

News, Travel & Events

Scientists discover world's largest coral—so big it can be seen from space

From the surface, it looked like a shipwreck, long forgotten on the seabed. But when cinematographer Manu San Félix dove down to take a closer look, he was amazed to find a huge, sprawling coral.

That was the moment the National Geographic Society's Pristine Seas team says they discovered the world's largest coral colony during an October 2024 expedition in Solomon Islands, an archipelago in the southwest Pacific Ocean.

At 112 by 105 feet, this mega coral is longer than a blue whale, Earth's largest animal. It is so enormous that it can be seen from space—yet it was long hidden from view.

Solomon Islands is nation made of six major islands and over 900 small islands in the southwest Pacific Ocean. The Duff Islands seen here sit to the east and are approximately 300 nautical miles from the newly discovered 'mega coral'.

The expedition team say this is the largest coral colony ever recorded. It is made up of nearly a billion genetically identical coral polyps that work together in the colony as if they

are one organism.

Although the newly discovered coral is in excellent health, researchers worry about the many threats facing all corals, including global warming and overfishing. They hope this discovery will inspire more protections for marine habitats in the Solomon Islands.

"Finding this mega coral is like discovering the tallest tree on earth," says Enric Sala, National Geographic Explorer in Residence and founder of Pristine Seas, via email. "This discovery rekindles our sense of awe and wonder about the ocean."

The organism is a type of hard coral called *Pavona clavus*, or shoulder blade coral because it has columns that "kind of looks like shoulders," says Timmers.

The researchers believe there could be nearly one billion polyps in this mammoth colony, which is surrounded by sand.

"It's amazing that they've just found this and nobody really noticed before," says Helen Findlay, a biological oceanographer at Plymouth Marine Laboratory in the U.K.

Researchers usually use a



Divers from National Geographic Pristine Seas measure the world's largest coral colony in the Solomon Islands.

coral's height to estimate its age. This 16-foot-high colony is around 300 years old—but it could be even older.

This coral has lived through major historical events. It would have seen the first Christian missionaries visiting the Solomons during the 19th century. It was alive during the Declaration of Independence was signed, the Second World War, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It gives you that wow factor—life really created this and has sustained this massive colony," says Timmers.

"It's like our ancestors are still there in the water."

During its 300-year life, this immense organism has witnessed striking changes to the ocean, such as global warming, overfishing, pollution, urban and agricultural development, and ocean acidification. When they visited a nearby reef, the expedition team saw that many corals had already died, but it's not clear how resilient this newly discovered colony could be in the face of these global threats.

www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/world-largest-coral-colony-discovery

www.visitsolomons.com.sb

www.uwpmag.com

*As part of ADEX's commitment to marine sustainability, entrants must adhere to ethical photographic principles, including capturing animals in their natural habitats exhibiting naturally occurring behaviour



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♥ 100% of profit supports our marine research

Blue Heron Bridge Workshops with Matthew Sullivan

Join me for a 1:1 or 1:2 macro photography workshop at one of the best macro dives on earth. Blue Heron is known for an abundance of unusual and exotic critters that are hard or impossible to find elsewhere outside of the tropical Pacific. The shallow depth and variety of subjects makes it a perfect spot to work on your underwater macro skills. Frogfish, seahorses, batfish, stargazers and octopus are all superstar Blue Heron subjects but countless crustaceans, pipefish, blennies, nudibranchs and more are all present and awaiting your lenses.

We will meet at the Phil Foster Park lot before the start of the dive, which will be dictated by high tide. That will give us time to go over techniques you are interested in working on, whether that be black backgrounds, close focus wide angle, portraits, or any other imaging style. I will help find subjects and provide in water instruction as to how to photograph each subject.

I am also available to guide/subject spot. I live close to the bridge and dive it regularly so I know the layout of the dive site and have become adept at finding many of the



critters who make their home there. I do not have a camera on these dives. I will help put you on a subject, and while you are busy photographing, will do my best to locate the next one in the immediate area. NOTE: I am not a certified Divemaster.

