Photo by Lureen Ferretti: The oh-so-beautiful tiger butterfly sea-slug (*Cyerce nigra*), Romblon, Philippines. Gear: Canon 70D camera, Canon 100mm macro lens with a 10+ diopter, Nauticam housing, two Backscatter dual HF-1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 200, f/20, 1/160s.

Sought-After Subjects

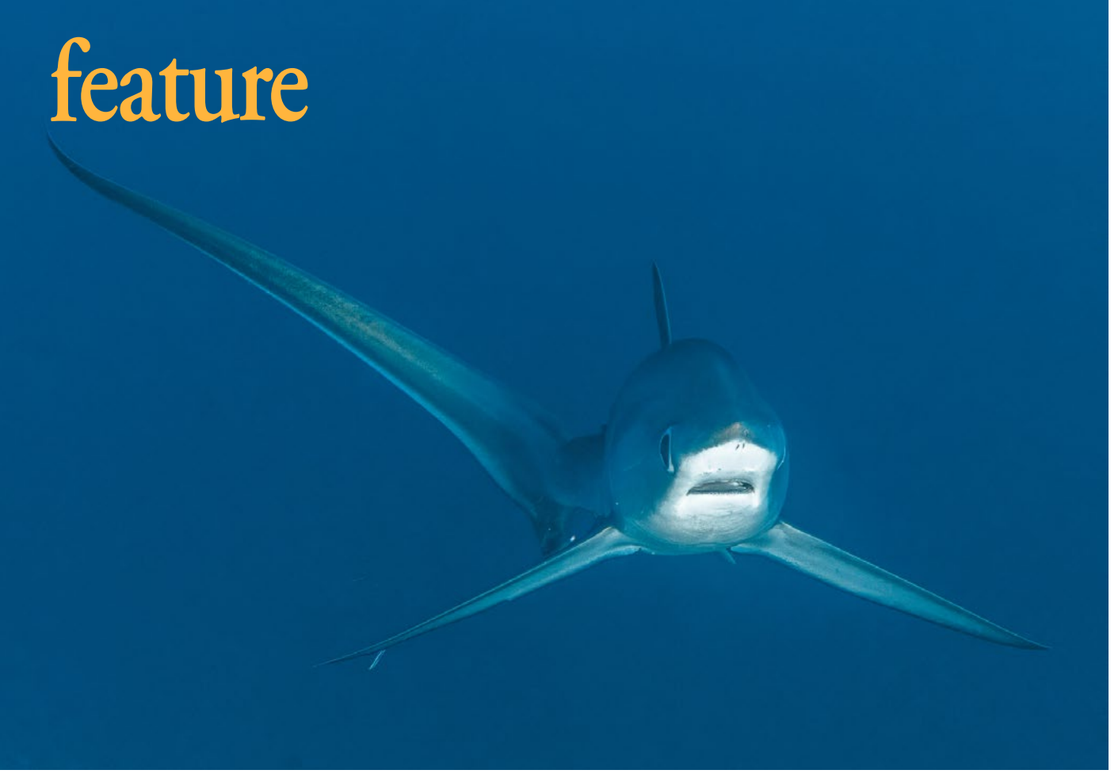
Contributors' Picks On Their Bucket Lists

Text and photos by John A. Ares, Sheryl Checkman, Larry Cohen, Lureen Ferretti, Anita George-Ares, Brandi Mueller, Gary Rose and Olga Torrey

We asked our contributors to share their favorite underwater images that showcase subjects on their bucket lists, including specific critters, wrecks or compositions, and they came back with an intriguing selection of macro to wide-angle shots featuring a range of subjects, from unique species to carefully composed cave and wreck shots, awaiting just the right moment. Here, *X-Ray Mag* contributors share their favorite images, from the tropical waters of the Solomon Islands, Micronesia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Maldives, the Bahamas, Turks and Caicos, Hawaii and Mexico to the temperate waters of British Columbia and the US East Coast.

LUREEN FERRETTI

JOHN A. ARES



Reef mantas (above), *Mobula alfredi*, buzzing a cleaning station, Komodo, Indonesia. Gear Canon 70D camera, Tokina 10-17mm fisheye lens, Nauticam housing, two Backscatter dual HF-1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 400, f/10, 1/125s.

Right-handed hermit crab (right), *Paguritta* sp., peeking out of its home, Solomon Islands. Gear: Canon 70D camera, Canon 100mm macro lens with a 10+diopter, Nauticam housing, two Backscatter dual HF-1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 100, f/18, 1/100s.

