

1) Wide angle



The following eight images are my personal favourites from UPY 2021.

You can see all the winning images by following the link below and you can also download the Yearbook to keep on your computer as inspiration for entering next year's competition!

Peter Rowlands
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RUNNER UP

'Gothic Chamber'

Martin Broen (United States)

The Riviera Maya in Mexico hosts the world's largest underground river systems filled with clear water, never-ending tunnels and amazing halls with decoration that can compete with the best gothic cathedrals of the world.

The challenge of capturing this beautiful hall in cenote Monkey Dust was not only the huge dimensions but the fact that it is pitch black.

This photo is a x6 shot horizontal panorama stitching captured at 1/15 sec handheld at the usable limit of the camera ISO and diaphragm wide open to create an 86mpx panorama. My aim was to capture the scale, the tridimensionality of it, the richness of the formations and their incredible textures.

Cenote Monkey Dust, Mexico

Sony, A7RIII, Nauticam NA-A7III, Canon 8-15mm at 15mm, iso 6400, f/4.5, 1/15, Big Blue 15000 lumen

Judges comment:

The very best cenote images often catch the judges' eyes in UPY but Martin's picture raises the bar significantly both in terms of jaw dropping beauty and for its technical achievement. This is a place few humans are capable of even reaching, so to get there and then produce a such a demanding piece of photography while in the darkness, deep underground and underwater is a stunning achievement.

Alex Mustard

1) Wide angle



HIGHLY COMMENDED

‘Descending from Above’

Celia Kujala (United States)

Juvenile Steller sea lions are curious and playful. When I was diving at Norris Rocks in British Columbia, I watched large groups of them appear seemingly out of nowhere. They are good at holding their breath but still need to breathe air and would often go to the surface for a breath as a group before descending again. One day I was observing the behavior of a group in the water and I realized I might have the opportunity to capture an image that I had dreamed of. In this moment, everything came together. I took this photo directly upward as they were descending toward me and was able to capture the group inside of Snell’s window showcasing their curiosity and energy. Steller sea lions are listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List. I hope this image inspires people to want to protect them.

Norris Rocks, Canada

Nikon, D500, Nauticam NA-D500 , Tokina 10-17mm Fisheye Lens , iso 500, f/11, 1/250, Sea & Sea YS-D2J

Judges comment:

Curious, mischevious, boisterous; all at once. This was a unique image this year and I never tired of looking at it. A perfectly timed image which shouts ‘The boys are back in town!’

Peter Rowlands

2) Macro

COMMENDED

'The Fastest Nudy'
Fabio Iardino (Italy)

Thanks to the restrictions of the Covid emergency, I was able to very well explore a dive site that many have underestimated. It is actually very interesting for underwater photography. One of the most common subjects is Felimida luteorosea. As a fan of the use of the snoot, I wanted to photograph it in a different way than usual. Using the slow sync technique, I enjoyed making a very slow animal look fast.

Sistiana (Trieste Gulf), Italy **(MBY)**

Nikon, D 850, Hugyfot HFN-D850, Micro Nikkor AFS 40mm f.2.8 + TC Kenko 1.4x, iso 200, f.29, 1/13, OneUW 160x and

Judges comment:

I was drawn to this image immediately and it never faded with repeat viewing. It's a great and very effective use of a technique to make 'a tortoise seem more like a hare!' I thought of a Formula One car when I first saw it :-)

Peter Rowlands



3) Wrecks



HIGHLY COMMENDED

‘Very Wrecked’

Pekka Tuuri (Finland)

In the murky waters of Finland it is really a struggle to find clear water to shoot wide angle. In Kaatiala Mine in wintertime, under the ice cover one can find such water. I had photographed this car wreck several times before. It is very unimpressive! I got an idea to photograph the car as if it were on fire. Lots of light and preferably lots of divers, too. I recruited volunteers and everybody said yes. We planned the photo at the surface and photographed the plan. Everybody did their part. With the help of my can-do friends an unimpressive car wreck turned into a rather impressive photo! And I will go back there. I already have a couple of new ideas

Kaatiala Mine, Finland

Canon, 5D M3, Subal, 15 mm, iso 1000, 2.8, 1/50, Ambient

Judges comment:

This was a particularly stand out image for me and more so each time it came on the screen. The lighting idea is different, graphically simple and visually direct. It makes a very ordinary subject extraordinary.

