



# User Review: The Olympus Tough TG-5

Text and underwater photos by Lawson Wood

I was sent recently a new small compact camera by Olympus to test on home grounds as opposed to taking it away to perfectly warm, perfectly clear, overseas destinations. Considering that most new compact cameras are aimed at a local market, it made sense to try this one out at home. The new little compact is the Olympus Tough TG-5.



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This review is NOT a scientific test, nor is it a blow-by-blow account of how every setting works. This is a user review written after taking the camera into the water for the first time and exploring its capabilities as I went along on the dive.

### Features

Maybe it is just me, but when I first get my hands on a new camera, I kind of explore it before I even look at an instruction manual. Speaking of which, you really have to download the BIG and expanded manual (free) to get the most out of this amazing little device. (See: [http://cs.olympus-imaging.jp/en/support/imgs/digicamera/download/manual/tg/man\\_tg5\\_e.pdf](http://cs.olympus-imaging.jp/en/support/imgs/digicamera/download/manual/tg/man_tg5_e.pdf)).

**Settings.** So, checking out the dials on the back, there are a couple of new settings. Undoubtedly this is the King of the macro compact cameras as there is not only an "Underwater" setting (more on that later) there is also a microscope mode, also with

three settings. By far this is the greatest magnification ratio available on any compact cameras in the market today. I was able to zoom in to a small cowrie and even smaller nudibranchs. Thank goodness, I had the camera to be able to see the subject!

**Sensors.** This hand-held compact also has a 12MP CMOS backlit sensor. It is the same as the sensor in the top-of-the-range Olympus OMD E-M1, which makes for massive sharp images, high speed writing to the memory card and allows a maximum of 20 fps. The raw buffer is 14fps, but in only JPEG mode, it is almost like a slow-motion movie. Speaking of which, this Olympus TG-5 is able to shoot at 4K high speed and a full 1080 120p, which can be slowed down in post-production to only 30p



for some amazing slow action shots. The camera also includes full image stabilization, so video and stills are always sharp. There is a dedicated movie button for the full 4K, but one can operate recording in any other modes, including the microscope setting, but at 60p. The 12-megapixel image sensor gives the best image quality, with





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25-100mm zoom telephoto. With an F:2 setting at maximum aperture, it is perfect for low-light shots.

scope, microscope control, focus bracketing and focus stacking modes.

**Modes.** For underwater photographers, there are special modes incorporated: Underwater Wide, Underwater Macro, Underwater HDR or Underwater Snapshot. And for all us fans of macro, the TG 5 has an advanced, four mode variable macro system, with micro-

**Internal flash.** The camera's internal flash is easily accessible through the rear control wheel, allowing you to change settings to suit the subject and situation, whether you want it at full power, fill-in only or off—you can do this as you go. Similarly, you can

adjust the resolution of the photograph the same way.

**Underwater settings.** The underwater settings on the camera can also be changed as you go, with Underwater Snapshot—in which there is a compensation filter added when close to the

increased image detail and much less noise than anything else out there of this size and style of camera. The TruePic VIII image processor is able to deliver high resolution photographs, especially when shooting in low ISO. This image processor, taken from the Olympus Pro flagship system camera OM-D E-M1 Mark II, has an improved image processing algorithm, which is even more powerful, delivering higher image resolution in low-contrast areas especially when shooting at low ISO sensitivity, which can go to 12,800.

