

UPY 2025 winner!

by Alex Mustard

Spanish photographer Alvaro Herrero is named Underwater Photographer of the Year 2025, his photograph 'Radiant Bond', which won the Wide Angle Category, shows the special relationship between a mother humpback whale and her new-born calf. The photo was taken in French Polynesia and triumphed over 6750 underwater pictures entered by underwater photographers from around the world.

The contest has 13 categories, testing photographers with themes such as Macro, Wide Angle, Behaviour and Wreck photography, and includes three categories for photos taken specifically in British waters. The winners were announced in an award ceremony in central London, hosted by The Crown Estate. This year's judges were experienced underwater photographers Peter Rowlands, Tobias Friedrich and Dr Alexander Mustard MBE.

www.underwaterphotographeroftheyear.com



Alex Mustard, Peter Rowlands and Alvaro Herrero UPY 2025 winner



Underwater Photographer of the Year 2025



'RADIANT BOND'

Alvaro Herrero (Mekan), Spain

A mother humpback whale accompanies her calf to the surface for its first breath early in the morning. The youngster is releasing a few bubbles as it rises, perhaps this is because it is still learning to control its breathing, or it is simply experimenting with its own body.

Every year, during the southern winter, I travel to French Polynesia to photograph these majestic animals. My favourite time of day is the early morning, because the light is soft and angled, allowing me to find the perfect angle to clearly define the shape of these animals in blue. For me, this photo is one that shows a mother's love for her calf, communicating both the fragility and beauty of our oceans, and revealing one of the amazing species with whom we share our home world.

Mo'orea, French Polynesia

Nikon , Z7 II, Isotta , Nikkor Z 14-24mm 2.8 s,
iso 1100, f/8, 1/640, Natural Light

Judge's comments:

An heartwarming interaction between mum and baby, in a perfectly timed pose of both majestic animals that look so comfortable in their underwater home. The photo invites us to observe, while giving the whales their space, both in the frame and from the photographer. The spearing light is dramatic, while the shadow the calf is casting on its mother is subtle. Mekan won the title of Marine Conservation Photographer of the

Year back in 2022 with the saddest of images of humpback, this uplifting family portrait is a perfect counterpoint. Alex Mustard

The overall winning image represents us as a Competition, and our community as a hobby/sport/profession, to the world at large for a whole year and sometimes it is very difficult to decide between them but this year, for me, this delicate yet powerful study of a mother and calf's bond says all that is great and good about our world. We face our challenges, true, but the increasing populations of whales worldwide shows what can be achieved. Peter Rowlands



MACRO

CATEGORY WINNER

'MAGIC BACKLIT'

Paolo Bondaschi, Italy

At the end of this dive, I spotted a couple of underwater photographers focused on shooting and it piqued my curiosity about what they were photographing. I signalled to my guide to check what they were shooting. After realizing that it was one of my favourite subjects, a hairy shrimp, I waited patiently for my turn and used the time to plan and prepare for the shot. I chose to shoot it in profile, backlight with a snoot. My guide and my buddy played a fundamental role in expertly managing the light of the snoot. After a few test shots to find the right setting, I finally got the photo I was looking for.

Secret Bay, Anilao, Anilao, Philippines

CANON, EOS R7, MARELUX MX-R7, EF-S60mm f/2.8 Macro USM + wet lens AOI UCL-90PRO, iso 100, f/16.0, 1/200, Backscatter MF-1 + Backscatter snoot OS-1

Judge's comments: Perfect execution and image! What a nice winning shot for this strong macro category this year. I love the minimalistic approach to a subject which is tiny and not easy to get a crisp shot of. The perfect position of the hairy shrimp is almost too good to be true, but these animals are very skittish and we concluded this is natural perfection, which is also emphasized to the maximum by the very selective lighting by the photographer. *Tobias Friedrich*



WRECKS



CATEGORY WINNER

'DEEP WRECK'

Alex Dawson, Sweden

The wreck sits on the reef at around 104m depth. When she sank she got wedged between the reef wall and a small reef so there is a swim through under the wreck. We did 25 min bottom time and about 2 1/2 hours of deco to produce this image.

