Life in the Coral Corridors

Weiwei Zeng

Animals in their Environment

Highly Commended

Diving off the remote island of Romblon, eagle-eyed Weiwei spotted two tiny shrimp, each just five millimetres long. Blending in with the stony colours of a large, round brain coral, so-called because of its appearance, the shrimp travelled along the tight passages of their home. Fighting to keep still against the current, Weiwei framed the shrimp in single file.

These shrimp depend on coral for shelter, sometimes hooking soft coral tissue with their legs and drawing it over their backs like curtains. Yet their fragile dwelling is now threatened. Overfishing can damage the coral habitat by depleting the species that help maintain it, and climate change warms seas, causing coral to bleach from heat stress.

www.nhm.ac.uk

Weiwei specialises in underwater photography in southeast Asia. She has been diving for more than 10 years and is fascinated by the incredible variety of underwater critters, especially macro and super macro critters.

Canon EOS 5DS
100mm f2.8 lens
1/200 sec at f25 • ISO 100 • Nauticam housing • INON Z-240 strobe

The Night Shift

Laurent Ballesta

Under Water

Highly Commended

As night fell, the molluscs began to move on the coral reef. Behind these slow grazers cruised one of the area's top predators: a grey reef shark. Laurent composed this shot of the animals stirring beneath the watery reflection of their habitat, contrasting the angular molluscs with the sleek hunter.

Because the thick shells of molluscs are iridescent and shiny on the inside, they are often used for making buttons, jewellery and other decorations. But, while trade and heavy fishing have led to a decline in numbers, these molluscs are now the focus of conservation efforts. In some countries, young molluscs are produced in hatcheries before being sent into tropical reefs.

www.nhm.ac.uk

Coming from the coastal region of Montpellier in France, Laurent discovered the sea at an early age. While studying benthic ecology at university he discovered a new species of fish in the Mediterranean. He has published portfolios in many international magazines and appears on the French television show Ushuaïa Nature as a scientific advisor in marine environment.

www.laurentballesta.com

Nikon D4S
17–35mm f2.8 lens
1/250 sec at f11 • ISO 800 • Seacam housing • strobes

Underwater Galaxy

by Domenico Tripodi

Under Water

Highly Commended

Having dived in the same area his whole life, Domenico knew that the stiff breeze on this particular day would be a challenge. But, upon descending beneath the choppy waves, he was rewarded, finding himself 'in an incredible sea of tunicates' – marine invertebrates that form long, star-studded-ribbon-like colonies. Domenico framed a jellyfish against the celestial curtain.

Known as the mauve stinger, this relatively small jellyfish can grow to anywhere between three and 12 centimetres across. Although little, it can form large blooms, which are potential hazards to swimmers. Unusually for jellyfish, this species has stinging cells on its umbrella-shaped bell, as well as on its tentacles and the oral arms that trail from around its mouth.

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Domenico's love of the sea began in childhood, spending hours observing its inhabitants with a mask and a snorkel. This passion and the desire to photograph led him to take more and more pictures of the beauty found in the Strait of Messina, between Sicily and Calabria, Italy.

Nikon D7200
Tokina 10–17mm
f3.5–4.5 lens at 10mm • 1/125 sec at f14 • ISO 250 • Isotta housing • INON Z-330 strobe

