

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2014

Now in its 50th year, the Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition provides a global showcase of the very best nature photography. The competition is co-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.

There is a major exhibition at the Natural History Museum that tours worldwide throughout the year. The winning images appear on this website, in BBC Wildlife Magazine and publications worldwide. As a result, the photographs are now seen by millions.

www.nhm.ac.uk

Winner 2014 Underwater Species Indra Swari Wonowidjojo, Indonesia Passing giants

During a new Moon, the lights from the bagans (semi-mobile fishing platforms) in Cenderawasih Bay in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, attract shoals of fish into the nets of local fishermen. The lights act as a signal to filter-feeding whale sharks, which have learned to suck on the nets to extract the fish. It's an easy meal, so easy that the whale sharks sometimes need to be shooed away from the nets, though some fishermen will feed them. Up to 10 whale sharks can cruise around a bagan at any one time, and the

location is now becoming a dive hotspot. Attracted by the spectacle, Indra spent a few days diving there. As a huge whale shark – at least nine metres long – glided by on one dive, she noticed another swimming a little deeper, in a different direction. She swam quickly to position herself above both of them when their paths crossed. She adjusted her strobe output and ISO so the great fish would both be sufficiently illuminated. 'The sharks will happily swim straight into you, gently nudging you

out of their way,' she says. 'The fishermen see them as good omens and often jump in and swim with them.' Elsewhere in Asia, these massive animals, the world's largest fish, continue to be hunted.

Canon EOS 5D Mark II + 17–40mm lens; 1/100 sec at f11; ISO 640; Nexus housing + Inon z240 strobes.



Finalist 2014 Underwater Species

Brian Skerry, USA

Dolphin downtime



Brian travelled to the waters off northwest Oahu, Hawaii, to photograph spinner dolphins as part of a scientific project examining dolphin intelligence. The researchers were looking in particular at social alliances and feeding strategies. Spinners are well known for their acrobatics, leaping up to three metres out of the water and completing as many as seven revolutions in the air before plunging in again. It is not certain why they do this, though it may be to dislodge remoras, or suckerfish, from their bodies and for communication. Their spinning once caused them to be targeted for aquariums, but they are hugely social – living in large

pods of up to 200 individuals – so never survived well in captivity. The dolphins Brian was working with foraged at night for fish, squid and shrimps in deep water offshore, then came into shallow bays in the early morning to socialise and rest. The animals are often harassed by dolphin-watching boats. Brian was careful to position himself off to the side so as not to disturb the pod. Free diving to a depth of nearly 18 metres, he took advantage of the white sand backdrop to create his picture – a moment of dolphin downtime, his subjects relaxed in their world.

Nikon D4 + 17–35mm lens at 24mm; 1/500 sec at f11; ISO 1000; Subal housing.

Finalist 2014 Underwater Species

Fabien Michenet, France

Little squid

Planktonic animals like this juvenile sharpshooter squid are usually photographed under controlled situations after they've been caught. But Fabien is fascinated by the beauty of their living forms and aims to photograph their natural behaviour in the wild. Night diving in deep water off the coast of Tahiti, he was surrounded by a mass of tiny planktonic animals. Apart from the occasional sound of a dolphin, it was silent, and he became fascinated by this tiny squid. Just three centimetres long, it was floating motionless about 20 metres below the surface. It was probably hunting even smaller creatures that had migrated up to feed under cover of darkness. Its transparent body was covered with polka dots of pigment-filled cells, and below its eyes were bioluminescent organs. Knowing it would be sensitive to light and movement, Fabien gradually manoeuvred in front of it, trying to hang as motionless as his subject.



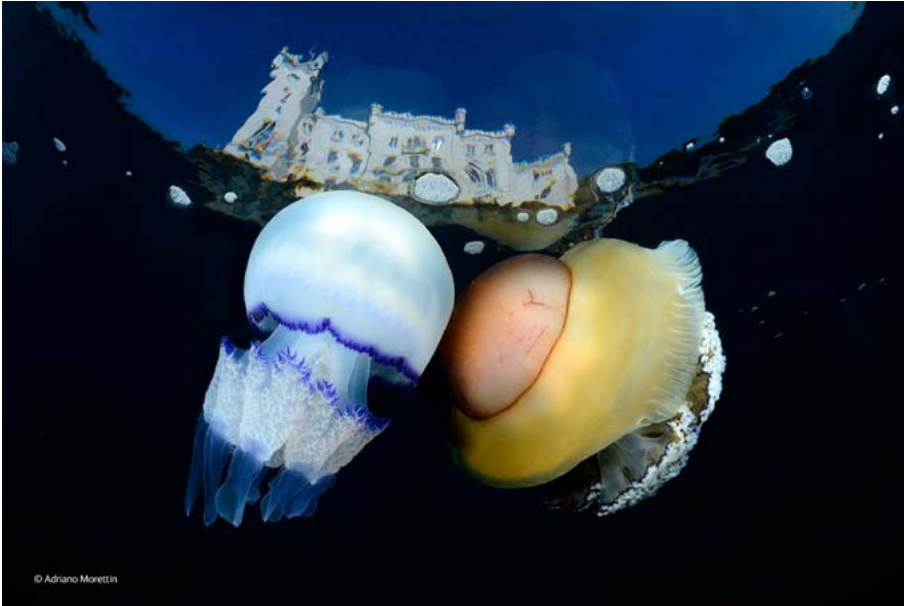
Using as little light as possible to get the autofocus working, he finally triggered the strobes and took the squid's portrait before it disappeared into the deep.