Gulf Fleet No 31 wreck at Shaabruhr Umm Qammar, Egypt

Nikon, Z9, Nauticam Z9, 8-15 fisheye, iso 800, 4,5, 1/80, ambient light

Judge's comments: Without a doubt one of my favourite photos in the whole competition. And also, as I learn now, one of our deepest. This image is packed with the feeling of adventure, in a finely crafted composition that draws you in with layer upon layer of interest, from foreground corals to the clouds of fish above the wreck. Understandable quality, once you know it was taken by last year's Underwater Photographer of the Year! *Alex Mustard*



BEHAVIOUR



CATEGORY WINNER

'FACE OFF'

Shunsuke Nakano, Japan

This is a photo of two male Asian sheephead wrasse fighting. The unique form of this species is characteristic of males, who form harems and claim territories during the breeding season. The one on the left in the photo is the harem king, who has defended his territory for more than 10 years and is estimated to be over 30 years old, while the one on the right is a young challenger.

Although I had planned carefully to capture the images, the 2024 season was more difficult to predict than usual, and despite staying there for a week during the breeding season, I was only able to observe this scene once, for just 10 seconds. And this was the only photograph I was able to take. The sight of them fighting in their flashy white outfits was so magnificent I can still remember it vividly.

Sado Niigata, Japan

Nikon, D850, Nauticam NA D850, af nikkor 28-70mm f3.5-4.5 d with Nauticam WACP-1, iso 200, f/16, 1/250, INON Z330

Judge's comments: Perfectly timed to capture the moment of the contender challenging the king. The fight for hierarchy is the strongest form of behaviour. Well lit with no distracting background, this image leapt out immediately and continued to be the one to beat off the challengers.

Peter Rowlands



PORTRAIT



CATEGORY WINNER

'HYDRATION'

Abdulaziz Al Saleh, Kuwait

I had the idea of photographing the camels drinking water for about one and half a years. I wanted to photograph them drinking water from the underwater perspective because I did not see any images showing this. The weather was a critical, and it took me several weeks to get the best possible shots. The first week the camels were a bit hesitant to drink water while my camera was under the water and only few gathered to drink, which is not what I wanted. But after several days the camels had already accepted to me and my equipment.

After my first week of shooting the Camels, I changed to electronic synch cords for my strobes instead of fibre-optic cables because of problems. And finally the shots came together.

Al Wafra desert, Kuwait

Nikon, Z8, Nauticam NA-Z8 , Nikkor 8-15mm fisheye, iso 100, F/18, 1/100, Inon Z330 (dual)

Judge's comments:

Such a joyous image and a portrait of camels certainly took us by pleasant surprise. Great eye contact, well chosen angle and surface distortions gives you plenty to look at and the lower, childlike, cheeky mouth adds a heartwarming finale to a quality photograph, which is much more than just an eye-catching subject.

Peter Rowlands



CORAL REEFS



CATEGORY WINNER

'KALEIDOSCOPE OF COLOUR'

Catherine Holmes, United Kingdom

Raja Ampat, Indonesia, is a magical destination where the colour, beauty, biodiversity and dense fish life can almost be an overload on the senses- a celebration of healthy reef life. I was lucky to find perfect conditions with clear water and schooling baitfish swirling amongst the canyons of a large coral bommie, adorned with verdant soft corals.

I aimed to capture the reef teeming with life and colour to inspire us all to protect this valuable habitat. All around the world, our oceans, and in particular the coral reefs, are under threat. They are vital habitat for the myriad of species they support, and critical for the oceans health. Climate change, pollution, overfishing and destructive fishing all threaten this environment, and the devastating outcomes are seen worldwide with bleached and dying reefs, with dwindling fish life. Awareness is essential to protect and sustain these precious environments for the future.