Tiger butterfly seaslug (previous page), *Cyerce nigra*, Romblon, Philippines. Gear: Canon 70D camera, Canon 100mm macro lens with a 10+ diopter, Nauticam housing, two Backscatter dual HF-1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 200, f/20, 1/160s.

A curious thresher shark (above), *Alopias vulpinus*, Fuvahmulah, Maldives. Gear: Canon 70D camera, Tokina 10-17mm fisheye lens, Nauticam housing, two Backscatter dual HF-1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 320, f/10, 1/100s.

Obsessions

Text and photos by Lureen Ferretti

The frustration for most photographers is that a "Bucket List" encounter is not just about seeing things; it is about capturing the "perfect shot". Being in the right place at the right time is essential, yet even after obtaining the envisioned image, there is often dissatisfaction, leading to an evolving, endless list of creativity.

My fascination with right-handed hermit crabs (*Paguritta* sp.) ignited during a dive in the Solomon Islands. I was unaware of their existence until my guide pointed one out. These tiny crabs, often overlooked, became my obsession. Their grain-of-rice-sized faces are challenging to photograph in shallow depths of one to two meters.

Another highlight was my pursuit of the tiger butterfly seaslug (*Cyerce nigra*) in the Philippines. A photograph sparked my interest, but seeing one in person revealed its minuscule size and elusive nature amidst its habitat, making the quest even trickier.

Having loved sharks for years, the thresher shark (*Alopias vulpinus*) quickly climbed to the top of my bucket list. During a dive in Fuvahmulah, Maldives, I positioned myself behind a coral head and patiently waited as one approached, capturing a series of stunning shots.

Most recently, I have become captivated by reef manta rays (*Mobula alfredi*). While I had numerous photos of single mantas, I longed for an image with multiple individuals. Diving in Komodo at Manta Alley finally fulfilled that dream.

Despite decades of crossing items off my list, it remains lengthy and ever-evolving, fueling my passion for photography and adventures around the globe. Visit: **instagram.com/lureenferrettiphotography**

Photo 1. (right) Coral catfish, *Plotosus* sp., Dumaguete, Philippines. Gear: Canon Rebel T1i camera, Canon 100mm macro lens, Ikelite housing, one Ikelite 161 strobe, Exposure: ISO 400, f/16, 1/125s.

Photo 2. (below) Tiger shrimp, Puerto Galera, Philippines. Gear: Canon Rebel T1i camera, Canon 100mm macro lens, Ikelite housing, two Ikelite 161 strobes. Exposure: ISO 400, f/16, 1/60s.

Photo 3. (left) Candy crab, Dumaguete, Philippines. Gear: Canon Rebel T1i camera, Canon 100mm macro lens, Ikelite housing, two Ikelite 161 strobes. Exposure: ISO 400, f/16, 1/200s.

Elusive Creatures

Text and photos by John A. Ares

To do macro photography underwater, you must have good buoyancy, plus a huge curiosity about the creatures that live close to the reef. By definition, bucket-list creatures are hard to find. To find bucket-list creatures, you need to enlist the help of your guide and stay close to them. You will most likely not find some of them on your own.

I love *Plotosus* sp., also known as coral catfish. Most of the time, you see juveniles out on the reef during daylight hours. Adults are much larger and hide under coral ledges and other holes during the day, as seen in Photo 1. Adults are much shyer and avoid divers.

Spiny tiger shrimp are a small species and hard to find (Photo 2). Luckily, the dive guide helped me find the shrimp to photograph.

Candy crabs are a difficult species to locate. The crab in Photo 3 is a lighter pink than the background red soft coral. Even when you do find them, they are still difficult to see and photograph against the soft coral background. Visit: **JohnAres.com**

Photo 1. (left) Blue-ringed octopus, Punta, Dumaguete, Philippines. Gear: Olympus TG-5 camera at 12.6mm, Sea&Sea YS-D1 and YS-D2 strobes. Exposure: ISO 100, f/11, 1/60s.

Photo 2. (above) Blue-ringed octopus on a tube, Punta, Dumaguete, Philippines. Gear: Olympus TG-5 camera at 10.29mm, Sea&Sea YS-D1 and YS-D2 strobes. Exposure: ISO 100, f/10, 1/50s.

