

The shot after waiting for the moray to get into position.

Text and photos by Cristian Umili

**Macro underwater photography comes with some challenges, particularly when positioning a subject in the frame. Cristian Umili offers some advice and tips to improve your macro images.**



Photograph of the situation as soon as the moray eels were found.



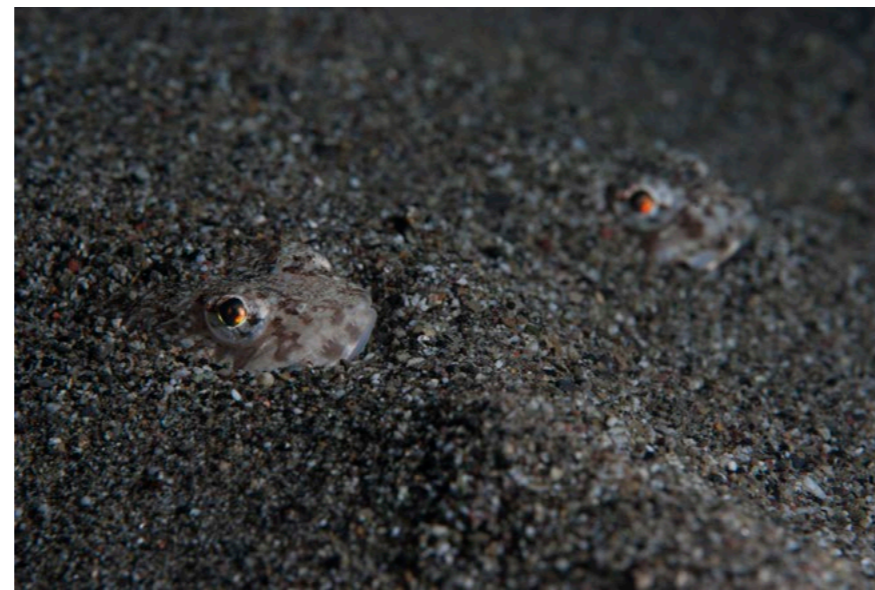
# Positioning Subjects

*in UW Macro Photography*

Taking macro photos underwater, in the beginning, can result in images that do not capture the impact of the subject as seen during your dive. This is often due to the photographer being too far away from

the subject, shooting the subject from the wrong angle, or not waiting for the fish or other marine species to move into the best and most photogenic position.

**The photographer's position**  
The first thing we need to understand is how to position ourselves in the water, i.e. our position in relation to the subject. If we position ourselves too high above the



The position of the photographer/camera is too high in relation to the subject.

The position of the photographer/camera is at the same level as the subject but too far away.

subject, we will be shooting from above, looking down, which will flatten the subject, and if the subject is well camouflaged, it will further blend into its surroundings, making it difficult to see in the picture. Another very common mistake is not getting close enough, which makes the subject too small

in the picture.

To avoid this problem, always remember to place your camera at least at the same level as your subject, and that the subject is large enough to fill the viewfinder for a good visual effect. This has secondary benefits, such as making lighting easier and reducing

the risk of your hovering over the subject having a negative impact on the image.

### Waiting for the right position

Under water, subjects often move or are moved by the current. Even a subject that appears, at first glance, to be moving slowly

The position of the photographer/camera is now close enough to the subject.

Photo taken as soon as I found the subject.



In this shot, I waited for it to come closer.

After waiting a little longer, here is the fish in the desired position.



After waiting for it to move on, it came into a good position for me to photograph it, but the current had caused the rhinophores on its head to droop.

(such as a nudibranch) will move quickly in your viewfinder if you frame it at a good magnification. Sometimes we get lucky, and the animal we want to photograph is already in a favorable position, sometimes not. If we encounter the second scenario, we will have to stop and observe the behavior, and if the animal is moving, it is best to wait for it to

move into the desired position.

If we are unfamiliar with the species that we are photographing, we can stop after the first shot and observe how it moves. We can then position ourselves better for the shot or change the angle or position of the camera to frame the subject better and create a more compelling and dynamic photograph.



