

## Veolia Environnement Wildlife Photographer of the Year

Now in its 48th year, the Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition is an international showcase for the very best nature photography. The competition is owned by two UK institutions that pride themselves on revealing and championing the diversity of life on Earth - the Natural History Museum and BBC Worldwide.

Being accepted into this competition is something to which wildlife photographers across the world aspire. Professionals win many of the prizes but amateurs succeed too.

Each year, tens of thousands of entries are received and judged by an international jury of photography experts.

The origins of the Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition go back as far as 1965, when BBC Wildlife Magazine was called Animals and there were just three categories and about 600 entries. But even then, it was the leading event of its kind for nature photographers. It grew in stature over the years, and in 1984, the Natural History Museum and BBC Worldwide joined forces to create the competition as it is today.

Now there have been more than 48,000 entries received from over 95 countries around the globe. There is a major exhibition at the Museum that tours worldwide throughout the year. The winning and commended pictures appear on this website, in BBC Wildlife Magazine and publications worldwide. As a result, the photographs are now seen by millions



*Bubble-jetting emperors*  
*Paul Nicklen (Canada)*  
*Winner, Underwater Worlds*

*This was the image Paul had been so hoping to get: a sunlit mass of emperor penguins charging upwards, leaving in their wake a crisscross of bubble trails. The location was near the emperor colony at the edge of the frozen area of the Ross Sea, Antarctica. It was into the only likely exit hole that he lowered himself. He then had to wait for the return of the penguins, crops full of icefish for their chicks. Paul locked his legs under the lip of the ice so he could remain motionless, breathing through a snorkel so as not to spook the penguins when they arrived. Then it came: a blast of birds from the depths. They were so fast that, with frozen fingers, framing and focus had to be instinctive. 'It was a fantastic sight', says Paul, 'as hundreds launched themselves out of the water and onto the ice above me' – a moment that I felt incredibly fortunate to witness and one I'll never forget.*



*Evening rays*

*Claudio Gazzaroli (Switzerland)*

*Specially commended, Underwater Worlds*

*North Sound, off the island of Grand Cayman, is a hotspot for 'friendly' southern stingrays – individuals accustomed to interacting with humans. Fishermen historically discarded their unwanted fish parts once they reached the calm waters of the sandbar at the Sound. The stingrays gathered for an easy meal and learnt to associate the boat-engine noise with food. Today, snorkellers gather in the waist-deep water to meet these charismatic fish. Inspired by David Doubilet's original split-level portrait of a Cayman stingray, Claudio set out to capture an image of the stingrays with a different perspective. 'There were about 75 of them undulating through the shallows,' he says. Balancing the light was a problem 'because of the extremes in contrast between the dramatic evening sky and sandy sea bottom', but keeping people out of the picture proved to be more of a challenge than executing the composition.*



*Midnight feast*

*Thomas P Peschak (Germany / South Africa)*

*Commended, Underwater Worlds*

*In the dead of night, the young whale shark was feeding close to the surface. The challenge for Tom was to capture an image of it. The whale sharks of this area in the Gulf of Tadjoura, Djibouti, eastern Africa, feed at night on zooplankton attracted to the lights of small fishing boats. These lights were too dim to allow Tom to photograph without a flash, but a flash would have disturbed the shark. So from his boat, he hung an additional light just above the water. 'The cone of light was just large enough to illuminate the small whale shark emerging from the gloom,' he says. 'The shark was about two and a half metres long, but if it had been an adult, it would have been at least four times longer, and I would have only been able to get part of the animal illuminated in the frame.' This location is the only known one where juveniles gather and the only one where whale sharks are regularly documented feeding at night.*



*The lion pack*  
David Hall (USA)  
Commended, Underwater Worlds

*David had tried many times to get close-ups of Steller sea lions – large and very active mammals that can grow up to an impressive four metres in length and weigh more than a ton. On this particular winter day he got more than he bargained for. Waiting patiently off Hornby Island, British Columbia, with appalling visibility, he suddenly realised he wasn't alone. There were at least 30 huge, inquisitive sea lions, swimming ever closer through the gloomy, green water. As their numbers increased, they grew bolder, and soon they were tugging on his arms and legs, and pushing him about. 'The situation was potentially dangerous,' says David, who was diving alone, 'and so I grabbed a few hasty shots, without checking camera settings or even looking through the viewfinder, and then made a sharp exit.' Loading the images onto his laptop later, he was amazed to see how well many of the shots had come out. 'That night in my bunk,' he adds, 'I couldn't sleep. All I could see were eyes staring at me in the dark.'*