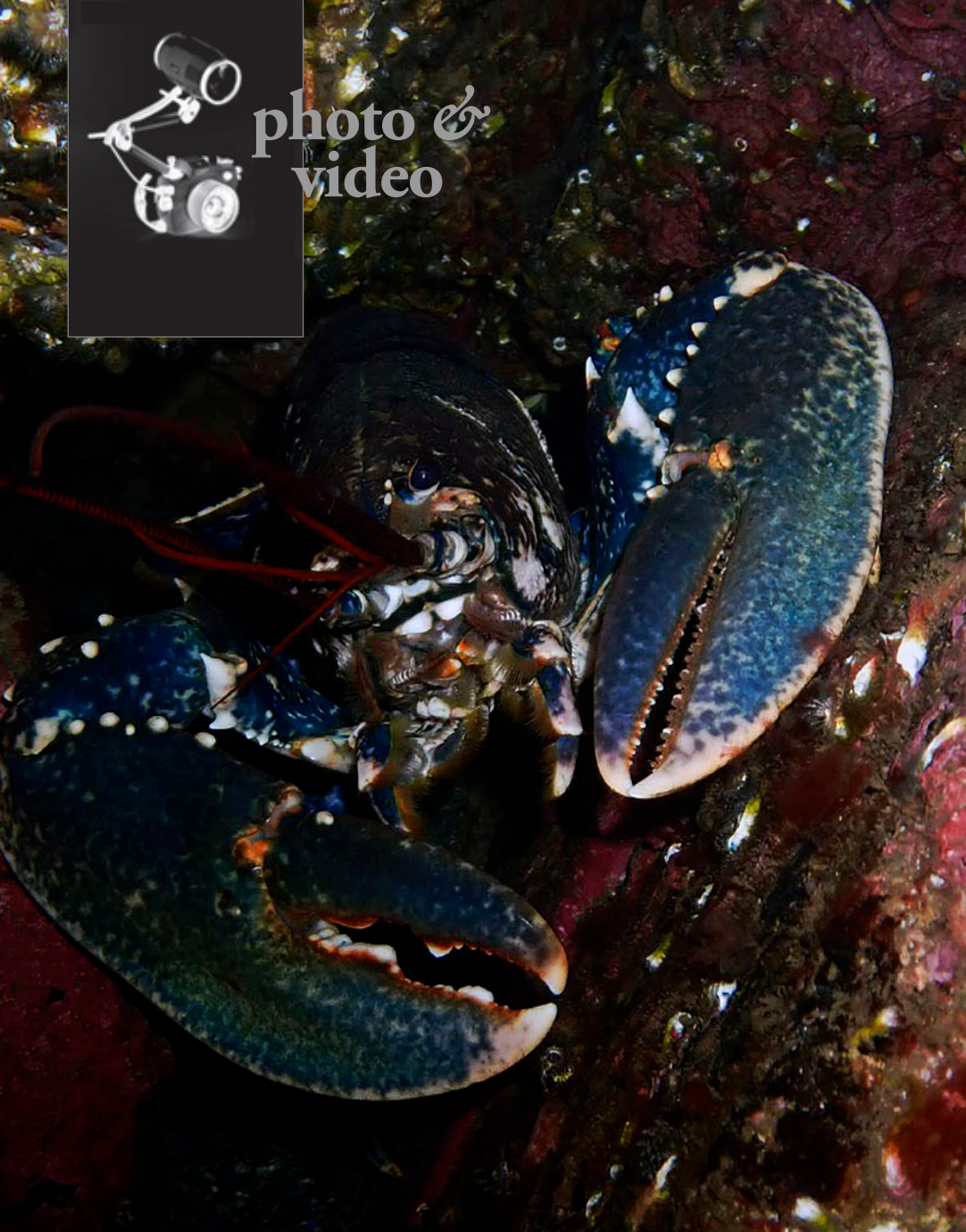
**Zoom lens.** There is also a 4x zoom lens, which is standard, giving the 35mm equivalent of







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surface (perfect for snorkelling); Underwater Wide; Underwater Macro; and Underwater HDR, in which the camera takes a series of images simultaneously and combines them in-camera to get the best colour saturation, best light and most optimum conditions of the picture, creating a more pleasing image overall.

**Pro Capture Mode.** Another exciting feature is the Pro Capture Mode, carried down from the Olympus flagship cameras. This basically involves the camera storing data as you start to focus

on your action photograph of a subject. Each time you partly depress the shutter, the camera will buffer the image to your memory card. When you finally take the photograph you are after, all of the pre-stored images will also be written to the camera, allowing you to choose the optimum photograph of that crucial action moment.

**Depth sensor.** Clearly, the 15m (50ft) depth rating is a massive plus, and the camera has a built-in depth sensor. At around 12m (40ft), a small banner is illumi-

nated across the screen warning you of the depth. At 15m (50ft), this warning is a much more obvious signal, with a large red triangle and depth warning. I am sure that if it could make noises, it would!

**Housing.** Should you wish to extend your depth range, there is an underwater housing also made by Olympus. All the camera's functions are accessible, and this case is waterproof depth rated to 45m (150ft). There is a fibre-optic connector to connect an external flash, such as the UFL-3. This is in effect operated as a slave flash by the firing of the camera's internal flash when taking a photograph. The housing is also neutrally buoyant underwater.

**Flash diffuser.** The one item that I really love with this camera is the flash diffuser—the FD-1. As we all know, using the integral flash with a compact camera is often a challenge, particularly in macro, as the flash is located in the top



left portion of the camera with a light output that may be cut off by the position of the lens in relation to the flash—particularly in macro or close focus/wide angle shots.

