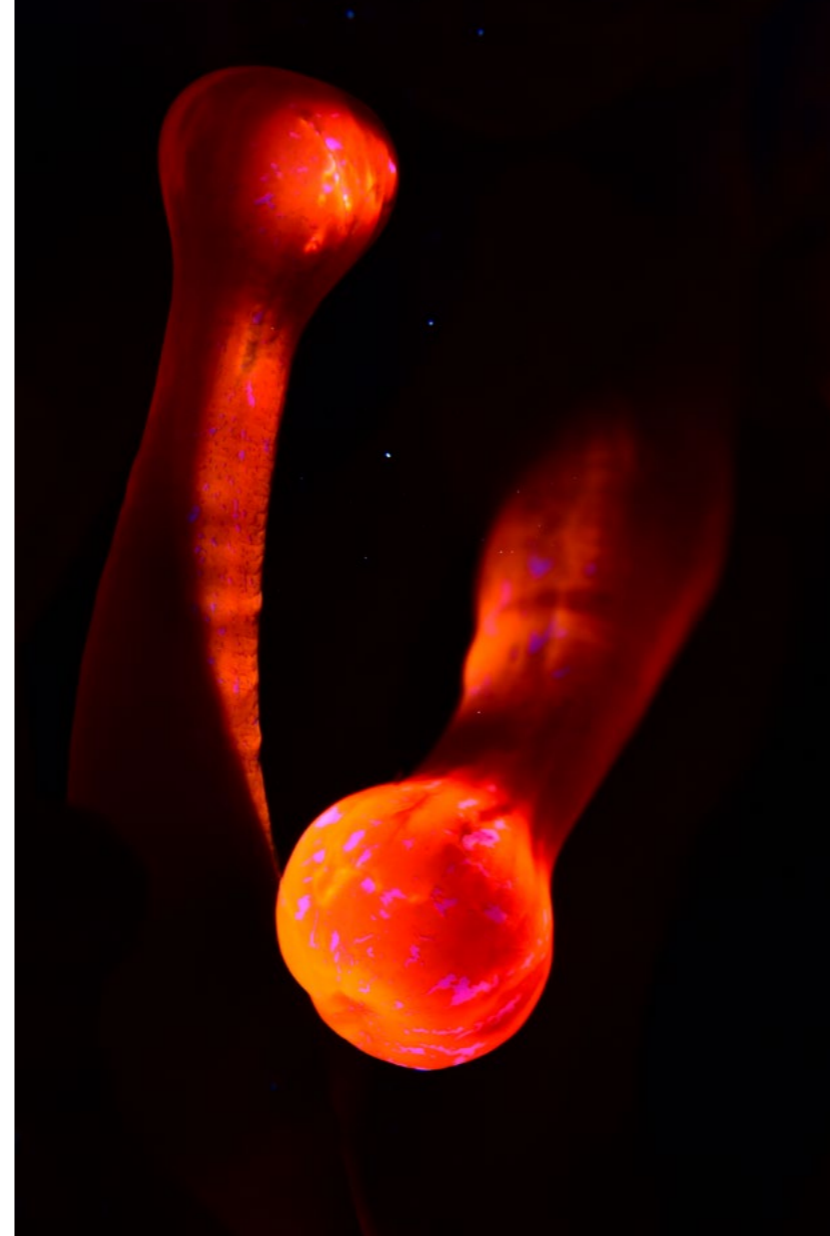




LEFT TO RIGHT: Close-Up Category. 1st Place: José Tomás Yakasovic and Gustavo Duarte, Chile; 2nd Place: Jesus Yeray Delgado Dorta and Abigail Martin Hernández, Spain; 3rd Place: Sebastien Ameeuw and Delphine Fraysse, France



Text by Adam Hanlon
Photos by the contest winners

The tiny charming and picturesque island of Porto Santo—the northernmost and easternmost island of the Portuguese archipelago of Madeira, located in the Atlantic Ocean—played host to the CMAS World Championship of Underwater Photography and Video, which took place on 4-9 October 2021. This biannual event was now in its eighteenth year and had attracted 48 teams from 18 countries, each competing for national and individual glory. Adam Hanlon reports.

2021 CMAS World Championship of Underwater Photography & Video

The CMAS World Championships are perhaps underrepresented by many of us in the underwater imaging media. Many of the teams are selected by their national bodies and attract funding from Olympic bodies. Placing or doing well in this event ensures both national acclaim and individual success.