Gorgonian Passage, Wayil Batan Island, Misool, Raja Ampat, Indonesia

Nikon , D500, NA-D500. Nauticam, Nikon Fisheye. 8-15 (3.5-4.5) @12mm, iso 320, f/11, 1/160, Retra Pro strobes- with diffusers

Judge's comments:

This image just screams "coral"! It's also rare to see a vertical image which works well of a coral reef. The light distribution on the image is absolutely beautiful and the reef full of colour. A very well deserved winner of this category. *Tobias Friedrich*



BLACK & WHITE



CATEGORY WINNER

'CHASING DOLPHINS'

Enric Gener, Spain

This image was captured in the northern Red Sea during a freediving expedition in search of bottlenose dolphins. The moment portrays an intimate mating ritual, where several males—four visible in the picture, though others were nearby—were playfully chasing a female. It was a dynamic and ritualistic display, with the males engaging in friendly skirmishes and occasionally mating with the female, their bodies joining briefly for just a few seconds. Notably, the female was not attempting to escape; she actively participated, playing along and waiting for them. The entire group swam gracefully and at a slow, deliberate pace, creating a mesmerizing underwater scene.

Red Sea, Egypt

Canon, 5D Mark IV, SeaCam, Canon EF 16-35mm 1:2.8 L III USM, iso 160, 4, 1/500, No Lighting

Judge's comments:

This image shows the definition of black and white photography, the composition comes alive with the thoughtful conversion to monochrome. Fantastic image. *Tobias Friedrich*



UP & COMING



CATEGORY WINNER

'AURORA UNDERWATER'

Ruruka, Korea

I first travelled to Cancun, Mexico, for a shoot two years ago, and since then, I've been captivated by its charm. These days, I find myself visiting Cancun frequently. From where I live, it's a very long journey - about 24 hours by plane - but this place perfectly aligns with the direction of my photography and offers a variety of shooting opportunities. To capture this particular photo, I visited during the rainy summer season and worked with a local Korean guide as my model.

Cancun, Mexico

Nikon, Z8, Nauticam NA-Z8, Nikon Z 24-50mm F4 with Nauticam WACP-1, iso ISO800, F9, 1/60s, Natural Light

Judge's comments:

Extraordinary image with a high technical standard and perfect postproduction of it! The diver is well positioned in the golden ratio while not being in front of anything. The balance of the light from outside which falls into the cave is just an excellent repetition and shows what the image is all about. Well done and a very well deserved category winner. *Tobias Friedrich*



COMPACT



CATEGORY WINNER

'THE BEAUTY OF THE SWAMP'

Bryant Turffs, United States

I captured this image at one of my favourite locations within the Everglades ecosystem. Historically, I primarily dove in saltwater, but I have become enamoured by this foreboding environment, with clear waters, light filtering through cypress trees, and the fish species, both native and introduced. I have revisited this spot many times trying to capture various subjects and the light just right. The water levels vary significantly, sometimes completely drying, during different times of year. The fish species are in constant flux, and this location is often dominated by exotics. Ironically, on this occasion, I hadn't invested too much thought and I was enjoying the scenery when this Florida Gar positioned itself perfectly in the frame of my GoPro.

Everglades National Park , United States

GoPro, Hero 7 Black, GoPro Supersuit, AOI 0.73x Ultra Wide Lens, iso 791, F/2.8, 1/180, N/A - Available

Judge's comments:

A stunning three dimensional composition placing this rarely seen Florida gar in its swamp habitat. It is, quite frankly, amazing that this image is shot with a simple GoPro camera demonstrating how many people already have all the gear that they need to capture beautiful underwater photos.
Alex Mustard



British Underwater Photographer of the Year



CATEGORY WINNER

'THE CURIOUS SEAL'

David Alpert, United Kingdom

North Devon is easily one of the most beautiful coastlines in Britain. High jagged cliffs pounded by an unforgiving sea. With the second highest tide change in the world, the outgoing current whips up against waves and wind rolling in from the North Atlantic. Stand back and marvel.

Diving windows are limited so I based myself in the area for two months last year, exploring different locations. This shot shows a grey seal off Lundy Island, a marine protected area since 1973. Seals are delightfully curious creatures, more interactive than any other species I have dived with around the world. Briefly, I become one of the privileged few, crossing the bridge into the world of a sentient wild animal.