Well, Olympus has designed the

flash diffuser to fit directly around the lens, creating a ring flash—something which many underwater photographers would love to use for macro and extreme close up photography. This allows an even output of light to illuminate a subject. The diffuser even incorporates a lever for adjusting the strength of the flash. By controlling the exposure of the subject in the foreground, one can darken the background and make the subject stand out—to spectacular effect.

Although you cannot use this flash diffuser with the fisheye converter, this wide-angle lens can be connected whilst underwater or removed at your whim, fitting the flash diffuser as usual, to greatly expand your versatility underwater. Unlike other compact cameras of this type, you can attach waterproof converters and 45mm lens filters, using the conversion

lens adapter. This fisheye lens allows for full wide-angle shooting, without sacrificing the brightness of the TG-5's F:2 lens. The angle of coverage is 130-degrees and has an extended focal length of 19mm.

**Tele-converter lens.** Last, but not least, is the tele-converter lens, which is able to extend your actual focal length from 100 to 170mm. With its incredible, super-resolution zoom, it will reach a maximum of 13.6x magnification and still at the F:2-rated lens.

**Flash.** Olympus does have its own flash and it recycles at two seconds, has a respectable guide number of 22 and is depth-rated to 75m. But the camera will, of course, accept any proprietary flash that is fired by slave through an optical lead.

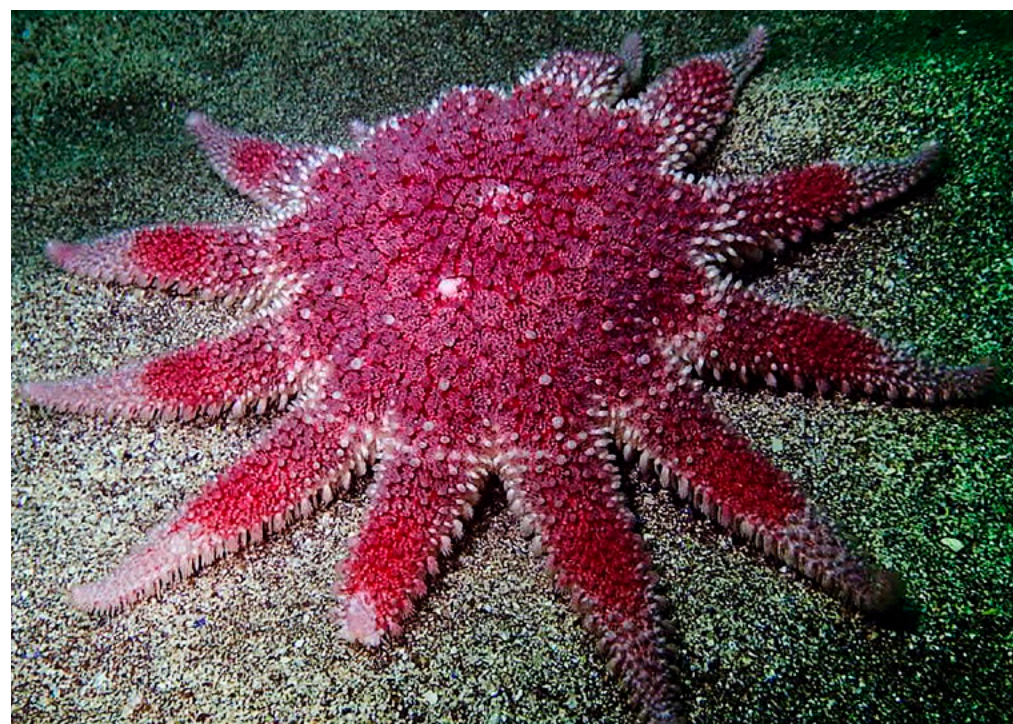






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the best macro and micro facility of any waterproof underwater camera on the market.

**Does it do what it says on the packet?** Much more than that! I was totally blown away by how versatile the camera is and how easily adaptable it is for changing lenses underwater without any loss of clarity or quality of photograph. The ring-flash gizmo is superb!

**How does it handle underwater?** It is quite small and compact, but that is the nature of the beast. It would be nigh on impossible to operate the camera with thick neoprene gloves on, but

for adventure sports; any wet or muddy work and yes, even an hour underwater off the St. Abbs and Eyemouth Marine Reserve in Scotland's North Sea, did not leave me undeterred.