Peter Rowlands

7) Compacts

THIRD

'Pelagic stingray (Pteroplatytrygon violacea)'

Isaías Cruz (Spain)

This image was taken in summer, offshore from Bermeo, while doing a shark dive. Being surrounded by 3 blue sharks, this pelagic ray appeared to check the bait. It was a very rare encounter, this animal was not been sighted before in this waters, and I too had never seen this animal before. It was going in and out from the bait, so I tried to get close to it calmly, then it come right to my dome and I took the photo.

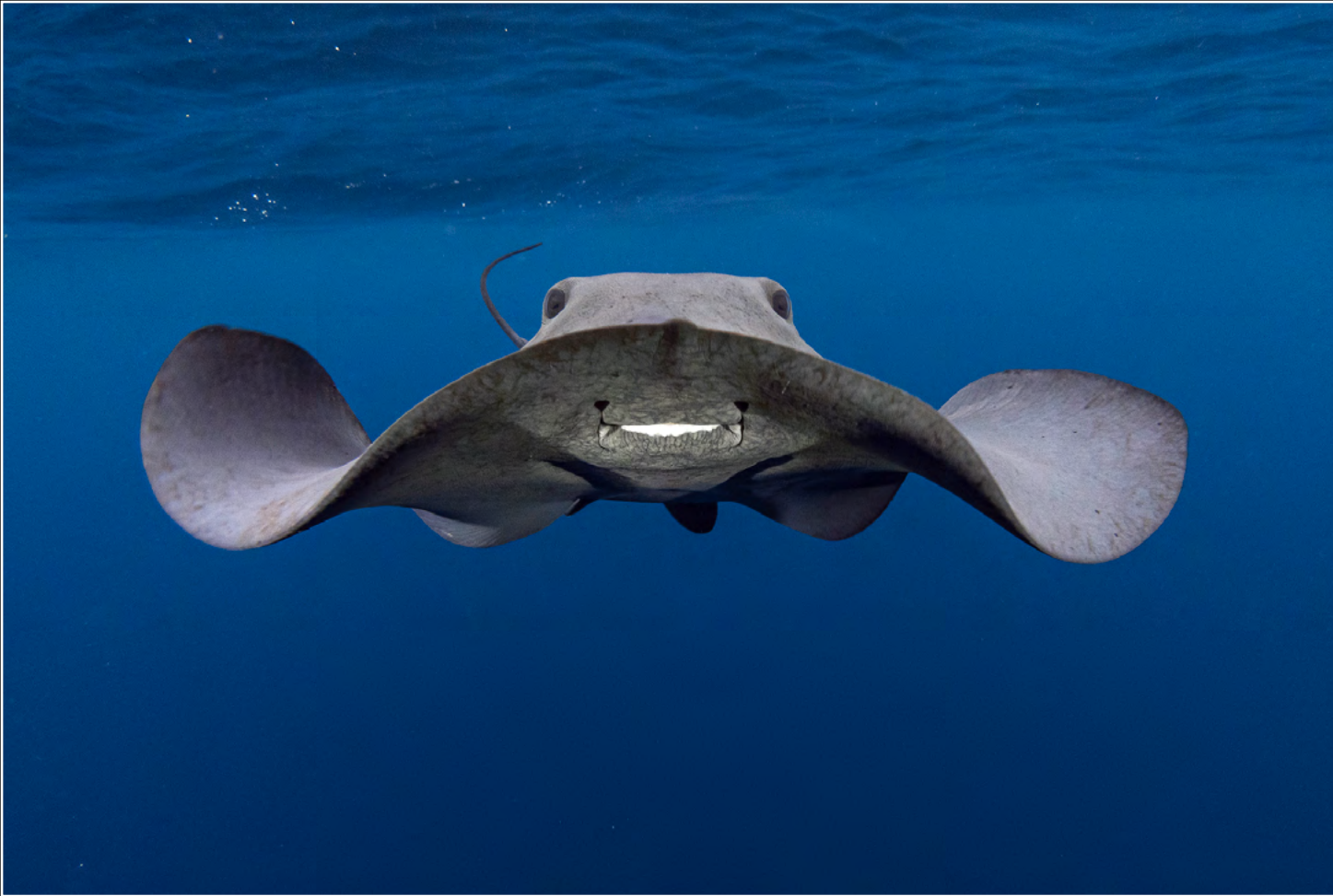
Basque Country, Spain **(MBY)**

Sony, RX 100 V, Nauticam NA-RX100V, Inon UWL-H100 + dome, iso 500, f/5, 1/160, x2 glowdive max lights

Judges comment:

Beautifully timed symmetry with subtle non distracting surface reflections. A big shot from a small camera.

Peter Rowlands





RUNNER UP

‘The Great Migration’

Mark Kirkland (United Kingdom)

It's the microscopic plankton which draws the massive Basking Shark up the west coast of Britain and into the narrow channel between the Isles of Coll and Tiree. While their migration is predictable, to share the water with them still requires that element of luck and to spend a late summer evening with them (in 2020 of all years) was a dream. I've photographed Basking Sharks before and never managed that classic 'head-on' shot, so decided to try for something completely different instead. With challenging lighting conditions and plankton rich waters, I wasn't sure if it could be done but after two years of planning, an experimental 19-inch dome (frame made by my brother - thanks Paul), trial and error with lenses and ND filters, and of course - the arrival of Sharks - I finally had the chance to find out.

Isle of Coll, Inner Hebrides, Scotland

Olympus, OMD Em5 Mkii, Olympus PT-EP13, Olympus 9-18mm, iso 1600, f6.3, 1/200, Natural

Judges comment:

This image raises the bar for Basking Shark shots. There is so much that has to come right to get a shot like this that it might seem impossible but we now have proof. It is possible and it's absolutely awesome!

Peter Rowlands



THIRD

'Nest buddies'

Dan Bolt (United Kingdom)

The corkwing wrasse you can see in the background was actually busy building a nest under the pier. This means he was very distracted by his duties and would regularly come back to the same spot to add more gathered pieces of seaweed.

The nudibranch had been making its way along a near-by piece of kelp, and I only had to wait for a minute or two before it made its way up a seaweed stump enabling me to grab a few shots just at the moment when wrasse and nudibranch were both in frame.

