

United Nations World Oceans Day winners

by Ian Bongso-Seldrup

The winners of the twelfth annual Photo Competition for United Nations World Oceans Day were announced today surrounding the United Nations World Oceans Day celebration in Nice, France.

A panel of world-renowned judges selected winners from thousands of global entries made by both amateur and professional photographers. This year's competition featured the recurring categories "Big and Small Underwater Faces," "Underwater Seascapes," and "Above Water Seascapes." The category "Wonder: Sustaining What Sustains Us" was newly added in celebration of the 2025 UN World Oceans Day theme sharing the same name.

The 2025 winning photographers hail from eight different countries: Rachel Moore, Luis Arpa, Steven Lopez ("Wonder: Sustaining What Sustains Us"); Andrey Nosik, Giacomo Marchione, Lars von Ritter Zahony ("Big and Small Underwater Faces");

Dani Escayola, Gerald Rambert, Pedro Carrillo ("Underwater Seascapes"); Leander Nardin, Nur Tucker, Andrey Nosik ("Above Water Seascapes").

Historically hosted at the UN Headquarters in New York, this year's United Nations World Oceans Day celebration moved overseas, taking place ahead of the UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3), which will also be hosted in Nice, France from June 9–13.

Since its inception in 2014, the competition has been curated by underwater and wildlife photographer Ellen Cuylaerts, and judged by a world-renowned panel of judges. Judges for 2025 included: underwater photographer Ipah Uid Lynn (Malaysia), underwater photographer William Tan (Singapore), wildlife photographer Vanessa Mignon (France), and underwater photographer Marcello Di Francesco (Italy).

www.divephotoguide.com

© Andrey Nosik (Russia). *Big and Small Underwater Faces* – Winner

This photo of a Japanese warbonnet (Chirolophis japonicus) was captured in the Sea of Japan, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) southwest of Vladivostok, Russia. I found the ornate fish at a depth of about 30 meters (100 feet), under the stern of a shipwreck. This species does not appear to be afraid of divers—on the contrary, it seems to enjoy the attention—and it even tried to sit on the dome port of my camera.



Winner - © Rachel Moore (USA). *Wonder: Sustaining What Sustains Us*

This photo, taken in Moorea, French Polynesia in 2024, captures the eye of a humpback whale named Sweet Girl, just days before her tragic death. Four days after I captured this intimate moment, she was struck and killed by a fast-moving ship. Her death serves as a heartbreaking reminder of the 20,000 whales lost to ship strikes every year. We are using her story to advocate for stronger protections,

petitioning for stricter speed laws around Tahiti and Moorea during whale season. I hope Sweet Girl's legacy will spark real change to protect these incredible animals and prevent further senseless loss.





© Dani Escayola (Spain). *Underwater Seascapes* — Winner

This year, I had the incredible opportunity to visit a jellyfish lake during a liveaboard trip around southern Raja Ampat, Indonesia. Being surrounded by millions of jellyfish, which have evolved to lose their stinging ability due to the absence of predators, was one of the most breathtaking experiences I've ever had.

© Lars von Ritter Zahony (Germany). *Underwater Seascapes* — Honorable Mention

With only orcas as their natural predators, leopard seals are Antarctica's most versatile hunters, preying on everything from fish and cephalopods to penguins and other seals. Gentoo penguins are a favored menu item, and leopard seals can be observed patrolling the waters around their colonies. For this shot, I used a split image to capture both worlds: the gentoo penguin colony in the background with the leopard seal on the hunt in the foreground.



© Leander Nardin (Austria). *Above Water Seascapes* – Winner

A serene lake cradled by arid dunes, where a gentle stream breathes life into the heart of Mother Earth's creation: Captured from an airplane, this image reveals the powerful contrasts and hidden beauty where land and ocean meet, reminding us that the ocean is the source of all life and that everything in nature is deeply connected. Shark Bay, Western Australia.

© Gerald Rambert (Mauritius). *Underwater Seascapes* — 2nd

This shot captures a school of rays resting at a cleaning station in Mauritius, where strong currents once attracted them regularly. Some rays grew accustomed to divers, allowing close encounters like this. Sadly, after the severe bleaching that the reefs here suffered last year, such gatherings have become rare, and I fear I may not witness this again at the same spot.

