



# photo & video

*Safe House*, by Beth Watson, took the overall theme prize at the UN World Oceans Day 2016 photo contest. Canon 5DMKIII camera, Canon 8-15mm lens, Nauticam housing, Ikelite DS 125 strobes, 1/125, f/10, ISO 160

Edited by Gunild Symes  
Photos by Greg Lecoeur,  
Brandi Mueller, Beth Watson

**In June at this year's United Nations World Oceans Day photo contest, three of our regular contributors won awards. American photographer Beth Watson claimed the competition's grand prize, the overall theme award "Healthy oceans, healthy planet"; French photographer Greg Lecoeur won first place in the Underwater Life category, second place in the Above Water Seascapes category and third place in the Underwater Seascapes category; and American photographer Brandi Mueller won third place in the Underwater Life category. Here are the stories behind their winning shots.**



## How I Got the Shot

### Beth Watson

My husband and I were diving the epic Birds Head Seascape region known as Raja Ampat, Indonesia. It was a blissful day and our next dive site was Citrus Ridge. This is a

highly anticipated dive site known for its beauty and diversity.

From my previous experience, I knew mangroves grew on the shoreline and wanted to capture their beauty again. We dropped

in on a gradual sloping wall, our dive group descended to explore the deeper area, but I headed towards the shallows where the mangroves trees adorned the shoreline. The visibility was good,

the sun was shining and a few clouds were in the sky.

Experimenting with different camera settings, I dialed in the appropriate settings to balance the ambient light with a bit of

strobe flash. Reflections are something that I enjoy capturing. I proceeded to work the shoreline in the hope of finding something interesting and eye-catching.

About 20 minutes into the dive,

BETH WATSON







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*Green Turtle, Tenerife, Spain*, by Greg Lecoeur, took first place in the Underwater Life category of the UN World Oceans Day 2016 photo contest. Equipment and specifications: Nikon D7200 camera, Tokina 10-17mm f/3.5-4.5 lens, Nauticam housing, Ikelite DS160 strobes, 1/250, f/11, ISO 100



GREG LECOEUR

*Humpback Breach, Port Saint John's, South Africa*, by Greg Lecoeur, took second place in the Above Water Seascapes category of the UN World Oceans Day 2016 photo contest. Equipment and specifications: Nikon D7200 camera, Tokina 10-17mm f/3.5-4.5 lens, 1/1000, f/8, ISO 400

I crossed an inlet that led into the bay. On the corner was a beautiful grouping of mangroves. The arrangement was especially appealing because the sloping wall, soft corals and growth protruding from the sandy bottom would provide a foreground element, giving the image depth and dimension. I noticed three juvenile batfish hanging out underneath the mangrove canopy and knew there was potential to capture something special.

It was important to stay focused. I kept my left eye open, looking out for the occasional crocodile, and kept my right eye glued to the

viewfinder, waiting and hoping for that magical moment when the batfish were in alignment. Several anxious minutes passed... then it happened. All three batfish turned magically, positioning themselves in the center of my viewfinder. The image was recorded, and after deliberation, the image was titled "Safe House."

### Greg Lecoeur

#### **Green Turtle, Tenerife, Spain.**

Photographing marine life is not so easy and requires a lot of patience. But sometimes we are lucky and all the ingredients come together to achieve the expected



GREG LECOEUR

image, as during this dive in Tenerife when the conditions were perfect. This green sea turtle decided

to play like a model through the sunlight. So all that remained for me to do was to set the exposure

and frame the shot!



GREG LECOEUR

*Sharks and Rays, Moorea, French Polynesia*, by Greg Lecoeur, took third place in the Underwater Seascapes category of the UN World Oceans Day 2106 photo contest. Equipment and specifications: Nikon D7200 camera, Tokina 10-17mm f/3.5-4.5 lens, Nauticam housing, Ikelite DS160 strobes, 1/250, f/13, ISO 100

#### **Humpback Breach, Port Saint John's, South Africa.**

During the Sardine Run event along the wild coast of South Africa, it is also the time for the migration of the humpback whales. I was looking for bait ball action when I spotted a big splash on the horizon. It was a humpback whale breaching. The whale was probably communicating with others mammals and didn't stop breaching. It was spectacular to see how 40 tons came out of the water, while the light on the horizon provided something magical to the scenery.

#### **Shark and Rays, Moorea, French Polynesia.**

rench Polynesia is an amazing place for nature lovers. In the lagoon of Moorea, I was snorkeling with a lot of marine life, especially blacktip sharks and rays.

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photo & video



BRANDI MUELLER

Initially I stopped at the anemone because I was drawn to the pretty purple color and the contrast of the orange clownfish (left). After getting a few shots of the clownfish I noticed several cleaner shrimp in the anemone too (left and below).