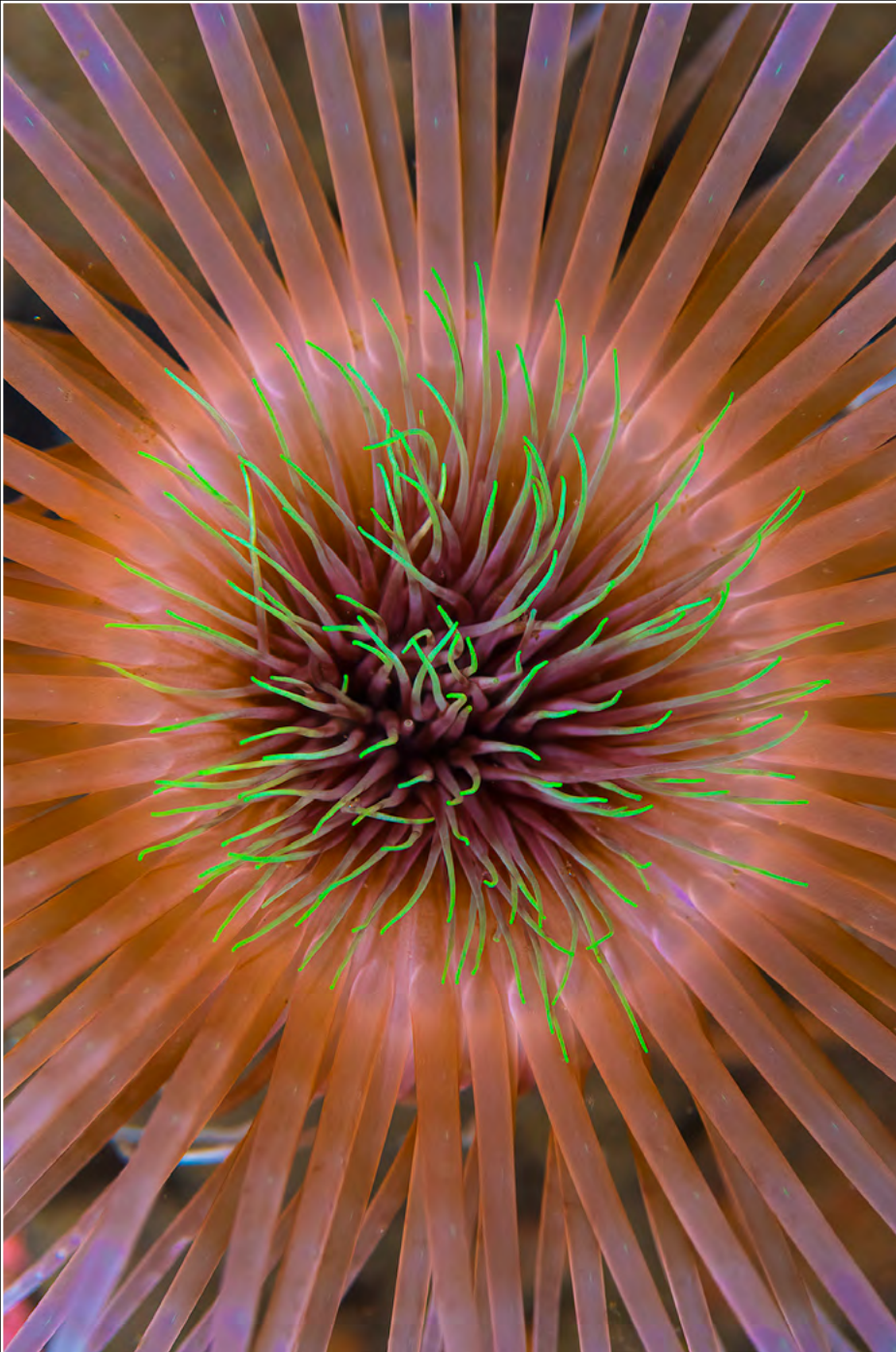
Swanage pier, UK

Olympus, OM-D E-M1, Aquatica AE-M1,
Olympus 60mm macro, iso 320, f/14, 1/250, 2
Sea & Sea YS-D1

Judges comment:

When I first saw this image I thought it was lucky to have the wrasse appear in the background but, having read the photographer's back story, I did him a disservice :-). The image was intentional, well planned, timed and positioned which makes it even more impressive.

Peter Rowlands



HIGHLY COMMENDED

‘Firework Explodes’

Simon Temple (United Kingdom)

Anyone familiar with diving the sea lochs of Scotland will have encountered the Firework Anemone. Over the last few years I've tried numerous techniques to capture their image often in dark silty environments. This individual was one of only two in an area we dived repeatedly for three days. After exhausting all the wider angle options in days one and two I had started to work with other subjects and formats in the area. On the final day I was returning from shooting macro further down the loch when I paused by this anemone and wondered if it was possible to take an interesting shot of this relatively large subject with a macro lens. I doubted it was worth it but took a single top down shot anyway. I'm really glad I did.

Loch Duich, western Scotland, United Kingdom

Nikon, D500, Aquatica AD500, 85mm, iso 200, f/11, 1/250, Inon z240

Judges comment:

Such a pretty picture and one I feel is going to make Simon's unconventional lens choice one many photographers will emulate when diving for this subject.

Alex Mustard