

BG WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR 2001

organised by BBC Wildlife Magazine and The Natural History Museum, London



WINNING PHOTOGRAPH by Tobias Bernhard

Nikon F90X with 18mm lens; 1/15 sec at f16; Fujichrome Velvia; two strobes.

We found grey reef sharks in this lagoon on the Beveridge Reef in the South Pacific and used bait to habituate them to meeting us at a particular coral head. Over the next fortnight, they ventured closer each day, in groups of up to eight. Most were adult females, with a distinct 'pecking order'. Though these sharks can be dangerous, we never once felt threatened. This dominant female was the biggest (about two metres long), and sometimes, out of apparent curiosity, she would swim straight towards us, then, at the last moment, gybe sharply to change direction. Once I was familiar with this habit, I could preset focus, exposure and flash and concentrate on panning the shark as she cruised in. On this occasion, she was barely 30cm from me.

'I believe that living and working on my boat, a converted old fishing vessel, is often central to achieving the images I have in my head. It allows me to spend virtually unlimited time to get to know an animal subject, its habitat and behaviour.

Winning the BG Wildlife Photographer of the Year award (even a highly commended) is a dream for many serious wildlife photographers and I was no exception. So it might be understandable that when I found out what I had won, I felt like I'd wake up any moment from this dream.

There are so many great nature photographers that I can still learn from myself and I am a bit reluctant to give advice. However there is the

obvious need for patience, perseverance and respect for your subject. I think being super critical of one's own work is important - I always see room for improvement in all my images.

For my next project I am planning to sail to Fanning Island in eastern Kiribati from here (Vavau) at the onset of the hurricane season where there is a Manta ray cleaning station in the pass to the atoll. From there on to the Tuamotu Islands for more pelagic and Tiger sharks.'

Naill Benvie - Wildlife Photographer and Competition Judge said "This picture is loaded with tension - between the warm and cool tones and between the viewer and subject. The line of the fish is dynamic and the sense of motion adds to the power of the image." ●