

Shark Trust Shark Photographer of the Year 2025 Results

14th July 2025

Shark Photographer of the Year 2025



Image: Indo-Pacific Leopard shark, Julian Rocks, Australia

Photographer Name: Julian Hebenstreit

Photographer Comments: I took this photo at a popular dive site off Byron Bay in New South Wales, Australia. The weather had been terrible all week with strong winds and rain, which persisted when I took this photo. It was cold and dark, strong waves gushing against the small rock island that marks the dive site. When I think back to the moment of this capture, I remember the stark contrast between the wild and uncomfortable outside and the calm and quiet world below the water. The leopard shark is an incredibly elegant shark with its pronounced body lines and long tail fin, carrying an immense presence in the water. I was freediving that day, and the shark passed me at about 15m deep, which is when I decided to try and capture the beauty of this animal to the best of my ability.

I selected this image because it reminds me why I do what I do. Why I dive, why I explore, and try to protect. It's not just about documenting wildlife; it's about conveying the fragile beauty of the ocean in a way that makes people care. I believe the contrast in this image is what makes it stand out. You can feel the cold and dark water through the photo, with the warm and angel-like presence of the leopard shark against the frigid background. The opportunity of interacting with a leopard shark is a memory I am intensely grateful for, as there are probably only a handful of locations in the world where you can encounter them consistently. It

was truly a privilege to have been able to capture this species and demonstrate the calming yet intense presence that these animals have.

British Isles Winner



Image: Smallspotted Catshark, Loch Carron, Scotland

Photographer: Hector Clarke

Photographer Comments: This image was taken in Loch Carron, Northwestern Scotland. The narrowing of this particular Loch near its junction with the Atlantic forces huge amounts of nutrient rich water through a small channel, creating a hotspot for marine biodiversity. Despite the fierce tidal currents, these narrows are my favourite place in the UK to encounter small-spotted catsharks. I found this individual resting on a bed of brittle starfish at around twenty metres depth. It seemed very comfortable with my presence, allowing me to get exceptionally close. I like how this image captures the density and diversity of life in this area, all the way from the multicoloured brittle stars to the exquisitely patterned catshark.

British Isles Runner Up



Image: Blue Shark, Penzance, England

Photographer: Colin Garrett

Photographer Comments: This photo of a female Blue Shark was taken 18 miles south of Penzance, Cornwall on June 28th 2024. My wife Sarah and I had booked a day aboard Celtic Fox, the vessel used by Blue Shark Snorkel, on a trip to go snorkelling with these sharks. I have always had a passion for sharks, ever since seeing the movie 'Jaws' on a black and white portable television in 1981 as a young child. A passion that has stayed with me right through to today and accounted for a collection of books on sharks - approximately 150 - that causes quite a few comments among friends. Along with this, I learned to SCUBA dive at 14 and have snorkelled all my life. Despite all this, one thing I had never done until June 2024 was to free swim with a shark of significant size. So being in the 86 metres deep water 18 miles from land with the most incredible coloured two metre fish was simply mesmerising.

British Isles Runner Up



Image: Basking Shark, Coll, Scotland

Photographer: James Lea

Photographer Comments: This image captures the moment I finally came face to face with a mysterious leviathan of British waters - the Basking Shark. We used to get them a lot in Cornwall - we would picnic atop cliffs and watch their sizable dorsal fins cut the surface. But I would dream of actually seeing one in the water, unable to imagine how it must feel to be alongside an animal of that size. After finishing my PhD in marine biology at Plymouth University, I resolved to celebrate by setting out to actually see a basking shark underwater. But by now they had become more and more scarce in Cornish waters, and so I began to search for

