

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2024 winners

Selected from a record-breaking 59,228 entries from 117 countries and territories, the winners of the Natural History Museum's prestigious wildlife photographer of the year competition have been announced, with an exhibition opening on Friday 11 October.

The Canadian marine conservation photojournalist Shane Gross was awarded wildlife photographer of the year 2024 for his image of tadpoles, *The Swarm of Life*, captured while snorkelling through lily pads in Cedar Lake on Vancouver Island, British Columbia

Our photography exhibition is back for its sixtieth year to reveal more of nature's stories.

It'll take you on a visual adventure through different environments and give you a window into the wildlife that calls them home.

See first-hand how our activities, both good and bad, are shaping the natural world

Explore breathtaking images, from majestic predators on the hunt to stunning compositions

Witness powerful stories of survival, fragility and the delicate balance of life

Every photograph is a reminder of the wonder of the natural world.

[WPY2024 link](#)

Winner, Wetlands *The Swarm of Life* by Shane Gross, Canada



Shane Gross looks under the surface layer of lily pads as a mass of western toad tadpoles swim past.

He snorkelled in the lake for several hours, through carpets of lily pads. This prevented any disturbance of the fine layers of silt and algae covering the lake bottom, which would have reduced visibility.

Western toad tadpoles swim up from the safer depths of the lake, dodging predators and trying to reach the shallows, where they can feed. The tadpoles start becoming toads between four and 12 weeks after hatching. An estimated 99% will not survive to adulthood.

Location: Cedar Lake, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada

Nikon D500 + Tokina fisheye 10–17mm f3.5–4.5 lens at 11mm; 1/200 at f13; ISO 640; 2x Sea & Sea strobes; Aquatica housing

Winner, Underwater *Under the Waterline* by Matthew Smith, UK/Australia



Matthew Smith carefully photographs a curious leopard seal beneath the Antarctic ice.

He used a specially made extension he designed for the front of his underwater housing to get this split image. It was his first encounter with a leopard seal. The young seal made several close, curious passes. 'When it looked straight into the lens barrel, I knew I had something good.'

Though leopard seals are widespread and abundant, overfishing, retreating sea ice and warming waters mean that krill and penguins – their main food sources – are both in decline.

Location: Paradise Harbour, Antarctica

Nikon Z 7 II + 14–30mm f4 lens; 1/200 at f11; ISO 640; neutral density graduated filter; Aquatica AZ6/7 housing + Matty Smith 12" split shot dome port; Sea & Sea YS-D3 MKII strobes

Ikelite OM Systems TG-7 Review

by Paul 'Duxy' Duxfield

In a past life as the Sales Manager of Cameras Underwater, and then Ocean Leisure Cameras, both now sadly gone, the victims of Covid 19 and the rapidly changing face of underwater photography retail.

Long before their demise I left to pursue a more focussed position within the travel industry, and for the last ten years I've been running photography trips for divers and snorkelers around the world, helping them to get the best from their underwater photography equipment, from GoPro's all the way up to DSLR's and all the equipment that goes along with this fun hobby, which is now more accessible than ever.

I've always been the champion of the beginner and those wishing to start out in this pursuit at more affordable prices, so I'm keen to see of any new developments within this sector.

And importantly, and not just because they're my friends, I've remained in contact with all of my old colleagues, as they've all set up internet based underwater photography retailers, but more of this in a bit.

You see gone are the days

when you could pick up a very capable Canon Compact camera and underwater housing new for under £500 and unless you opt for second hand then this price point is mostly occupied by action cameras like GoPro's and the like.

Nothing wrong with GoPros at all by the way, in fact I'm a big fan of them and very regularly advocate for their use for both stills and video, however they're quite narrow in their scope, being very very good at wide-angle available light shooting but no good if you'd like to learn how to use a strobe/flash or control a camera more, and importantly learn the skills that you can transfer to a higher end camera further down your journey into underwater photography.

And even if you didn't want to progress to a more advanced camera, GoPros have a natural limit to their capabilities, particularly if you'd like to shoot macro shots as well.