*Turtle gem*  
Jordi Chias (Spain)  
Commended, Underwater Worlds

*Armeñime, a small cove off the south coast of Tenerife, is a hotspot for green sea turtles. They forage there on the plentiful seagrass and are used to divers. Jordi cruised with this one in the shallow, gin-clear water over black volcanic sand. 'The dazzling colours, symmetry and textured patterns were mesmerising,' says Jordi, 'and I was able to compose a picture to show just how beautiful this marine treasure is.' Like the other seven species of sea turtles, the green sea turtle is endangered, with populations declining worldwide. The many threats include habitat degradation, building development on their breeding beaches, ingestion of rubbish such as plastics and entanglement in fishing gear.*



*The eye of the baitball*  
**Cristóbal Serrano (Spain)**  
 Runner-up, Behaviour: Birds

*Cristóbal found this great circling shoal of grunt fish in the Sea of Cortez, Mexico, and watched it over two days. He would dive down and then sit on the sandy bottom some 20 metres below the surface to watch. ‘With the sky behind the fish ball,’ he says, ‘it looked like a shimmering body of energy. I just needed a focal point to get the picture I was after.’ A pelagic cormorant was also watching the fish, and now and then it would shoot a hole through the ever-tightening baitball (tightening in response to the predator), making it easier for it to pick off individual fish. Cristóbal tried to predict the angle that the cormorant would use. After many attempts, using a fisheye lens and strobes to illuminate the fish and the sandy bottom, he got the shot.*



*Dive robbers*  
**Jean Tresfon (South Africa)**  
 Commended, Bird Behaviour

*For five days, Jean had been trying to photograph the feeding frenzy that develops when sardines and herrings migrate off South Africa’s Wild Coast. His luck finally changed in clear water a few miles off Port St Johns. ‘Activity was intense, with dolphins herding the fish into a ball from below, while Cape gannets rained down from above. I couldn’t wait to get in the water.’ Gannets were plunging down several metres at great speed, catching and swallowing several fish in a dive. In contrast, Cape cormorants diving from the surface were much less successful. But what they lacked in fishing skill they made up for with thievery. ‘In this picture,’ says Jean, ‘the gannet is desperately trying to swallow a herring as a gang of cormorants gives chase.’*



*Into the mouth of the caiman*  
**Luciano Candisani (Brazil)**  
 Winner, Behaviour: Cold-blooded Animals

*Motionless but alert, a yacare caiman waits, ‘like a small tyrannosaurus’ for fish to come within snapping reach, says Luciano. Caimans are usually seen floating passively on the surface. Under the water, it’s another story. It’s this secret life that has fascinated Luciano ever since he first came face to face with a caiman while snorkelling. Once he’d recovered from the shock, he realised that the reptile was neither aggressive nor fearful – and that he could approach it. Luciano now regularly documents the underwater life of caimans in the shallow, murky waters of Brazil’s Pantanal (the biggest wetland in the world), which contains the largest single crocodilian population on Earth. Caimans can grow to be three metres in length. Most aren’t aggressive, but some individuals can be. ‘The safest way to get close is when they are concentrating on a shoal of fish,’ says Luciano. ‘While I was concentrating on this caiman emerging from the gloom, I had a field biologist with me all the time.’ The result was ‘the picture that’s been in my imagination since my father first showed me a caiman 25 years ago’.*



*Father’s little mouthful*  
**Steven Kovacs (Canada)**  
 Commended, Cold-blooded Animals

*A dusky jawfish father is a diligent parent, protecting fertilised eggs in his mouth until they hatch. This male, in the opening of his burrow off the coast of Florida, was aerating his eggs. Says Steven: ‘He seemed unconcerned by my presence and didn’t retreat into his burrow when I started taking pictures.’ Steven used home-made snoots (tubes that control the direction and radius of light) to focus the light on both sides of the jawfish’s face. ‘He couldn’t have been more cooperative,’ says Steve. ‘For the next hour he barely moved,’ more interested in making sure the eggs were rotated and in a good flow of water.*

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