Workshop Cost: \$200 per person, per dive OR \$300 per person for two dives

Guided Dive Cost: \$150 per person, per dive.

www.9milesnorth.com/blue-heron-bridge

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Alex Mustard Appointed President of The British Society of Underwater Photographers

Dr Alex Mustard MBE has been named as the new President of the British Society of Underwater Photographers (BSoUP). The position has been unfilled since the passing of previous President, Brian Pitkin, in 2021. Alex becomes the 5th BSoUP President, following Peter Scoones, David George, Peter Rowlands and Brian Pitkin. BSoUP was founded in 1967 and continues in its mission to share knowledge to help its members with the challenges of underwater photography and to create memorable imagery.

“We’re thrilled to welcome Alex as our President as we continue to inspire and inform underwater photographers and push the boundaries of photographic excellence beneath the waves,” said Nur Tucker, Chairman of BSoUP. “We could not be prouder to have Alex, not only as a member but now also as our President. Alex is an experienced, energetic and selfless mentor, and all members will benefit from his dedication to help us create powerful



images underwater. And as a leading innovator in underwater photography, he is ideally placed to help elevate the name of BSoUP in Britain as well as around the world. BSoUP membership is open to all underwater photographers, with monthly online meetings attracting an audience and speakers from around the world, and themed competitions where the judge provides feedback on your pictures.” Membership is £35 per year.

www.bsoup.org.uk

www.uwpmag.com

Bunaken Oasis 2025 Photography Workshop with Alex Tattersall

Dive into an underwater photography paradise with Alex Tattersall at Bunaken Oasis!

We are thrilled to announce our 2025 Photography Workshop, a unique opportunity for enthusiasts to elevate their skills amidst the stunning marine landscapes of Bunaken, Indonesia.

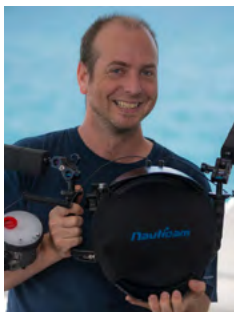
Departing the UK on 23rd September 2025, this 9-night adventure includes 8 days of diving, featuring 23 Nitrox dives and 2-night dives.

At Bunaken Oasis Dive Resort and Spa, you will receive expert instruction from Alex Tattersall, renowned for his passion and expertise in underwater photography. Immerse yourself in crystal-clear waters teeming with vibrant coral reefs and diverse marine life, while enjoying the luxury and serenity of Bunaken Oasis.

Don't miss out on this unforgettable journey for more information or call us at 01323 648924 to secure your spot today.

Join us for the ultimate underwater photography adventure and capture the ocean's beauty like never before!

www.bunakenoasis.com



Alex Tattersall



2017 Alex Tattersall

Join Us At the 2025 Digital Shootout in Bonaire!



Take it seriously or take it slow, the Digital Shootout is an underwater photography/videography vacation designed to take the shooter in the group to the next level. If you're a new or an intermediate shooter, the Digital Shootout is our fast-track to better underwater imaging. In six days of seminars and diving, the Digital Shootout team will help dial in your underwater system and shooting techniques. Enter your best images in the final contest to win trips, gear, and more from our great sponsors.

The Divi Flamingo is beachfront, and approximately 20 yards from the Calabas Reef, making shore diving easy and convenient.

Divi Dive Bonaire is the island's oldest and best-known dive operator, operating what many call the most convenient dive experience in Bonaire. With the Calabas Reef just 20 yards in front on the hotel and 24 hour

access to tanks, diving with Divi is the easiest dive vacation you will ever take.

Each afternoon we offer professionally produced seminars on basic and advanced photo and video techniques. Just learning how to assemble your camera for the first time? Looking for the secrets of exposure and strobe placement? Our seminars are world renowned for their simple delivery of complex topics and will take you to the next level.

The workshops and experts assembled at this event will whisk you along the learning curve of underwater photography. By the end of the week, you will be shooting well enough to enter our friendly competition. The best images shot during the week will be awarded over \$30,000 in prizes.

www.backscatter.com

Grace Schreckengaust



Hi! My name is Grace Schreckengaust, I am a photographer, free diver, spearfisher, and ocean advocate!

Born and raised in Encinitas, California, I spent most of my days by the water. I moved to Oahu Hawaii when I was 18 years old, where I fell in love with the ocean and photography even more!

Free diving offers me a unique sense of freedom and tranquility, a peace that I can not seem to express any other way than through my photography; each photo taken on a single breath, it is a memory for me and a way I can share my view of the world with others!