There is one point though. I tend to use a small movie light by LUME CUBE [see my next review], which I fix onto the handle of a small bracket via the accessory screw on the bottom of the camera. Working in micro close-up, the variable output from this little light negated the effect of needing flash. The camera responded extremely well for "natural" light, even in wide-angle mode. It handled this type of light on the Automatic setting, allowing the

camera to do the thinking for me, and it worked amazingly well.

**Would I own one?** Certainly! This would be an easy add-on to my other Olympus equipment, as I currently use the OMD EM-1. The price for many can be prohibitive, particularly if you want all of the must-haves that go with it. But overall, I feel that the innovations are well worth the price tag.

**Would I recommend the camera and accessories to others?** Much more difficult to answer, as I have also to think of others and perhaps what their uses would be. You should never just look at a camera as a single entity; rather it is the start of a comprehensive and versatile system. The Olympus Tough TG-5 fits that bill admirably, as the supplementary lenses and flash diffuser raise this little waterproof camera to a much greater level of status.

### Final thoughts

Overall, I have no hesitation in recommending this BIG, little camera for everyone. I am con-

### THE COSTS \*

Olympus TG-5 digital camera  
US\$ 449.00\* / GB£ 399.00

Underwater case PT-058  
US\$ 299.99\* / GB£ 259.00

External flash UFL-3  
US\$ 499.00\* / GB£ 319.00

Flash diffuser FD-1  
US\$ 47.95\* / GB£ 49.99

Wide-angle fisheye converter  
FCON-T01  
US\$ 169.00\* / GB£ 120.00

Tele-converter TCON-T01  
US\$ 129.00\* / GB£ 129.99

Conversion lens adapter CLA-T01  
US\$ 19.00\* / GB£ 20.00

Silicone protective cover TG-5  
US\$ 26.95\* / GB£ 29.99

(Additional arms, brackets, connecting shoes and optical lead will cost extra, but all are made by a variety of companies, and all are a standard fit and design). ■

\* Prices listed are approximate.

**Sharing.** The last interesting point is the GPS, location compass, and, of course, WiFi, allowing one to send instant photographs anywhere on one's smart phone.

### Maintenance and cleaning

There are two waterproofed compartments. One underneath the camera, which holds the battery and memory SD card; the other is on the left-hand side, protecting the charging ports (USB & HDMI). Both have a double-lock mechanism, so please make sure that there are no hairs or dust anywhere near the silicone gasket

before closing the camera.

After a dive, remove any attachments and place all of the bits into warm water for ten minutes or so to allow any salt particles to dissipate. Allow the camera and accessories to dry naturally, and wipe with a dry, lint-free cloth. Then you are ready to go again!

### So, the questions are:

**Am I impressed?** Yes absolutely! The Olympus Tough TG-5 is small and lightweight, with lenses that are interchangeable underwater; it is waterproof to 15m and has



stantly amazed at how technology is advancing. I look forward to the next generation of underwater cameras, which are becoming more and more like the old Nikonos film cameras. These new, digital compact cameras just need a better depth-rating, and we will have moved full circle.

The Olympus Tough TG-5 is a joy to use, and I am learning more about its excellent capabilities every time I enter the water with it. ■

*Lawson Wood is a widely published underwater photographer and author of many dive guides and books. For more information, visit: [lawsonwood.com](http://lawsonwood.com).*







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THIS PAGE: First place winners in the Open Class;

RIGHT: Open Class, Cephalopod, 1st Place: Lilian Koh of Singapore. Koh also won the DOT-PAL Photographer of the Year Award for this image.



## Fifth Anilao Underwater Shootout winners announced

Anilao in the Philippines is home to some of the rarest underwater species on the planet. This location was also the base of the 5th Anilao Underwater Shootout, presented by the Department of Tourism (DOT) and co-organized by Philippine Airlines (PAL), in Mabini, Batangas.

Dubbed the "World Cup of Photo Competitions," the Anilao Underwater Shootout drew 173 divers and underwater photographers from Asia, Europe and

North America. The awards night and closing ceremonies at Camp Netanya were officiated by DOT Undersecretary Benito Bengzon Jr., with a keynote address by Secretary Wanda Corazon Tulfo-Teo.