Lundy Island , United Kingdom

Canon 5D MKiii, Nauticam , Canon EF 16-35mm f/2.8L iii USM, iso 200, F/8, 1/200 , 2 x Inon Z330 Strobes

Judge's comments: In the UPY competition we usually see a lot of seal images, especially in the British categories. I used to be a soft touch for these images, but having seen so many now, my standards are very high. This image though is truly a stunner! So well framed in the sea weeds and with the light coming from the back in the shallow waters. The composition is completed by the curious look of the seal to the photographer. An excellent portrait. *Tobias Friedrich*



Most Promising British Underwater Photographer of the Year 2025



'FLUO SPINY SQUAT LOBSTER'

James Lynott, United Kingdom

This image was taken on a wonderful night dive at Inveraray, Loch Fyne. This site is known for being home to many beautiful fireworks anemones at shallow depths, but it also has an old pipe covered in concrete blocks which is home to lots of life, including the spiny squat lobster. These squat lobsters are usually found clinging upside down on boulders/overhangs and disappear the instant the camera shutter is pressed. However, on this night dive they were wondering about in the open and didn't seem to mind having a few pictures taken. These squat lobsters show the brightest fluorescence I have seen in crustaceans and I was really pleased on this dive to be able to capture the whole animal in frame. I used excitation filters on my strobes, along with a yellow barrier filter in front of the lens to capture the fluorescence.

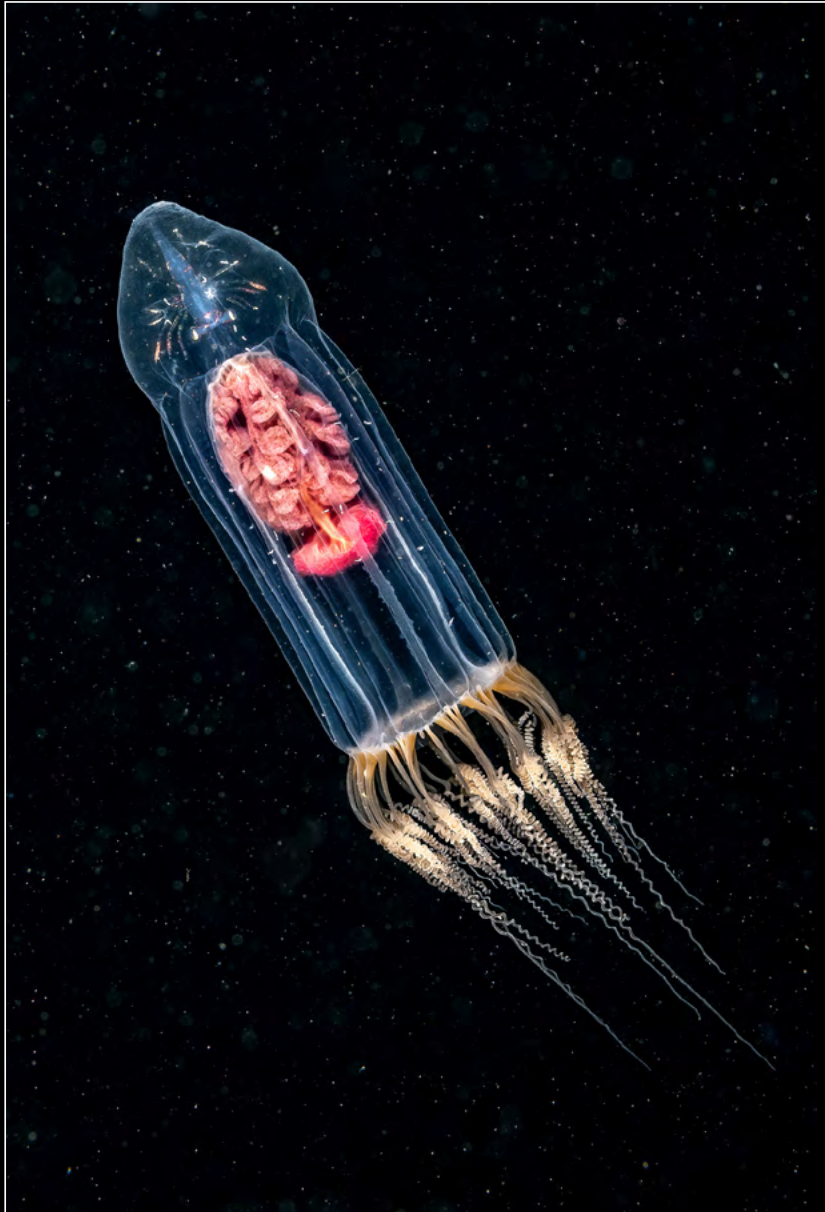
Inveraray, Loch Fyne, Scotland

OM SYSTEM, OM-D E-M1 MarkIII, AOI UH-EM1III, M.Zuiko Digital ED 14-42mm F3.5-5.6 EZ, iso 500, f/6.3, 1/50, 2 x Sea&Sea YS01-Solis w/ Nightsea filters