After waiting a moment longer, the nudibranch had raised its head and its rhinophores were raised, creating a more dynamic and interesting shot.

## Positioning

Sometimes you find subjects in odd positions, like this nudibranch, which was in a curious position, but the background made it barely visible.

This photo of a nudibranch walking on the head of a scorpionfish—a strange and almost comical situation—was taken as a whole, but it remains a shot that lacks personality.

Getting closer and giving more prominence to the nudibranch in action, and only partially capturing the scorpionfish, make for a more interesting shot.



### Focus on one subject

Sometimes on a dive, we will come across certain scenes where several animals of different species are involved. However, taking a shot of the whole scene often does not translate well into a photograph, and we end up with a confused image.

To improve this, we can move in closer and photograph only part of the scene, giving more importance to one subject and less to another. When photographing only part of the secondary subject, we must be careful to give the photo a pleasing crop that makes it clear what the secondary subject is.

### Conclusion

With a little patience and

practice, photographers can improve their macro shots by changing their own position as well as the camera's. Getting to know your subject and waiting for it to move into a good position will result in better images. ■

*Cristian Umili has been taking underwater photographs since 1990, starting with a Nikonos camera and today with digital reflex cameras. Since 2004, he has been a commercial photographer, with clients such as Seac Sub, Scubapro and Cressi Sub. A member of the Ocean Artist Society, he is represented by Mondadori Portfolio and collaborates with Scubazone. Please visit: [cristianumili.com](http://cristianumili.com)*



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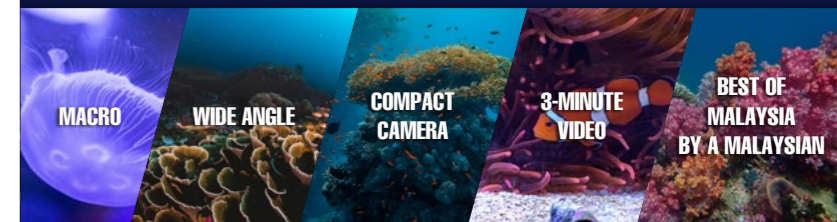
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Underwater Photographer of the Year 2024: *Whale Bones*, by Alex Dawson, Sweden (right)

Behavior Category Winner: *The End of the Baitball*, by Rafael Fernandez Caballero, Spain (below)

Portrait Category Winner: *Grey Whale Connection*, by Rafael Fernandez Caballero, Spain (center)

## Underwater Photographer of the Year 2024 Winners

A poignant image capturing a freediver surveying the aftermath of whaling has earned Alex Dawson from Sweden the prestigious title of Underwater Photographer of the Year 2024. Dawson's captivating photograph, entitled *Whale Bones*, emerged victorious from a pool of 6,500 submissions by underwater photographers hailing from diverse corners of the globe.

"*Whale Bones* was photographed in the toughest conditions," said Alex Mustard, chair of the judging panel, "as a breath-hold diver descends below the Greenland ice sheet to bear witness to the carcasses. The composition invites us to consider our impact on the great creatures of this planet. Since the rise of humans, wild animals have declined by 85%. Today, just 4% of mammals are wildlife, the remaining 96% are humans and our livestock. Our way needs to change to find a balance with nature."



ALEX DAWSON / UPI / VIA PRESS RELEASE



RAFAEL FERNANDEZ CABALLERO / UPI / VIA PRESS RELEASE

Whales took center stage among this year's victorious images, with Spanish photographer Rafael Fernandez Caballero clinching two categories with his captivating portrayals of these majestic ocean dwellers: a close-up of a grey whale's eye and a dynamic

shot capturing a Bryde's whale engulfing an entire bait ball, both captured in the breath-taking backdrop of Magdalena Bay, Baja California, Mexico. Fernandez Caballero seized the moment for *Grey Whale Connection* while adrift in a small boat, positioning his cam-