### Open Class

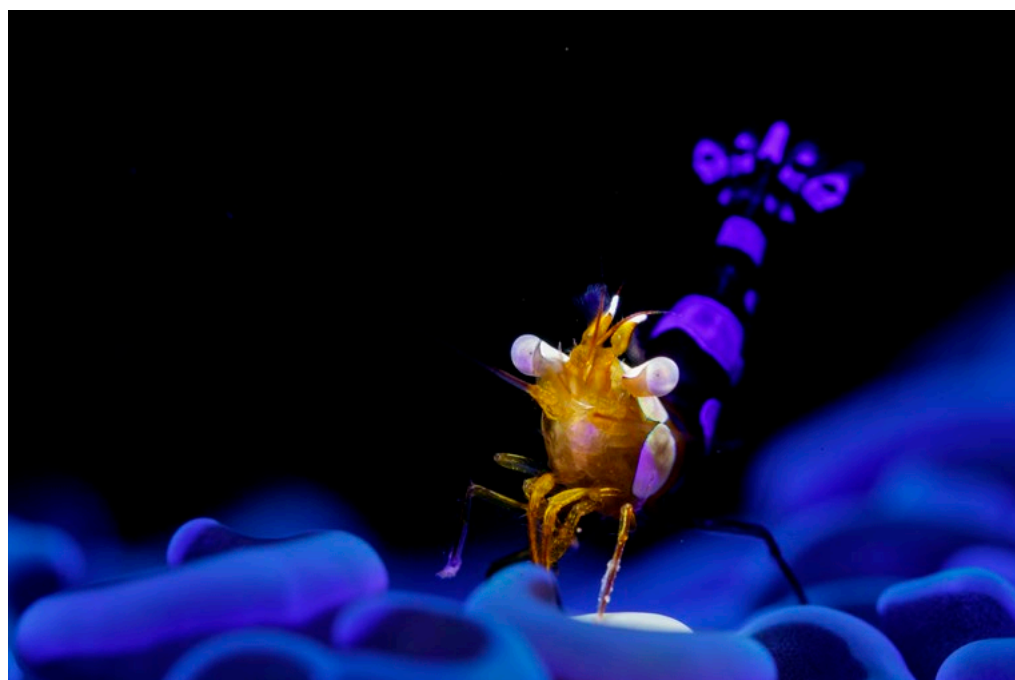
Macro/Supermacro category, winners included: Wu Yung Sen of Taiwan, 1st place; Hongchao Yao of China, 2nd place; and Navapan Janjarasskul of Thailand, 3rd place. Marine Behavior category winners included: Cem Gazivekili of Turkey, 1st place; Seungchul Yang of South Korea, 2nd place; and Wen Chih Yen of Taiwan, 3rd place. Nudibranch



Open Class, Marine Behavior, 1st Place: Cem Gazivekili of Turkey



Open Class, Fish Portrait, 1st Place: Wen Chih Yen of Taiwan



Open Class, Macro/Supermacro, 1st Place: Wu Yung Sen of Taiwan



Open Class, Nudibranch, 1st Place: Cem Gazivekili of Turkey

category winners included: Cem Gazivekili of Turkey, 1st place; Songda Cai of China, 2nd place; and Hakan Basar of Turkey, 3rd place. Fish Portrait category winners included: Wen Chih Yen of Taiwan, 1st place; Wayne Jones of Austria, 2nd place; and Dennis Corpuz of the Philippines, 3rd place. Winners of the new Cephalopod category included: Lilian Koh of Singapore, 1st place; Wen Chih Yen of Taiwan, 2nd place; and Peichi Chiang of Taiwan, 3rd place.

### Compact Class

All the Macro/Supermacro category winners were from the Philippines: PJ Aristorenas, 1st place; Penn De Los Santos, 2nd place; and Ma. Nerissa Fajardo, 3rd place. Marine Behavior category winners included: PJ Aristorenas of the Philippines, 1st place; Penn De Los Santos of the Philippines 2nd place; and Virginie Barfuss-Gofart of France, 3rd place. All the Nudibranch category winners were from the Philippines: Ronald Dalawampu,







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1st place; East Pardillo, 2nd place; and Jonathan Christopher Veridiano, 3rd place. Fish Portrait category winners included: Jorge Ida of the Philippines, 1st place; Nancy Berg of the United States, 2nd place; and PJ Aristorenas of the Philippines, 3rd place. All the Cephalopod category winners were from the Philippines: Ian Amboy, 1st place; PJ Aristorenas, 2nd place; and Eric Yee, 3rd place.

### Honorable mention

Special prizes were awarded to Ryan Berg of the United States in the Special Beginners category, and Yung Sen Wu of Taiwan in the Blackwater/Bonfire category.