Boat Strike

by Francis Pérez

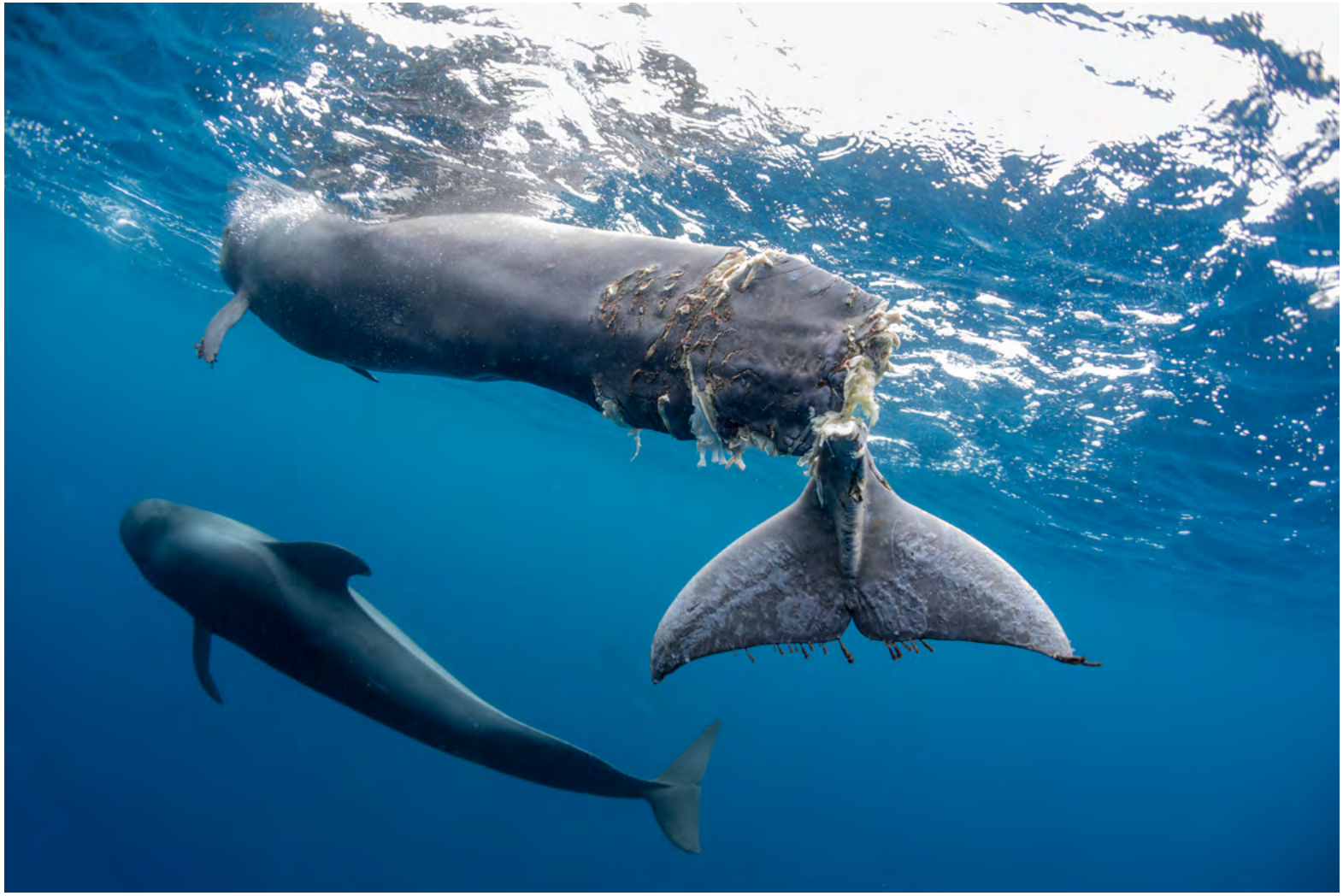
Wildlife Photojournalism

Highly Commended

This short-finned pilot whale was left unable to swim after its tail was severed by a boat propeller and its body attacked by sharks. In the water, Francis could hear the injured whale's cries, as well as those of its family group, which circled protectively. 'It was the saddest day of my career,' says Francis, who has photographed marine life for 20 years.

These deep waters host more than 20 whale and dolphin species. With increasing boat tourism and no speeding regulations, propeller strikes are a constant threat, especially to pilot whales, which recover from long, tiring dives at the water's surface. Speed restrictions can reduce collisions.

www.nhm.ac.uk

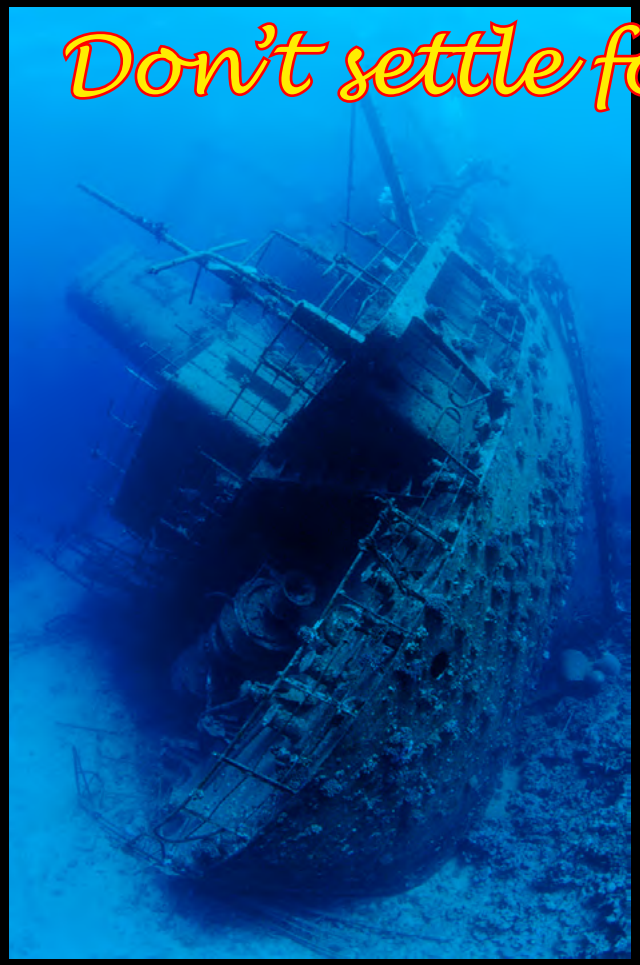


Francis is an underwater photographer and economist, specialising in environmental economics. In recent years his photography has focused on cetaceans and marine mammals. He is a regular collaborator to National Geographic Spain and a SeaLegacy Collective member. He won first prize in the nature singles category at World Press Photo 2017.

