Here, you can find healthy hard corals in very shallow water enveloped by diverse marine life. Mangrove forests are vital ecosystems which store large amounts of blue carbon, increase shoreline stability, act as a nursery for fish and other sea creatures, and provide a source of food and ecotourism. It's crucial that mangrove forests receive additional protections, especially now in the face of climate change, and so that they remain for future generations.

Raja Ampat, Indonesia

Canon, 5D Mark IV, SEACAM, Canon EF 11-24mm f/4L USM, iso 500, f18, 1/160, Sea & Sea YS-D3

Judge's comments: Perfect split shot of a very nice reef in Raja Ampat! The two round stone corals in the lower part of the frame with the reflections of those in the surface. Well done by the photographer to lift up the camera a bit to capture those. *Tobias Friedrich*



CORAL REEFS



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'REFLECTIONS OF A HUMPEAD WRASSE'

Joe Daniels, France

Fakarava, a remote atoll in the heart of the South Pacific is home to one of the most pristine coral reef ecosystems on the planet. During the spring tides water levels drop bringing many areas of already shallow reef crest almost in contact with the surface, creating mirror like reflections. To take advantage of these special conditions, I would snorkel out to a small channel in the reef where the local blacktip reef sharks (*Carcharhinus melanopterus*) would move in and out of the lagoon during low tide. Whilst waiting and being as still as possible to not disturb the surface and the animals, a large humphead wrasse (*Cheilinus undulatus*) glided past me, and I was able to make this mirror image. Moments later the wind picked up and the current started to run disturbing the surface once again.

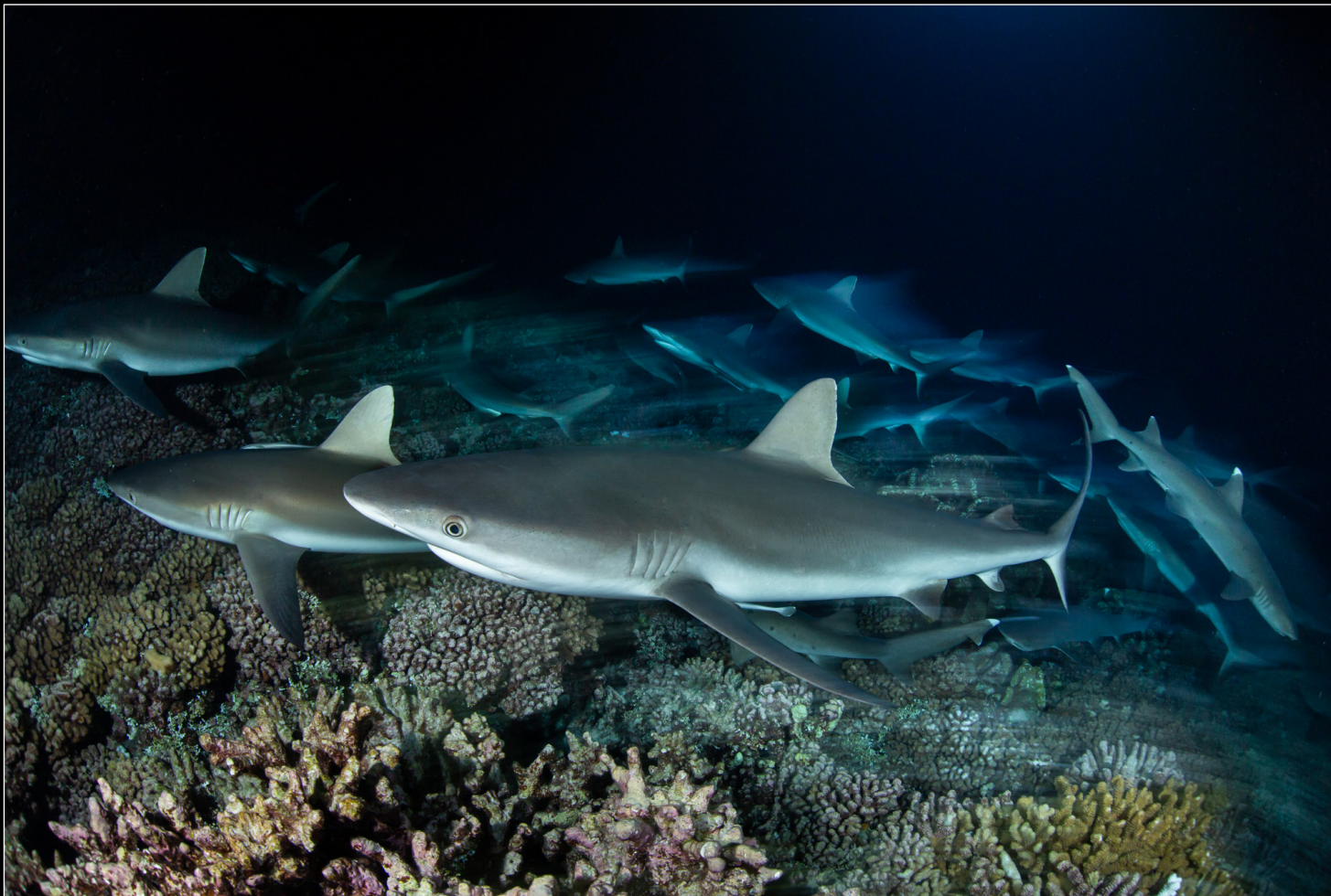
Fakarava South Pass, French Polynesia

Canon, 5D MK III, Nauticam NA 5DS, Sigma 15mm fisheye + Kenko 1.4 teleconverter., iso 200, f13, 1/125th, Retra Flash x 2

Judge's comments: The magnificent Napoleon wrasse has been heavily exploited for the live fish food trade, as it was often prized as a centrepiece for banquets. It means that they are very rare or absent in many coral reef areas, so seeing one is always a reason to be cheerful. We love that there are two in this frame as the ephemeral conditions have allowed for a perfect reflection shot.

Alex Mustard

CORAL REEFS



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'SHARK NIGHT'

Joe Daniels, France

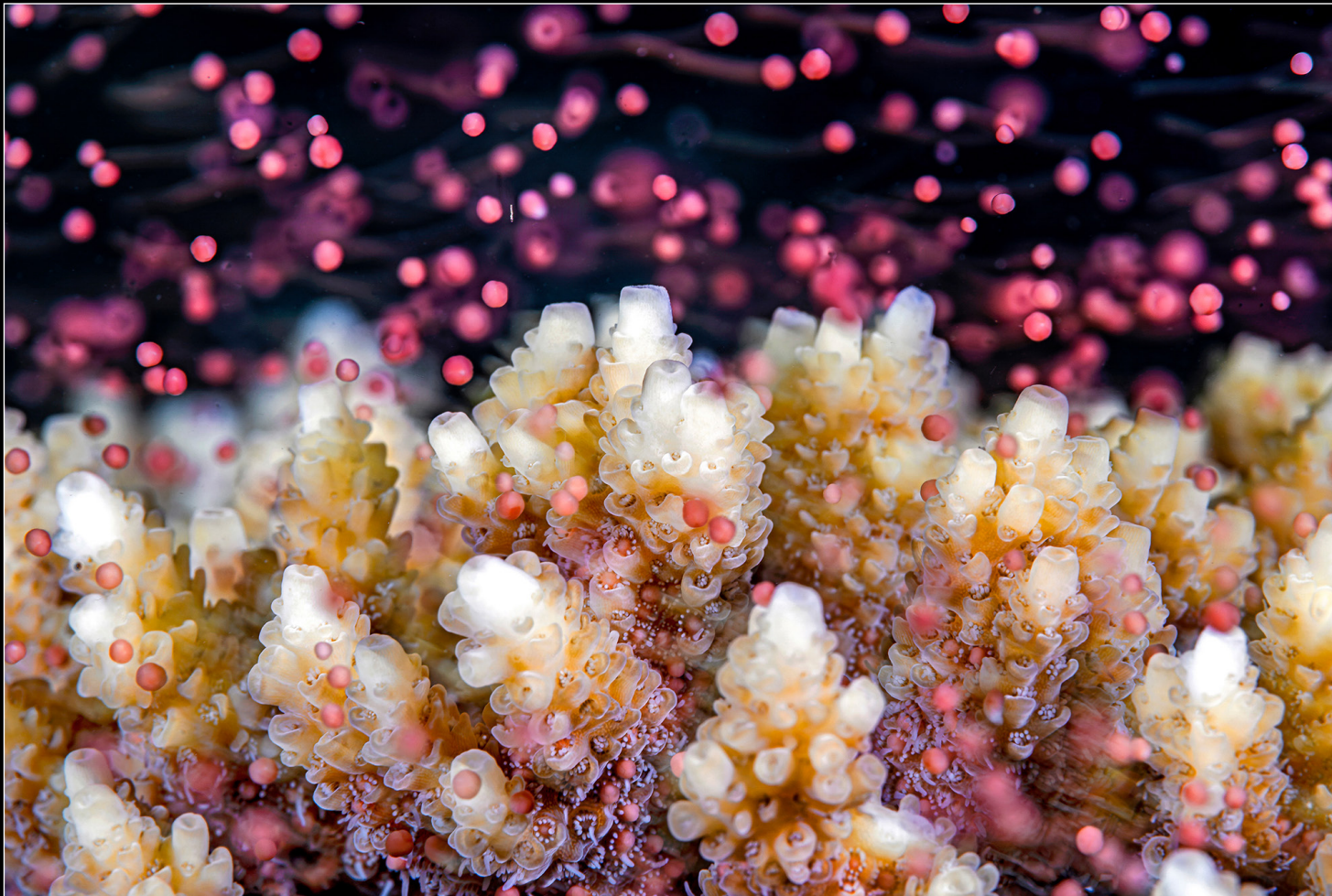
Whilst everyone at the lodge was finishing their evening meal and turning in for the night I was gearing up for an unforgettable dive. Fakarava Atoll is a UNESCO Biosphere reserve and is home to some of the healthiest shark populations anywhere in the world. Drifting through the South Pass among walls of grey reef sharks is a truly mind blowing experience. This experience can only be topped by diving in the pass at night. Surprisingly (or unsurprisingly to most) I was the only one who wanted to do the night dive that night. My guide's Machou, Lola and I slipped into the inky blackness to be surrounded by the grey reefs and whitetip reef sharks, too numerous to count, emerging in and out of our torch light. Slowing down my shutter speed I was able to capture the movement and ethereal atmosphere of the dive.

Fakarava, South Pass, French Polynesia

Canon, 5D MK III, Nauticam NA 5DSR, Sigma 15mm fisheye, iso 800, f10, 1/8th, Retra Flash x 2

Judge's comments: Very good idea of the photographer to shoot a night dive with sharks, I assume in Cocos, with a long exposure of the camera. Usually we have only seen these shots during the day and it was quite refreshing to have such a nice image taken at a different spot. Well done to think about that technique during that dive. *Peter Rowlands*

CORAL REEFS



COMMENDED

'UNDERWATER COLORFUL SNOWSTORM: CORAL SPAWNING'

Dr. Tom Shlesinger, Israel

Unveiling the enigmatic world of coral reproduction reveals a stunning underwater show. Like clockwork, thousands of corals across vast distances synchronize their release of egg-and-sperm bundles into the sea—this is how corals make babies. Yet capturing this mesmerizing phenomenon is no small feat, demanding precision and patience as it occurs once annually, on a specific month and night, within a narrow time window of minutes.

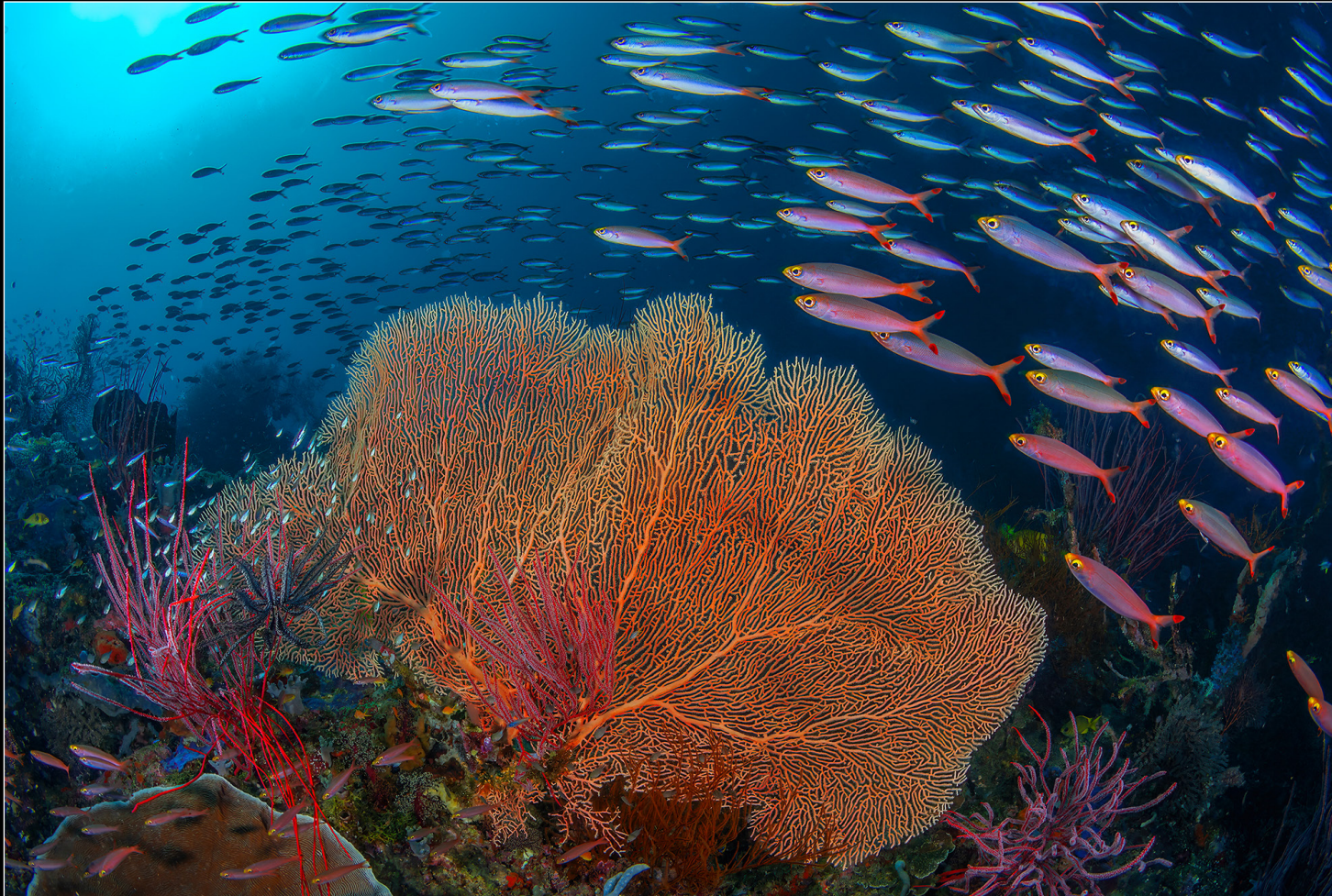
This image is part of a long-term scientific-documentary project in the Red Sea, exploring the vibrant reproductive rituals of corals and other reef dwellers. Immersing myself in this project, I dedicated over 300 nights to unveiling the secrets of coral reefs' nightlife. The image features a slow-shutter close-up of a branching coral spawning pinkish bundles, gracefully drifting with the currents. The enchanting spectacle, akin to an upside-down, and colourful snowstorm, provides a unique aesthetic sensation, offering a glimpse into the magical nocturnal underwater life.