One of the reasons for its relative obscurity is the actual format of the contest. It is based on the “photo-sub” style, with teams and individuals diving on specific sites and submitting images directly from the camera. Hence, the images are judged against other images taken under very similar conditions. So, it is the

best photographer or filmmaker of the day who wins, rather than photographers who have the time, money or occupation that allows them to spend long periods of time in exotic locations.

Diving

The diving at Porto Santo is temperate, with clear blue water and excellent visibility. At the time of the contest, the water temperature was 24°C (75°F), which is as warm as it gets. The dive sites are characterised by dramatic underwater scenery with encrusted boulders and a large variety of fish and critter life.

The Portuguese government has pro-

vided funding for the deliberate sinking of rocks to provide artificial reefs and attractions for visiting divers. Porto Santo has the wreck of the NRP *General Pereira d’Eça*, which was a corvette of the João Coutinho class. She rests at around 30m and is intact, providing a home to a variety of fish life, including grey triggerfish (*Balistes capriscus*), which are bitey like their larger relatives, although they are too small to do any significant damage!

Serious competition

To emphasise how seriously the competing teams take this event, many of them have been on the island for some time

before the official start of the contest, carrying out training dives to figure out how to maximise the opportunities. I was fortunate enough to join them on a few dives to explore the diving and to see what they were up to.

Having been in “travel isolation” for the past 18 months, and hence not having dived in blue water for that period, Porto Santos’ clear, blue and relatively warm waters reminded me how much I have missed it! The locals all told me that the visibility was not as good as it could be, and was improving, but given my recent diet of green water diving at home, it seemed wonderful!





photo & video

Creative Category. 1st Place: Eser Pasa and Tolga Pat, Turkey (top right); 2nd Place: Rafael Fernández and Esteban Montserrat Veja Moreno, Spain (left); 3rd Place: Hakan Basar and Ersin Tohumat, Turkey (bottom right)

Covid-19 restrictions

Travel in general was still not an easy process, with (in this case) pre-flight testing required and registration on arrival. In general, I would say that mask use in public indoor and outdoor spaces was being well adhered to, with mask-wearing being the norm. There did seem to be a general willingness to put other's health ahead of one's own convenience, which boded well for the removal of travel restrictions in the future.

Day One

The first day of the CMAS World Championship of Underwater Photography and Video was largely one of paperwork and ceremony. The nature of the event and the number of contestants inevitably meant that this process was somewhat protracted.

All the contestants were now ensconced in the competition's official hotel: the Vila Baleira in Porto Santo. As most of you reading this will probably know, underwater image-makers do not travel light, so it was fair to say that the lobby was knee-deep in housings and diving gear.

This was complicated by the additional steps needed to ensure that the contest was safe and did not become a superspreader event for Covid-19. To this end, all the contestants and staff were required to take a test, which was carried out as part of the registration process.

The local Portuguese CMAS Federation was critically involved in making this process run smoothly. The true heroes of the event were the scores of volunteers who worked incredibly hard to make the event a success.

Pedro Vasconcelos was the driving force behind the choice of Porto Santo as the venue, as well as the organization of the contest. He was joined at the registration by CMAS' appointed Technical Director for the contest, Cenk Ceylanoglu, and Director of Visual Communications, Kerim Sabuncuoglu.

After lunch, the whole assembly headed off to the center of Porto Santo town for a parade with all the contestants, and the offi-

cial opening of the contest. As always, this was a high-spirited and colorful affair, with much flag-waving and high jinks.

During the procession, each team was led by local school children. As a part of the contest, local children would also be participating in a program of snorkeling, drawing and creative exercises, beach clean-ups and rock pooling. It was great to see the competition performing an important and active role in developing

young people's attitudes towards the sea.

The contestants were welcomed by a group of local dignitaries, local government officials and CMAS representatives. CMAS' Sabuncuoglu formally declared the event open.

The last order of business for the day was the technical meeting. This was a venue to discuss the contest's rules and to brief the contestants on its organization. Vasconcelos introduced the contestants

