

Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023

and Up & Coming Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023

An eye-catching photo of a pink river dolphin breaching the surface of the Amazon river sees Kat Zhou from the United States named Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023.

Zhou's photograph triumphed over 6000 underwater pictures entered by underwater photographers from 72 countries.

Zhou's photo 'Boto Encantado' perfectly frames this endangered species, whose numbers are falling year on year, by photographing it simultaneously above and below the surface, at sunset. *"There's a legend among locals that river dolphins, or 'botos', can transform into handsome men known as 'boto encantado' to seduce women," she said. "Though I did not witness the transformation, I was enchanted by these beautiful mammals in a different way. After seeing how botos would sometimes bring their beaks above water, I knew I want a split shot at sunset. Though the water was so dark that I was shooting blind, this dolphin gave me a perfect pose and smile!"*

"As more people have settled the Amazon, river dolphins began living in closer proximity to human populations, even making use of food scraps," continued Zhou. "many river dolphins

have also been killed for use as fish bait, drowned in gill nets or poisoned by mercury pollution. I fear that one day botos will truly become no more than mythical creatures."

Chair of the competition judges, Alex Mustard, commented, *"at first glance simple, then simply perfect. In dark, tannic waters, Kat has created a striking composition capturing this rarely photographed and endangered species at the perfect moment. This is by far the best image we've ever seen of this species, whose numbers are declining at an alarming rate and whose IUCN's Red List status was worryingly increased to Endangered in 2019."*

"It is appropriate that the Amazon, as the world's mightiest river, has produced our overall winner," commented judge Mustard. "The Underwater Photographer of the Year contest aims to celebrate underwater photography in all its diversity and we are delighted that this year's awarded images come from the poles to the tropics, from all corners of the ocean, and from renowned freshwater bodies like the river Amazon and Lake Baikal. We even have winners taken in swimming pools."

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



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British Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023

The Underwater Photographer of the Year contest is based in the UK, and Ollie Clarke, an Englishman now living in Australia, was named as British Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023 for his image “The Swarm” showing a whale shark, the largest fish in the world, hidden within a bait ball of smaller fish.

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

Ningaloo Reef, Australia

Sony, A7Riii, Nauticam NA-A7Riii,

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



Judge’s comment:

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

Alex Mustard.



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Most Promising British Underwater Photographer of the Year 2023

British Waters Wide Angle

CATEGORY WINNER

'AN ISLAND'S WILD SEAS'

Theo Vickers, United Kingdom

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

Needles Marine Conservation Zone, Isle of Wight, United Kingdom

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

Judge's comment:

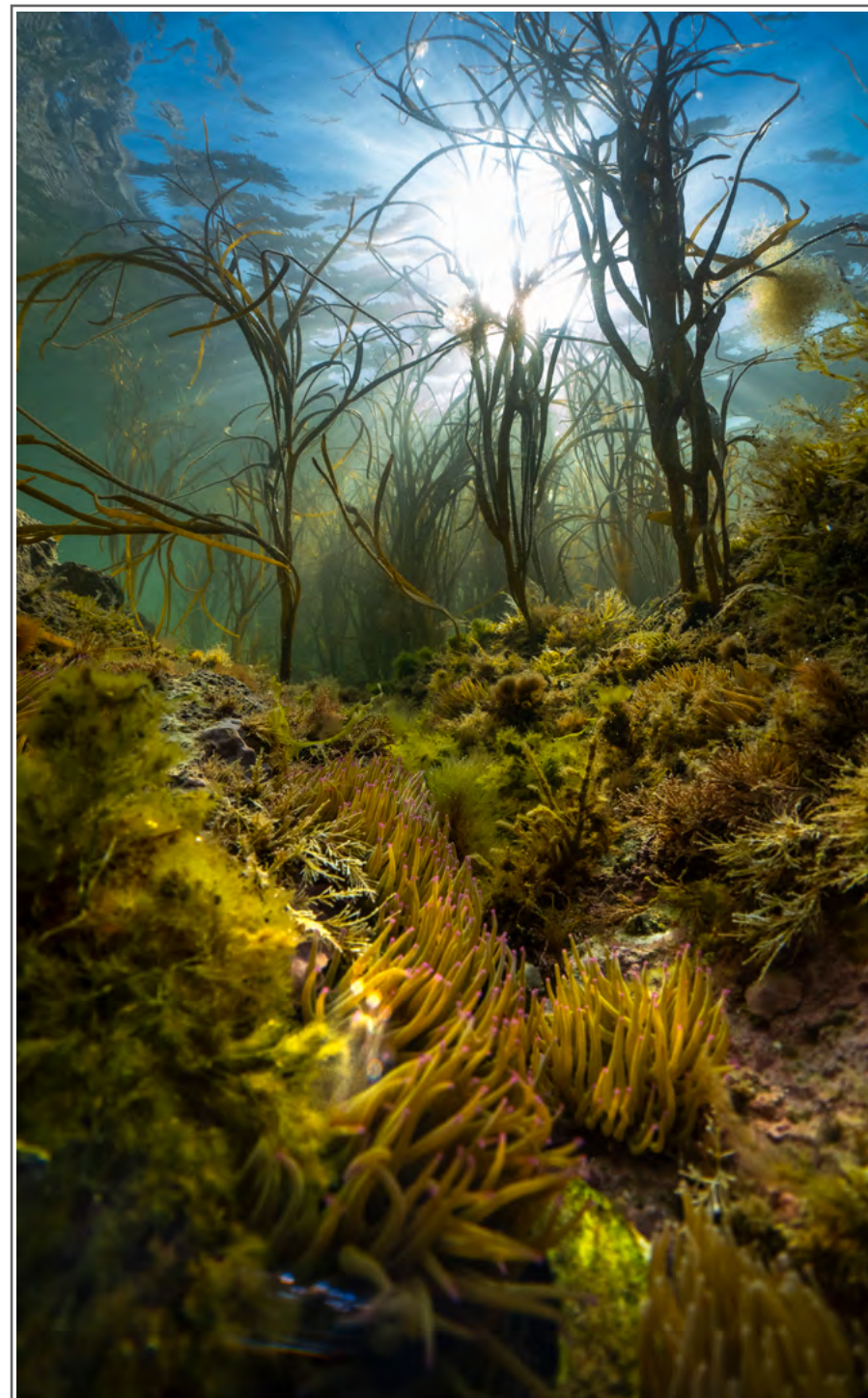
What a stunning image ! This magical and mystic atmosphere is just blasting. A very good example of what you can achieve even with a small camera and an artistic and good eye! The blurry foreground even gives you the impression that you are in a small, tiny world, looking up into the weed. Very well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

Tobias Friedrich



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WINNER

'PIPE REEF'

Dan Bolt, United Kingdom

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

Loch Fyne, western Scotland,
United Kingdom

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

Judge's comment:

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

Alex Mustard

British Waters Living Together winner 2023



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'Save Our Seas Foundation' Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2023



'HOPELESS'

Alvaro Herrero, Spain

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

Baja California, Mexico

Nikon , D500, Isotta D500, Sigma

10-20mm f4-5.6, iso 200, 6.3, 1/320,

Natural Light



Judge's comment:

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

Tobias Friedrich



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