As a photographer, I strive to share these awe-inspiring moments with the world. My images aim to

evoke the wonder and serenity of the underwater realm, highlighting the delicate balance of life in our oceans, and inspire others to appreciate and protect our precious marine ecosystems.

My work has taken me to diverse environments, from lush forests to undiscovered waters, where I have honed my skills in both field photography and understanding animal behavior. I believe that each image has a story to tell, and I strive to create evocative visuals that not only showcase wildlife but also raise awareness about conservation issues.

Website/ print shop:

www.graceschreck.com
Instagram: [Grace_schreck](https://www.instagram.com/grace_schreck)

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Discover the depths of the world's most breathtaking underwater landscapes with Apex Ocean Travel, your premier US-based dive travel agency. We specialize in crafting custom personal dive vacations and exclusive group expeditions led by renowned photographers and scientists.

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in 2025 to: Socorro, Galapagos, French Polynesia, Bahamas, Maldives, Baja California Sur ...with more captivating destinations on the horizon.

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Sea Save Foundation

Sea Save Foundation stands witness to the health of the oceans and the threats they face, we document problems and develop solutions, arm people with knowledge, and tools so they can make a difference.



With the public as our ally, we go to the United Nations and other global bodies to effect international change. We attend these meetings so we can offer creative, economically viable, sustainable, and environmentally friendly plans to decision-makers.



Stay Informed. Get our free weekly global ocean news summaries. Stay on top of the latest, critical issues affecting our oceans.

Your Virtual Front Row at CITES CoP! Our team leads efforts to protect endangered marine species from trade threats. Join us to stay on top of this crucial mission.



We will be live at the United Nations in 2025: We're pushing for the High Seas and Plastic Pollution Treaties. Our Ocean Week in Review is a featured commitment. Sign up for immediate updates.

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Bilikiki Cruises Move Offers Huge Potential For Solomon Islands Dive Tourism



In a move Tourism Solomons says will have major ramifications for the Solomon Islands dive industry, Honiara-based Bilikiki Cruises has joined resources with fellow liveaboard dive boat expert Emperor Divers,

Bilikiki Cruises' live-aboard cruise programs will now comprise part of the Singapore-based Emperor Divers' existing international dive portfolio which includes Egypt, Indonesia and the Maldives.

Congratulating them on the move, Tourism Solomons CEO (Acting), Dagnal Dereveke said "Our region's rich marine biodiversity, coupled with the historic World War II wrecks scattered across its waters, makes the Solomon Islands a highly

sought-after destination for divers globally."

Bilikiki Cruises' managing director, Sam Leeson said the company was delighted to have linked up with Emperor Divers to create this new working relationship.

"The chance to work with such a prominent organisation in the liveaboard industry is a great opportunity for us," Mr Leeson said.

"Very little will change in the day-to-day running of Bilikiki as our existing management and staff will keep doing the tremendous work they have been doing for years.

www.visitsolomons.com.sb
www.bilikiki.com

2025 with Wildlife Photo Tours



We are willing to welcome 2025 with enthusiasm and joy. Some new destinations, tested in 2024, have been added to our offer and are pure, crystal clear immersions in the wild, far away from the chaos of the common tourism trips.

We put the basis for long lasting collaboration with local researchers and communities.

These trips reminded us how like minded local people, deeply involved in conservation efforts, highly inspire our life style and continuously shown us the ways to protect oceans and ourselves.

Looking ahead to 2025, we'll have another full schedule and impressive year, with a few options which are still being finalized. Stay tuned to our next newsletters for details but, for now, you can browse our confirmed tours



here below.

If you have any questions regarding any of the trips we organize and lead, feel free to contact our trips' expert at tour@banfi.ch or reply to this email.

We look forward to share with you our expertise, passion, knowledge and more days in nature in 2025.

Sabrina & Franco Banfi.

www.wildlifephototours.ch



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MMF invites you to join Dr Simon Pierce, our Co-founder and Executive Director, on two incredible dive expeditions to some of the world's most iconic marine destinations – Socorro and the Galapagos!

100% of profits will directly support MMF's critical conservation and research programs. By joining us, you'll be part of a global movement to protect these incredible creatures and the oceans they call home.

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<https://marinemegafauna.org/trips>

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