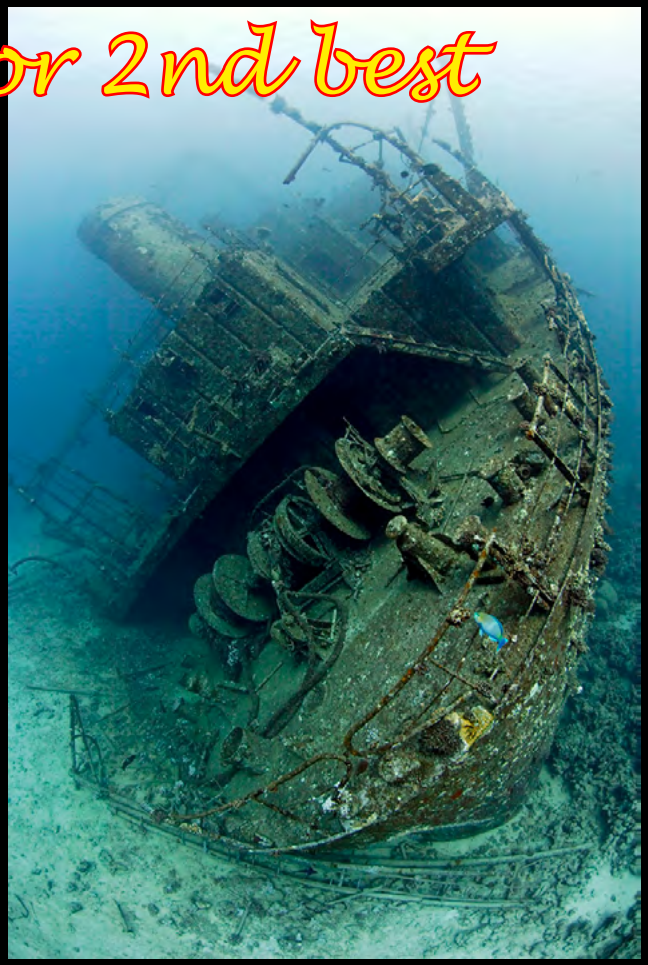
www.francisperez.es

Canon EOS 5D Mark IV
15mm f2.8 lens
1/400 sec at f5 • ISO 640

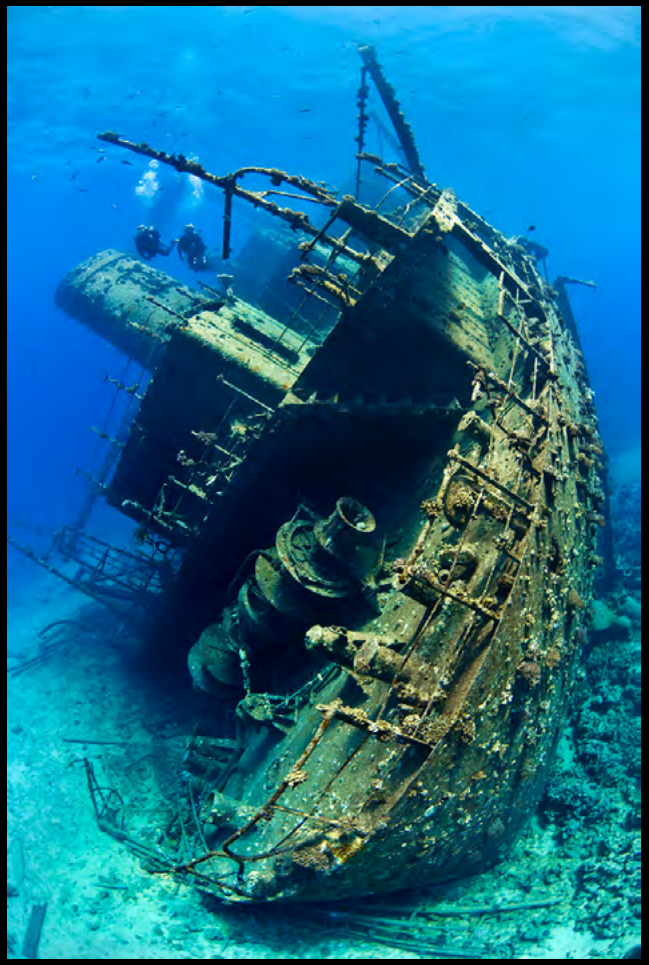
Don't settle for 2nd best



Film - No Filter No White Balance



Digital - No Filter Manual White Balance



Magic Filter Manual White Balance

Digital cameras have opened up new possibilities to underwater photographers. For available light photography manual white balance is an invaluable tool for restoring colours. But when you use it without a filter you are not making the most of the technique. You're doing all the hard work without reaping the full rewards. These three photos are all taken of the same wreck in the Red Sea. The left hand image was taken on slide film, which rendered the scene completely blue. The middle image is taken with a digital SLR without a filter, using manual white balance. The white balance has brought out some of the colour of the wreck, but it has also sucked all the blue out of the water behind the wreck, making it almost grey. The right hand image is taken with the same digital camera and lens, but this time using an original Magic Filter. The filter attenuates blue light meaning that the colours of the wreck are brought out and it stands out from the background water, which is recorded as an accurate blue.

www.magic-filters.com