other places I might be able to reliably find these sharks. I quickly found Basking Shark Scotland, an operator up in the west coast of Scotland that regularly encountered these amazing creatures. I set off towards the end of the season on one of their research trips, long-suffering family in tow, and could not have been more excited to embark on an adventure to see a Basking Shark up close. But it wasn't to be. Seven days of almost dawn to dusk searching, and that excitement and hope of an actual encounter gradually washed away. Off we set back home, not knowing if another chance may come. Thankfully, it did! A couple of years later I found myself back up in Scotland, making another attempt to find these elusive sharks. This was a complete contrast to the previous trip, whereby the end of day one our boat was surrounded by fins slicing through a flat ocean. It was very surreal having put so much effort in before to suddenly be having to dodge sharks! But we managed to gear up and slip into the water and wait, hoping that one of these sharks makes a pass. British seas aren't known for their clear water, so it's quite an eerie experience dropping in and knowing there's an 8 m fish nearby, but you can't see anything. But then through the gloom you glimpse their big white open mouths as they career through the water feeding - at surprising speed - and before you know it this gargantuan shark is careening past you in its mission to consume as much plankton as possible. And they seem oblivious, focused on the task at hand, apart from that beady eye that clocks you for the briefest moment, before they continue past on their merry way. But it's a moment seared in my mind, finally making that direction connection with this enigmatic creature. We continued to be very lucky that week with many encounters and even got to see them breaching. It was truly humbling to witness these majestic animals in their own environment and an honour to capture that moment - a perpetual reminder of their wonder, and that we have that wonder right on our doorstep in the British Isles.

Overseas Winner



Image: Mobula Ray Migration, Baja California, Mexico

Photographer: Martin Broen

Photographer Comments: This evocative black-and-white split-shot photograph captures the extraordinary Mobula ray migration off the coast of Baja California, Mexico. Below the surface, a dense school of rays forms a luminous, geometric ballet, their bodies catching shafts of sunlight filtering through the ocean. Above, a small boat with observers floats quietly, a silent witness to one of nature's most graceful spectacles. Each year, thousands of Mobula rays gather in the nutrient-rich waters of the Gulf of California—a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the most biodiverse marine environments on the planet. These acrobatic relatives of manta rays are known for their synchronized swimming and aerial leaps, making their migration a breathtaking display of collective behaviour. Baja's Mobula migration is not only a visual marvel but also a vital ecological event. In recent years, conservation efforts by local communities and international organizations have intensified, aiming to curb bycatch, protect critical habitats, and regulate tourism practices. Sustainable ecotourism now plays a growing role in raising awareness and funding for protection, helping ensure that these rays continue their ancient journey through Mexico's marine corridors.

Overseas Runner Up



Image: Port Jackson Shark, Port Phillip Bay, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Photographer: Vadim Belakhov

Photographer Comments: An adult Port Jackson Shark basks in the sunlight of the shallows at the Teahouse Reef in Port Phillip Bay, Melbourne, Victoria. The abundance of these sharks in the reef's shallow waters is a major attraction for snorkellers, freedivers, and scuba divers alike. As nocturnal hunters, Port Jackson Sharks usually rest under ledges during the day or swim quickly to avoid people. This individual, however, was enjoying the sun in just 2 m of water, allowing me to slowly approach and capture the moment. I was careful not to startle the shark and left it undisturbed to continue daydreaming. Being alone with these truly wild creatures brings a sense of peace, and I aim to depict their beauty without interference.

Overseas Runner Up



Image: Chimaera, Trondheim, Norway

Photographer: Galice Hoarau

Photographer Comments: Chimaera are the closest relative to sharks and rays. Usually found in the deep sea, diving Norwegian Fjords at night offer unique opportunities to observe these fascinating animals.