Photo 3. (top right) Whale shark, Providenciales, Turks and Caicos. Gear: Canon PowerShot S400 camera at 7.41mm, no strobe. Exposure: ISO 100, f/2.8, 1/125s

Photo 4. (right) Whale shark, South Ari Atoll, Maldives. Gear: Olympus TG-5 camera at 4.5mm, Sea&Sea YS-D1 and YS-D2 strobes. Exposure: ISO 100, f/2.8, 1/250s.

Octopus and Shark Species

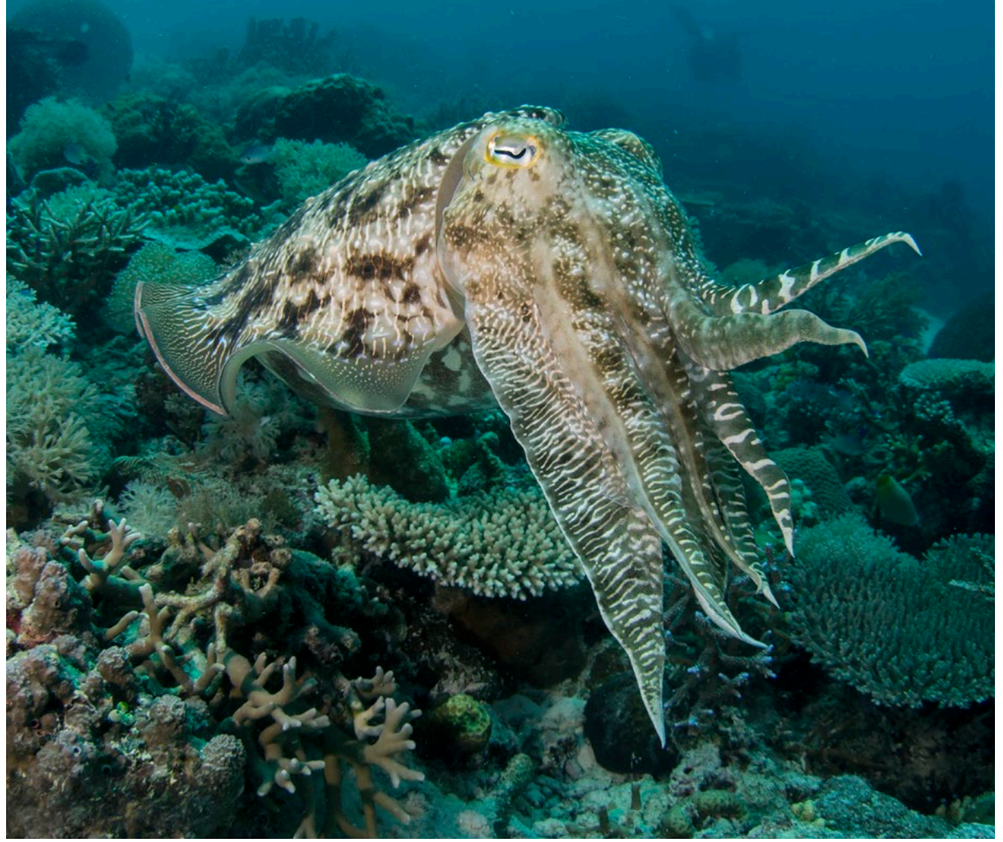
Text and photos by Sheryl Checkman

When I decided to go to the Philippines last year, the one critter that was at the top of my bucket list was the blue-ringed octopus. I had heard how beautiful these tiny animals can be. They get their name from the blue rings that are present on their skin, which can be more or less obvious depending on their level of alertness and if they are hiding.

The blue, iridescent color of the rings on their skin is formed and controlled by three structures: chromatophores, iridophores and leucophores. Photo 1 shows the octopus with its rings very vibrant, most likely agitated by the divers surrounding it, while Photo 2, taken a little earlier, shows the octopus more relaxed and less colorful, blending in with its surroundings. This tiny octopus can be deadly, however. Its venom contains tetrodotoxin, which attacks the nervous system and can cause paralysis and even death if not treated. We made sure to look but not touch!

Another species on my list has always been the whale shark. I saw my first whale shark (Photo 3) by accident in June of 2006, while I was diving on a wall in the Turks and Caicos. I happened to look away from the wall towards the blue and, to my surprise, discovered this giant fish beside me. I have no idea how long it had been joining our dive group before I noticed it. As I was in the back of the group of divers and was the only one to have seen our new dive buddy, I alerted my companions by banging my tank, at which point the whale shark slowly turned away from us and swam into the deep. What a thrill!

