

Pod of sperm whales in Dominica. Photo by Amos Nachoum.

Text and photos by Amos Nachoum

Have you ever wondered how an underwater photographer got an astounding, sublime or compelling shot? In this new series, *Story Behind the Picture*, explorer and wildlife photographer Amos Nachoum shares insights about one of his captivating photos in each segment.

As the boat crew shouted eagerly, I adjusted my mask and fins and plunged into the warm, crystal-clear waters off Dominica. Moments after surfacing, I lifted my head to locate the approaching sperm whales. Having detected their clicking communications through a hydrophone, the skipper signaled that they were near. The crew's shouts intensified, directing me to the left as I submerged into a world transformed by the rhythmic

clicks of these majestic creatures. I remained motionless, entranced by the alien symphony surrounding me, feeling as if I were floating in space alongside them.

The silence that followed was profound, and in that hush, shadows materialized before me. A pod of five or six sperm whales glided gracefully toward me, aligned in perfect



Whale Whispers

A Dance with the Giants of Dominica

formation. I edged to the right, careful to avoid disturbing their path. It was a poignant reminder that these creatures, the largest carnivorous animals on the planet, move with such gentle and warm regard for one another.

Once the whales passed, I followed, mesmerized by the gentle

sway of their tails. At times, I drew closer; at others, they outpaced me with their effortless power. Despite losing them briefly, I persevered in their direction and soon rediscovered them, idling just ahead, breaking the surface quietly.

I paused, floating silently to avoid startling them, absorbing the slowed

cadence of their clicks. The pod then began a synchronized dive—one by one, the adults first, followed by the smallest. As they gathered below, their heads converged in a lotus formation, their clicks intensifying into a familial dialogue.

I witnessed this intimate ritual with awe, though the depth blurred my vision for a clear photo. Driven by the rarity of the moment, I took a deep breath and dived toward them, descending slowly to 20ft (6m), where I paused to observe. The whales' conversation grew louder as I reached 30ft (9m). Carefully equalizing, I pushed to 40ft (12m), camera in hand, and captured three precious frames of their touching exchange before my lungs beckoned for air.

Surfacing, gasping and invigorated, I was overwhelmed with gratitude for the natural world's gift—a glimpse into the profound connections within a whale family. This encounter, where I swam alongside the gentle giants of the deep, listening to their private symphony, was an adventure and a profound reminder of the intricate lives unfolding beneath the waves. The sperm whale, previously endangered but now numbering between 250,000 and 300,000 thanks to international conservation efforts, showcases nature's resilience. Their remarkable recovery since the 1986 commercial whaling ban

underscores the strength of their tight family bonds and cooperative behaviors—traits that have played a critical role in their comeback. These experiences emphasize the essence of wildlife photography: the intersection of endurance, precise timing and a profound respect for the natural world. It reminds us how inspiring and precious wilderness is when we approach it with respect and patience. ■

With over 40 years of experience merging exploration and artistry, Amos Nachoum is a renowned figure in wildlife and underwater photography. Widely published, his captivating work, revealing the power and fragility of marine life, has been featured in National Geographic, Time, and The New York Times. He has received significant awards for his dedication and skill, including two BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year awards. As founder of Big Animals Expeditions, Nachoum invites adventurers to join him in photographing iconic marine creatures such as great white sharks and orcas. His journey is captured in the 2019 documentary Picture of His Life, which chronicles his daring mission to photograph polar bears in the Canadian Arctic—showcasing his dedication to the beauty and wonder of the ocean. For more information, visit: biganimals.com



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