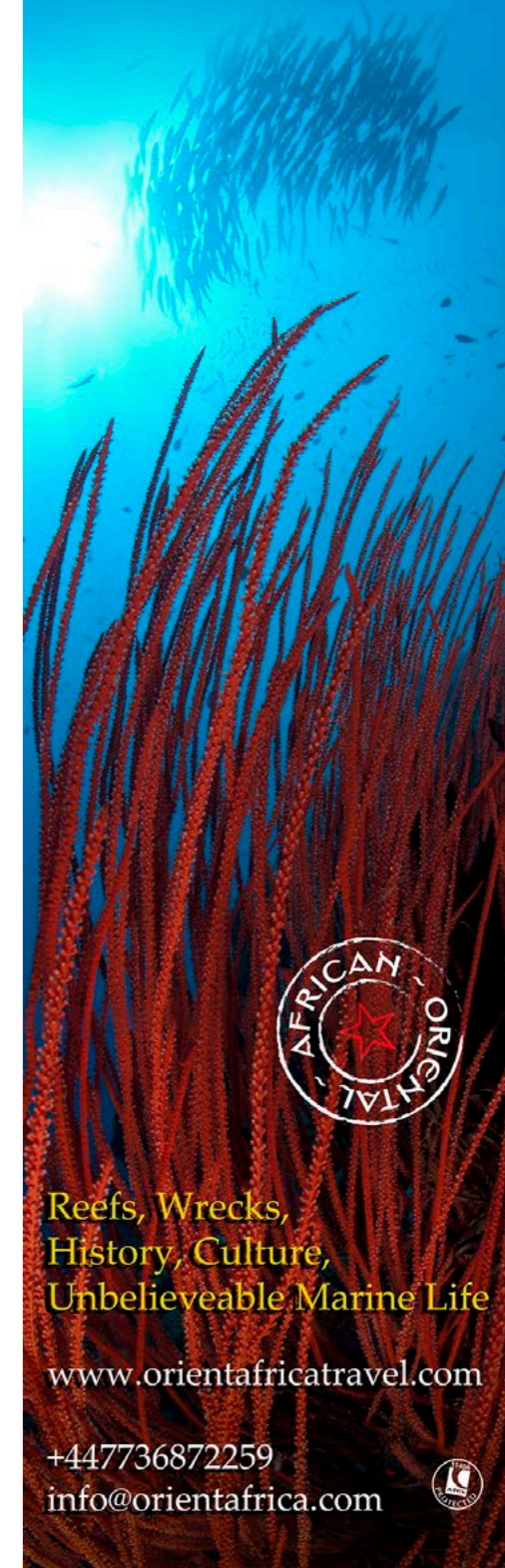
era over the water's edge to capture the inquisitive whale. For *The End of a Baitball*, he immersed himself underwater, ensuring he was precisely positioned to photograph the whale lunging.

"The photo shows the high-speed attack," he said, "with the whale engulfing hundreds of kilograms of sardines in one bite—simply unforgettable to see predation on such a scale."

### Up & Coming award

Lisa Stengel from the United States secured the title of Up & Coming Underwater Photographer of the Year 2024 for her mesmerizing depiction of a mahi-mahi capturing a sardine in the waters of Mexico. Stengel expertly captured the fleeting moment with precision and finesse by using her hear-