Since lockdown was over I've diversified into running accompanied snorkelling trips with a Bristol based company called Snorkel Venture, this has been an education for me into the hopes and expectations of a whole new bunch of aquatic photographers.



And the camera they nearly all come armed with is one from the Olympus TG range, the current model being the TG7.

The Olympus TG is a logical choice for the snorkelling community, as most models are waterproof to just over 10m depth, they're tough and



can be used with a whole ecosystem of accessories, from Olympus and also from third party manufacturers, such as their popularity. They're also small and easy to carry and handle on a snorkel.

They've likewise been adopted by a lot of divers too, as they possess extraordinary macro chops, and so nudibranchs and critters just a few millimetres long are well within their grasp, and unlike a regular action camera they have a built in strobe which can easily trigger an external strobe giving you a lot of flexibility.

You just have to look online to see what the underwater macro photography community can do with these tiny tough marvels. I've included

a couple of macro shots I took with it but to be honest it's another unique facility of the current combo I'm rocking that attracted me personally.

From a diving standpoint, and arguably from a serious snorkelling position it's wise to put them in the security of an underwater housing, this gives it another layer of toughness, and some peace of mind, so even if you were to inadvertently get water in the housing the chances are the camera would still come out of the ordeal relatively unscathed.

As I mentioned there's a wider ecosystem than just Olympus' own branded kit, and I also suggested that I have a very specific use case scenario.



You see I'm very keen on taking split or half half shots, and they're particularly relevant for the snorkel trips I do.

So the last few years I've used a very inexpensively priced special housing for my GoPro's, something which cost less than £50 to achieve these unique viewpoints, and for snorkelling this is fine, but I've always hankered after something with more immediate control and functionality, and also which I could take on a dive to greater than 15m for other shots.

The GoPro split housings don't work well for diving, being ridiculously buoyant and also they aren't tough enough to go deeper, so they're pretty much limited to surface use.

The Olympus TG range gave me the functionality but up until recently there's been no practical way to do split or half half shots with these cameras.

So checking in with my old colleagues Adam Green and Steve Bridge at the newly formed Nemo Photo, I found that there was a solution to my dilemma.

They're the UK importers of Ikelite underwater housings and accessories, and after a quick research on the Ikelite website, which btw is a lot more snazzy and up to date than it was when I was at Cameras Underwater and OLC, I discovered that Ikelite do a very specific dome port that attaches to their underwater



housing for the Olympus TG7. And even though way back then in my previous role I wasn't a big fan of Ikelite housings as I felt they were very clunky and poor to handle, even on their website the housings looked a lot better than their past offerings from 20 years ago.

So after a discussion with Adam he agreed to send me an Ikelite with the all important dome port and lens to test and feedback.

This is to work with the fisheye lens attachment that fixes directly to the Olympus TG 6 or 7. And then the camera with this attached goes inside the housing and all is sealed within.

This is very different to using the housing as it

is with a flat port and wide-angle lens. Whilst split shots are achievable with the above they're rarely successful and a huge amount of luck is involved, so this Olympus TG and Olympus fisheye housed within the Ikelite with the dome is very much unique and so far no other manufacturer that I know of allows such a thing.

It's also worth noting that the Olympus fisheye lens is ludicrously inexpensive by comparison to most fisheye lenses, which brings the price of the dome and housing down by comparison to others quite considerably.

The Ikelite Housing

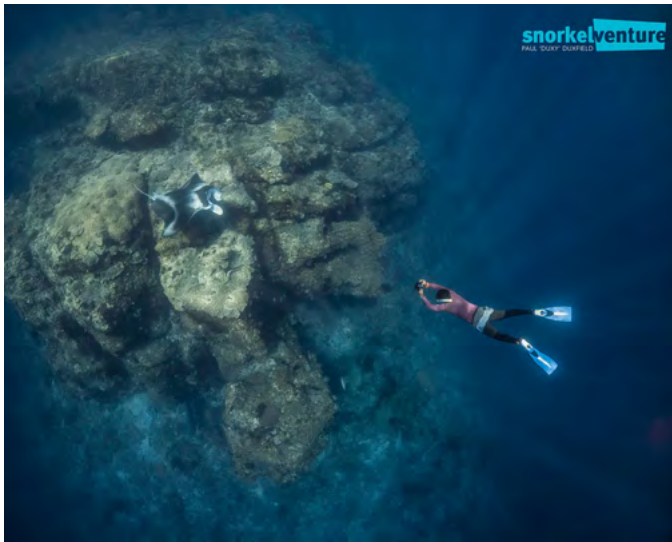
Unlike earlier Ikelite housings this one seems much more tailored to the camera itself rather than just a one size box with a bunch of buttons.