Eilat Coral Beach Nature Reserve, northern Red Sea, Israel

Sony, a7RIII, Nauticam NA-A7RIII, Sony FE 90mm F2.8 macro G, iso 100, f/16, 1/4, 2 X Retra Flash Pro M

Judge's comments: The Coral Reef category would not have been complete without a spawning image and I loved this right from the start and continued to champion it through the rounds. A well lit celebration of life's natural cycle. *Peter Rowlands*

CORAL REEFS



COMMENDED

'CORAL REEF PNG'

Luc Rooman, Belgium

Last year at the World Shoot Out I was lucky enough to win the best of 5 category with the prize of 4 weeks to PNG. November 2024 was the time and we traveled to PNG for 3 weeks. During the last week in the Tawali resort, on one of the reefs, I took this photo, and while I was photographing the large gorgonians, a large school of fish suddenly swam by, which of course added value to the photo.

Tawali, Papua New Guinea

Nikon, Z7 II, Isotta, Nikon 8-15mm fisheye, iso 100, f/11, 1/125, Backscatter flash

Judge's comments: A celebratory image of pristine health and vibrancy, well lit with ambient light and the fish in the distance give depth and scale. World class destination, world class image.

Peter Rowlands

CORAL REEFS



COMMENDED

'THE END OF CORALS'

Ishino, Japan

I've been using scuba diving to survey and photograph corals for the past 6 years since moving to Okinawa. In the summer of 2024, Okinawa's coral reefs experienced massive bleaching. To investigate the extent, I went skin diving to a place I don't normally visit. When I swam to an area where most people cannot reach from the coast, I discovered a vast coral reef that had been completely bleached.

Okinawa had experienced a major coral bleaching event in 1998. Since then, the corals have grown, overcoming many challenges over the past 26 years. However, the corals that had endured so much were unable to survive the prolonged high water temperatures of 2024. Within two weeks, nearly all the corals were covered with algae. The once beautiful coral reef disappeared almost unnoticed.

Okinawa, Japan

Canon, 5D Mk4, Nauticam NA 5DMK4, AT-X 107 DX Fish Eye 10-17mm F3.5-4.5, iso 320, f/9.0, 1/125, none

Judge's comments: The climate crisis is the biggest threat to many ecosystems, especially coral reefs. Reef building corals that construct this entire habitat can only thrive a narrow temperature range and a warming seas cause them to initially bleach white and then quickly die. Here this beautiful scene is also a very sad one. *Alex Mustard*



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TRUK LAGOON

BLACK & WHITE

Category History

2025 Enric Gener (Spain)
2024 Jasmine Skye Smith (Australia)
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



CATEGORY WINNER

'CHASING DOLPHINS'

Enric Gener, Spain

This image was captured in the northern Red Sea during a freediving expedition in search of bottlenose dolphins. The moment portrays an intimate mating ritual, where several males—four visible in the picture, though others were nearby—were playfully chasing a female. It was a dynamic and ritualistic display, with the males engaging in friendly skirmishes and occasionally mating with the female, their bodies joining briefly for just a few seconds. Notably, the female was not attempting to escape; she actively participated, playing along and waiting for them. The entire group swam gracefully and at a slow, deliberate pace, creating a mesmerizing underwater scene.

Red Sea, Egypt

Canon, 5D Mark IV, SeaCam, Canon EF 16-35mm 1:2.8 L III USM, iso 160, 4, 1/500, No Lighting

Judge's comments:

This image shows the definition of black and white photography, the composition comes alive with the thoughtful conversion to monochrome. Fantastic image. *Tobias Friedrich*



BLACK & WHITE



RUNNER UP

'WATER ZEN'

James Rokop, United States

This image was taken at the Los Angeles Olympic send-off event for the USA Olympic Artistic Swimming Team. As the event photographer, I was able to photograph the team both underwater and from land. In this shot, the swimmer is warming up before the team's demonstration of their 2024 Paris Olympic routines by standing on the bottom of the pool engaged in a breathing exercise. Artistic swimmers have an incredible lung capacity and they are able to perform these unusual feats such as standing on the bottom of the pool, effortlessly. This was the only swimmer using the bottom of the pool like this for her warm-up and the unusual sight immediately captured my attention. The image evoked a sense of peace and calmness.

Los Angeles Expo Center, USA

Canon, R3, Ikelite , 35 mm, iso 125, f/3.2, 1/1000, None

Judge's comments:

A pinpoint composition that works so brilliantly in black and white, creating a beautiful image filled with the tranquility of the underwater world. We didn't know it during judging, but we particularly love that this image was observed and not posed.
Alex Mustard

BLACK & WHITE



THIRD

'GRAYSCALE REVERIE'

Nur Tucker, United Kingdom

I love spending time in my pool photographing friends in Turkey. My beautiful friend Melisa was staying with me, and I managed to persuade her to do some modelling underwater. The aim was just to pass time, be silly and have fun. Spontaneously the outfits, an acrylic mirror, accessories and a head piece came together. The sun's rays were so strong that the pool underwater turned into a kaleidoscope of ripples and fractured light. Though our main accessory unexpectedly broke during the session, it added a layer of imperfection that "mirrored" the unpredictable beauty of our day together. This photograph isn't just a visual—it's a memory of great times, surrounded with light and water.

Bodrum, Turkey.

Nikon , D500, Subal ND500, Tokina 10-17mm Fish Eye, iso 100, F13, 1/200, Inon Z240 X2

Judge's comments:

Nur is a former winner of our Most Promising award and the inventiveness poured into this frame shows why. Graphically powerful and filled with fascinating optical details in perfect and imperfect reflections, all created by two friends having fun.
Peter Rowlands

BLACK & WHITE



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'THE DUTCH TOMPOT BLENNY'
Luc Rooman, Belgium

To create this frame, I literally gritted my teeth during 6 weeks of trying, for several hours each day. But, finally, I managed to get my desired result. Actually, my desired results is not this photo, but I am very satisfied with it. My intention was to highlight only the eye and the outline of the fish. But to my surprise everyone appreciates this variation of composition more than the planned image.

Lake Grevelingen, Holland

NIKON , Z7 II, Isotta, Nikon 60 mm macro, iso 100, f/22, 1/125, Backscatter miniflash + snoot (backlight)

Judge's comments:

At first it seems a shame that a colourful fish such as the Tompot Blenny should be reduced to black and white, but here it is an excellent choice because it focuses out attention on the lighting which emphasises the shape, texture and eye, while the backlit foreground completes the simplicity. A good choice for Black and White. *Peter Rowlands*



BLACK & WHITE



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'BLUE SHARK REFLECTIONS'

Pietro Cremone, Italy

I had wanted to photograph blue sharks for a long time, when a friend invited me to join him in Bermeo, having found a place where these encounters were frequent. We sailed about 10 miles off shore and waited for some fins to arrive. As soon as a couple of sharks approached the boat my emotion was very strong, these animals are incredible and wonderfully elegant. I hope that my images and those of my friend can raise awareness on the need to preserve this highly endangered species!

Bermeo, Spain

Nikon , D850 , Nauticam NA-D850, Nikonos 13mm
, iso 800, f/11, 1/160, 2 x Seacam 160

Judge's comments:

Really interesting to see images from a new location for blue sharks, on the Atlantic coast of Spain. The black and white conversion is highly effecting reducing this scene to the key elements of shark, reflection and refraction. Very strong work.

Peter Rowlands



BLACK & WHITE



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'THE BIG MEETING'

Mike Korostelev, Russian Federation

Sperm whales are the largest toothed predator on our planet, capable of diving to extreme depths. As breath-hold divers they have been recorded diving more than two kilometres below the surface of the ocean, using their powerful echolocation (they make the loudest sound of any animal) to locate prey in the darkness. They also have the largest brain of any species living or extinct. Between feeding dives they rest and warm up at the surface of the ocean, often hanging vertically in the water. This composition shows just how large they are, with the free diver providing an ideal sense of scale.

Dominica

Canon , 5D MARK IV, Seacam, 8-15mm Fisheye, iso 200, f/4, 1/500, Available light

Judge's comments:

A well chosen black and white simplification to David and Goliath proportions enhanced by enough subject and surface reflections to entertain without interfering with the overall impact. *Peter Rowlands*



BLACK & WHITE



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'SHIMMER'

Toh Xing Jie, Singapore

The Sardine Run is notorious for its chaos, but many don't realize it's also a waiting game. It is the quiet moments that stay with you. This inspired me to capture the magic in its calm moments, in parallel to the dolphins who, like me, were chilling and waiting for the rest of the pod to catch up. Composing the shot, I dived and held my breath, and waited for the perfect moment. Then, as if on cue, a pod of three dolphins swam close to the surface, their curiosity mirroring my own. To enhance the scene, I lowered the aperture to create the dreamy bubbles effect, transforming the shimmering light into an ethereal backdrop. Using a wide-angle lens, I framed the dolphins as they glided gracefully, their energy bringing the image to life. Surreal is the only word to describe the Sardine Run—a dream I'm lucky to have lived.

Port St Johns, Sardine Run, South Africa

Nikon, Z9, Nauticam NA-Z9, 14-35 F4, iso 500, F/4, 1/1000, 2x CB16500PB-RC

Judge's comments:

I love these images with some bubbles that make it at the same time fuzzy but also creatively appreciated! The key element is that the photographer managed to keep the focus on the dolphins so everything else is a bit blurred which even gives more attention to the subject.

Tobias Friedrich

BLACK & WHITE



COMMENDED

'CURIOUS PUP'

Jon Anderson, United States

Spring brings many cute young harbor seal pups in Monterey, California. They are often shy toward divers, but occasionally one will be very friendly. This young harbor seal approached my buddies and as we were entering from the beach for a dive. It swam between us for 15 minutes, checking us out. The morning was overcast and our interaction was in the shallows, we did not have a beautiful kelp forest or explosive sunbeams for the background. I framed the shot to include a sliver of Snell's window at the top of the frame to have something more than just the seal in the composition. While processing, I decided the simple high contrast composition worked well in black and white.

Monterey, California, USA

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA-D850, Nikon 8-15mm, iso 1250, f/13, 1/160, 2x Retra Pro strobes

Judge's comments:

Take note. This is a classic example of what a successful black and white image must contain. Pure blacks, pure whites with delicate shades in between. Graphically simple with an unobtrusive but vital surface reflection, it oozes quality. Less is more is much more. *Peter Rowlands*



BLACK & WHITE



COMMENDED

'INVASION'

Rosie Richards, Australia

On rare occasions after heavy rains, giant smacks of jelly blubbers invade Sydney's shores. On this day, my buddy and I ventured into the heart of the jellies in the hope of capturing their sheer density. The process was not without its challenges, and after enduring several painful stings, I managed to achieve the shot I envisioned. The black-and-white edit lends the image an almost X-ray-like quality, accentuating the intricate beauty of each individual jellyfish, offering a glimpse into the vibrant and dynamic world beneath Sydney's shores.

Cabbage Tree Bay Aquatic Reserve, Manly, Australia

Olympus, OMD EM1 Mkii, Ikelite, 8mm, iso 200, f/3.2, 1/80, Ambient

Judge's comments:

The jellyfish look incredible in black and white, especially the fine detail within the oral arms. With a slightly more pleasing arrangement of the pulsating medusae across the frame we feel that this shot could have been right at the top.
Alex Mustard



BLACK & WHITE



COMMENDED

'THE SCREAM!'

Pietro Cremone, Italy

I was diving in Bunaken Marine Park, when my attention was caught by a large sponge with an almost human appearance. Some large pores resembling eyes and mouth, a crinoid placed right at the top like a tuft of hair, made me stop and take a closer look at this composition. Shooting from a precise angle, the result was astonishing. A shouting human face!!

Siladen Island, Indonesia

Sony , A7rV, Nauticam A7rV, Nikonos 13mm, iso 640, 11, 1/250, 2 x SUPE D-Pro

Judge's comments:

Such a funny image! We all had a smile in our faces when we saw the image first time! Very well capture and spotted by the photographer. The little feather star on the top which looks like the hair rounds up the image! Not necessarily a real black and white image as it would work, maybe better, in colour as well. *Tobias Friedrich*



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UP & COMING

Category History

2025 Ruruka (Korea)	2019 Taeyup Kim (Korea)
2024 Lisa Stengel (USA)	2018 Man BD (Malaysia)
2023 Kat Zhou (USA)	2017 Horacio Martinez (Argentina)
2022 Quico Abadal (Spain)	2016 Pier Mane (South Africa)
2021 SJ Alice Bennett (Mexico)	2015 Fabrice Guerin (France)
2020 Anita Kainrath (Austria)	

"As the world's largest purpose-driven diving organisation, PADI is committed to making the underwater world accessible for all and creating positive ocean change. Sponsoring the 'Up & Coming' category in the Underwater Photographer of the Year 2025 competition aligns with our mission to inspire ocean exploration and conservation. Images have the power to tell impactful stories, with this category celebrating emerging underwater photographers who are capturing the beauty and wonder beneath the surface while inspiring more people to learn to scuba dive so they can join in on seeking adventure and saving the ocean."

