

No cover limitations here

This issue's front cover by Jordi Chias Pujol continues the long line of consistently great cover images and I am very grateful to him for allowing us to use it. It won the One Earth category in the recent Veolia Environnement Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2010 but it is not really front cover material in the traditional sense.

Printed magazines on shelves need their front cover to say "Buy me". A colourfully clad, well lit diver watching a cuddly clownfish usually does the trick or sadly any image of a shark, for some reason. But put a struggling turtle, terminally entangled in a discarded fishing net, and the reader will feel uncomfortable and move on to pastures prettier.

I went along to the press launch of the Veolia Competition and had the opportunity to meet and chat with Jordi about this image and his recent work. He spends a great deal of time on the water between Barcelona and the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean and finding such as turtle stranded in fishing nets is far from uncommon. In fact the majority of inspections of discarded fishing nets on the surface reveal stranded or dying species of one kind or another. He revealed that the majority of his underwater images nowadays were of the destructive nature of man's waste rather than the beauty of the underwater world.

His portfolio of such shots has built up so much over the recent years that he thought he might try and get a book of them published. My initial reaction was to say what a good idea it was but then it dawned on me that no publisher would commit capital to such a project. Sales of coffee table books are precarious enough without choosing a subject

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which portrays such negativity. And then it dawned on me very quickly that the way in which UwP is produced would be the ideal way to enable such a book to come to fruition.

The beauty (and some would say genius...) of the idea behind UwP is that it costs only time to produce and virtually nothing to distribute worldwide so it can be free to download. A book of images and text showing the stark reality of some underwater life could be produced in such a way and in doing so could be made available to anyone who wanted to download it. As a result the stark message could be transmitted worldwide and, who knows, the media world may even pick up on it and publicise it to give it an even greater effect. After all, bad news makes good news, as they say.

If there is one thing which has changed the world in the late 20th, early 21st century, it is the power of the people. The power through the internet, free downloads and video clips to educate and inform the general public - in this case to the real dangers faced by the underwater world. A world which remains hidden to the vast majority and which is so easily ignored. A world normally portrayed by pretty colourful pictures (which sell books) published by companies with both eyes on the balance sheet.

Now we can self produce the pdf books which will show parts of our world in a newer, more truthful light. They can still be technically excellent, as Jordi's most certainly is, but maybe, just maybe, they will help to draw the general public's attention away from 'Nemo' and its saccharine reassurance to the plight of the real world.

Home grown goodness

Tim Priest's thought provoking article (see page 43) on the ethics of underwater photography made very interesting reading for me, and I hope it will for you also.

As travelling underwater photographers we face the dilemma of increasing the weight of our baggage with tons of carbon emitted by air travel. His observation that some competition winners are looking closer to home for their images (urban foxes in London and Paris by one and raccoon dogs and badgers near one photographers home in Finland) made me all the more pleased when I received articles for this issue from Sue Daly and Charles Hood.

Sue covers her local diving on the island of Sark in the Channel Islands just north of France while Charles extols the virtue of photographing the second largest fish in the sea - the basking shark - in his native Cornish waters. They are both great photographic examples that we do not have to fly thousands of miles to encounter excellent diving and world class subjects; more often than not they are on our doorstep.

Sue's images were, in particular for me, a breath of fresh air for if you were to look at images in UK diving magazines taken around our coast you would be forgiven for thinking that all backgrounds are black with little or no available light or alternatively they need to be blasted with flashlight to illuminate the foreground because it is so dark.

It isn't like that and Sue's images prove it.

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