BRANDI MUELLER

### Brandi Mueller

Muck diving in the Philippines is always a treasure hunt and it is one of my favorite types of diving because you just never know what you might see. I was diving off Dumaguete, and at the very beginning of the dive, I was drawn to a vibrant purple anemone with two

false clownfish swimming around it. I stopped to take a few shots and I noticed there were at least five or six tiny purple cleaner shrimp hopping around in the anemone as well.

With my eye looking through the viewfinder, I was waiting for one of the clownfish to look at me so I could snap a photo when I noticed one of the cleaner shrimp was moving closer to the clownfish. Finger on the shutter, I waited, and the shrimp hopped right onto the clownfish and started cleaning the fish. I snapped a shot, and the second my strobe lights went off, both the fish and shrimp darted off in opposite directions.

I wasn't sure if I got the shot but I was hoping I might get another chance. So I waited, following the clownfish through my camera, to see if it would happen again. After about five minutes, they still hadn't gone near each other. Evidently,

the shy clownfish did not want any more photos during its bath time. I was really excited to get back to my room and download the photos to see if it turned out. In the end, I was pleased with this one and only shot that I got with the shrimp on the clownfish.

### Behavior and conservation

Observing cleaning behavior is one of my favorite things to see underwater. It always amazes me when an eel opens its mouth wide for a shrimp or wrasse to clean its teeth, but the eel resists making an easy meal of this food already in its mouth.


These acts of symbiosis show how delicate the balance of the ocean is. Every creature in the ocean is there for some purpose, so many of which we don't have any idea. This is one of the reasons why ocean conservation is so important. We need to reduce threats to every part of the ocean because we don't fully understand how it is all connected, and how even small changes may have huge negative impacts. That way we can all continue to observe these special connections in the underwater world. ■



BRANDI MUELLER

*Spa Day, Dumaguete, Philippines*, by Brandi Mueller, took third place in the Underwater Life category of the UN World Oceans Day 2016 photo contest. She said, "This was the only shot I got with the cleaner shrimp cleaning the clownfish." Equipment and specifications: Nikon D750, Nikon 105mm lens, Ikelite housing, Ikelite DS161 strobes, 1/160, f/16, ISO 200.


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CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Best Night – Mike Stallings; Best of Show – Mike Stallings; Best edited with Vivid-Pix – Mike Stallings; Best Wreck – Mike Stallings; Best Shark – Mike Stallings; Best dSLR – David Herrick; Best Compact Camera – Ray Darwin

## Roatán Underwater Photo Fest 2016 Report

Text by Brandi Mueller

The second annual Roatán Underwater Photo Fest was held at Turquoise Bay Dive and Beach Resort in Honduras from 24 September to 1 October 2016. Photographers of all skill levels met for an epic week of diving to practice and improve their underwater photography led by hosts Brandi Mueller, Andrew Raak, Paddy Ryan, Markus Daase and special guest speakers Mickey Charteris and Brenda Stumpf.

Roatán diving provides the perfect elements to develop underwater photography skills, with plenty of marine life and a variety of dive sites. Photographers practiced their wide-angle skills at dive sites such as the *El Aguila* wreck, a cavern system called Dolphin's Den, a shark dive and lots of beautiful mini-wall dive sites, which provided opportunities to photograph turtles, eagle rays, green moray eels and more. The dives also had plenty of macro life, including juvenile spotted drums, octopus, flamingo tongues and decorator crabs, just to name a few.

At the end of the week, a photo contest was held to show off everyone's photos from the week and honor those who got the best shots. Congratulations to the winners.

### The week

Participants arrived on Saturday and got settled in, unpacking gear and setting up cameras. After dinner, participants met festival presenters for introductions and a brief presentation on how to keep your camera dry, protecting the environment (from underwater photographers), and what to expect throughout the week. The plan was to keep everyone busy and immersed in underwater photography, with 16 dives planned and two or three presentations per day.

Sunday started off with two reef dives in the morning to check gear and make sure everything was working followed by a third dive after lunch. Before dinner, participants were split into two groups with dSLR cameras and compact cameras. Andrew and I gave talks on tips on how to get the best photos

possible, including camera settings, focusing, composition and lighting.

After dinner, special guest Mickey Charteris—author and photographer of *Caribbean Reef Life of the Bay Islands, Honduras*—gave a fantastic presentation on the marine life of Roatán as well as tips on what and where to look for some of the rare and most photogenic critters of the area. After his talk, everyone was super excited to go macro critter-hunting on the next dives.

On Monday and Tuesday, there were three dives each day focusing on macro photography on the first day and wide-angle, including a wreck



dive, on the second day. Host presentations included how to photograph fish, wide-angle tips specific to the dives in Roatán, editing and a crash-course in getting amazing macro shots.







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CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT:  
2nd Place Night – Michelle Scamahorn; 2nd Place edited with Vivid-Pix – Mike Stallings; 2nd Place dSLR – David Herrick; 2nd Place Shark – David Herrick; 2nd Place Wreck – Michelle Scamahorn; 2nd Place Compact Camera – Tom Hawkes



MICHELLE SCAMAHORN



MIKE STALLINGS

diving situations, including wrecks, shark dives, night dives, wall dives and caverns. The fantastic dive guides provide safe, helpful environments, going slowly while pointing out critters.

