

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-

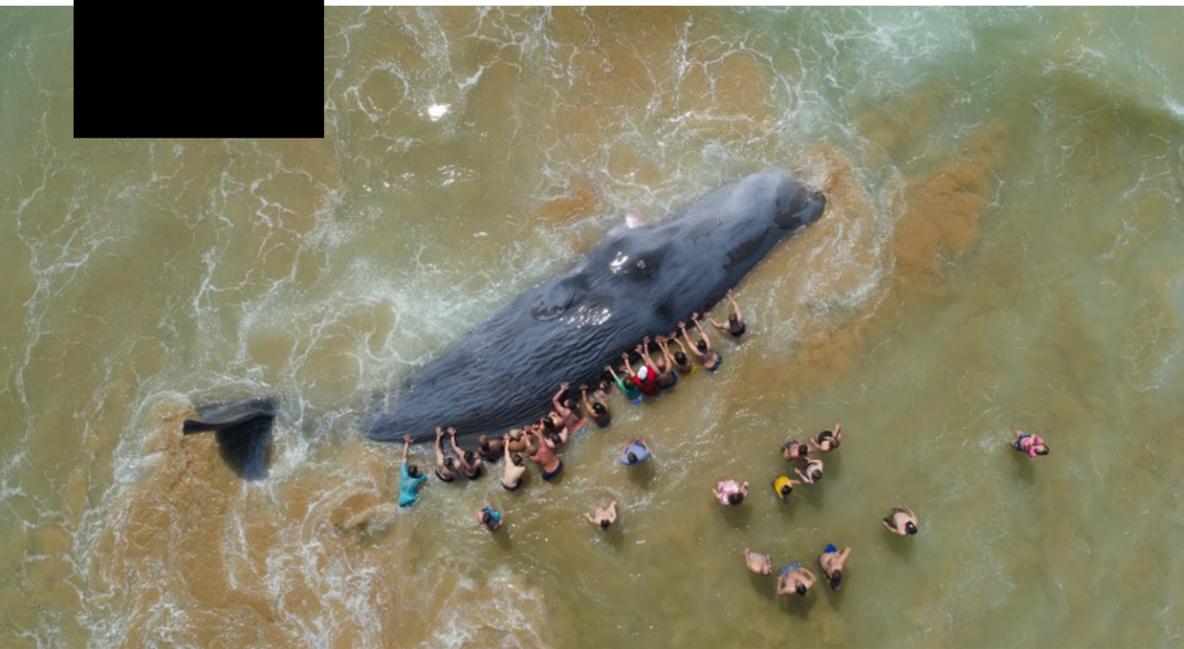
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Up & Coming Underwater Photographer of the Year 2024: *Window of Opportunity*, by Lisa Stengel, United States (right)



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.

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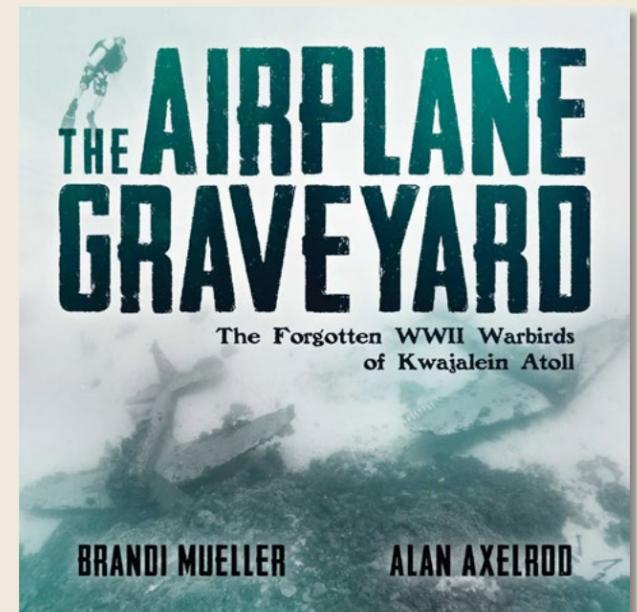
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