Dave Murray, Managing Director for PADI EMEA

"Our Up & Coming Category is incredibly important to the UPY team. We are so proud that it provides a brilliant platform to showcase the work of new talent in underwater photography. We are very excited to be collaborating with PADI, with their world-leading reputation for developing the skills of both new and existing divers. Thanks to PADI's world-wide reach these images and the stories of the photographers behind them will inspire a huge global audience."

Alex Mustard, Chair of the judging panel



Up & Coming category is sponsored by PADI

UP & COMING



CATEGORY WINNER

'AURORA UNDERWATER'

Ruruka, Korea

I first travelled to Cancun, Mexico, for a shoot two years ago, and since then, I've been captivated by its charm. These days, I find myself visiting Cancun frequently. From where I live, it's a very long journey - about 24 hours by plane - but this place perfectly aligns with the direction of my photography and offers a variety of shooting opportunities. To capture this particular photo, I visited during the rainy summer season and worked with a local Korean guide as my model.

Cancun, Mexico

Nikon, Z8, Nauticam NA-Z8, Nikon Z 24-50mm F4 with Nauticam WACP-1, iso ISO800, F9, 1/60s, Natural Light

Judge's comments:

Extraordinary image with a high technical standard and perfect postproduction of it! The diver is well positioned in the golden ratio while not being in front of anything. The balance of the light from outside which falls into the cave is just an excellent repetition and shows what the image is all about. Well done and a very well deserved category winner. *Tobias Friedrich*



UP & COMING



RUNNER UP

'CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE GIANT KIND'

Christian Hut, Singapore

Photographing Tonga's humpback whales had been on my wish list for a long time, and it definitely did not disappoint. What made the experience truly special is the sheer diversity of the encounters. Every single time you get in the water it is different, with each whale having a unique personality, and with their attitude towards swimmers often changing throughout the day. The most exciting, of course, are the encounters where the whales' curiosity matches your own, and that was clearly the case with this mom-and-calf pair. We were able to spend several hours with them as they navigated around the Vava'u islands, alternating between travel, rest and play. This shot, taken when the pair crossed a shallow reef, remains one of my favourite images from that amazing day.

Vava'u, Tonga

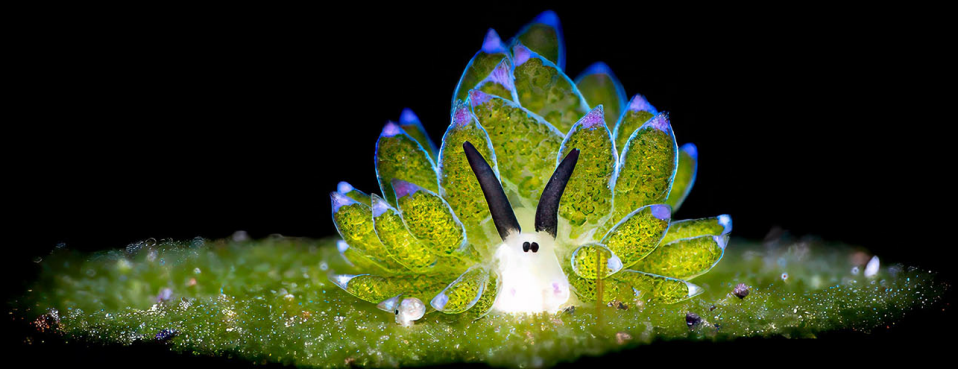
Sony, A1, Nauticam NA-A1, 16-36 f2.8 @ 16mm, iso 800, f/11, 1/250, Ambient light only

Judge's comments:

What a dream encounter of a mother and calf. The reef gives a fantastic sense of scale to the whales, really showing their size, while adding interest and visual depth to the composition. Talk about everything coming together... *Alex Mustard*



UP & COMING



THIRD

'PINK CHEEKS'

Autumn Martin, Canada

This was my first time taking a camera underwater, and was nervous but excited. My goal was to get a tiny nudibranch in focus, and with the support of my husband, Adam Martin, and our amazing guides, I quickly fell in love with macro photography. The excitement of getting a 'good' image was challenging and exhilarating. After photographing a few other Shaun the Sheep nudibranchs and others, I decided to step up the challenge by adding the SMC lens. By the fifth dive, I finally spotted this perfect little creature. With a deep breath and a lot of patience, I took multiple shots, hoping to capture its beauty. The experience was incredibly rewarding, sparking my passion for underwater macro photography. It's a journey that taught me persistence and patience, and I'm thrilled to have captured something I can truly be proud of.

Tulamben, Bali, Indonesia

Canon, 5D MKIII, Sea & Sea MDX-5DMKIII Ver.2, Canon 100mm macro with nauticam smc, iso 200, f/22, 1/200, Backscatter miniflash with snoot

Judge's comments: Shooting these kind of nudibranch is not easy at all. The sheer size is already a challenge but the photographer executed it perfectly. The simple sharpness of this tiny animal caught my eye from the first moment, rounded up by the use of a snoot and an excellent composition it's a minimalistic shot which has been captured on a very high level. *Tobias Friedrich*



UP & COMING



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'ETERNAL LOVE'

Fin He, China

The model in the photo is my wife, and we created this work together. The colours in the image symbolize eternal beauty and love, with the violet hues representing the longevity and eternity of our love. By incorporating Chinese elements, the photograph showcases elegance and grace in a dreamy and fluid environment. The element of water adds a layer of tranquillity and movement, enhancing the delicate expression of my wife as she dances in her flowing costume.

Beijing, China

Nikon, Z7, Nauticam NA-Z7, Sigma 14.0 mm f/1.8, iso 100, f5.6, 1/200, Inon Z240

Judge's comments:

This powerful portrait encapsulates creative imagination with both strong and subtle lighting to great effect, perfected with delicate reflections. This Up and Coming underwater photographer has arrived. *Peter Rowlands*



UP & COMING



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'BANGGAI ABLAZE'

Ross Makulec, Indonesia

I first came across this group of urchins with Banggai cardinalfish in 2m of water at the end of a dive. I only had 5 minutes to photograph them, but I loved the fiery background created by a pair of rusting metal buckets. It was over a month later before I was able to return the site, and I was lucky enough that the urchins and cardinalfish were still in the same place. This time I planned for this open-aperture shot in shallow water by adding a 3 stop ND filter to my lens, and I brought a hole-effect filter to play with as well. I spent the whole dive with the cardinalfish, waiting for them to pose while shooting a shallow depth of field to bring out the orange in the background, broken by the spines of the urchin and a playful swirl from the filter.

The Lembah Strait, Indonesia

Sony, A1, Nauticam NA-A1, FE 90mm F2.8 Macro G OSS w/ Nikon 5T Close-Up Lens, iso 125, f/3.5, 1/250, Backscatter MF2 x 2

Judge's comments:

Very nice usage of a filter along with a perfect technical execution. We saw plenty of images with this filter and technique, but this image in Up & Coming was outstanding. The fiery coloured background works so well along with the spikes of the sea urchin which gives the image also a creative and dynamic element. *Tobias Friedrich*



UP & COMING



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'SHOWER OF LIGHT'

Ruruka, Korea

In Cancun at high noon is when the sunlight shines at its most direct angle. I waited several days to avoid cloudy weather, aiming to capture the model and the light perfectly aligned in a straight line. This photo is the result of a lot of patience, and above all, I'm deeply grateful to the model for enduring such challenging conditions to enable this shot to be created.

Cancun, Mexico

Nikon, Z8, Nauticam NA-Z8, Nikon Z 24-50mm F4 and Nauticam WACP-1, iso IS800, F/4.2, 1/30 s, Natural Light

Judge's comments:

It takes a lot of talent and an equal share of dedication to create such a flawless underwater image. Exquisite. *Alex Mustard*



UP & COMING



HIGHLY COMMENDED

**'MANATEES SHELTERING IN A SPRING ON
A STARRY NIGHT'**

Joseph Ricketts, United States

An aggregation of manatees seek shelter on a cold, starry night in the thermal refuge of a freshwater spring in Florida. Manatees are susceptible to developing life-threatening cold stress in water that is 20C and below. However, Florida's springs maintain a constant temperature of near 22C year-round. When temperatures plummet during winter, manatees will gather in large numbers in the springs - even if just for a night. This image is the result of two years of effort, spending many long and cold nights in a remote Florida spring with my underwater housing precariously balanced on a tripod. As far as I know, it is the first-ever, single-exposure, splitshot image of manatees and the night sky.

Florida, USA

Canon, R5, Ikelite, Canon EF 8-15mm f/4 L Fisheye, iso 640, f/4.0, 30s, Sea & Sea YS-90DX

Judge's comments: Highly inventive and sensitively taken capturing the manatees undisturbed beneath a starry sky. *Peter Rowlands*



UP & COMING



COMMENDED

'KELP BLISS'

Christine Hartley, United States

Giant kelp grows in stalks using holdfasts to attach to the rocky ocean floor. Small bladders on each blade allow the stalk to float, continuously reaching towards the surface in search of sunlight. Once a stalk reaches the surface it will continue to grow, eventually covering the surface with a canopy of kelp, creating breathtaking underwater forests. On this November day, the ocean was the calmest I have ever experienced in Southern California. There was no current, no surge, no real movement at all. The water was crystal clear, as clear and blue as the sky above. These days are rare and I wanted to capture the pure bliss and beauty of this pristine moment in the kelp forest.

Bird Rock, Catalina Island, California, United States of America

Sony, A7RV, Nauticam NA-A7RV, Sony 28-60mm f/4-4.6 with the Nauticam WWL-1b, iso 800, f/13, 1/250, Inon z330

Judge's comments:

An inviting and celebratory shot of a beautiful day in a forest of super seaweed. I want to dive right into this scene. We loved how the blades of the kelp mirror the beams from the sun, and how the stalks in the distance add a three dimensionality to the composition. *Alex Mustard*



UP & COMING



COMMENDED

'ON APPROACH'

Ronja Arnold, Germany

Have you ever travelled to a country just because of one picture you randomly saw? Last year I stumbled over this photo of hundreds of grey sharks gathering in the deep blue waters of the Fakarava Atoll and instantly felt a strong urge to not only see this with my own eyes, but also to capture it with my camera. So I did my research, bought an appropriate underwater housing, booked the flights and even completed my advanced open water diver. And what can I say? This was one of the best trips I've ever done. We had perfect conditions, saw plenty of sharks and while laying flat down in an underwater cave at a depth of thirty meters, I managed to take this picture of two grey sharks approaching me in almost perfect symmetry making it look like a scene straight from a science fiction movie.

Fakarava Atoll, French Polynesia

Nikon, Z6 ii, Isotta Nikon Z6ii/Z7ii, Z 24mm, f/1.8, iso 125, f/1.8, 1250, none

Judge's comments: I loved the graphic simplicity, the simple composition and well chosen idea to reduce it to black and white. The background detail and the great presence of the subjects made me push for this image again and again. It was worth it.
Peter Rowlands



UP & COMING



COMMENDED

'AN ALLIGATOR RESTS BELOW TALL REEDS IN A SPRING'

Joseph Ricketts, United States

While preparing for a night dive in a beautiful spring run in Florida, my friend and I saw an alligator dip below the surface in front of our canoe. We weren't sure where it went until we looked down and realized it was resting directly beneath us. The sun had just started to set and since my camera was already in its housing, I held it in the water off the side of the canoe and took this image. Although shooting from above a subject isn't usually my favourite position, I like how the reeds lead the eye of the viewer straight to the partially concealed alligator. The fish darting in between the reeds were an added bonus, of course.

Florida, USA

Canon, R5, Ikelite, Canon EF 8-15mm f/4 L Fisheye, iso 1600, f/8.0, 1/160, Sea & Sea YS-90DX

Judge's comments:

It would have been a travesty if this image hadn't made the winners enclosure because it is highly original, well observed and shot 'on the hoof' without fear of failure - all of the attributes needed for any Up and Coming underwater photographer.
Peter Rowlands



COMPACT

Category History

2025 Bryant Turffs (United States)
2024 Enrico Somogyi (Germany)
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



CATEGORY WINNER

'THE BEAUTY OF THE SWAMP'

Bryant Turffs, United States

I captured this image at one of my favourite locations within the Everglades ecosystem. Historically, I primarily dove in saltwater, but I have become enamoured by this foreboding environment, with clear waters, light filtering through cypress trees, and the fish species, both native and introduced. I have revisited this spot many times trying to capture various subjects and the light just right. The water levels vary significantly, sometimes completely drying, during different times of year. The fish species are in constant flux, and this location is often dominated by exotics. Ironically, on this occasion, I hadn't invested too much thought and I was enjoying the scenery when this Florida Gar positioned itself perfectly in the frame of my GoPro.

Everglades National Park , United States

GoPro, Hero 7 Black, GoPro Supersuit, AOI 0.73x Ultra Wide Lens, iso 791, F/2.8, 1/180, N/A - Available

Judge's comments:

A stunning three dimensional composition placing this rarely seen Florida gar in its swamp habitat. It is, quite frankly, amazing that this image is shot with a simple GoPro camera demonstrating how many people already have all the gear that they need to capture beautiful underwater photos.
Alex Mustard



COMPACT



RUNNER UP

'GIANT FROGFISH'

Enrico Somogyi, Germany

When I was diving in Anilao, in the Philippines, we found this beautiful giant frogfish at a depth of around 15m. I tried to get a picture with a coloured backlight, and a background of small fish and the sun. After a couple of frames I got this picture and was very happy.