## Sponsors

The event was honored to

be graciously sponsored by some of the top brands in scuba diving, underwater photography, dive travel and media. Sponsors included DAN, DIP Shipping, Fantasea Line, Ikelite Underwater Systems, Light and Motion, Mares, NightSea, PADI, Sealife Underwater Cameras, SUSV FSSS, Trident Diving Equipment and Vivid-Pix. Media sponsors included Blue Magazine, Dive News Network, Dive News Wire, Divemag.org, Sport Diver, Unterwasser and X-Ray Mag. Travel sponsors included Caradonna Adventures, CM Airlines, Dream Weaver Travel, Erlebe-Mesoamerica, Maduro Dive, Roatán Charter, Subway Watersports and Turquoise Bay Dive and Beach Resort.

photographer, Brenda Stumpf, gave an after-dinner presentation about photographing models underwater, both in pools and in the ocean. I think everyone was thoroughly impressed with how much planning, preparation and safety is involved in getting her amazing artistic photos.

## Next year

The tradition will continue next year 23-30 September 2017, with returning hosts Brandi Mueller, Andrew Raak, Markus Daase and others to be announced. Join us for a fun-filled week of great diving, photography development, and an overall fabulous time at Turquoise Bay Dive and Beach Resort. Check out more photos and video from this year's event on festival's website, Facebook and Instagram pages: [RoatanUnderwaterPhotoFest.com](http://RoatanUnderwaterPhotoFest.com).

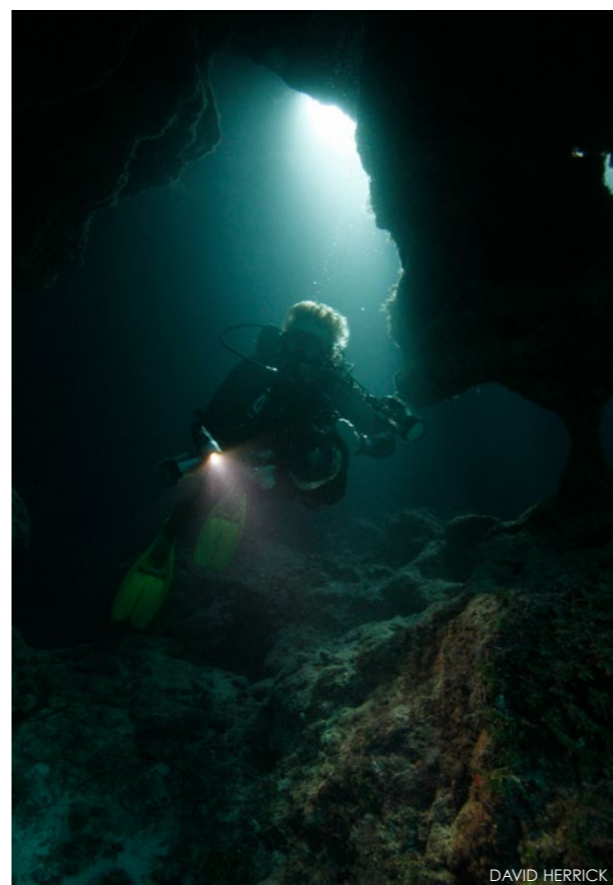
Wednesday was shark day. Vans were loaded with all the dive gear and everyone headed to Coxen Hole for Roatán's famous shark dive. This dive has been going on for over ten years and pretty much guarantees plenty of female Caribbean reef sharks. As expected, at least 21 sharks showed up, giving all the photographers plenty of shark models.

After the shark dive, everyone returned to Turquoise Bay Resort for lunch and talks on fluorescence night photography and more photo editing. Then participants headed out for a twilight and night dive on the reef. The night dive was particularly exciting, with several Caribbean octopuses out hunting on the reef, cryptic teardrop crabs, shrimp and even a few sea slugs posing for photographers.

On Thursday, the weather was ideal to head to Pigeon Cay, off the northeast tip of Roatán. The two-hour boat ride revealed the stunning coast of Roatán



TOM HAWKES



DAVID HERRICK



MICHELLE SCAMAHORN



DAVID HERRICK

and the ride was worth it for two beautiful wall dives with gorgeous, giant barrel sponges, lots of coral and fish life. Participants had lunch on the white sand beach of Pigeon Cay and took in some topside beauty (and photographs) as well.

and patterns that can be found underwater. His talk was an important reminder that amazing photos can come from even what one may initially think of as common subjects, if we look at them a little differently.

Special guest and underwater portrait

Returning to the resort, Paddy gave a talk on slowing down while diving and remembering to consider the amazing textures

and patterns that can be found underwater. His talk was an important reminder that amazing photos can come from even what one may initially think of as common subjects, if we look at them a little differently. Special guest and underwater portrait