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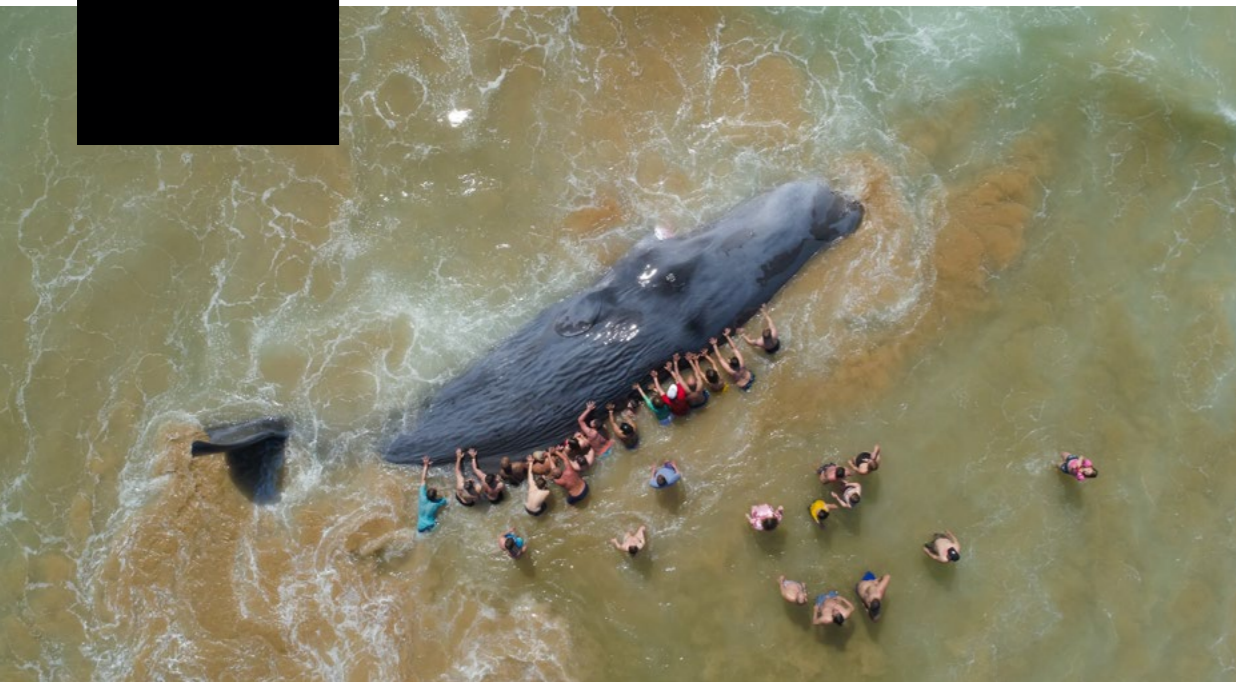
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Up & Coming Underwater Photographer of the Year 2024: *Window of Opportunity*, by Lisa Stengel, United States (right)



NUNO SÁ / UPIY / VIA PRESS RELEASE

Save Our Seas Foundation Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2024: *Saving Goliath*, by Nuno Sá, Portugal (above)

ing and a very fast shutter speed. "If you listen there's an enormous amount of sound in the ocean," she said. "The action was too fast to see, so I homed in on the sound of the attacks with my camera to capture this special moment."

"It is such an exciting time in underwater photography because photographers are capturing such amazing new images, by visiting new locations and using the latest cameras," said judge Alex Mustard. "Until this year I'd hardly ever see a photo of a mahi mahi, now Lisa has photographed one hunting, action that plays out in the blink of an eye."

### British award

As the Underwater Photographer of the Year contest is based in the United Kingdom, the British Underwater Photographer of the Year 2024 award went to Jenny Stock for her image *Star Attraction*, which features frequently over-

looked species of British wildlife.

As she explored Scotland's western coast, Stock said "in the dark green depths my torch picked out the vivid colors of a living carpet of thousands of brittle stars, each with a different pattern. I was happily snapping away, when I spotted this purple sea urchin and I got really excited."