Anilao, Philippines

Sony , RX100vii, Fantasea RX100vii, Nauticam Emwl 160-Wetlens, iso 125, f 7.1, 1/1000, 2x Backscatter MF2

Judge's comments:

A large image from a small compact, perfectly lit with just enough complimentary highlights, not too gaudy. A sprinkling of sunburst and a clatter of small fish produces an impressive combination to complete the package from the our reigning Compact champion. *Peter Rowlands*

COMPACT



THIRD

'BLUE PLANET'

Jenny Stock, United Kingdom

I don't often shoot with compact cameras, but I absolutely loved playing with the Insta360 due to its wide scope for creative imagery. Whilst looking through footage I had captured on the liveaboard The Ghazala Explorer, in Egypt, I found a frame that told the story of boat-life, Egyptian reef diving and selfie photography. This split level frame captures the crew on the back of the deck. Moving in, it shows the glistening surface of the water, then dips below to the vibrant coral reef. In the centre - that's me, shown capturing the image whilst holding the camera up and half out of the water on a selfie stick. The Insta360 uses software to automatically delete this stick from its footage and photographs. I feel the image is a metaphor of our community; diving in the exciting water bodies of our tiny Blue Planet.

Insta360, Natural light

Judge's comments:

A truly original image, making use of the latest underwater imaging technology. Another remarkable creative vision from last year's British Underwater Photographer of the Year.

Alex Mustard



COMPACT



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'CHROMATIC DANCE'

Andrea Michelutti, Italy

The radial filefish is a stunning creature with its unique patterns and its ability to camouflage among corals. A feature that makes it even more fascinating, but also quite challenging to photograph. To ensure the fish's vivid colours did not blend into the background, I used a slow shutter speed technique combined with precise snoot backlighting and a rapid camera movement.

This technique not only highlighted the striking coloration of the filefish but also conveyed the dynamic essence of its underwater habitat. The effect gives the impression of a dance, capturing the graceful movement and fluidity of the filefish against the backdrop.

Anilao (Batangas, Luzon island), Philippines

Sony, RX100 VII, Marelux, Integrated, iso 100, 8, 1/13, Two Inon Z330 strobes + Snooty snoot adapter

Judge's comments:

What a nice combination of subject and usage of colour. It is a pleasure to look at this colour combination, especially with the small Xenia coral polyps that really make such an attractive background! If the fish would swim in the other direction, I know it's hard to capture it in this situation, it could have placed right at the top.

Tobias Friedrich

COMPACT



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'RESILIENCE BENEATH THE SURFACE'

Martin Mayobre, Spain

An unforgettable moment at Aliwal Shoal off the coast of Umkomaas in South Africa. This potato bass with its broken jaw, from being hooked multiple times by fishermen, now carries the scars of survival. We've been told that either the line snapped from its weight, or it was released by cutting the line. It now seems to have found comfort around divers who have helped free it from the hooks. Its trust in us highlights the bond between marine life and those who care for it - a powerful reminder of both human impact and the resilience of wildlife.

Aliwal Shoal, South Africa

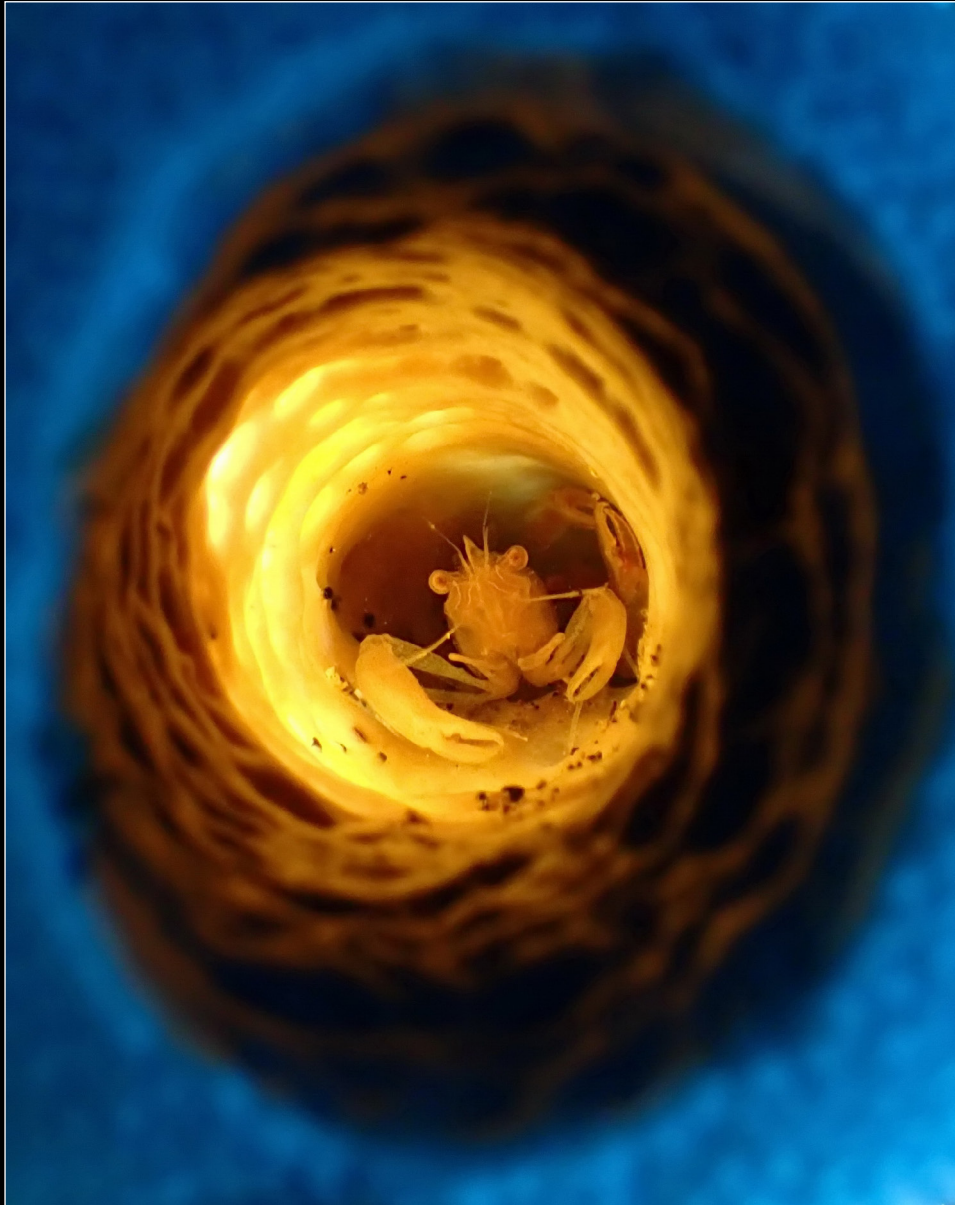
Sony, Rx100II, Recsea REC-WHS-RX100II, Inon UWL100, iso 400, F/6.3, 1/160, 2x Inon Z240

Judge's comments:

A sad story of a broken jaw turned into a fantastic portrait! The unfortunate groupers face looks almost grumpy and is excellently captured by this frontal view by the photographer. I love this minimalistic view with no other distraction in the background as well. *Peter Rowlands*



COMPACT



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'FIRE IN THE TUNNEL'

Ben Sarinda, Indonesia

Snapping boxing shrimp is a subject that is difficult to photograph. Not all divers know how to find them, as they live deep inside tube sponges. To create this shot, I used two Fotocore flash lights aimed through the walls of the sponge to light the subject.

The difficulty level comes when placing flashlights right to the shrimp inside the tube. It takes time to get the perfect lighting. My initial idea was just to get close up shot of the shrimp, but after many shots I decided to pull the camera further back for better composition of the blue and orange colours and dark part inside the sponge.

Nudi Falls - Lembeh Strait, Indonesia

Olympus, TG -6 , Olympus PT-059, Internal lens
25-1000mm (35mm Equivalent) , iso 800, f/4.3,
1/125, Fotocore ST-01

Judge's comments:

We've seen this idea before, but never so beautifully produced. We love the pose of the shrimp and particularly the yellow blue combination in the ever decreasing circles composition.

Alex Mustard



COMPACT



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'WHITE WHALE'

Adam McKnight, Australia

I was fortunate enough to stumble across this incredibly rare white humpback whale calf in Vava'u in October 2024. I'm told the chance of a humpback being born white is around 1 in 40,000. To be one of very few in world to witness the luminescent glow in the water and the playful breaching up close was breath-taking. This photo was taken using a Go Pro 12, while the white calf surfaced for a breath, under the watchful eye of Mum and a male escort a few meters below.

Vava'u, Tonga

GoPro, Hero 12, GoPro Underwater Housing, GoPro Underwater Housing, iso 188, f/2.5, 1/950, Ambient Light

Judge's comments:

What a nice encounter and excellent capture by the photographer. Maybe the best image that we have seen of a white whale in the competition this year, which is even higher to value as the image has been taken with simple action camera. The composition and post-production round up this fantastic image.

Tobias Friedrich



COMPACT



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'MISFIRE'

Jo Taylor, Australia

After being relentlessly pursued by two 'pumping' male stallions, this large yellow female seahorse anxiously attempts to transfer her eggs to her chosen mate at the height of a copulatory rise as the contender falls away.

Mating is difficult for inexperienced seahorse pairs to accomplish successfully and many of her bright eggs were spilt in the process. I had this rare & exciting opportunity whilst diving in the Lembeh Strait. Owing to the flexibility of compact photography, I was able to capture the heat of the moment!

Lembeh Strait, Indonesia

Canon , G7X Mark ii, Isotta housing, Nil additional, iso 125, f/7.1, 1/250, 1 x Inon S-220 strobe

Judge's comments:

A fantastic behaviour capture. In my experience seahorses form long lasting pairs, so it is fascinating to see an example of a second male trying to muscle in on the action and presumably contributing to the spilt eggs. Focusing on such moments can be hard enough with a state of the art mirrorless cameras, so capturing this action with a compact camera is particularly impressive.

Alex Mustard



COMPACT



COMMENDED

'ENDEMIC ELEGANCE: GASFLAME NUDIBRANCH'

Kate Jonker, South Africa

Stone Dog in Gordon's Bay is a favourite dive site of mine for photographing nudibranchs. I had this image in my mind for a long time and knew the site's abundance of Bryozoans would provide the perfect setting. Gasflame nudibranchs, Bonisa nakaza, love feeding on Bryozoans, and the combination of the nudibranch's vibrant yellow and blue against the Bryozoans' golden tones creates a natural complement of colour and texture.

On this dive, I was fortunate to find a nudibranch perched perfectly on a bryozoan. I used my Inon Z240 and Marelux SOFT Pro snoot to create contrast and isolate the subject. The snoot allowed me to highlight the intricate details of the nudibranch, turning the image I had envisioned into reality. This beautiful nudibranch is endemic to the southern tip of Africa, making it a special find for underwater photographers.

Stone Dog Dive Site, Gordon's Bay - False Bay, South Africa, South Africa

Olympus, TG6, Marelux , iso 400, f/14, 1/200, Inon Z240 Strobe, snooted with Marelux SOFT Pro

Judge's comments: An intelligent image maximising a compact camera's capabilities with the snooted light concentrating the eye and the pastel colours complementing the gentle fragility whilst entertaining the viewer. *Peter Rowlands*

COMPACT



COMMENDED

'SHADES OF RED'

Alopa, Italy

Seraya, in Bali, is famous for the harlequin shrimps and my intention for this dive was shooting them, but frustratingly I didn't find any on this dive. Close to the end of the I noticed a nice red, vertical seapen. And on it was a goby with the eggs of a parasite on its back. It was in a tricky position to shoot, but I held my breath and managed three stable shots. At home, I was very happy with my goby picture and it made me realise that we don't always need the A-list subject; sometimes good light and perspective with make a more special image.

Seraya, Bali, Indonesia

Sony, RX 100 M4, Fantasea, Weefine Macro 12, iso 100, f/11, 1/100, INON S-2000

Judge's comments:

Exquisite colours and a strong diagonal create an important initial appeal perfected by the eggs to complete the story. A great example of the serious capabilities of a compact camera system.

Peter Rowlands



We fund and support research, conservation, and education projects worldwide to restore functional marine ecosystems, manage healthy shark and ray populations, and ensure sustainable livelihoods. We are invested in impactful conservation storytelling that connects people to nature, and empowers citizens to create positive change.



British Underwater Photographer of the Year Winners

2025 David Alpert
2024 Jenny Stock
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

2025 James Lynott
2024 Sandra Stalker
2023: Theo Vickers
2022: Paul Pettitt
2021: Alice Bennett
2020: Nur Tucker
2019: Malcolm Nimmo
2018: Tony Stephenson
2017: Nicholai Georgiou
2016: Marty Engels Dunmore
2015: Mario Vitalini
2003: Andy Heath
2001: Mark Walker
1999: Jeff Collett
1987: Benny Sutton
1983: Alan Youngs
1979: Geoff Tompkinson
1976: Mike Portelly

British Underwater Photographer of the Year



CATEGORY WINNER

'THE CURIOUS SEAL'

David Alpert, United Kingdom

North Devon is easily one of the most beautiful coastlines in Britain. High jagged cliffs pounded by an unforgiving sea. With the second highest tide change in the world, the outgoing current whips up against waves and wind rolling in from the North Atlantic. Stand back and marvel.

Diving windows are limited so I based myself in the area for two months last year, exploring different locations. This shot shows a grey seal off Lundy Island, a marine protected area since 1973. Seals are delightfully curious creatures, more interactive than any other species I have dived with around the world. Briefly, I become one of the privileged few, crossing the bridge into the world of a sentient wild animal.