I had to wait until 2024 to see another whale shark—this time while snorkeling off a liveaboard in South Ari in the Maldives (Photo 4). It was just as exciting as the first time, even though it was not as much of a surprise. Visit: **Instagram.com/SherylCheckman**



Bucket List

The stop sign warns open-water divers not to enter the cave zone in Cenote Carwash (far left), Tulum, Mexico. Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M1 camera, Olympus 9-18mm lens, Aquatica housing, Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes attached to housing, and Nikonos SB-104 strobes for the background. Exposure: ISO 200, f/11, 1/160s.

Cuttlefish (left), Pom Pom Island, Malaysia. Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M1 camera, Panasonic 8mm fisheye lens, Aquatica housing, Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 200, f/5.6, 1/120s.

Wolf eel (below), British Columbia, Canada. Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M1 camera, Panasonic 8mm fisheye lens, Aquatica housing, Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 400, f/8, 1/250s.

Propeller on *Hoki Maru*, Chuuk Lagoon (left). Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M1 camera, Olympus 9-18mm lens, Aquatica housing, Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 200, f/5.6, 1/60s.

Favorite Moments and Chances

Text and photos by Larry Cohen

The Japanese wrecks in Chuuk Lagoon have always been on my bucket list. When I finally had the chance to dive on these wrecks, I was not disappointed. One of my favorite moments was seeing the giant propeller on the *Hoki Maru*. Witnessing that magnificent propeller in the blue water is truly a wreck diver's dream. I had my dive buddy hover above the propeller for scale when I took the photo.

Another must-see location is the caves in the Mexican Yucatán. The first time I visited, Cenote Carwash was the first cave I entered. I vividly remember swimming through the expansive tunnel where the visibility seemed limitless. It felt like being on a different planet. I was captivated by the formations that formed before the ice age. Since my initial visit, I have returned to Carwash, experimenting with lighting techniques to capture images in these dark tunnels.

I have always wanted to see a cuttlefish. During my trip to Pom Pom Island in Malaysia, I finally had the chance. This fascinating creature is not shy and allowed me to get close while capturing photographs with a fisheye lens.

The wolf eel has a face only a mother could love, but I have always wanted to photograph one. When diving in British Columbia, I got my chance. Despite their name, wolf eels are fish. They typically stay in their holes but are curious and will come out enough to be photographed. Interacting with them was a fun experience. Visit: **liquidimagesuw.com**

ANITA GEORGE-ARES

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Photos 1 (above) and 2 (right). Blue-ringed octopus, Dumaguete, Philippines. Gear: Canon EOS Digital Rebel XTi camera, Canon EF50mm f/2.5 Compact Macro lens, Ikelite housing, two Ikelite DS161 strobes. Exposure: ISO 200, f/11, 1/200s.

Photos 3 (top center) and 4 (top right). Poison ocellate octopus, Dumaguete, Philippines. Gear: Canon EOS Rebel SL1 camera, Canon EF-S60mm f/2.8 Macro USM lens, Ikelite housing, two Ikelite DS161 strobes. Exposure: ISO 200, f/8, 1/200s.

ANITA GEORGE-ARES

Change Artists

Text and photos by Anita George-Ares, PhD

Cuttlefish, octopuses and squid are always on my bucket list. I enjoy observing their behavior, along with their rapid changes in color and texture.

The same blue-ringed octopus is shown in Photos 1 and 2. In Photo 1, bright blue rings are present on the brown and yellow octopus. The blue rings are a warning to potential predators that the octopus is venomous. In Photo 2, the octopus begins to swim away. The striking blue rings are now faded on the yellow octopus. Perhaps the octopus was feeling less threatened. In rare cases, blue-ringed octopus bites have been fatal. However, these octopuses are harmless if one does not touch them.

In Photos 3 and 4, the same poison ocellate octopus is portrayed. As its name indicates, the bite of this octopus is also venomous. At first, the octopus displayed a pair of bright blue rings and maroon stripes, which serve as a warning that the octopus is venomous. A few minutes later, the octopus changed colors and texture, perhaps to aid in camouflage. The blue rings are no longer visible.

A pair of Papuan cuttlefish display different colors in Photo 5. Earlier, the female was dark red but changed to a pale red with extensive white mottling. The golden male later became dark red. The color changes are likely a form of communication during courtship. Visit: **facebook.com/profile.php?id=100016947967639**

ANITA GEORGE-ARES

Photo 5. Papuan cuttlefish, Raja Ampat, Indonesia. Gear: Canon EOS Rebel SL1 camera, EF-S60mm f/2.8 Macro USM lens, Ikelite housing, Ikelite DS161 strobe and Bigblue VL4200P video light. Exposure: ISO 100, f/11, 1/160s.