Mediterranean Programme Winner



Image: Angelshark, Lanzarote, Canary Islands

Photographer: Linda Mazza

Photographer Comment: This photo was taken off La Graciosa, a tiny island north of Lanzarote, at a dive site called Montaña Amarilla. I selected it for several reasons. Angel sharks are critically endangered, making any encounter special - though sadly, for all the wrong reasons. They're also one of the focus species of the Shark Trust, which adds personal significance to this shot. What I love about this photo is that it doesn't capture the classic, angel-shaped silhouette most commonly seen - usually taken from above to show their unique markings, camouflage, and evolutionary perfection. Instead, this is a close-up portrait, taken purely by chance. I was observing another shark when I suddenly found myself face-to-face with this one. Luckily, I had my camera ready. I quickly zoomed in and captured the moment before quietly moving away so as not to disturb it. The resulting image shows an unusual and perhaps less flattering perspective. It reveals the flattened head, eyes, slightly open mouth, barbels, and skin texture in vivid detail - even the wounds and imperfections. This raw portrayal highlights not only their vulnerability but also their misunderstood nature in an increasingly threatened ocean. For me, this photo breaks the usual barrier between viewer and shark. It creates an unexpected intimacy. At that moment, I felt incredibly privileged - I could sense the shark's sentience and quiet expressiveness. Seeing its eyes and dermal denticles up close stirred real empathy and awe. Living in the Canary Islands, I see angel sharks on most of my dives, but I had never been face-to-face with one like this. It was a truly special moment.

Mediterranean Programme Runner Up



Image: Rough shark, Albania

Photographer: Andrej A. Gajić

Photographer Comments: This photo was taken during the clinical examination of an adult rough shark (*Oxynotus centrina*) caught by a commercial trawler off the coast of Vlorë, Albania. At Sharklab ADRIA, we run a dedicated clinic focused on studying trauma and injuries caused by fisheries, assessing post-capture survival, and rehabilitating deep-sea sharks. Mitigating bycatch and improving post-release survival are essential for effective conservation. However, a lack of species-specific knowledge can create a dangerous illusion about the true status of vulnerable species. We believe that generating such data is critical to developing meaningful and effective conservation strategies. This image is particularly emotional for me. It captures not only the extraordinary resilience of this less-known, critically endangered species, but also its complete dependence on timely and targeted conservation actions. Although we have successfully rehabilitated and released many rough sharks since, this individual did not survive—an outcome that brought half of our team to tears. I chose this photo to honour the strength and fragility of the species. It symbolizes both a scientific milestone and a deeply personal loss, reminding us why our work matters. The research was supported by an Explorers Club Expedition Grant and the UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention, and it has delivered the first empirical data on several deep-sea elasmobranch species in the Adriatic Sea.

Oceanics Programme Winner



Image: Silky shark, Jardines de la Reina, Cuba

Photographer: Byron Conroy

Photographer Comments: This image is of Silky sharks, a surface-dwelling shark that can be found in large number sin Cuba due to the protection they are afforded in the Jardines de la Reina national park. Cuba is one of very few places on earth with such a population and it is testament to the conservation efforts they have made to preserve their waters. To tell the story of these sharks I used a slow shutter speed to get some natural movement into the image, this also allowed me to use Snell's window at sunset to burn in some beautiful colours from the sunset above and show the relationship these sharks have with the surface. A memorable experience, amongst the best large animal encounters I have had.

Oceanics Programme Runner Up



Image: Thresher Shark, Malapascua, Philippines

Photographer: László Földi

Photographer comments: The thresher shark is perhaps the most beautiful and elegant shark in the world, and it is also my favourite shark. I took this picture in the Philippines, the name of the reef Kimud Shoal, is the only place in the world

where Thresher sharks can be predictably encountered daily, which attracts many tourists, and makes this place very crowded. Although it would be important to protect the sharks and to ensure the sustainability of the environment.

Living with Sharks Winner



Image: Blue Shark, Cornwall, England

Photographer: Gillian Marsh

Photographer Comments: This is a natural light image, taken while snorkeling in Cornwall approximately 15-17 miles out from Penzance. It was August bank holiday in 2017 and we had amazing conditions, with blue skies and sunshine, clear blue water and flat calm seas. We had put out a chum slick to attract the blue sharks but, over the course of two days, we had it all, not only plenty of sharks, but a group of common dolphins, a large school of blue-fin tuna, a basking shark and even a bait ball in the distance. It was a truly magnificent experience.

The blue sharks were bold and curious and we four snorkelers had a lot of good interactions with them, but I particularly like the interaction in this image. It's tempting to imagine the shark is asking the photographer "Have you got my best side?"