Lundy Island , United Kingdom

Canon 5D MKiii, Nauticam , Canon EF 16-35mm f/2.8L iii USM, iso 200, F/8, 1/200 , 2 x Inon Z330 Strobes

Judge's comments: In the UPY competition we usually see a lot of seal images, especially in the British categories. I used to be a soft touch for these images, but having seen so many now, my standards are very high. This image though is truly a stunner! So well framed in the sea weeds and with the light coming from the back in the shallow waters. The composition is completed by the curious look of the seal to the photographer. An excellent portrait. *Tobias Friedrich*



Most Promising British Underwater Photographer of the Year 2025



'FLUO SPINY SQUAT LOBSTER'

James Lynott, United Kingdom

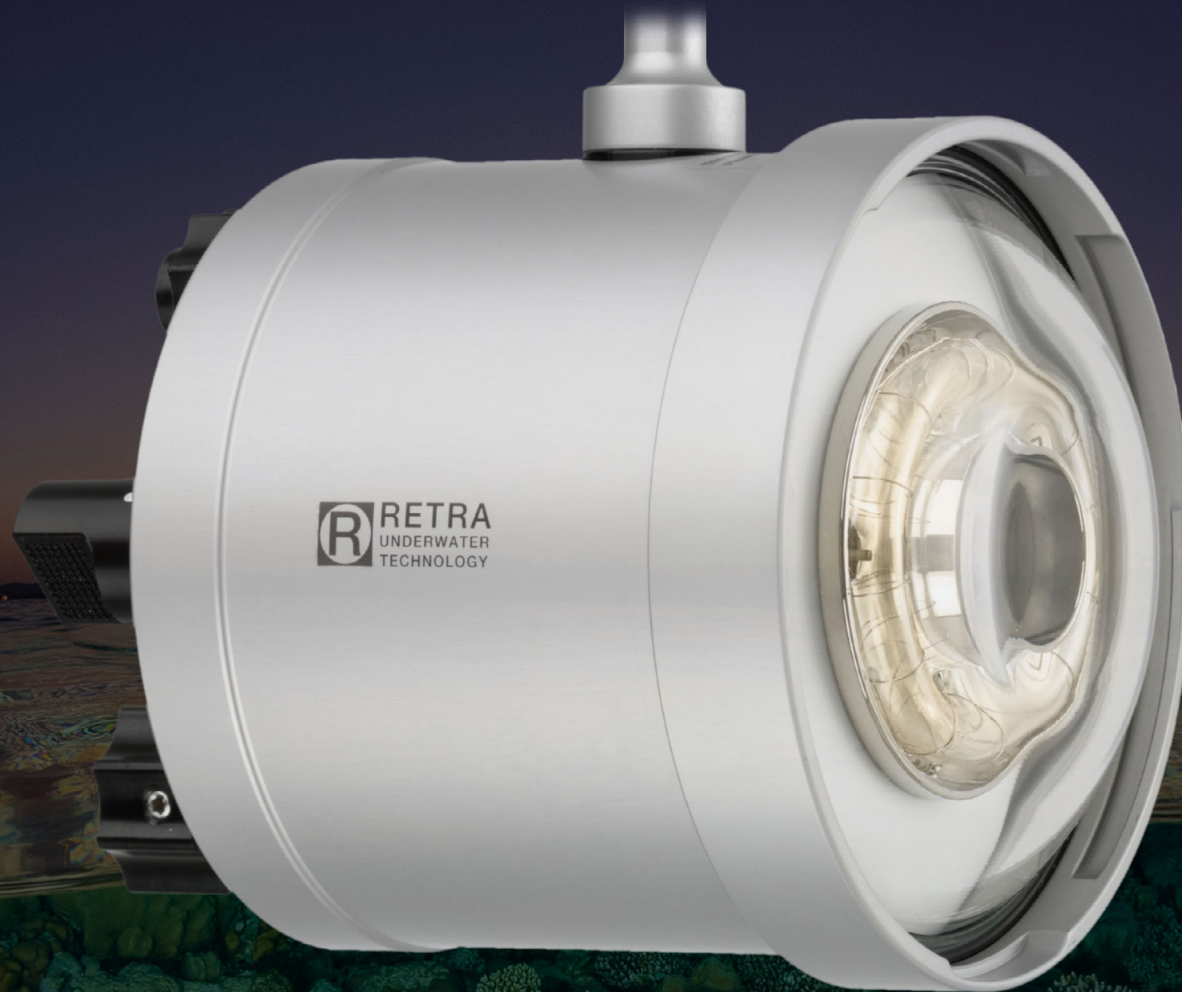
This image was taken on a wonderful night dive at Inveraray, Loch Fyne. This site is known for being home to many beautiful fireworks anemones at shallow depths, but it also has an old pipe covered in concrete blocks which is home to lots of life, including the spiny squat lobster. These squat lobsters are usually found clinging upside down on boulders/overhangs and disappear the instant the camera shutter is pressed. However, on this night dive they were wondering about in the open and didn't seem to mind having a few pictures taken. These squat lobsters show the brightest fluorescence I have seen in crustaceans and I was really pleased on this dive to be able to capture the whole animal in frame. I used excitation filters on my strobes, along with a yellow barrier filter in front of the lens to capture the fluorescence.

Inveraray, Loch Fyne, Scotland

OM SYSTEM, OM-D E-M1 MarkIII, AOI UH-EM1III, M.Zuiko Digital ED 14-42mm F3.5-5.6 EZ, iso 500, f/6.3, 1/50, 2 x Sea&Sea YS01-Solis w/ Nightsea filters

Judge's comments: James's fluorescent exploration of British waters has revealed another stunning subject when photographed with this technique. A little more contrast in processing, a tiny crop and a rotation into vertical and this truly memorable shot could have gone all the way...
Peter Rowlands





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BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE

Category History

2025 David Alpert (UK)
2024 Kat Zhou (USA)
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



CATEGORY WINNER

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Lundy Island , United Kingdom

Canon , 5D MKiii, Nauticam , Canon EF 16-35mm f/2.8L iii USM, iso 200, F/8, 1/200 , 2 x Inon Z330 Strobes

Judge's comments: In the UPY competition we usually see a lot of seal images, especially in the British categories. I used to be a soft touch for these images, but having seen so many now, my standards are very high. This image though is truly a stunner! So well framed in the sea weeds and with the light coming from the back in the shallow waters. The composition is completed by the curious look of the seal to the photographer. An excellent portrait. *Tobias Friedrich*



BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE



RUNNER UP

'CURLED OCTOPUS WITH SOFT CORAL'

Simon Temple, United Kingdom

My encounters with octopuses in the UK are usually unplanned. This one was no exception. It was early May, and visibility was poor. I chose my widest lens and planned to drift along the reef with the flood tide, capturing what I could among the soft corals.

Midway through the dive, the current surged unexpectedly, turning our gentle drift into a rapid ride. Then I saw it: an octopus perched high on the reef wall. I kicked hard against the current, raising my camera as it observed me calmly. The tide was relentless, and I managed only four shots before it pulled me away. As I drifted, I glanced back for one last look. The octopus remained, seemingly unfazed by our encounter, but out of range.

Lochcarron, Scotland

Nikon, D500, Aquatica AD500, 10.5mm, iso 400, f/8.0, 1/125, Inon Z-240 Type 4

Judge's comments: An excellent shot of an iconic UK subject that is being seen more and more around our shores. The soft lighting highlights the pastel colours and the scenery recedes out of the frame to create depth perfected by great eye contact and a classic pose. *Peter Rowlands*

BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE



THIRD

'BASS SHOAL'

Rick Ayrton, United Kingdom

I had taken my Nauticam EMWL probe lens (I think with the 130 degree optic) on a dive to the Eddystone reef south of Plymouth. I had been working on a number of close focus wide angle subjects, when I was aware of a large shoal of bass swimming above me. I used the probe lens as a simple wide angle lens and was very pleased to see that the lens was capable of good quality in this situation. My strobes were on minimum power. I purposely under exposed the shot knowing how reflective the silver scales of bass can be, adjusting the exposure and highlights in post to get the image you see. I think the swirling kelp fronds help to set the scene and the diagonal direction of the fish creates a pleasing composition.

Eddystone Rocks, UK

Nikon, Z9, Nauticam NA Z9, 105mm Macro, EMWL probe lens with 130degree optic, iso 250, f13, 1/200, Inon Z240 x2

Judge's comments: It is wonderful to see such profusion of fish life in British Waters, but we also really liked the presentation of this shot, which almost feels like a duotone print. Powerful and original. *Alex Mustard*

BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'JELLYFISH HANGOUT'

Martin Stevens, United Kingdom

Jellyfish are one of my favourite things to photograph, and there are some impressive species that regularly visit Cornwall. Last year, unusually, there were loads of reports of mauve stingers being seen around the Cornish coast (this species is usually very rare). Frustratingly, I hadn't seen any, as they had largely avoided Falmouth, and by autumn I was almost resigned to not witnessing them at all. Then on a day when a few of us were out to film and photograph some rock pool animals, we found huge numbers washing up on the beach and swimming in the tidal pools. I got into my wetsuit, snorkelled in a low shore pool, and happily captured this photo of a group of these beautiful animals where they had collected against the bright yellow seaweed.

Falmouth, Cornwall, UK

OM System, OM-5, Isotta, Olympus 7-14mm Pro, iso 400, f/11, 1/100, Two Sea and Sea YS-D3 MII strobes

Judge's comments: This image grabs the eye with its pastel delicate subjects complimented by the weed. An unusual aggregation, well lit overall and perfected by the surface reflections. A celebratory image for British waters. *Peter Rowlands*



BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'RAINBOW SEAWEED AT SUNRISE'

Martin Stevens, United Kingdom

The rocky shore around Cornwall, with its stunning array of yellow, pink, red, and green seaweed, is as beautiful as any underwater environment. Yet one species stands out to me: rainbow wrack. This incredible seaweed shines iridescent blue-green. I wanted to capture a split shot at sunrise in a rock pool, with the morning sky colours and the blue seaweed below the surface. It needed planning since rainbow wrack dies back over winter, grows into impressive bushes in spring, before its colour gets bleached in the summer. So I needed to time it to get the rainbow wrack at its peak, combined with a relatively clear sunrise that coincided with a low tide. On one morning last year, it came together, with the sky a rich glow of pinks and yellows. I exposed for the sky and used strobes to illuminate the seaweed and capture its blue colour.

Falmouth, Cornwall, UK

OM System, OM-5, Isotta, Olympus 8mm fisheye, iso 200, f/16, 1/250, Two Sea and Sea YS-D3 MII strobes

Judge's comments: A beautiful image with so much to entertain the eye and a well chosen split level from slightly above the waterline. This creates three levels of visual interest and provides much more depth (pun not intended). A very original image is the reward for the photographer's dedication. *Peter Rowlands*



BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'CATSHARK IN KELP'

Shannon Moran, United Kingdom

In the spring we had a period of warm, calm and clear weather; perfect for exploring those hard to reach dive sites and a welcome relief after a winter of poor diving conditions. On this day the conditions aligned, with slack tides and calm seas we ventured to Mullion Harbour on the south coast of Cornwall to explore the rich seas which surround the historic harbour walls. To our delight we were greeted by sunshine and excellent visibility, at over 10m this is quite a rare sight in the UK. We encountered many species of fish and crustacean amongst the rocky reef and kelp forest, such as this small-spotted catshark taking advantage of the calm weather and resting beneath the kelp forest canopy.

Mullion Cove, Cornwall, United Kingdom

Olympus , EM1 mark ii, Nauticam NA-EM1ii, Lumix 8mm Fisheye , iso 250, f/7.1, 1/100, Inon Z240 (x2)

Judge's comments: Such a vibrant image, it is a fantastic advert for diving in British Waters. The composition is beautifully lit and encourages us to enjoy both the shark and the kelp forest.
Peter Rowlands



BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'SUSPENDED IN TIME'

Guy Trees, United Kingdom

The slate mining industry was brutal, burdened by recession, war, strikes, and cultural and language barriers between Welsh quarrymen and English landowners. Intense financial pressure often resulted in these underground industries being closed down overnight, the pumps switched off, and the mines left to flood as the water table returned to ground level. Here, a chain ladder remains suspended underwater, deep in the mountains of North Wales. Quarrymen working here would make the descent down this precarious 15m ladder every day to reach the quarry floor. I wanted this photo to give scale to the ladder, and to provide a glimpse into the forgotten times represented by these pieces of human history. With no ambient light, 143,000 lumens of lights were carefully positioned around the enormous chamber to allow this shot.