It's also a much more aesthetically pleasing solution, having rounded edges in a grey body with dedicated strobe connectors.

And even with the dome attached I could still fit it inside my Apeks Tech shorts pockets, so it was practical to snorkel with as well as dive.

The controls on the housing whilst not up to much more expensive and sleeker offerings from Nauticam and Marelux, they were much easier to use than I remember Ikelite housings being, and even the very important zoom lever wasn't too clunky in operation.

This was important as you have to zoom into 2x whilst using the fisheye lens otherwise you'll get a completely circular view, and it only took a bit of practice with the fine motor skill of nudging the lever to achieve this.



The Dome Port

The port is made from acrylic, and is around 15cm across with the familiar petal shaped hood surround.

The surround is rotatable and is secured in place with a couple of grub screws.

As with all these devices I've always found that over time they slacken anyway so I now prefer to keep them relatively loose and locate the petals in the proper orientation periodically, i.e. longer petals at 12 O'clock and 6 O'clock, or if I notice them intruding into the shot at all.

First time I removed the flat port from the housing to screw in the dome it was very stiff to rotate so I used a strap wrench to do it, but to be honest after a couple of goes it slackened off a lot and the 'stiction' after greasing the o rings diminished to an easily manageable state to turn without the aid of a strap wrench.

The size of the dome allows split shots as I hope the supplied shots display, but it's not a huge dome so it needs a little practice.

And unlike the GoPro it actually focusses, so locking the focus off at around a metre from the front gives sufficient depth of field with a small sensor, but this also means that if you don't take care to half press the shutter release to lock focus, then because of the Olympus TG range having such good close focussing capabilities it will actually focus onto the front of the dome if you're not careful, so it's not as fire and forget as a GoPro is, however personally I like the challenge of learning new things so it's worth the effort in my opinion.

The Olympus TG 7

Prior to shooting with the latest model TG I've used every model up to the 5.

There wasn't a great deal of difference from an out and out quality standpoint, but I did find it a lot quicker to lock focus and shoot than earlier models, and the RAW buffer is definitely better as I was able to easily shoot of quick bursts at up to 20 frames per second which made shooting fast action like dolphins and the like much easier, but a caveat

is that you will end up with a lot more shots to go through.

The overall experience

Compared to my regular go to GoPro set up with either a Backscatter AOI lens attached or with the Shoot Dome housing, I welcomed most the ability to review pictures immediately, not possible with a housed GoPro, and the inherent flexibility of a camera rig that could shoot 20 Raw files in a second if so desired, trigger a separate strobe and even with the fisheye attached allowed a semblance of zoom.

So will it replace my GoPro set up?

My answer to that is not quite yet, as I still think that if used for split shots and general reef wide-angle scenes the GoPro Raw files seem a little bit more malleable to the editing that is definitely needed.

I use Adobe Lightroom, Photoshop and Topaz as my current editing workflow and I just find that in very specific use case scenarios like wide angle reef scenes the GoPro just very slightly edges it.

Ideally you'd have both, something which I've been lucky enough to do the last few months, and with them both being small I was able to bring them both along on a dive or a snorkel.

I also think the current GoPro's are better shallow water video tools as well, however the TG7 is no slouch in this regard, and has some advantages having a larger screen and also the ability to directly influence the white balance, something which is trickier with a GoPro.

If you could only have one and wanted an all rounder then the Olympus TG7 is the much more obvious choice, and inside the Ikelite Housing allows the use of a fisheye lens and a dome, something which I personally think is a must if