Living with Sharks Runner Up



Image: Whale Shark, Hurghada, Egypt

Photographer: László Földi

Photographer Comments: Late afternoon and our boat was returning back from the daily dive. Close to the port, we saw a boat, and people jumping into the sea. When we get closer, I took my camera, jumped in, and took this photo. It shows snorkelers getting too close to a Whale Shark. Some even attempted to touch the shark. This can be dangerous for the shark, but also for the people. Luckily, nobody was injured on this occasion. I took this photo to draw attention to the negative aspects of Whale Shark tourism and to highlight the need for increased regulations around wildlife interactions.

Great Eggcase Hunt Winner



Image: Pyjama Catshark (Egg), Cape Town, South Africa

Photographer: Grant Evans

Photographer Comments: This image was taken on the wreck of the HMSAS Pietermaritzburg, a warship scuttled in 1994 to be an artificial reef in False Bay, South Africa. This image was taken during peak diving season in the area, and this dive showed why, with 20m of visibility and abundant life in the water and on the wreck. Catsharks are my favourite group of sharks, and I was very excited to come across this eggcase, wrapped around a sea fan. I had seen it before, but never so securely, almost strangling the coral. I took this picture as I found it a curious sight, and it is important to acknowledge the sharks' life stages before it is a fully formed shark that is so often seen gliding through the nearby kelp forests. It also highlights the importance of the sea floor for these animals, as they need these sea fans to secure their egg cases safely. Bottom trawling threatens these corals and the egg depositing sites of catsharks in South Africa.

Great Eggcase Hunt Runner Up



Image: Smallspotted Catshark eggcase, Lizard, Cornwall, England

Photographer: Tom Ingram

Photographer Comments: This photo was taken on a spectacular reef off Chynhalls point on the lizard peninsula Cornwall. The image shows a catshark eggcase (also known as a mermaid's purse). It caught my eye underwater as I believe it to have only been entwined to the wonderful pink sea fan hours before I took this photo, as the striking yellow yolk sac and the tough, leathery egg case looked very fresh. As a diver it's always a thrill to see the fully grown cat sharks swimming about, so when you come across the eggcases it makes you feel good knowing the next generation is on its way.

Young Photographer of the Year



Image: Whale Shark, Maldives

Photographer: Panitbhand Paribatra

Photographer Comments: This was my first encounter with a Whale Shark, in April 2025, in the Maldives. It was such a joyful and unforgettable moment. I was very excited to see with my own eyes the largest fish in the world feeding on some of the smallest living creatures in the ocean. For me, enjoying this moment is not all there is, we must take action to help ensure these incredible, gentle giants of the sea survive. I believe that together we can help Whale Sharks live and swim freely in their ocean home, allowing them to share this planet with us for years to come.

Highly Commended Images



Image: Indo-Pacific Leopard Shark, Byron Bay, NSW, Australia

Photographer: Vadim Belakhov

Photographer Comments: This portrait image features a resting Leopard Shark, photographed at Julian Rocks in Byron Bay, NSW. While many images show these graceful animals swimming, I wanted to capture the calm expression and the striking, almost smiling appearance of one at rest. I took this shot at a depth of 10 m on a single breath, as I am a freediver. I chose this image to highlight the shark's harmless nature—its small, non-threatening teeth are clearly visible, helping to dispel fear and show that these animals pose no danger when treated with respect. The peaceful moment and the Leopard Shark's irresistible smile made this encounter especially memorable.



Image: Bull Shark, Florida, USA_

Photographer: Dana McConnell

Photographer Comments: Although I have been face-to-face with some of the ocean's top predators on many occasions, this day left a considerable impression on me. One morning, some close friends invited me to head out early to explore the open ocean. The sea was full of life with pods of jumping dolphins, bait balls of fish, and flocks of birds in the sky, all seemingly guiding us out to sea. As many ocean people know, if you are lucky enough to see so many animals from the surface, the probability of the ocean below showing some crazy animals is pretty high. Sure enough, as soon as we got far off shore and slipped into the water, we were greeted with the presence of one of my favorite species. Around 6-7 bull sharks emerged from the blue and swam towards us through a slowly swimming school of fish. During this encounter, I captured this picture of one of the more curious bull sharks. It remains one of my favorite photos to this day, and it reminds me of how humbling and powerful it is to come face-to-face with one of the ocean's top predators.



