

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2021

Creation

by Laurent Ballesta, France

Winner, Underwater



Laurent Ballesta (France) peers into the depths as a trio of camouflage groupers exit their milky cloud of eggs and sperm.

For five years Laurent and his team returned to this lagoon, diving day and night to see the annual spawning of camouflage groupers. They were joined after dark by reef sharks hunting the fish.

Spawning happens around the full moon in July, when up to 20,000

fish gather in Fakarava in a narrow southern channel linking the lagoon with the ocean. Overfishing threatens this species, but here the fish are protected within a biosphere reserve.

*Nikon D5 + 17–35mm f2.8 lens at 17mm 1/200 sec at f11 ISO 1600
Seacam housing Seacam strobes 1/200 sec at f11 ISO 1600 Seacam housing Seacam strobes*

Bedazzled

by Alex Mustard, UK

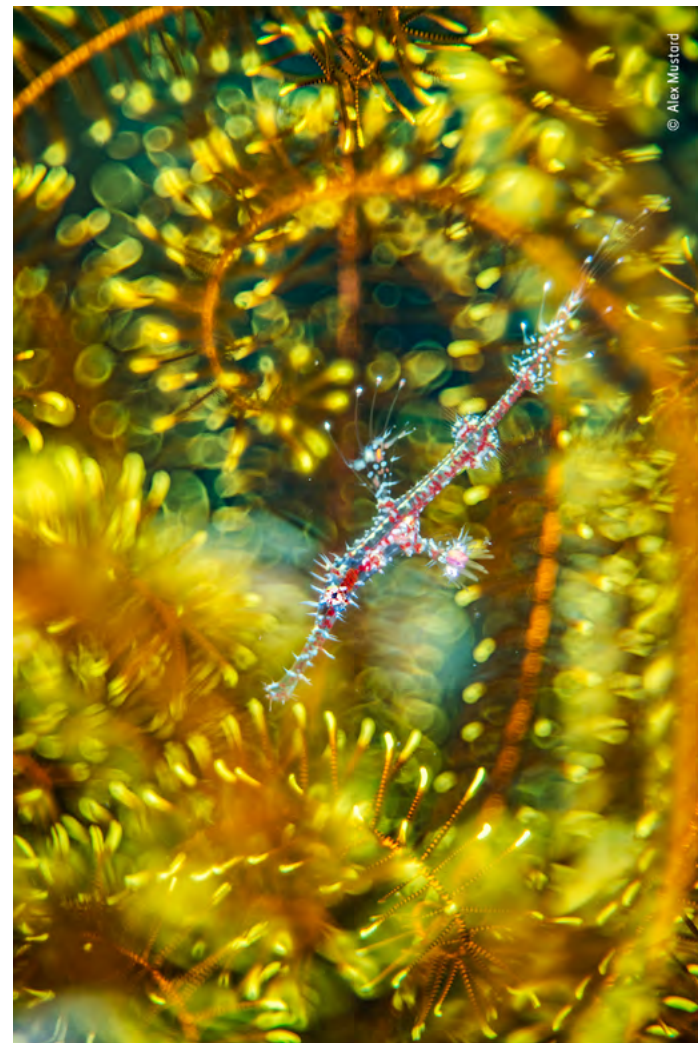
Winner, Natural Artistry

Alex Mustard (UK) finds a ghost pipefish hiding among the arms of a feather star.

Alex had always wanted to capture this image of a juvenile ghost pipefish but usually only found darker adults on matching feather stars. His image conveys the confusion a predator would likely face when encountering this kaleidoscope of colour and pattern.

The juvenile's loud colours signify that it landed on the coral reef in the past 24 hours. In a day or two, its colour pattern will change, enabling it to blend in with the feather star.

*Nikon D850 + Trioplan 100mm f2.8 lens 12mm extension tube ND8 filter
FIT +5 close-up lens 1/250 sec at f2.8
ISO 80 Subal housing two Retra strobes*



Where the giant newts breed

by João Rodrigues, Portugal

Winner, Behaviour: Amphibians and Reptiles



João Rodrigues (Portugal) is surprised by a pair of courting sharp-ribbed salamanders in the flooded forest.

It was João's first chance in five years to dive in this lake as it only emerges in winters of exceptionally heavy rainfall, when underground rivers overflow. He had a split second to adjust his camera settings before the newts swam away.

Found on the Iberian Peninsula and in northern Morocco, sharp-ribbed newts (or salamanders) are named after their defence strategy. They use their pointed ribs as weapons, piercing through their own skin and picking up poisonous secretions, then jabbing them into an attacker.

Canon EOS 5D Mark IV + Tokina 10–17mm f3.5–4.5 lens at 16mm 1/200 sec at f13 ISO 320 Aquatica housing two INON Z-330 flashes

Rich reflections

by Justin Gilligan, Australia

Winner, Plants and Fungi



Justin Gilligan (Australia) creates the reflection of a marine ranger among the seaweed.

At the world's southernmost tropical reef, Justin wanted to show how careful human management helps preserve this vibrant seaweed jungle. With only a 40-minute window where tide conditions were right, it took three days of trial and error before Justin got his image.

Impacts of climate change, such as increasing water temperature, are affecting the reefs at an ever-

increasing rate. Seaweed forests support hundreds of species, capture carbon, produce oxygen and help protect shorelines.

Nikon D850 + Sigma 15mm f2.8 lens 1/160 sec at f13 ISO 400 Nauticam housing twin Ikelite DS161 strobes + sync cord

www.nhm.ac.uk/wpy/