All photos were taken in Dumaguete, Philippines, with a Nikon Z8 camera, 105mm lens with adapter, Ikelite housing and two Ikelite DS230 strobes. “Shawn the Sheep” nudibranch (top left). Exposure: ISO 160, f/18, 1/200s. Wonderpus (above). Exposure: ISO 160, f/8, 1/200s. Clown frogfish (top right). Exposure: ISO 160, f/18, 1/200s.

Seahorse (above). Exposure: ISO 160, f/11, 1/160s.
Skeleton shrimp with hairy shrimp (right). Exposure: ISO 160, f/11, 1/200s.

The Littlest Bucket List

Text and photos by Brandi Mueller

As a diver, my bucket list consists of many things, big and small. Recently, I was muck diving in the Philippines, and here, there were special, sought-after subjects among the weird and wild critters of the muck. Nudibranchs, like Shawn the Sheep, were on my list. But it seems that once you see one nudibranch, you want to see more, and with every tick off the bucket list, another gets added.

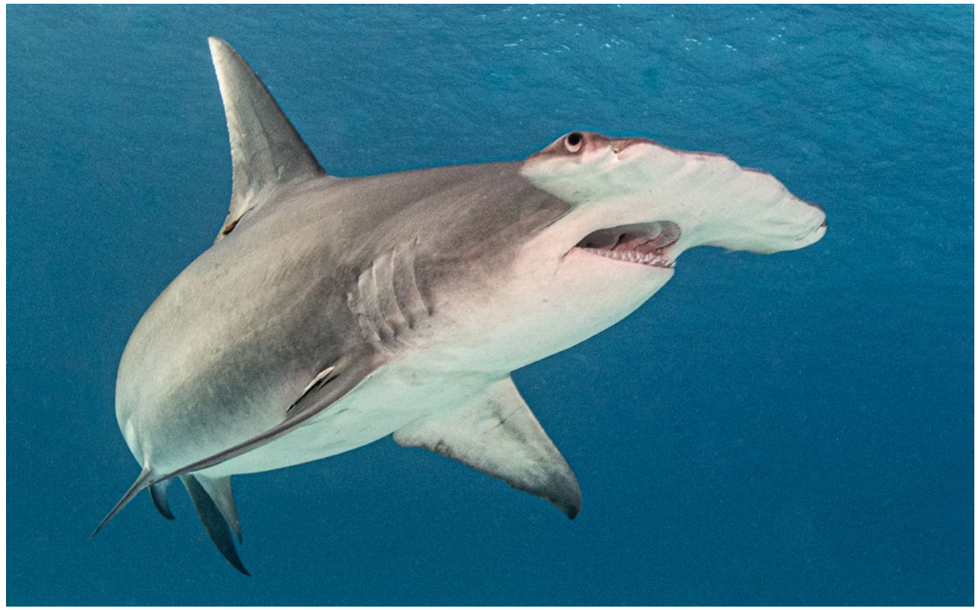
The adorable clown frogfish is a good candidate. It is smaller than a dime but bright white with orange accents. Seahorses are also on the list, with bonus points if it is a pregnant male. Plus, don’t forget about the many wonderful cephalopods, like the wonderpus.

Then, there are unique behaviors to check off (sometimes so special they are not even on the list until after they happen). A skeleton shrimp has a body the width of a thread, an epic check on its own, but the one in my photo appears to be about to eat another shrimp, possibly an algae shrimp, which is also a worthy addition. The macro bucket list never ends… Visit: **brandiunderwater.com**

All photos taken with Nikon D500 camera, Tokina 10-17mm lens, Nauticam housing, Inon Z-330 strobes.
Photo 1. (below) Great hammerhead cruising, Bimini, Bahamas. Exposure: ISO 200, f/11, 1/125s, FL 17.
Photo 2. (left) Great white shark up close and personal, Guadalupe Island, Mexico. Exposure: ISO 320, f/8, 1/125s, FL 17.
Photo 3. (right) Tiger shark at a deep wreck, Jupiter, Florida. Exposure: ISO 200, f/11, 1/125s, FL 11.
Photo 4. (lower right) Bull shark at the dome of my camera housing, Jupiter, Florida. Exposure: ISO 100, f/8, 1/125s, FL 17.