Image: Caribbean Reef Shark, Jardines de la Reina, Cuba

Photographer: Martin Broen

Photographer Comments: A split-shot photograph captures a group of Caribbean reef and silky sharks gliding through the waters of Jardines de la Reina, Cuba, at sunset. The image showcases the contrast between the glowing twilight sky above and the dynamic marine life below, with the lead shark emerging with a calm intensity. Jardines de la Reina—"Gardens of the Queen"—is one of the Caribbean's largest and most pristine marine protected areas. Located off Cuba's southern coast, this remote archipelago has become a global model for shark conservation. Thanks to decades of strict protection and regulated ecotourism, the waters here teem with life, including some of the highest densities of reef and pelagic sharks in the region. This abundance speaks to the health of the ecosystem and the success of marine protection efforts, offering a rare glimpse into what a thriving reef once looked like across the Caribbean.



Image: Great Hammerhead Shark, Tiger Beach, The Bahamas

Photographer: Laura Storm

Photographer Comments: One of our most iconic endangered sharks is the distinctly shaped Great Hammerhead. My first close encounter took my breath away - an exhilarating, heart-stopping moment with a shark boasting a simply enormous dorsal fin. They are powerful yet supremely graceful animals. This was my second visit to the waters around Tiger Beach in the Bahamas. It's a place I love deeply, not least because sharks there are protected. The light in the turquoise shallows can be sublime. Perfect for capturing big scenes and big personalities. Lying to the northwest off Grand Bahama island, Tiger Beach is open ocean, sitting geographically on Little Bahama Bank. The Banks themselves are vast - covering about 17,000 square kms of ocean. Surrounding the shallow waters of the Bank are deep trenches with steep drop offs. A unique combination that helps to sustain healthy populations of apex predators. Dedicated trips (like the one I'd joined) make it possible to spend many hours a day photographing all sorts of sharks. And that was critical in allowing me time to observe their behaviour and favourite patterns of movement. Interesting hierarchies exist between the different species, and individuals. In this Blue offshore realm, Great Hammerheads rule the roost. I'd spent many dives watching this particular shark navigate a sort of figure-of-eight swim circuit. This stood out as a little unusual because typically these big animals like to skim along the seabed. That's where their stingray prey lives. That's where they hunt. At the beginning of this trip, I'd made a decision to photograph my encounters using natural light as much as possible. I enjoy those sorts of challenges! Early one morning, with the sun still climbing to its zenith, everything came together. A certain clarity in the water, the perfect opportunity to shoot against the light. All I needed was an iconic star centre stage. The name of the game - watching and waiting - is where the magic lies. Then suddenly it's there, that special moment when you're in the right place, and you have a few seconds to capture what's in your mind's eye. I love that this image shows a different aspect of these distinct sharks. It's that perspective that I wanted to share. Their easily identifiable shape does all the talking. And the light. An afterglow. That incredible quality found in a sweet spot a few metres below the skin of the ocean.



Image: Great Hammerhead Shark, Bimini, The Bahamas

Photographer: Rowan Dear

Photographer Comments: I was holding onto the line doing my safety stop, when I saw this huge hammerhead coming out from the deep. I quickly sunk to the floor at 10m and waited as she swam right up over my head, helping me get this great angle, and with no people in my shot.



Image: Oceanic Whitetip Shark, Cat Island, The Bahamas

Photographer: Remuna Beca

Photographer Comments: Up close with a Critically Endangered Oceanic Whitetip Shark—an encounter I'll never forget. These sharks have an amazing presence in the water, exuding confidence and curiosity as they glide through the open ocean with unmistakable, white-tipped fins and a powerful, graceful build. Although often described as the most dangerous shark in the sea due to their bold nature and opportunistic feeding habits, in reality, Oceanic Whitetips generally avoid human interaction. Their reputation has been shaped more by myth than fact, and like so many shark species, they are deeply misunderstood and misrepresented. This image was taken off Cat Island in the Bahamas, one of the few remaining hotspots where Oceanic Whitetips can still be seen with some regularity. After multiple dives where these elusive sharks kept their distance, I was thrilled when this inquisitive female came in close enough for a portrait. She passed by gracefully, her golden eyes momentarily locking with mine, allowing me to capture her stunning eye in focus—a fleeting moment of mutual curiosity and trust. It's these encounters that deepen my respect and admiration for sharks and remind me why their protection is so critical. Oceanic Whitetips were once among the most common large sharks in the world's oceans, but today, they are teetering on the edge of extinction. Populations have declined by over 98% globally—a staggering loss driven almost entirely by human activity. As pelagic sharks, they inhabit the open ocean, far from coastal protections, roaming vast expanses of tropical and subtropical waters. They spend much of their time near the surface in search of scarce food and mates, making them particularly