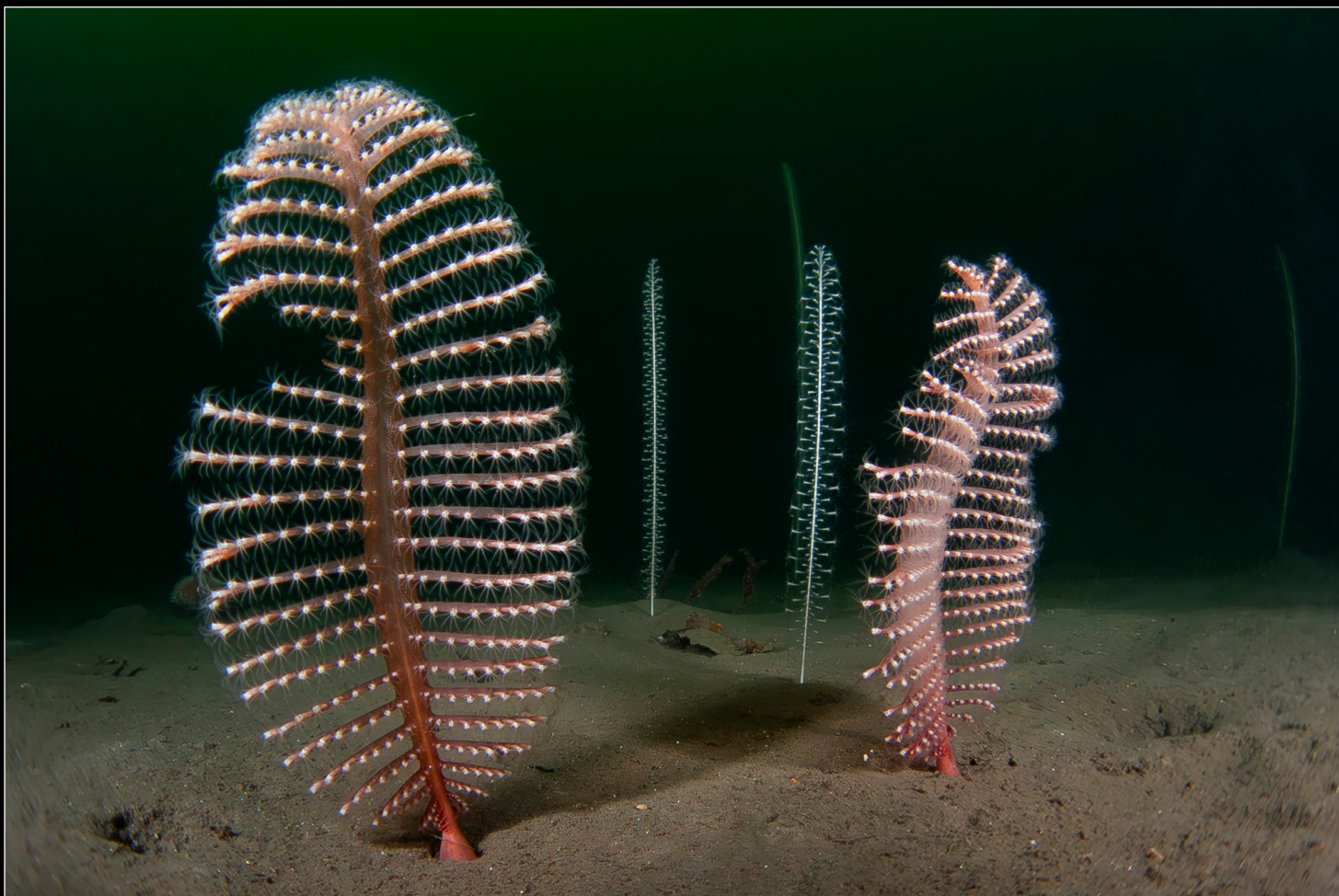
Slate Mine, North Wales , United Kingdom

Nikon , D850, Nauticam NA D850, Nikon 14-24mm f2.8, iso 2500, f/4.5, 1/30, ERA underwater 50k lm, Big Blue 33k lm, 4x 15k lm

Judge's comments: A very unusual image from British waters! I even didn't know that there are mines in the UK, which makes the image already fascinating. Very good idea of the photographer to have the ladder in the middle and adding the two divers with their lights on each side of it. I assume there is an additional, bigger light on the right which helps to illuminate the scenery. Only the blurry edges are a bit unfortunately to the overall image quality. *Tobias Friedrich*



BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE



COMMENDED

'FROM MUD GROW THE FLOWERS'

Hector Clarke, United Kingdom

Sea pens are usually denizens of deep, dark waters but find a shallower home in the mud-filled basins of many Scottish sea lochs. On the day I took this image, the sun was high and the tide was extremely low, allowing light to reach into deeper areas of the loch. Forests of tall and phosphorescent sea pens were cast in a soft jade light that complemented their pinkish hues. Toward the end of the dive, I was lucky enough to find a pair of phosphorescent sea pens in just the right position to make use of the light. In such a muddy environment a single misplaced fin stroke can throw plumes of silt into the water column, obscuring subjects for hours at a time. Acutely aware of this, I approached cautiously, positioning my camera as close and as low as possible to include both species and their delicate polyps.

Loch Duich, Scotland

Olympus, TG-6, Ikelite , FCON-T02, iso 200, f/3.2, 1/50, Weefine WFS07

Judge's comments:

Exquisite subjects, lightly lit to allow in the perfect amount of subtle natural light. This impressed the judges every time and we were all in agreement. Undeniable quality. *Peter Rowlands*



BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE



COMMENDED

'BOW OF SS HANS JENSEN'

Rick Ayrton, United Kingdom

I was diving from dive boat "Seeker" from Plymouth a long way offshore. The dive was blessed with exceptional visibility and the wreck was very well preserved. I was equipped with a scooter that my camera was mounted to. I placed a light inside the fo'c'sle and diver Dom Robinson lined up and illuminated the rest of the bow, allowing me time to get into position to get this shot. I particularly like being able to see the whole height of the bow and some sea bed detail. During the dive Dom located the makers plate of the ship which confirmed its identity. The SS Hans Jensen was a Danish collier of nearly 2000 tons, she was stopped by UB18 on September 13th 1916, the crew were told to leave and the ship was scuttled with charges, there were no casualties.

Western Approaches of the English Channel, UK

Nikon, Z9, Nautical NA Z9, Nikon 8-15mm
@14mm, iso 12800, f5.6, 1/60, Weefine smart
focus 10000 video lights

Judge's comments: A great shot of a wreck deep in British waters sitting bolt upright. The internal light lifts the intrigue and the divers lights focus the eye. An exceptional image for British waters. *Peter Rowlands*



BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE



COMMENDED

'ABOVE THE RAIN FOREST'

Dave Peake, United Kingdom

Renney Rocks are in the Plymouth Sound National Marine Park, Devon UK. It is a favourite area of mine to go snorkelling with colourful reefs and scenery. During May 2024 a period of stunning visibility allowed a great day of snorkelling with Buddy Pete Rustage. I took my iPhone in a DiveVolk housing with a wide angle lens. This particular area of reef looked really beautiful. I set the phone to 'Pano' mode and swept from left to right resulting in this panoramic image which I think provides about the maximum wide angle view for the UK. I was impressed with the Phone and Housing.

Renney Rocks, Heybrook Bay, Plymouth Sound National Marine Park, Devon, England

Apple, iPhone SE (3rd generation), DiveVolk Sea Touch 4 Max. With wide angle lens, 1.8 with Sea and Sea wet wide angle lens. Pano., iso 80, f1.8, 1/305sec, Natural light

Judge's comments: A stunning scene that truly exploits the unique capabilities of a smart phone in a housing to produce an inventive and expansive shot from British Waters. We're impressed too!
Alex Mustard



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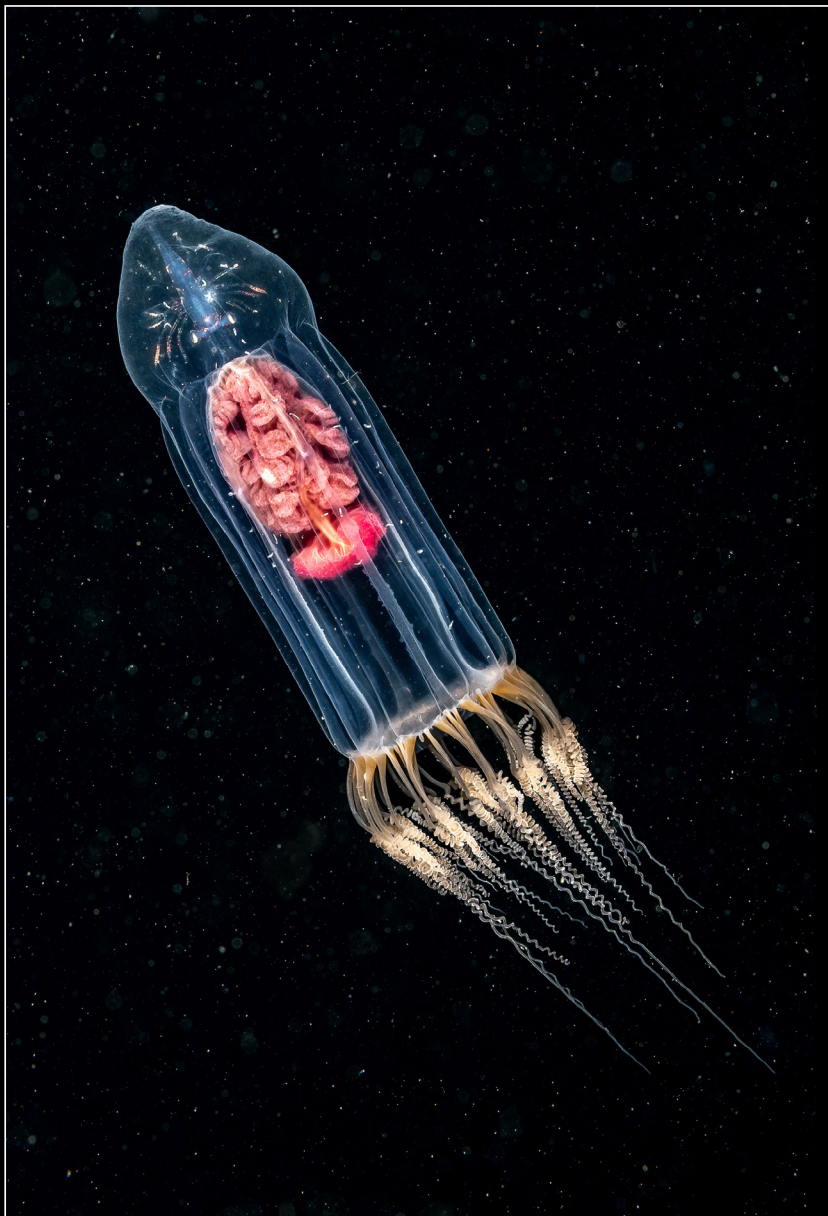
- Guide number : 30
- Flash tube : circular flash tube
- Power : 160 Ws
- Connection : optical cable / 5 pin syn cord/flash of light
- Illumination : 150°
- Color temperature : 4800K
- Flash capacity : 500 flashes at full power, 3000 flashes at 1st mode
- Recycle time : 0.1s---1.1s
- Flash speed : continuous unlimited flash sync with 10 flashes/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

2025 Dan Bolt (UK)
2024 Jenny Stock (UK)
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



CATEGORY WINNER

'THE HITCH HIKER'

Dan Bolt, United Kingdom

Occasionally in my time under the water I have come across this medusa 'Neoturris pileata' in the open water but had not taken a decent photo of one. On this occasion however, my buddy and I were specifically targeting them and other similar creatures to try to explore the idea of UK 'blackwater' photographic opportunities. Of the many, many(!), images I took that day, this one revealed a larval crustacean within the bell of this medusa. The frames either side of this capture actually show that the larval crab (or lobster) is actually on the outside of the bell, but in this instant it was perfectly on the opposite side from me and hence the effect of being contained within the transparent body.

Scotland, UK

OM Systems , OM-1, AOI UH-OM1, Panasonic 45mm macro, iso 250, f/13, 1/250th, 2x Sea & Sea YS-D3Duo

Judge's comments: This is a beautiful and rarely see jellyfish, but the wow moment really comes when you spot the hitchhiking shrimp through the transparent bell. Stunning, surprising and novel.
Alex Mustard



BRITISH WATERS MACRO



RUNNER UP

'FLUO SPINY SQUAT LOBSTER'

James Lynott, United Kingdom

This image was taken on a wonderful night dive at Inveraray, Loch Fyne. This site is known for being home to many beautiful fireworks anemones at shallow depths, but it also has an old pipe covered in concrete blocks which is home to lots of life, including the spiny squat lobster. These squat lobsters are usually found clinging upside down on boulders/overhangs and disappear the instant the camera shutter is pressed. However, on this night dive they were wondering about in the open and didn't seem to mind having a few pictures taken. These squat lobsters show the brightest fluorescence I have seen in crustaceans and I was really pleased on this dive to be able to capture the whole animal in frame. I used excitation filters on my strobes, along with a yellow barrier filter in front of the lens to capture the fluorescence.

Inveraray, Loch Fyne, Scotland

OM SYSTEM, OM-D E-M1 MarkIII, AOI UH-EM1III, M.Zuiko Digital ED 14-42mm F3.5-5.6 EZ, iso 500, f/6.3, 1/50, 2 x Sea&Sea YS01-Solis w/ Nightsea filters

Judge's comments: James's fluorescent exploration of British waters has revealed another stunning subject when photographed with this technique. A little more contrast in processing, a tiny crop and a rotation into vertical and this truly memorable shot could have gone all the way...

Peter Rowlands

BRITISH WATERS MACRO



THIRD

'STARS AND STRIPES'

Sandra Stalker, United Kingdom

In summertime the towers of bootlace weed in Kimmeridge bay, Dorset, are covered in tiny 5mm beautiful stalked jellyfish. Each with a unique pattern and colour, like tiny intricate lace doilies. For this image I wanted the stalked jellyfish to stand out like a jewel on the weed where they are naturally quite camouflaged, so I lit the weed from behind with a blue light and snooted the tiny swaying stalked jellyfish with white light. This was my second attempt at this shot having trialled it but not quite got the result I wanted the previous week. Being lucky to live close to the dive location was a key ingredient in producing a successful image.

Kimmeridge bay, Dorset, England

Sony , A7RIV, nauticam na A7RIV, Sony FE 28-60mm F4-5.6 Lens , iso 160, f/18, 1/160, Backscatter miniflash x2

Judge's comments: Graphically simple images always catch the eye and this one appealed immediately, geometrically, and then the almost theatrical lighting topped off by excellent and the almost indiscernable snoot light gave it star quality. Less is more and subtle is much more.

Peter Rowlands



BRITISH WATERS MACRO



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'RETICULATED DRAGONET SPAWNING'

Cathy Lewis, United Kingdom

For the past five years I've been diving the Scottish lochs specifically to look for spawning reticulated dragonets (*Callionymus reticulatus*). I had seen the males displaying to the females, flashing their spectacular iridescent blue dorsal fins, but it took three years to witness them spawning. I got lucky during a targeted dive in Loch Carron. After repeated fin displays by the male, the two finally rose into the water column. This image captures the effort and coordination that goes into a successful spawning rise.

Loch Carron, Scottish Highlands, UK

Nikon, D500, Nauticam NA D500, Nikkor 60mm, iso 250, f/16, 1/250, Single Backscatter strobe

Judge's comments: Many international photographers will be familiar with the mating behaviour of mandarinfish, colourful, tropical dragonets. But until now they probably didn't realise we have their relatives in British waters, which as this novel images shows, have a very similar spawning behaviour. *Alex Mustard*



BRITISH WATERS MACRO



HIGHLY COMMENDED

**'COMMON HERMIT CRAB WITH PAINTED
TOPSHELL'**

Simon Temple, United Kingdom

I always found shooting with vintage lenses a real challenge. I read a little and listened to others, I even dabbled with reversing elements in some lenses, searching for the much talked about bubble bokeh. After many failed attempts I realised the bubbles were more to do with the small points of light just outside the depth of field. In September last year I had just sourced a material I hoped would reflect points of light when Issue 140 of Underwater Photography Magazine landed.