My Bucket List of Sharks

Text and photos by Gary Rose, MD



I am often asked, on dive boats or after giving a lecture, and by friends and family, "What is on your bucket list of sharks?" My answer has always been the same: "Great white shark, tiger shark, great hammerhead shark and bull shark." All four are apex predators and big. When diving deep in the water column, I look all around, in all directions. Most often, they first make an appearance on the edges of visibility. It is particularly rewarding when they come close and the visibility is good.

Great hammerheads are shy around divers. Underwater photographers must be patient. No noise or signaling to other divers is the rule. Enjoy this solitary moment. Become as one with this exquisite creature. The great hammerhead will circle and slowly approach. Wait for the right moment, and take the shot. Photo 1 was one such moment, at Bimini in the Bahamas.

Number one on my list is the great white shark. It started with the movie *Jaws*. The thrill to dive with them and to observe their behavior was like a siren's song. It is thrilling to be in a cage and observe dozens of great whites. It ups the adrenaline incredibly when you are sitting on top of the cage with no obstructions between you and a great white. Patience, the shark will approach and glide by, without any appreciable movement of its body or fins. Photo 2 is of this magical moment, captured at Guadalupe Island, Mexico.

There are plenty of tiger sharks where I dive in Jupiter, Florida (Photo 3). This particular tiger shark is known to prowl the local wrecks. Tiger sharks are ambush hunters, making it imperative that all divers and photographers keep their heads on a constant swivel and *ALWAYS* maintain eye contact with a tiger shark. As the shark approaches my housing dome, it appears to be swimming right out of the photograph.

Bull sharks are skittish and move rapidly. In deep, open water, the shiver (or pack) of bull sharks will send a scout to explore, and then it will leave. Shortly after, it will come back, leading the remaining members of the shiver. This bull shark (Photo 4) was very curious and came right up to my camera. It appeared to be studying its own reflection.

It is a privilege to be able to go on underwater safaris in my own backyard and abroad. Patience and good planning will be rewarded with some incredible encounters and photographs of apex predators. Always keep an eye out—dive it, be patient, and they will come. Visit: **garyrosephotos.com**

Photo 1. (left) Diver in US Navy Mark-V gear, Pennsylvania, USA. Gear: OM System E-M5 camera, Lumix 7-14mm lens, Nauticam housing, Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 320, f/9, 1/200s.

Photo 2. (top left) Divers observing the *Atlantis Kona* submarine, Big Island, Hawaii, USA. Gear: OM System E-M5 camera, Lumix 7-14mm lens, Nauticam housing. Exposure: ISO 320, f/5.6, 1/125s.

Photo 3. (top right) Blue shark, Rhode Island, USA. Camera gear: OM System E-M5 camera, Panasonic 8mm fisheye lens, Nauticam housing, Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 400, f/8, 1/250s.

Photo 4. (right) Cenote Pedrín Fenómeno, Tulum, Mexico. Gear: OM System OM-1 camera, Panasonic 8mm fisheye lens, Nauticam housing, Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 1250, f/5.6, 1/60s.

Unique Opportunities

Text and photos by Olga Torrey

There have been a few boxes on my bucket list that I have been able to tick. One of them was photographing a surface-supplied diver event organized by the North East Diving Equipment Group, where divers could try diving with vintage underwater gear. The US Navy Mark-V gear, which weighs 198 pounds, was everyone's favorite to dive with. To avoid entanglement with the surface supply cable, I swam to the side and angled my camera's wide-angle lens upward to capture an image that conveyed a sense of human power as the diver walked up the hill (Photo 1).

On a visit to the Big Island of Hawaii, I wanted to see the *Atlantis Kona* submarine. My dive guide planned the dive according to the submarine's schedule. We descended on an artificial barge wreck. We heard the propeller and saw the submarine approaching. I took the image in Photo 2 with available light, using a wide-angle lens.

In Rhode Island, I had the opportunity to snorkel with blue sharks. I jumped into the water and waited for the right moment to photograph these beautiful, curious fish. One shark approached a few times and touched the dome of my camera housing with its nose because it saw its reflection. I used a fisheye lens to capture the entire shark when it came in close (Photo 3).

Another bucket list shot was taken among the spectacular limestone stalactites in Cenote Pedrín Fenómeno in Tulum. I chose an area with stalactites that inspired me to create the composition in Photo 4. I used a fisheye lens on my camera and opened the strobe arms wide to light it up properly. I also mounted powerful video lights on the diver's tanks to light up the background. Visit: **fitimage.nyc**.