vulnerable. Because they traverse international waters—known as the High Seas—they are exposed to some of the world's most destructive fishing practices with little to no regulation. These remote areas, which cover nearly two-thirds of the ocean, are rich in biodiversity yet shockingly under protected. Oceanic Whitetips often fall victim to targeted shark fishing and the gruesome practice of shark finning, where fins are cut off for use in shark fin soup and the rest of the body is discarded. Even when not targeted directly, they are frequently caught as bycatch in commercial longline and purse seine fisheries, which further devastates their already fragile population. Despite their precarious status, Oceanic Whitetips receive limited protection under international law. Conservation efforts are beginning to emerge, including some listings under CITES and regional fishing bans, but enforcement remains inconsistent. Urgent global cooperation is needed to safeguard pelagic sharks by establishing fully protected marine reserves, enforcing stricter regulations on the High Seas, and reducing consumer demand for shark products. Photographing this incredible animal was a gift—but also a call to action. Oceanic Whitetips, like so many sharks, are essential to the health of our oceans. By changing how we perceive and protect sharks, we can help ensure that future generations also have the chance to witness their beauty, grace, and presence in the wild.



Image: *Odontaspis ferox bis*, El Hierro, Spain

Photographer: Claude Lespagne

Photographer Comments: I moved to the island of El Hierro at the end of 2018. That's when I heard about a ferocious shark (*Odontaspis Ferox*) that sometimes comes to the island in summer. It's such a rare shark that I hardly believe it. My only known encounter to date is on the island of Malpelo, where this shark can swim upstream and can only be seen for a few months of the year, and quite deep.

In July 2019, I observed this shark for the first time, and although I was initially surprised and impressed by the size and mouth of this shark, we soon realised that this calm animal exudes tranquillity. I was speechless, almost teary-eyed, at the sight. This female is over 4 metres long. She has a prominent set of teeth that

she takes from the bull shark family. Her enormous black eyes scrutinise us deeply and follow our every move. It is slow and peaceful, and its swollen belly is clearly visible, indicating that it is at the end of its gestation period.

The females go up in the summer to give birth in order to protect their offspring from other sharks in the depths. Once their mission is accomplished, they descend to join their fellow sharks at a depth of 500 metres. The topography of the island of El Hierro is favourable to the existence of this type of animal, as the great depths are very close to the coast.



Image: Pelagic Thresher Shark, Malapascua, Philippines

Photographer: Michael Gallagher

Photographer Comments: I took this photograph of a pelagic thresher shark whilst scuba diving off the coast of Malapascua Island in the Philippines, which is one of the few places in the world where you can reliably encounter these magnificent and graceful sharks. By observing this particular individual circle the cleaning station for a little while, I learnt its favourite route and could place myself perfectly to take this head-on shot. Flashes are strictly prohibited whilst diving with these sharks so a black and white conversion perfectly complements the original photograph.



Image: Shortfin Mako, Cabo San Lucas, Mexico

Photographer: Rowan Dear

Photographer Comments: Mako sharks are truly one of those sharky looking sharks, and I had wanted to dive with and photograph them for some time. Heading to Mexico for a trip to find them and blue sharks, i was hopeful i would get that encounter. After a few days of great blue shark encounters, we finally had the makos coming in. Fast, but shy, they would zoom in to check us out and leave as quickly as they came. Whilst the blue sharks you could see cruising in from far away, the Makos were on you before you saw them. This individual was only around 1.5m, but you could see the speed and incredible features on them. A truly beautiful looking shark.



