



SHOTLINES



Brian Skerry - First Encounter

Top of The Paps

IN A PREVIOUS edition of **SCOTTISH DIVER** we gave you a sneak peek at one of the images that caught the attention of the judges in the 2008 Wildlife Photographer of the Year organised by the Natural History Museum and BBC Wildlife Magazine. We are now able to show you the winning images from The Underwater World category which will perhaps inspire you to enter in 2009.

Brian Skerry's 'First Encounter' was a worthy winner, depicting his dive buddy drifting alongside an enormous southern right whale. Brian had this to say of his image: "Swimming along the ocean bottom with a 14-metre long, 70-tonne whale was the single most incredible animal encounter I have ever had."

It was probably memorable for the whale too, which became fascinated by Brian's dive buddy. The picture was taken some 22 metres down off the Auckland Islands, far south of New Zealand, and emphasises the sheer bulk and scale of this animal which is seldom visible from the ocean surface.

Brian had travelled to these remote and stormy islands specifically to photograph the population of right whales that feeds in the cold water around them. Almost certainly the right whales had never encountered humans under water and were as curious about the divers as the divers were about them.

2008 must have been Brian's lucky year as he also walked away with the runner-up accolade for his image entitled 'Underworld' where a blue cod is seen taking a stroll on its fins through an otherworldly garden of vibrant soft corals and starfish. The soft corals are sea pens - usually found at considerable depths, but here they are growing in the shallow waters of

Long Sound Marine Reserve in New Zealand's Fiordland, where tannin-stained surface water blocks out sunlight, 'tricking' deep-water animals such as sea pens into settling at shallower depths.

Careful use of flash has brought them to light, their arms outspread to filter micro-organisms from the swirling water. Fragile marine areas such as this one still exist in New Zealand waters thanks to federal protection.

Two highly commended images came courtesy of Laurent Piechegut of France and David Hall of the USA. Hall's image 'Soft Coral Community' depicts colourful corals in Indonesia: "Soft corals are one of my favourite subjects, and this particular colony in Indonesia was unusually colourful". Says David.

A shy goby was living with the colony, and deciding to make it the focus of the composition, David waited patiently for it to show itself long enough for a few exposures. The goby depends on the coral for shelter, as do many small animals, including the transparent shrimps and ctenophores (comb jellies) that also appear - or disappear - in the picture. For them, the choice of lack of colour is driven by the need to camouflage themselves in their soft coral home.

If you do feel that you could compete with these amazing images then you have from January, 19 until the end of March to submit entries and you can enter online at: www.nhm.ac.uk/wildphoto.

To whet your appetite for



David Hall - soft coral community

photography success a little more, why not visit the touring exhibition of all winning images when it comes to a location near you?

- March 21 - June 14
Scotland Street School Museum
Glasgow
- June 27 - September 20
Great North Museum
Newcastle-Upon-Tyne
- May 9 - August 2
National Museum of Rural Life
East Kilbride
- October 3 - November 8
The Beacon, Whitehaven, Cumbria



Brian Skerry - the underwater world

Aquatron Gang In Big Clean Up

8 STAFF MEMBERS from Aquatron Dive Centre in Glasgow were joined by 36 volunteers recently, to Dive for Debris and participate in a beach clean-up for International Cleanup Day. The day was spent removing underwater and shoreline debris from Loch Long by the Finnart Oil Terminal - a popular dive training ground in the West of Scotland.

Over 100 kg of rubbish were collected in over 30 bags, with specialist rubbish pickers and gloves that had been provided by Argyle and Bute Council. Among the stranger articles found were two car batteries, an oil drum and a large plastic chemical container, as well as a triangular road hazard sign saying 'Ford'. Over 300 cigarette butts were found, as well as pottery, bricks, plastic bottles and glass.

A beach-watch survey was also undertaken for the Marine Conservation Society who had a representative in the information marquee/beach-clean HQ. They were joined by representatives from Seasearch who were there to encourage past and present students of Aquatron Dive Centre to develop responsible diving.

Divers are the guardians of our underwa-

ter environments - this event is the largest single day volunteer event world-wide on behalf of our underwater environment.

Literally thousands of volunteers world-wide participate and it is a chance to celebrate diving and give something back to our marine environment at the same time.

This is a crucial time with the west coast of Scotland and its unique marine environment being offered greater protection when the Scottish Marine Bill comes into force this parliamentary session.

Aquatron organised this local clean-up in partnership with the Project AWARE Foundation raising over £300 from a raffle and BBQ which were held alongside the clean-up event. Drinks for volunteers were kindly donated by INEOS, who operate the Finnart Oil Terminal, and their key workers took some time out from their work to join the volunteers and clean the local beaches, as well as take interested volunteers on tours of the terminal itself.

Raffle Prizes were kindly donated by local



suppliers and dive clubs, including Suunto, Scubapro, Mares, Northern Diver, Fourth Element and Inverclyde SAC.

