

Shell Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2007

Report by Alex Mustard

The Shell Wildlife Photographer of the Year is probably the most prestigious photographic competition for the underwater photographer. This year the competition attracted a record 32,000 entries from professional and amateur photographers from 78 countries. The Shell Wildlife Photographer of the Year is owned by the Natural History Museum and BBC Wildlife Magazine.

Like last year, underwater photographers did particularly well. The Underwater World category was won by Felipe Barrio for his photograph of feasting whale sharks and Thomas Peschak won the Nature In Black and White category with a split level of a blacktip shark at dawn. Other award winning underwater images were taken by Paul Nicklen, Graham Eaton, Jurgen Freund, Angel Fitor, Douglas David Seifert, Len Deeley, Patrick Weir, Bela Nasfay, Jeff Yonover, Wade Hughes and Alex Mustard. Also three other underwater photographers, Amos Nachoum, Paul Nicklen and Sergey Gorshkov, were category winners although with photos that they had taken above the

surface!

The Wildlife Photographer of the Year has long been considered as a barometer for trends in nature and underwater photography - both aesthetic and technical. Perhaps the clearest message from the entries was that the transition to digital is complete, with all the award winning underwater images coming from Nikon or Canon digital SLRs. The competition also leads the way in preserving and rewarding the skill of the photographer in the field, as opposed to on the computer, as the rules prohibit manipulation of the content of the photographs.

Personally, I think that this year's selection is one of the strongest I can remember and this makes me particularly pleased to see that underwater photographers are competing so successful against terrestrial wildlife photographers. It is an exciting time to be in this game.

Alex Mustard
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Animal Portraits - Winner

Sergey Gorshkov (Russia)

Bear glare

'I'd been so busy taking pictures of the salmon in the Ozernaya River in southern Kamchatka, east Russia, I didn't notice the bear until it was a metre away. It was a terrible shock. I kept calm enough to take the picture but only later did I realise how serious the situation was.' Brown bears roam mainly in far northern parts of America and Russia. But they used to live as far south as north Africa and Mexico. Excessive killing and habitat loss has made their existence more fragile. They tend to avoid humans, but can become aggressive if defending a cub or carcass.

Nikon D2X + Nikkor 12-24mm f4 G AF-S DX lens at 12mm; 1/250 sec at f10; ISO 200; Subal housing; two strobes INON D2000.

© Sergery Gorshkov / Shell Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2007



The Underwater World - Winner

Felipe Barrio (Spain)

Giant feast

‘I was woken by a huge crash against the boat in the Red Sea. It was a 10-metre-long young whale shark. Four other sharks then joined it, gathered below a school of sardines. We slipped into the water using snorkelling gear, and watched them feed, non-stop for three hours. They not only sucked up the plankton, but also the sardines’ excrement. It was a fantastic experience.’ Whale sharks are the largest fish on Earth. The Gulf of Tadjourah off Djibouti, in the Red Sea, is a hotspot for these giants, which congregate from October to January to feed. Despite their huge size, they are filter feeders, sucking in water and filtering out the plankton, algae, krill and small squid or fish.

Nikon D200 + Nikon 10.5mm lens; 1/50 sec at f4; ISO 160; Seacam housing.

© Felipe Barrio / Shell Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2007



The Underwater World - Runner-up

Paul Nicklen (Canada)

Teeth exposure

‘I wanted to see if leopard seals were savage beasts or simply curious and misunderstood. I dived with them more than 50 times at Anvers Island off the Antarctic Peninsula, and they almost always approached in the same way, opening their mouths inches from my face. After they established their dominance, they seemed to relax.’ Leopard seals are one of the largest seals in Antarctica, with a reputation for being aggressive. They are the only seals that regularly eat warm-blooded prey such as birds and other seals. They have punctured inflatable boats and even followed people onto the ice. But like all predators, they are usually judged by the worst stories. Leopard seals are inquisitive and solitary.

Canon EOS 1Ds Mark II + 17-40mm f4 lens; 1/30 sec at f11; Ikelite 125 digital strobes.

© Paul Nicklen / Shell Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2007

The Underwater World - Highly Commended

Alec Connah (United Kingdom)

Fish roundup



‘I visited Lankayan Island, off Sabah, Borneo, to photograph nesting turtles. One morning from the jetty I saw these young blacktip reef sharks, seemingly herding small fish into the shallows. I liked the patterns that formed as the fish leisurely

evaded them. Sometimes, a shark would lash out and try to feed. I never did get the turtle shots, but this more than compensated.’ The blacktip reef shark is relatively small, less than two metres long. All its fins have black or dark brown tips, and it lives around shallow waters in the Indo-Pacific. It is a fast predator, feeding mainly on reef fishes, but also stingrays and crustaceans such as crabs. Its fins are valued for shark-fin soup, a market that is decimating shark populations worldwide.

Nikon F5 + Sigma 70-200mm f2.8 lens; 1/250 sec at f5.6, Fuji Velvia 50 rated at 100 asa

©Alec Connah / Shell Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2007

Animal Behaviour: All Other Animals - Winner

Amos Nachoum (USA)

Great white torpedo

‘I spent two years planning this project, in an area known as the Ring of Death, Seal Island, in South Africa, where great white sharks ambush seals. Sometimes they breach for seals, sometimes one would do it for a rubber dummy towed behind the boat, as here. It was always unexpected and over in less than a second.’ Sharks are the most notorious predators in the sea. They are fish, but unlike other fish, sharks do not have bones. Their skeletons are made from cartilage, making them more light weight and flexible. They survive on blubber from whales, seals and dolphins and large fish. More people die from encounters with bees, elephants and crocodiles than sharks.



Nikon F5 + 70-200 f4 lens; 1/1000 sec; Fujichrome Provia 100.

©Amos Nachoum / Shell Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2007



The *Ghost Fleet Of Bikini Atoll* and *Pacific Realm – A Kelp Forest*, two newly released eBooklets by Joseph C. Dovala, are now available. These are PDF files easily read by a number of free existing software programs such as Acrobat Reader. Electronic photo books, or eBooks, are able to showcase images and text in a new, exciting, and very inexpensive way. They have relatively small file sizes, usually of 10mb or less. Both above titles are only \$4.00 each emailed. Please visit www.jcdovala.com for details.

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