Nikon D800 + 105mm f2.8 lens; 1/320 sec at f16; ISO 200; Nauticam housing; two Inon Z-240 strobes.

Finalist 2014 Underwater Species

Adriano Morettin, Italy

Touch of magic



Adriano had this picture in mind for 15 years before he had a chance to capture it. The nineteenth-century Miramare Castle, near his home in Trieste, stands on a cliff overlooking the Adriatic Sea. Last summer, a significant jellyfish swarm gathered beneath the cliff. Hundreds of barrel jellyfish and tens of fried egg jellyfish congregated in the unusually clear water. Adriano needed to get close with his wide-angle lens, receiving many minor stings to his face in the process. But his real challenge was to follow the jellyfish as they moved, 'using their domes like engines'. He waited patiently for two to touch

near the surface, getting just the right angle to photograph them with the castle behind. Most difficult of all was balancing the exposure of the jellyfish with that of the sunlit castle above to reveal the beauty of both.

Nikon D800E + Sigma 15mm f2.8 lens; 1/160 sec at f18; ISO 100; Seacam housing + Superdome; two Seaflash 150 strobes.

Winner 2014 Natural Design

Patrik Bartuska, Czech Republic

Cardinal sparks



Patrik's goal was to photograph a group of beautiful Banggai cardinalfish, which are found only in the waters off Sulawesi, Indonesia. They are endangered because of overfishing for the aquarium trade. Patrik encountered this scene while diving in the Lembeh Strait to the north. The contrasts of movement and texture entranced him – the anemone's soft tentacles swaying in the current and the flicks of the angular, patterned fish sheltering within them. During his trip he mostly came across small groups of adults gathered around the coral. But he was after a group associating with an anemone. During

the day juveniles use the anemones' tentacles for protection, either avoiding their stings or being in some way unaffected by them. It took many dives before he found this large grouping. It appeared to Patrik like an underwater fire display, the tentacles like licking flames and the fish like erratic sparks. To capture the moving pattern he chose to shoot from above. Holding his position in the current, he waited for the fish to move so he could frame the composition.

Canon EOS 5D Mark II + 16–35mm f2.8 lens; 1/8 sec at f9; ISO 320; Seacam housing; Seaflash strobes.

Winner 2014 Plants & Fungi

Christian Vizl, Mexico

Glimpse of the underworld



Water lilies stretch up to the light through a layer of green mist in the Aktun Ha cenote, a huge sinkhole on Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula. Aktun Ha is part of a great ring of thousands of cenotes, created when the limestone bedrock collapsed to expose the subterranean groundwater. Christian has been photographing the cenotes for the past 10 years. What makes Aktun Ha special is its underwater garden. The water is crystal clear, except in summer when an algal bloom several metres thick can develop beneath the surface. Christian settled on the bottom of the cenote to compose a picture of this still, silent

underworld garden. The challenge was to balance the artificial with the natural light. The intensity and angle of the strobe illumination had to be just right. He wanted to bring out the texture of the leaves, flushed pink through ageing, without detracting from the natural light filtering down through the algae, or overexposing the skittish silvery fish. The resulting picture hints at why the ancient Maya considered cenotes to be sacred places and thought of water lilies as plants of the underworld.

Canon EOS 5D Mark II + 15mm lens; 1/160 sec at f14; ISO 200; 2 x Inon Z-240 strobes.

Finalist 2014 Invertebrates

Alex Mustard, United Kingdom

You have been warned



When Alex went diving in the Lembeh Strait in North Sulawesi, Indonesia, he was on a mission to celebrate the smaller sea creatures. Equipped with a new high-magnification lens, he encountered this variable neon nudibranch, a species of sea slug, crawling across the seabed. Less than two centimetres long, it has green gills on its back and orange mouthparts. It uses its orange, feather-like rhinophores to smell out its prey, primarily sea squirts. It incorporates distasteful chemicals from sea squirts' skin into slimy mucus, and uses its neon colours to warn predators that it tastes bad.

Alex wanted an eye-level view of this unforgettable mollusc. But even with a small aperture it was a challenge. There was little depth of field and the subject was moving – and even a slug's pace under magnification is surprisingly fast.

Nikon D4 + 105mm f2.8 lens + Nauticam Super Macro Converter; 1/250 sec at f40; ISO 200; Subal ND4 housing; two Inon Z-240 strobes.