Enclosed was a great article on the Trioplan and Artisan lenses by Alex Tyrell. It confirmed most of the things I had discovered so far by trial and error. The final image of the article, a spotted hermit crab taken in Thailand, caught my eye. This was something I thought I could recreate in UK waters and after two practice dives I got my shot!

Lochcarron, Scotland

Nikon, D500, Aquatica AD500, 60mm, iso 80, f/3.5,
1/320, Inon Z-240 Type 4

Judge's comments: Very nice usage of a bubble bokeh background on a common, but very photogenic subject. Perfectly placed on a nice and simple foreground it really adds up to an extraordinary image. We would have wished that the closer eye would be a bit more in focus as well and the image potentially could have placed even higher. *Tobias Friedrich*

BRITISH WATERS MACRO



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'THE RUSH'

Dan Bolt, United Kingdom

I have turned my attention to long-exposure underwater photography recently, and a night dive in December proved to be the perfect opportunity to continue that experiment. A recent storm had ripped the dying kelp from the near-by reef and mashed it up into myriad small pieces. This had, in turn, attracted thousands of mysid shrimp (*Neomysis integer*) into the shallow waters of this shore dive.

All I had to do was to place my torch in the sand, wait for 15 minutes, and a large number of these see-through shrimp were being attracted to the light-beam. Using a slow shutter I managed to capture the reflection in their eyes as they were rocked gently past the torch-light by the small swell that was evident that evening.

Hope Cove, South Devon, UK

OM Systems, OM-1, AOI UH-OM1, Olympus 30mm macro, iso 200, f/14, 1 second, FIT torch

Judge's comments: What an excellent usage of technique and subject selection! I loved this highly creative image from the beginning, especially with this colour combination. It almost looks like aliens in space, floating through the universe. Perfect technically done and a very good idea by the photographer to make use of it in this situation.
Peter Rowlands

BRITISH WATERS MACRO



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'FLUO SHARK EYES'

James Lynott, United Kingdom

Small-spotted catsharks have long been a favourite fluorescent subject of mine, so it is always a pleasure to find one on a night dive and be able to view (and capture) their otherworldly fluorescence under blue lights. On this particular evening diving in Loch Long, I had spotted this juvenile shark on my first dive. It didn't move at all while I got some 'normal' shots so I hoped it would still be in the same place on my second dive later on when I would have my fluorescence gear. Luckily, I was able to find the shark still in the same spot on the later dive and it was very tolerant of me getting up close to capture this shot of it head on.

Loch Long, Scotland

Canon , G7X MkIII, Fantasea FG7XIII S, Nauticam CMC1, iso 400, f/5, 1/100, 2 x Sea&Sea YS01-Solis w/ Nightsea filters.

Judge's comments: Fluorescing images are not everyone's cup of tea but there was no denying this one. Great unambiguous eye contact and the lighting and colour create the feeling of seeing an alien. *Peter Rowlands*

BRITISH WATERS MACRO



COMMENDED

'THREE'S A CROWD'

Ryan Stalker, United Kingdom

I had been waiting for the sea hares to return on mass like they do every year in May/June to try and get some interesting shots of them. I dived Newton's Cove not expecting them to have arrived just yet. But they were there and had arrived in large numbers. Sea hare mating season had started and I had the wrong lens on. The next day I returned all set up with the right lens to see what I could photograph. I used a Nauticam EMWL lens to get that close focus wide angle perspective of these three sea hares mating. Sea hares often mate in chains with each individual acting as either male or female. This image is of a group of three with the large one looking straight into the camera lens.

Newtons Cove, Weymouth., UK

Sony, A7R IV, Nauticam, Sony 90mm with a Nauticam EMWL, iso 1000, 18, 1/60, Inon Z330

Judge's comments: I am a sucker for behaviour shots, but this picture is also visually powerful and a great story-teller, showing the sea hares in their habitat. Totally worth the return trip with the specialist lens to create this winning image.

Alex Mustard



BRITISH WATERS MACRO



COMMENDED

'DREAMSCAPE'

Sandra Stalker, United Kingdom

In Portland harbour, Dorset there is a large grille covering the end of a pipe that is always a haven for life and is one of my go to snorkeling spots all year round. I love the way the sunlight shines through the grille and for this image wanted to create a photograph that almost felt like a painting with the soft hues of colour and the bars creating an almost stained glass window feel. I snooted a bunch of lightbulb squirts in the foreground as I love their shape and structure and used a long exposure to create the dreamlike ambiguous background.

Portland Harbour, Dorset, United Kingdom

Sony , A7RIV, nauticam na A7RIV, Sony FE 28-60mm F4-5.6 Lens , iso 50, f/22, 1 second, Backscatter miniflash

Judge's comments: I love these artistic images with a lot of blur and well composed colours. Such a nice usage of simple subjects while being highly creative. It wouldn't even need a subject in the left golden ratio to make it good, but integrate that into the overall frame is just the icing of the cake.
Tobias Friedrich

BRITISH WATERS MACRO



COMMENDED

'SEARCHING FOR A LADY DRAGON'

David Alpert, United Kingdom

The common dragonet spends most of its time on the seabed buried beneath the sand. I was fortunate to find this one perched on a piece of shale rock deep in a narrow gully. I was diving the North Devon coast, one of the most tidal stretches of water in the world and the tide had just turned. Perhaps like me, the dragonet had dropped into this protected space to avoid being swept out into the Bristol channel and wider Atlantic beyond.

Its eyes and gills are situated high up on its head and body to facilitate a life partially buried. This behaviour helps it to both evade predators and ambush prey. The faint blue markings beginning to show up on its torso leads me to believe this is possibly a young dragonet male? Perhaps he is searching for a lady dragon?

Rockham Shoal, Morte Point, North Devon, United Kingdom

Canon , 5D MKiii, Nauticam , Sigma 50mm f/2.5
Marco, iso 320, F/10, 1/250, 2 x Inon Z330 Strobes

Judge's comments: An appealing pose from one of the UK's most charismatic characters. Well lit with great eye contact and the delicate pastel shades in the background lifted this image into the winners.
Peter Rowlands



BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER

Category History

2025 Dan Bolt (UK)
2024 Kirsty Andrews (UK)
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 British Waters living together category is sponsored by The Crown Estate

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER



WINNER

'RUSTY HAVEN'

Dan Bolt, United Kingdom

This image shows nature's ability to make the best of a bad situation. The iron block and heavy chain are actually holding a small barge in-place on the surface where local scallop divers store their equipment. The barge itself is a floating reef system all of its own, and the anchor blocks have attracted many species too.

I was actually practising for a different underwater photography competition when I took this shot. For a couple of days before an on-the-day "splash in" competition, this crab was consistently in this position, or very close by. Sadly on the day it was no-where to be seen! Happily for me though that meant I was able to use my practice photos for UPY!

Loch Carron, Scotland

OM Systems, OM-1, AOI UH-OM1, Olympus 14-42mm with Nautocam WWL-1, iso 640, f/7.1, 1/50, 2x Sea & Sea YS-D3 Duo

Judge's comments: A well chosen angle to include just enough background to combine visual depth with location. The chain links starting off powerful in the foreground then receding delicately out of the scene topped by the small inquisitive fish entering the top of the frame. A worthy winner.
Peter Rowlands

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER



RUNNER UP

'TAKE A DEEP BREATH'

Guy Trees, United Kingdom

As the seaweed photosynthesizes around us, we seek refuge from the fast pace of daily life beneath the waves, where it is quiet. We relax, our heart rate slows down; for many people, the ocean provides a place to find peace. With no prior set up and only ambient lighting, this photo captures a freediver in a moment of tranquillity as she weaves her way through the kelp. All too soon, we surface for air.

Balaclava Bay, Portland, United Kingdom

Nikon , D850, Nauticam NA D850, Nikon 14-24mm f2.8, iso 200, 2.8, 1/640, Ambient Light

OM Systems, OM-1, AOI UH-OM1, Olympus 14-42mm with Nautocam WWL-1, iso 640, f/7.1, 1/50, 2x Sea & Sea YS-D3 Duo

Judge's comments: Beautiful scenery that rounds up with a very nice model position. The atmosphere of the shot and the nice framing are truly well done, with the model smiling and dressed so nicely. Only the fins could have been also in the frame, nothing else to criticize! *Tobias Friedrich*

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER



THIRD

'SS BAYGITANO'

Kirsty Andrews, United Kingdom

Fish soup. This is how the wreck of the SS Baygitano is often described. She sits in only 20m of water, just off the shore, and is unparalleled for the sheer number of fish above the wreckage as well as large conger eels filling every likely crevice. This conger was particularly large, fitting snugly into its hole, but I couldn't believe it when I looked more closely and saw a lobster tucked snugly into the same spot. The lobster moved off shortly after this shot. Although it's the first time I've seen this behaviour, I understand that these species are known to cohabit, with the lobster feeding off the conger's scraps, as long as its fully grown enough not to be a meal in itself.

SS Baygitano wreck, off Lyme Regis, Dorset, United Kingdom

Nikon, D500, Nauticam NA D500, Tokina 10-17mm, iso 400, f/11, 1/10, 2x Retra Pros

Judge's comments: A living blizzard of life makes this image irresistible. Fish galore, and a focal point of the odd couple, bunk mates on the wreck of the SS Baygitano. *Alex Mustard*

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'A MISCHIEVOUS ENCOUNTER'

David Alpert, United Kingdom

Lundy Island, the first marine protected area in the UK, is home to hundreds of grey seals. I have dived with many seal species across 4 continents, but I have not met ones quite like these before - delightfully curious, mischievous and playful. For many an unsuspecting diver, the first encounter may be a heart stopping tug on a fin as they come up stealthily from astern to play.

Having a hearty chuckle and loving every minute of this is my son, Joe, a long time dive buddy of mine. We were on the east coast of Lundy when this seal approached Joe from behind to 'nibble a fin'. They love to pose, using pieces of kelp as props, or examine their reflection in ones dome port. Considering that not that long ago they were threatened with extinction, it's amazing to be able to share these encounters - #living together.

Lundy Island, Bristol Channel, United Kingdom

Canon , 5D MKiii, Nauticam , Sigma 15mm Macro, iso 320, f/8, 1/200, 2 x Inon Z330 Strobes

Judge's comments: An image that perfectly captures a joyous moment most have experienced when diving with seals. We love the timing of this image, with the seal tickling the diver's fins and the diver emitting bubbles of laughter. *Alex Mustard*

THE CROWN
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BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'REAL ESTATE'

Sandra Stalker, United Kingdom

Tompots are always a favourite of mine, cheeky, playful and so full of character. They are also a little territorial over their homes and seem to favour a certain spot. I came across this one living in a mooring chain at Kimmeridge, perfectly framed within the link of the chain. I managed to get just a couple of shots with it in this position before, being the unreliable model it was, it moved to a much more awkward to access position in one of the lower links. The chain was on an otherwise barren part of the seabed so actually paints a positive narrative of our coexistence providing a home for this handsome fish.

Kimmeridge bay, Dorset, United Kingdom

Sony , A7RIV, nauticam na A7RIV, Sony FE 28-60mm F4-5.6 Lens , iso 400, f/14, 1/125, Backscatter miniflash x2

Judge's comments: This very strong, well framed, on message, image was a favourite of mine right from the start but it slide down the order compared to other shots which incorporated more background space. *Peter Rowlands*

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'SS PERSIER'

Kirsty Andrews, United Kingdom

The wreck of the Persier is a crowd pleaser: sufficiently intact and full of the features of a historic Second World War wreck to please history buffs and wreck appreciators, and covered in schooling bib and other animals which appeal to the wildlife-lovers. Last year the visibility was often exceptionally good too. One of my favourite South coast dives.

SS Persier wreck, Bigbury Bay, Devon, United Kingdom

Nikon, D500, Nauticam NA D500, Tokina 10-17mm, iso 400, f8, 1/30, 2x Retra Pros

Judge's comments: Well captured schooling fish in front of this wreck in perfect visibility. The photographer used the strobes very well to light up everything very precisely and plane. Maybe a bit less strobe power would have made it even better, otherwise very well done, also by the low perspective. *Tobias Friedrich*

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'HOME IS A PLASTIC SQUARE'

Terry Griffiths, United Kingdom

This image was captured at Porthkerris Divers Cornwall, one of my favourite dives in the SW. The photograph of a Montagu's blenny was taken on the steps of the old MOD building, which is home to several different species of bennies. It can be fun and challenging trying to get the photographs here because the waves never leave you alone, as I was less than a metre under the water.

Porthkerris Divers Cornwall, United Kingdom

Canon EOS, R7, Nauticam NA-R7, RF 100mm f2.8 L macro, iso 400, f/22, 1/200, 2 Inon z240

Judge's comments: A perfect combination of nature co-existing alongside human activities underwater. The handsome Montagu's blenny is the perfect focal point, but we also liked the patterns of barnacles defining the plastic lattice making up this step. *Alex Mustard*

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER



COMMENDED

'MERMAID AND THE SEAWEED'

Martin Stevens, United Kingdom

I love photographing all the wonderful marine wildlife we have in Cornwall, and alongside this it's also great to show human connections with the ocean and how important the sea is as a source of inspiration, enjoyment, and bond to nature and general wellbeing. The ocean attracts all manner of human visitors, from paddle boarders, kayakers, and sailors, to sea swimmers, snorkelers, and divers. Sometimes there are mermaids too. With Marianne Thompson, aka Mermaid Marianne, we wanted to make use of the clear, calm waters on a sunny summer morning and capture photos among the golden seaweed, with this image being one that we think illustrates the intrigue and wonder that many of us have towards the marine realm, whether a mermaid or a land person.

