

2023 DPG Masters

Competition Winners

by Ian Bongso Seldrup

DivePhotoGuide (DPG) is proud to announce the winning images and short films in the 2023 edition of the DPG Masters Underwater Imaging Competition. Once again, thousands of photographers and filmmakers from dozens of countries competed in what has become known as the “World Championship” of international underwater imaging events.

The competition invited submissions to seven image categories and one video category, with entries evaluated by a panel of award-winning photographers: Stephen Frink, Renee Capozzola, Scott “Gutsy” Tuason, Allison Vitsky Sallmon, Matty Smith and Amanda Cotton.

This year’s “Best of Show” prize went to Italian photographer Marco Gargiulo for his extraordinary split shot of a juvenile imperial blackfish riding a jellyfish under the gaze of the famous Mount Vesuvius volcano in Italy. The photo, entitled “The Passenger,” also took Gold in the Over-Under category.

“Most remarkable for me is the juxtaposition of a blackwater subject against wide-angle topside with sunlight,” commented Renee Capozzola. “I initially thought this must be a composite, so to learn this photograph was one image clinched the decision in my view.” Stephen Frink added: “Possibly the highest compliment I can give an underwater shot is wondering, ‘How did they do



Best of Show – Over-Under – Gold – “The Passenger” by Marco Gargiulo (Italy)

Shooting Location: Castellammare di Stabia, Naples, Campania, Italy

Equipment and Settings: Nikon D850, Nikon 16–35mm f/4 lens at 35mm, Nauticam housing, Nauticam 9-inch dome, dual ONEUW One 160X strobes, f/13, 1/200s, ISO 110

Photographer’s Comment: “It’s not often you see snow on the Vesuvius volcano here in the Gulf of Naples, where I live in Sorrento. It soon vanishes due to the mild temperatures. I’ve always wanted to take a photo, and I finally managed to get into the water to do it. During my walk along the Marina Grande in Sorrento, my usual place for winter night diving, the wind pushed a large quantity of jellyfish along the coast. I was lucky to find one that had a small passenger on board, a juvenile imperial blackfish (Schedophilus ovalis).”



Blackwater – Gold – “Flamenco Pose” by Magnus Lundgren (Sweden)

Shooting Location: Anilao, Balayan Bay, Batangas, Philippines

Equipment and Settings: Nikon D850, Nikon AF-S 60mm f/2.8 macro lens, Nauticam housing, Inon Z-330 strobes, f/16, 1/250s, ISO 320

Photographer’s Comment: “It was a night filled with drama when I encountered one of my dream subjects in Balayan Bay. The Taal volcano was erupting, sending fireworks into the dark sky like a huge dragon, and the deep, thundering sound of earthquakes rolled through the ocean. At the same time, this female blanket octopus appeared from nowhere, out of the dark, in front of my camera. She started rolling out her long blanket, ending up in this Batman-like pose. False eyes decorating her flamenco-style webbing between her arms stared back at me. It is believed that the blanket is probably used to spook or confuse predators.”



Conservation – Gold – “Massacre” by Yinan Liu (China)

Shooting Location: Magdalena Bay, Baja California Sur, Mexico

Equipment and Settings: Canon EOS 5DSR, Canon 8–15mm f/4 fisheye lens at 15mm, Nauticam housing, f/10, 1/250s, ISO 200

Photographer’s Comment: “When we went out to sea in the morning, we passed a small island and saw the fishermen cutting up sharks and throwing the unused parts on the beach. When we returned in the afternoon, due to the high tide, the abandoned parts had been brought out into the sea, allowing me to go underwater and capture this heartbreaking scene. I hope that through this photo, more people can work together to protect sharks. If there is no trade, there will be no killing.”



Wide Angle – Gold – “Wishing Well” by Suliman Alatiqi (Kuwait)

Shooting Location: Phi Phi Islands, Thailand

Equipment and Settings: Nikon D850, Nikon AF-S 8–15mm f/3.5–4.5 fisheye lens, Nauticam housing, dual Sea&Sea YS-D2J strobes, f/20, 1/250s, ISO 280

Photographer’s Comment: “An underwater photo of a crab-eating macaque gazing at the water from the edge of a rocky platform, as seen through Snell’s window. After touring the islands known for their macaques, I noticed that the animals tend to stay on cliffs close to the water during the day. This made me think about the possibility of capturing an underwater perspective of the animal with the scenery above. The biggest challenge was lighting a subject completely above the water, as I did not want a silhouette. After some experimenting, I waited patiently for the right opportunity and managed to get this moment on breath-hold. The macaque seemed inquisitive about my approach, which made the photo possible.

that?” I look at this over/under and marvel at how perfectly aligned the interface is between the topside and the underwater, despite the surface chop. The blend of strobe light for the

underwater subject and the ambient light in the background is masterful. Combining artistic vision with significant technical mastery makes this the winner for me.”



Traditional – Gold – “Sea Lions at Work” by Fabien Michenet (France)

Shooting Location: Magdalena Bay, Baja California, Mexico

Equipment and Settings: Nikon Z8, Nikon AF-S 16–35mm f/4 at 16mm, Nauticam housing, f/7.1, 1/400s, ISO 640

Photographer’s Comment: “Every year, in the south of Magdalena Bay, on the Pacific coast of Mexico, a sardine run occurs between October and November. As millions of Pacific sardines (*Sardinops sagax*) gather over seamounts, fin whales, humpbacks, striped marlin, mahi-mahi, Pacific sea lions and other predators are attracted by the feast. After a few hours of searching, we found this baitball of densely packed sardines, and we observed marlin and mahi-mahi—particularly abundant this year due to the El Niño phenomenon—feeding on the fish. Suddenly, a group of sea lions took over the area, denying other predators access. Keeping the sun at my back, I positioned myself so that the scene was illuminated symmetrically, taking a few images as the ball of churning fish, surrounded by sea lions, moved away.”

The organizers are pleased to announce that 15 percent of entry proceeds will once again be donated to marine conservation efforts.

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