Judge's comments: James's fluorescent exploration of British waters has revealed another stunning subject when photographed with this technique. A little more contrast in processing, a tiny crop and a rotation into vertical and this truly memorable shot could have gone all the way...
Peter Rowlands



BRITISH WATERS MACRO



CATEGORY WINNER

'THE HITCH HIKER'

Dan Bolt, United Kingdom

Occasionally in my time under the water I have come across this medusa 'Neoturris pileata' in the open water but had not taken a decent photo of one. On this occasion however, my buddy and I were specifically targeting them and other similar creatures to try to explore the idea of UK 'blackwater' photographic opportunities. Of the many, many(!), images I took that day, this one revealed a larval crustacean within the bell of this medusa. The frames either side of this capture actually show that the larval crab (or lobster) is actually on the outside of the bell, but in this instant it was perfectly on the opposite side from me and hence the effect of being contained within the transparent body.

Scotland, UK

OM Systems , OM-1, AOI UH-OM1, Panasonic 45mm macro, iso 250, f/13, 1/250th, 2x Sea & Sea YS-D3Duo

Judge's comments: This is a beautiful and rarely see jellyfish, but the wow moment really comes when you spot the hitchhiking shrimp through the transparent bell. Stunning, surprising and novel.
Alex Mustard



BRITISH WATERS LIVING TOGETHER



WINNER

'RUSTY HAVEN'

Dan Bolt, United Kingdom

This image shows nature's ability to make the best of a bad situation. The iron block and heavy chain are actually holding a small barge in-place on the surface where local scallop divers store their equipment. The barge itself is a floating reef system all of its own, and the anchor blocks have attracted many species too.

I was actually practising for a different underwater photography competition when I took this shot. For a couple of days before an on-the-day "splash in" competition, this crab was consistently in this position, or very close by. Sadly on the day it was no-where to be seen! Happily for me though that meant I was able to use my practice photos for UPY!

Loch Carron, Scotland

OM Systems, OM-1, AOI UH-OM1, Olympus 14-42mm with Nautocam WWL-1, iso 640, f/7.1, 1/50, 2x Sea & Sea YS-D3 Duo

Judge's comments: A well chosen angle to include just enough background to combine visual depth with location. The chain links starting off powerful in the foreground then receding delicately out of the scene topped by the small inquisitive fish entering the top of the frame. A worthy winner.
Peter Rowlands

THE 'SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION'

Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2025



CATEGORY WINNER

'1 / 200.000.000'

Robert Marc Lehmann, Germany

This tiger shark is just one of around 200 million sharks that lose their lives every year at the hands of humans.

Since I was six years old (35 years+), I have been intensively studying sharks. In all these years, hardly anything has changed and that is frustrating. Sharks protect their habitat, the sea, through their ecological function as "health police". Over a billion people depend on the sea every day and we all breathe the oxygen that is largely produced in the sea. If we continue to eradicate the animals that guard our largest and most important habitat, we are taking away our own livelihood. And that's why I've been fighting for people to see and understand sharks through my eyes. Every time I take a photo like this, it hurts, but through imagery I can inspire millions of people to understand sharks and their situation and make a difference.

Indonesia

CANON , R5, -, CANON EF 24mm f/1.4L II USM with EF to RF Mount, iso 1000, 5.6, 1/6400,

Judge's comments: A stunning, story-telling image, with four men hauling this huge ocean predator onto land. The light is beautiful, the composition immersive and the timing, capturing the fisherman's gesture, is perfect. Although an everyday occurrence and legal in most places, the man reaching out to stop the photo reveals what his conscience reckons on what they are doing. Powerful photography. Alex Mustard

UPY
2025