### DOT-PAL Photographer of the Year

Two photographers were awarded the DOT-PAL Photographers of the Year Award, sponsored by The Department

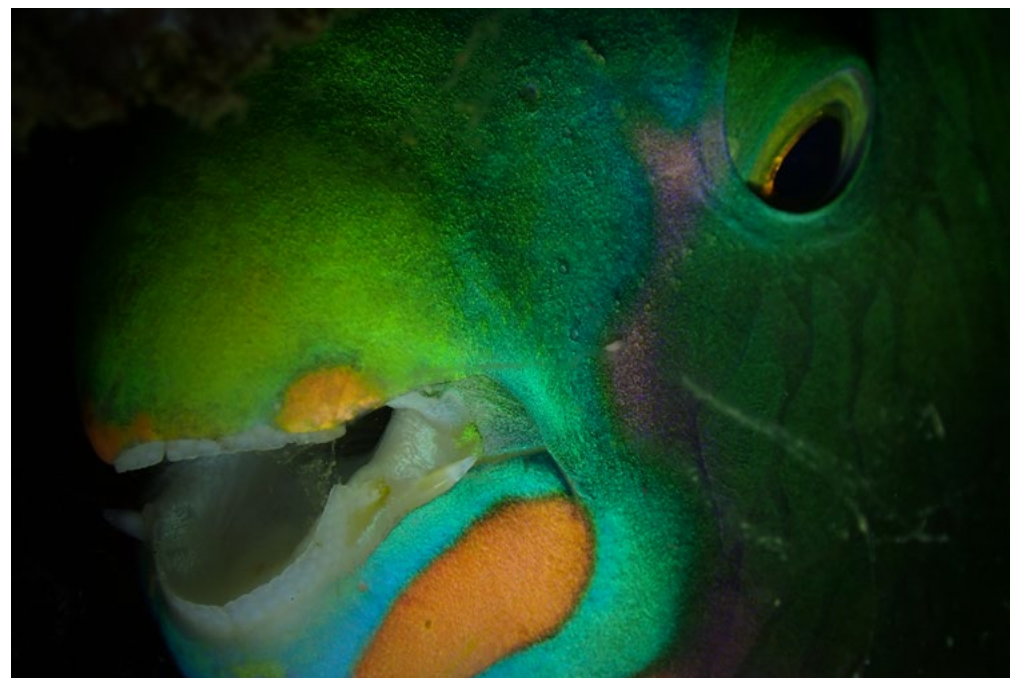
of Tourism (DOT) and Philippine Airlines (PAL): Singapore's Lilian Koh for her Open-Cephalopod image, and the Philippines' PJ Aristorenas for his Compact-Macro photo.

During the awards ceremony at Camp Netanya in Mabini, Batangas, Tourism Undersecretary Benito Bengzon Jr. said: "As the event grows and evolves, so does our goal in recognizing and highlighting the importance of Anilao as a dive destination with a unique and critical ecosystem."

### Judges

This year's panel of judges included renown names in underwater photography, such as veteran National Geographic photographer David Doubilet; photojournalist and aquatic

THIS PAGE: First place winners in the Compact Class.  
RIGHT: Compact Class, Macro/Supermacro, 1st Place: PJ Aristorenas of the Philippines. Aristorenas also won the DOT-PAL Photographer of the Year Award for this image.  
BELOW: Compact Class, Fish Portrait, 1st Place: Jorge Ida of the Philippines.  
BOTTOM CENTER: Compact Class, Marine Behavior, 1st Place: PJ Aristorenas of the Philippines



Compact Class, Nudibranch, 1st Place: Ronald Dalawampu of the Philippines



Compact Class, Cephalopod, 1st Place: Ian Amboy of the Philippines

biologist Jennifer Hayes; William Tan of Singapore; Tobias Friedrich of Germany; Cannes Palme d'Or winning photographer Scott "Gutsy" Tuason; and Cebu-based Japanese marine researcher Yoshi Hirata.

Resort, Balicasag Island Dive Resort, Buceo Anilao Beach and Dive Resort, Camp Netanya Resort and Spa, Fun In Taiwan (FIT), Pacifica Dive, Pier Uno Resort and Dive Center, RGLBlue and Weefine. ■

### Sponsors

The 5th Anilao Underwater Shootout took place in partnership with Nauticam and ScubaLamp Underwater Photography Equipment (SUPE), and was sponsored by Aiyandar Beach and Dive Resort, Azure Dive