The day was a truly family event, with the youngest participant aged only two and the oldest over 65! Around 20 participants also entered the water and collected rubbish and surveyed the marine life - sightings of shoals of wrasse, a conger eel, dog fish and numerous edible crabs and squat lobsters were testament to the health of the local marine environment. A seal passed by but refrained from joining the divers!

A very energetic and productive day was had by all involved and a number of drawings and the best photos of the event are now displayed in the Aquatron shop. Photos from Jessica Learmont, Bob Otto and Kelvin Ng were among the best.



LOCHALINE DIVE Centre situated in a great location on the Sound of Mull has recently purchased a new 12.5m dive charter boat called: *Sound Diver* and are now taking bookings for the 2009 season.

The spacious dive boat has an onboard generator and compressor, toilet, purpose built deep-seated benches, and a hydraulic diver lift at the stern. Pick ups from Oban are available.

Lochaline Dive Centre has space for 34 divers, and has easy access to the clear waters of the Sound of Mull which boast some of Britain's best known wreck dives, in addition to an abun-

dance of shallow, scenic and shore dives sites. There are also a number of deep wrecks minutes from Lochaline which are in excess of 90m for those technical divers amongst you (trimix is available at the Centre).

In addition, the Dive Centre Bunkhouse is undergoing a major refurbishment offering underfloor heating and full en-suite facilities for each room.

Whether it's the boat or simply self-catering accommodation you need, or even a complete package including catering, then visit: www.lochalinedivecentre.co.uk for more information.

New Boat At Lochaline

REGALDIVE WAS delighted to catch up with the Marine Conservation Society gang during Dive 2008 and new member of staff Igor was game to join in the fun on the MCS stand. However there is a serious message aside from the show time shenanigans!

Regaldive feel that the conservation of our seas is vital and are supporting the MCS by donating £1 from every holiday booking made directly with

Regaldive from the 2008/09 programme.

MCS is a recognised authority on marine and coastal conservation, working on pollution, fisheries, and the protection of marine habitats and species, whilst promoting the sustainable and sensitive use of our marine resources for future generations.

Find out more about Regaldive and MCS by visiting www.regaldive.co.uk



Regaldive's Igor joins in the fun at Dive 2008

Regaldive Support MCS



Race Backs Whales' Search For Home



Orca Whales by Rob Lott

The Volvo Ocean Race started in early October from Alicante - travelling around the globe before finishing in St. Petersburg in June. WDCS has teamed up with the event organisers to highlight the need to protect whales and dolphins around the world ...

A FIVE YEAR campaign to create 12 highly protected 'safe havens' for whales and dolphins across the globe has been launched by WDCS, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society. The announcement was made at a press conference just two days before the start of the Volvo Ocean Race in Alicante, Spain.

Under the banner 'We Sail for The Whale', WDCS has joined forces with Team Russia, the only privately financed boat in the race, as the team's environmental partner. The race,

formerly known as the Whitbread round the world race, stretches over 37,000 nautical miles this year, visiting 10 ports over 9 months before it concludes in St. Petersburg in June 2009.

WDCS aims to achieve 12 large Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) for whale and dolphin species worldwide by 2012. With almost a quarter of the world's whale and dolphin species known to be threatened with extinction, time is running out fast for some of the world's most endangered mammals.

Erich Hoyt, WDCS Programme Lead of the MPA campaign said: "The campaign is very much in line with the spirit of the Volvo Ocean Race. It is a race against time and of epic proportions."

Currently, only 0.5% of the sea surface has any protection from damaging fishing practices, noise pollution, hunting and other threats that impact on the wildlife it supports. "When you compare this to the protection afforded to land animals, it is clear that we are really lagging behind when it comes to looking after vulnerable marine life" said Hoyt.

As well as safeguarding whale and dolphin habitat, these large protected areas would conserve the entire ecosystem on which they depend. The first proposed protected area is the Alborán Sea which, with 9 different species of whales and dolphins, is the densest and most bio-diverse marine region in Europe. It covers the area

between Andalusia and northern Africa, stretching 300 nautical miles east of the strait of Gibraltar.

When the race heads south towards Cape Town the journey will lead the vessels through West African waters where 15 states have finally agreed on better protection measures for small whales and dolphins under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). "A first and long fought for step towards better protection in this region", comments WDCS.

The 'homes for whales' message is to be carried around the world by *Kosatka*, Team Russia's Volvo Open 70 boat, one of the fastest class of monohull on the ocean. *Kosatka*, which is Russian for Orca, aptly symbolises the speed, agility, intelligence and team work of both the largest member of the dolphin species as well as the necessary skills for completing the world's most daring race for professional sailors.

WDCS has briefed the crews on whale behaviour and has been reaching out to the community in the Alicante race village. "The support from the sailing community is stunning. Thanks to our cooperation with the organising body Alicante 2008/2009 we have an educational programme that has already reached over 4000 children and more than 5000 people have already signed our petition", said Roenitz.

For more information on the campaign, and to sign the petition, visit www.whales.org

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