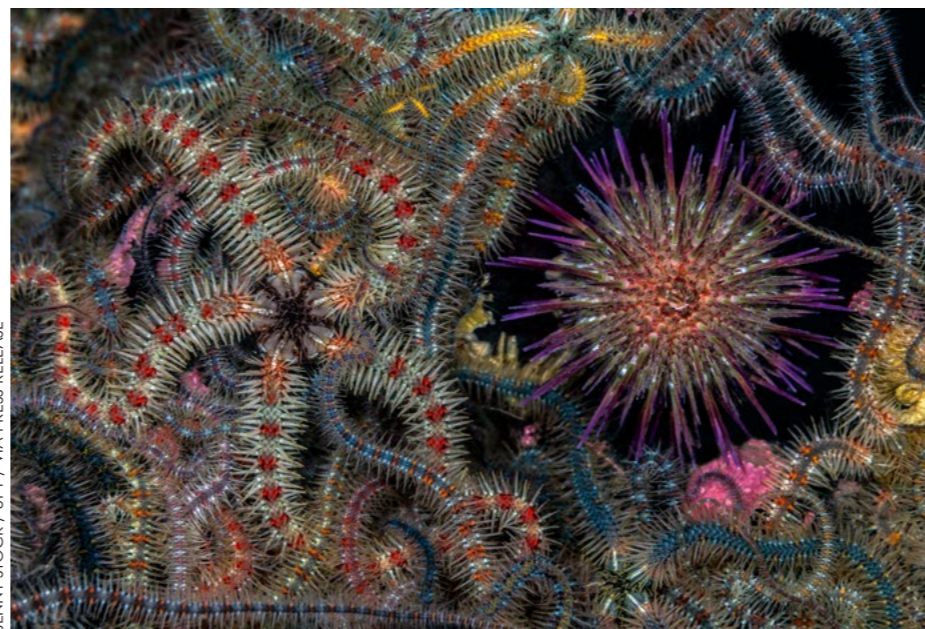
### Marine Conservation award

In the same competition, the Save Our Seas Foundation Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2024 award went to Portuguese photographer, Nuno Sá, for his photo *Saving Goliath*, which was taken in Portugal. A stranded sperm whale and beachgoers attempting to save it is captured in Sá's photo. The image inspires hope in people's concern for the oceans but underscores the necessity for substantial, transformative actions.

"The whale had been struck by a ship and its fate was sealed," said



LISA STENDEL / UPIY / VIA PRESS RELEASE



JENNY STOCK / UPIY / VIA PRESS RELEASE

British Underwater Photographer of the Year 2024: *Star Attraction*, by Jenny Stock, United Kingdom (left)

Sá. "An estimated 20,000 whales are killed every year, and many more injured, after being struck by ships—and few people even realize that it happens."

### About UPY

The Underwater Photographer of the Year, held annually in the United Kingdom, commemorates subaquatic photography across oceans, lakes, rivers, and pools, drawing global submissions. With 13 categories encompassing Macro, Wide Angle, Behavior, and Wreck photography,

showcase. Winners were revealed at a ceremony in Mayfair, London, graciously hosted by The Crown Estate, with judges including renowned underwater photographers Peter Rowlands, Tobias Friedrich, and Dr Alexander Mustard MBE.

The Marine Conservation category of UPY was sponsored by The Save Our Seas Foundation, which is dedicated to the protection of life in the oceans, especially sharks and rays. ■

For more information, visit: [underwaterphotographeroftheyear.com](http://underwaterphotographeroftheyear.com).

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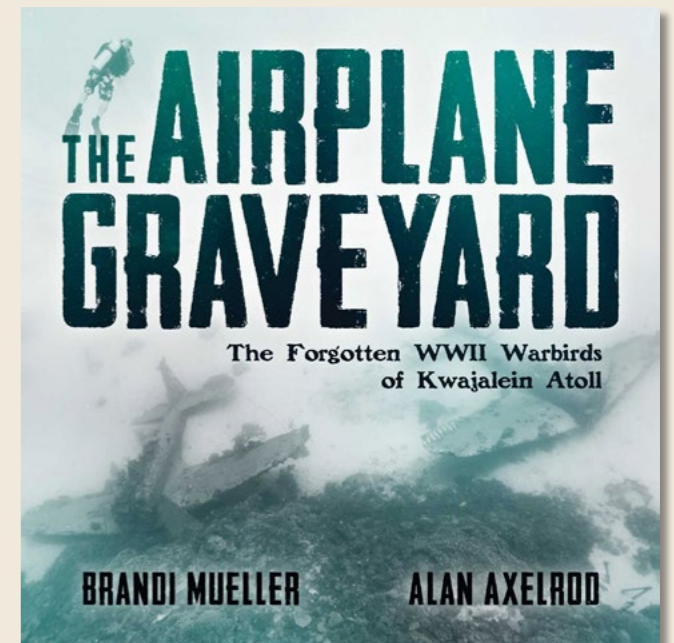
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