Image: Silky Sharks, Jardines de la Reina, Cuba

Photographer: Steven Lopez

Photographer Comments: This was taken during a sunset dive in Jardines de la Reina, just as twilight gave way to darkness. As the sun dipped below the horizon and the boat engine shut off, silky sharks began to gather beneath us—a known behaviour in this region. They're curious but not aggressive, and they appeared silently in the black water. It was almost completely dark when I captured this photo. We couldn't use constant lights because the sharks would immediately react to them; we were diving blind at the surface, surrounded by more than 15 silkies. Only the flash of a strobe would reveal their forms—sudden, brief glimpses in an otherwise invisible world. Looking for something different, I dropped slightly below the surface and noticed reflections forming when my strobes fired. I quickly turned on a focus light to lock in my shot—just for a few seconds—but within moments, a silky shark swam up and bit it. Heart pounding, I switched it off, but I'd gotten what I needed. I waited, and this image emerged from that moment of intense stillness and instinct.

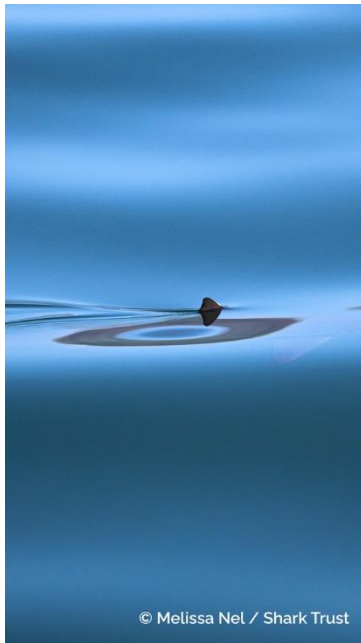


Image: Smooth Hammerhead, Plettenberg Bay, South Africa

Photographer: Melissa Nel

Photographer Comments: This image was taken during a dolphin-watching trip in Plettenberg Bay, South Africa, during the summer months when smooth hammerheads are known to frequent the area. Usually elusive and shy around boats, this particular individual surprised us by swimming directly toward the vessel, briefly breaking the glassy surface of the water and offering a rare, magical moment. What makes this photo special to me is the calm and minimalism — the shark's dorsal fin slicing through the still water, framed by gentle ripples and soft hues. It's a powerful reminder of the quiet presence of these ocean predators just below the surface. Smooth hammerheads are often caught by recreational fishers in the bay. They are particularly vulnerable to stress and post-release mortality, which makes encounters like this one even more meaningful. I selected this image to help raise awareness of their presence, fragility, and the need for education to promote their protection in South African waters.



Image: Solo spotty Traveller, Young Whale Shark, Huvadhoo Atoll, Maldives

Photographer: Mizy Maldives

Photographer Comments: While returning from a visit to a Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) west of Huvadhoo Atoll near Fenehutta, we spotted something unusual — the distinct pattern of a spotted dorsal fin gently breaking the surface. We slowed our boat and watched closely. It was a whale shark — a solitary traveler, gracefully feeding at the surface.

Without hesitation, we entered the water to respectfully observe and document the moment. What followed was nothing short of magical. This whale shark, curious and calm, swam slow, deliberate circles around us. She lingered, almost posing for the camera, and allowed us to share her space for over 25 minutes — a rare and humbling encounter.

I had only recently started exploring underwater photography more seriously, and this moment made everything click — literally and emotionally. The natural light, the clarity of the water, and the whale shark's elegant movement came together in a way I hadn't expected. It felt like she was modelling for us.

A few days later, I received an email from the Maldivian Whale Shark Research Programme. The shark I had photographed was a newly identified individual — the 820th entry in their database. Knowing that my photo contributed to research and conservation efforts made the experience even more meaningful.

As a beginner photographer, this encounter reinforced why I love what I do. This image isn't just about the technical aspects of photography — it's about connection, emotion, and storytelling. It reminds me of the ocean's quiet power and the importance of protecting the creatures that call it home.