Falmouth, Cornwall, UK

OM System, OM-5, Isotta, Olympus 7-14mm Pro, iso 400, f/11, 1/160, Two Sea and Sea YS-D3 MII strobes

Judge's comments: A very unusual image for this category, but so well done ! The light on the mermaid as well for the ambience is well balanced while the foreground just adds up to the overall composition. I would have loved a tiny bit more space on the right side as well as the mermaid having her eyes open. *Tobias Friedrich*

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BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER



COMMENDED

'UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT'

James Harris, United Kingdom

I took this shot while diving at a site constructed from eco-friendly Reef Cubes designed by Arc Marine. The dive revealed an array of marine life, yet it was this small crab, tucked securely inside one of the cubes, that most captured my attention. I aimed to make him the focal point of the image while preserving the essence of his unique habitat. By angling my strobes to shine through the cube's upper opening, I created a spotlight effect, allowing the ambient light to softly illuminate the surrounding seascape.

Torquay, United Kingdom

Panasonic, GH5, Nauticam NA-GH5SV, Panasonic Lumix G Vario 7-14mm f/4, iso 800, f/6.3, 1/100, 2 x Backscatter HF-1

Judge's comments: A captivating image that really draws you in to the swimming crab sheltering in the Reef Cube, brought alive by the inventive use of lighting. *Alex Mustard*

BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER



COMMENDED

'NEST GUARDIAN'

Atanas Petrov, United Kingdom

One of my favourite dives on the East Coast of England is on the SS Rosalie — a shipwreck from World War I. Corkwing wrasse are often seen at this location and I had the opportunity to observe and photograph a male exhibiting parental care behaviour. It was busy going up and down around the nest and did not pay much attention to my presence. So, I had enough time to compose and take the photo I wanted.

SS Rosalie at Weybourne, North Norfolk, UK, United Kingdom

Nikon Corporation, Nikon D7200, Subal ND7100, AF-S FISHEYE NIKKOR 8-15mm f/3.5-4.5E ED, iso 100, f11, 1/40, Two Inon Z240

Judge's comments: One of the UK's most colourful fish sheltering behind manmade wreckage on which marine life has colonised profusely. Still and moving life like living together. *Peter Rowlands*

THE 'SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION' MARINE CONSERVATION

Category History

2025 Robert Marc Lehmann (Germany)
2024 Nuno Sá (Portugal)
2023 Alvaro Herrero Lopez-Beltran (Spain)
2022 Thien Nguyen Ngoc (Vietnam)
2021 Karim Iliya (USA)
2020 Pasquale Vassallo (Italy)

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)



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

THE 'SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION'

Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2025



CATEGORY WINNER

'1 / 200.000.000'

Robert Marc Lehmann, Germany

This tiger shark is just one of around 200 million sharks that lose their lives every year at the hands of humans.

Since I was six years old (35 years+), I have been intensively studying sharks. In all these years, hardly anything has changed and that is frustrating. Sharks protect their habitat, the sea, through their ecological function as "health police". Over a billion people depend on the sea every day and we all breathe the oxygen that is largely produced in the sea. If we continue to eradicate the animals that guard our largest and most important habitat, we are taking away our own livelihood. And that's why I've been fighting for people to see and understand sharks through my eyes. Every time I take a photo like this, it hurts, but through imagery I can inspire millions of people to understand sharks and their situation and make a difference.

Indonesia

CANON , R5, -, CANON EF 24mm f/1.4L II USM with EF to RF Mount, iso 1000, 5.6, 1/6400,

Judge's comments: A stunning, story-telling image, with four men hauling this huge ocean predator onto land. The light is beautiful, the composition immersive and the timing, capturing the fisherman's gesture, is perfect. Although an everyday occurrence and legal in most places, the man reaching out to stop the photo reveals what his conscience reckons on what they are doing. Powerful photography. Alex Mustard

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Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2025



RUNNER UP

'BOAT STRIKE VICTIM'

Henley Spiers, United Kingdom

The corpse of a sea turtle offers a window into life and death in the open ocean. The gashes across the turtle's carapace offered clear evidence that it perished due to a boat strike, an unnatural death and a poignant reminder that these animals must share the ocean with an ever-growing human presence.

Even in death, however, the turtle became a vessel for life. Far out at sea, every bit of flotsam, whether natural or man-made, becomes a form of inverted life raft. Small fish use any structure they can find to hide from predators. Here, the decomposing corpse of the turtle has been rapidly adopted as a refuge by juvenile fish.

Gulf of California, Baja California Sur, Mexico

Sony, A7IV, Marelux MXA7IV, Canon Fisheye 8-15 @15mm, iso 4000, f/11, 1/400, Ambien Light

Judge's comments: This is a stark, on message, subject in it's own right but the upward angle creates visually impressive reflections topped by the delicate surface reveal. An image with so much visual detail but only one message. Perfect and awful in equal measures. *Peter Rowlands*

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Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2025



THIRD

'ESPERANZA'
Giacomo Rossi, Mexico

Esperanza, a boat symbolizing hope for ocean conservation, embodies the mission to preserve marine resources. Organizations like Pelagios Kakunja tirelessly work to protect sharks in the Sea of Cortés, Mexico. I was privileged to document the tagging and release of juvenile sharks, including hammerheads and a surprise juvenile tiger shark. Most inspiring was Pedro, a former shark fisherman turned into a conservationist, who helped with the tagging and handling of the tiger shark. His transformation underscores the power of change and collaboration in conservation efforts. The Sea of Cortés was once a place where sharks were so abundant that children on the beach would play by tossing small stones at their dorsal fins. Sadly, this abundance is now a thing of the past. Today, we must strive to bring a new "Esperanza"—a New Hope—for the ocean and its incredible life.

Cabo Pulmo National Park, Mexico

Sony, A7IV, Marelux MXA7IV, Canon Fisheye 8-15 @15mm, iso 4000, f/11, 1/400, Ambien Light

Judge's comments: An image what "screams" marine conservation in all aspects! Very well executed split shot of the lovely, juvenile Tiger sharks which makes it a true eye catcher. Great positioning for the "models" as well, which all look in the subject and are very convivial in the background and not disturbing the overall composition. *Tobias Friedrich*

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Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2025



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'HANGING BY A THREAD'

Joost van Uffelen, Netherlands

Anthropogenic marine debris is a global issue sadly and a lot of its impact materializes beyond our sight. Northern gannets build nests out of seaweed and other vegetation. Sadly, they also find leftovers from the fishing industry out at sea and use it often to construct their nests on remote cliffs. A scientific research in 2019 identified that out of 7280 nests researched 46% used marine debris, like fishing gear.

This image was taken at the Isle of Noss in Shetland where this gannet died when it entangled itself in its own nesting material made out of rope. It must have fought for its life trying to free itself. After suffocating, the seabird hung on this string for weeks on end before the decomposing body must have given way to gravity. It is a stark visual reminder that human debris impacts seabirds worldwide massively.

Isle of Noss, Scotland

Nikon , D850, -, 200-500mm, iso 3200, f10, 1/1000, Ambient Light

Judge's comments: Like all good powerful reportage images, this initially evokes sadness which very soon turns to anger and then there's the guilt and the realisation that the natural world would be far safer without us. Point taken.
Peter Rowlands

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HIGHLY COMMENDED

'AWAITING SPAWNING'

Dan Mele, Virgin Islands, U.S.

"Reproductively extinct" is an increasingly common term in coral restoration research. It describes coral species with so few survivors in the wild that when they spawn, the chances of sperm from one colony fertilizing eggs from another are almost nonexistent. To address this, researchers at the University of the Virgin Islands bring grooved brain corals (*Diploria labyrinthiformis*) into their land-based nursery ahead of predicted spawning events. By spawning them in the nursery, researchers can perform assisted fertilization, significantly increasing the number of coral recruits (baby corals) compared to what naturally occurs on the reef. This method not only boosts coral population numbers but also enhances genetic diversity, which is critical for creating corals more resilient to rapidly changing environmental conditions.

University of the Virgin Islands - St. Thomas campus,
U.S. Virgin Islands

Canon, R5, Nauticam NA-R5, Canon EF 8-15 f/4L
Fisheye USM, iso 250, 11, 1/250, Sea & Sea YS-D3

Judge's comments: An engaging composition, playing with the reflection and refraction of light, draws us in to want to find out more. It is sad to learn coral populations have become so sparse they cannot reproduce effectively without this help. *Alex Mustard*



THE 'SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION'

Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2025



HIGHLY COMMENDED

'FRAGMENT FIELD'

Joe Daniels, France

Marine biologist Ambre tends to the coral nursery at the Four Seasons Resort, Bora Bora. In 2020 the resort partnered with WiseOceans, a Marine Conservation and Education organisation to restore the coral reefs surrounding the resort. Over the past 4 years almost 5000 coral fragments have been grown on and planted out from these nursery frames. Resilient coral species are selected and the fragments are carefully maintained by the team of Biologists until they are large enough to be planted out around degraded sites in the lagoon, helping restore and conserve coral reef ecosystems in the area.

Bora Bora, French Polynesia

Canon, 5D MK III, Nauticam NA 5DS, Sigma 15mm fisheye + Kenko 1.4 teleconverter., iso 125, f13, 1/125th, Retra Flash x 2

Judge's comments: Powerful marine conservation image which really shows the effort of the biologist to care and raise a coral plantation. The composition is very clear, while being also dynamic. The image is well lit and fascinated me from the beginning as it can tell the whole story in a blink!
Tobias Friedrich

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HIGHLY COMMENDED

'CONCH GRAVEYARD'

Dan Mele, Virgin Islands, U.S.

Queen conch (*Strombus gigas*) populations are overharvested throughout most of the Caribbean, and the British Virgin Islands are no exception. Off the coast of Anegada lies one of the largest conch middens (graveyards) in the region. Carbon dating and artifacts found in the massive pile reveal these mounds are as old as 1250 AD and likely date back even earlier.

When we arrived by boat, the scale of the middens was hard to grasp—some mounds rose higher than the boat itself. Launching a drone revealed sprawling mazes of discarded shells, with piles extending underwater, yet to reach the surface. As I flew overhead, a lone fisherman worked nearby, extracting conchs from their shells and adding to the centuries-old pile.

Anegada, British Virgin Islands

DJI, Mavic 2 Pro, N/A, 1.33x anamorphic lens, iso 100, f/5.0, 1/120, natural light

Judge's comments: Although I was aware of what this image was and where it was taken, we selected it as a winner because its graphics draw people in and we knew the caption would surprise and shock. Even away from large centres of populations and industrial fishing, humans have been significantly diminishing the oceans since pre-history. It should make us all truly consider what pristine and natural should look like. *Alex Mustard*

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Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2025



COMMENDED

'ENTANGLED SEA LION'

Henley Spiers, United Kingdom

A California sea lion pup roars with apparent frustration as it suffers from a painful entanglement with fishing line around its neck. Thankfully, it was eventually freed by Rescate De Lobos Marinos, a Mexican NGO devoted to disentangling pinnipeds.

This image was realised during an assignment to cover the life and threats facing Mexico's population of sea lions. I joined a rescue mission to better understand and document the threats faced by the sea lions, and the people devoted to helping them.

Young pinnipeds are especially vulnerable to entanglement: as the sea lion continues to grow, the fishing line around their neck acts like a cheese cutter. It took multiple visits and considerable manpower to free this pup, but in the face of a declining population, each disentangled sea lion gains in importance as it can resume its role as a reproductive member of the colony.

Los Islotes, Baja California Sur, Mexico

Nikon, Nikon D850, N/A, Nikon 70-200mm @200mm, iso 1000, f/2.8, 1/2000, Natural light only

Judge's comments: Pointless pain but as, the back story reveals, a positive outcome thanks to dedicated conservation efforts. One life saved and left to reproduce for years to come. Out of pain comes positivity. *Peter Rowlands*



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Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2025



COMMENDED

'PLASTIC EVERYWHERE'

Xavier Mas Ferrà, Spain

Strong storms are becoming more and more common in the Balearic Islands due to climate change. The waves deposit a large amount of plastic on the beach. This image shows the scene I found in Cala Tarida, a beach in Ibiza. I went to this beach to photograph the storm at dawn. When the sun came up I saw that the sand was full of plastics and microplastics.

Cala Tarida (Ibiza), Spain

Nikon, D500, -, Nikon 17-55 mm, iso 1000, f/8, 1/200,

Judge's comments: A very simplistic approach of an "ordinary" subject but very well executed. It shows immediately what is it about and has an excellent composition at the same time.

Tobias Friedrich



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COMMENDED

'DROWNING IN PLASTIC'

Kimber Greenwood United States

This image was part of an awareness project for the Florida Springs Council about the impacts of water bottling on Florida's Springs. Over 300 bottles are produced every minute at water bottling plants such as the one just minutes from the Spring this image was shot at. Not only are these bottles ending up in landfills and introducing micro-plastics into our environment, the bottling of "Spring Water" is causing a loss of water from the Floridan Aquifer which is reducing water levels and water flow, allowing for deterioration of the Springs and rivers. The bottles used for this image were donated from a local conservation activist who pulled them off the production belt of a local bottling plant. The images created from this campaign are used in on-going social media and print advertising campaigns to encourage individuals to make a better choice to use reusable water bottles over plastic bottles.

North Florida Springs, USA

Sony, A7IV, N/A, Sony 24-70 F2.8 GM, iso 400, f/3.5, 1/500, Natural Light

Judge's comments: Such a nice and simply way to create awareness. A perfect example of what can be done "easily" and has a high impact on the viewers of this image. I loved it from the moment I saw it first. *Tobias Friedrich*

UPY
2025

 **save our seas**
foundation

Underwater Photographer of the Year AWARDS

2025

UPY: Alvaro Herrero (Mekan) (Spain)
BUPY: David Alpert (UK)
U&C: Ruruka (Korea)
MPBUPY: David Alpert (UK)

2024

UPY: Alex Dawson (Sweden)
BUPY: Jenny Stock (UK)
U&C: Lisa Stengel, (USA)
MPBUPY: Sandra Stalker (UK)

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