This is the photo I chose because it represents more than just a perfect shot — it's a memory, a moment of mutual curiosity between two species, and a reminder of why I first picked up a camera.



Image: Spotted Eagle Ray, Bonaire, Caribbean Netherlands

Photographer: Jean-Baptiste Cazajous

Photographer Comments: This image of a spotted eagle ray was taken during a trip to Bonaire. I love the image of the ray appearing to break away from the sand in the sunlight.



Image: Thresher Shark, Malapascua, Philippines

Photographer: Megan Shea-Graff

Photographer Comments: This was one of those dives I will never forget. Most people had already come and gone from the dive site, so it was just me and my

dive buddy left in the water. It was quiet, and that's when I spotted this Thresher Shark out in the blue, slowly circling. At first, it kept its distance. Every time it came around it would come a little bit closer, almost as if it was trying to build up the courage. After 10 minutes of getting closer and closer, it started coming straight for me. That moment felt so special. It was like the shark had decided it trusted me enough to come in for a proper look. I stayed still and just let it move at its own pace. When it passed in front of my camera, I got this shot. My absolute dream shot. What I love most is how much personality comes through in the image. Its big eyes staring straight at me. You can see how shy and nervous it is, but also how curious. And of course, its long, elegant tail trailing behind it, everything that makes a thresher so unique. Since this dive, I've completely fallen in love with thresher sharks. There's something about their faces, their behaviour, the way they move. They're not like other sharks; they've got this calm but cautious energy that's hard not to admire. This was one of the best encounters I've ever had. Not just because I saw a thresher up close, but because it felt like a real interaction like the shark had been watching me for a while and then chose to come closer. I'll never forget it.



Image: Wobbegong shark, Raja Ampat, Indonesia

Photographer: Philippe Lassalas

Photographer Comments: I was in Raja Ampat in April 2025. When I get close to a thousand of glassfishes, I didn't see the Wobbegong shark that was hidden behind in his hole. I put my left hand forward to see behind the glassfishes and I saw this quiet Wobbegong shark. I had to put my left hand forward many times before I could take the picture because the glassfishes were getting close to each other very quickly. I like this picture because I was very excited to see such a wonderful Wobbegong shark in Raja Ampat which is a paradise to dive in. The image shows a Wobbegong shark surrounded by a thousand of glassfishes and other reef fishes.



Image: Wobbegong, Raja Ampat, Indonesia

Photographer: Galice Hoarau

Photographer Comments: Wobbegong shark lying in small cave fills with glass fish. Wobbegong are an iconic species from Raja Ampat. They can be found lying under rocks or hiding in plain site on the coral reef. We had the luck to observe >30 individuals during our week of diving.



Image: Yellow Stingray, Tobacco Caye, Belize

Photographer: Billy Rolls

Photographer Comments: I captured this image during a sunrise freedive in the turquoise waters surrounding Tobacco Caye, a small island nestled along the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef off the coast of Belize. The area offered a mosaic of marine habitats—including vibrant coral reefs, sandy seafloors, and lush seagrass beds—each teeming with life. This particular shot was taken in the shallow seagrass, where the morning light streamed through the clear water. The natural sunlight brought out the intricate textures and colours of both the habitat and the

yellow stingray resting among the blades. I especially love how the sun catches the stingray's upturned snout, illuminating it in a golden glow that mirrors both the warm tones of the seagrass and the warm feeling I get when remembering taking this image.



Image: Zebra Shark, Julian Rocks, Byron Bay, Australia

Photographer: Joshua Blank

Photographer Comments: This image was photographed at Nguthungilli (Julian Rocks), Byron Bay located along the East Coast of Australia. I chose to submit this image because it highlights the zebra shark; one of my favourite species, and one that is perhaps not quite as well-known around the world. During the summer months we are fortunate to see these sharks in large numbers as they elegantly glide around the rocks with their long, spotted tails. During peak season, it's not uncommon to find yourself diving amongst 20 to 30 zebra sharks at any given time. When the clear, blue water flows, diving with these sharks is an incredible experience. For this particular image I was able to capture the 2 individuals shortly after interacting with one another leading to a unique composition.