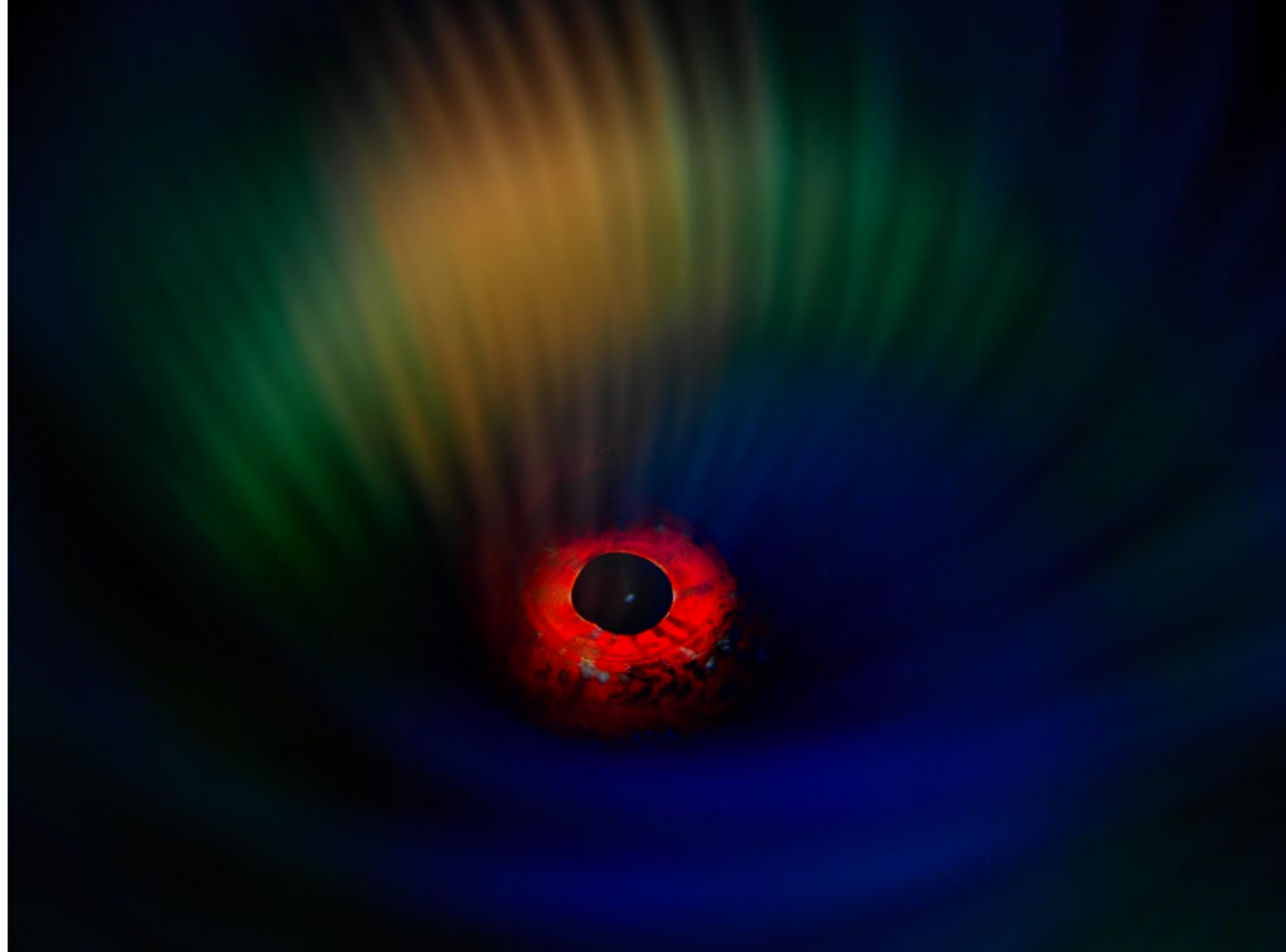




photo & video

Fish Category. 1st Place: José Tomás Yakasovic and Gustavo Duarte, Chile (right); 2nd Place: Filip Staes and Thomas Van Puymbroeck, Belgium (top right); 3rd Place: Francesco Sesso and Alessandra Pagliaro, Italy (bottom right)

to the team that would be supporting the diving operations, from a doctor on standby to the boat skippers that each team will be diving with. The head of the judging panel for the video contest, Julie Ouimet, had arrived from Canada and was roped into helping draw the group allocations.

Tomorrow, there would be “dress rehearsal” day, which would allow the organizers to iron out any last-minute organizational challenges, before the two days of competition began. I looked forward to visiting the clear blue waters of Porto Santo again!

Day Two

Day Two was a practice day for the contestants. As Technical Director Ceylanoglu noted, this was as much a rehearsal for the organizers as it was for the participants.

The structure of the contest was somewhat unfamiliar to many participants from the Wetpixel community. The goal of the competition was to select winners who produced the best results on the day.

The dive teams rotated through each dive site and were strictly limited in terms of dive time, depth and reserve air supplies.

The only edits allowed were those available to contestants in-camera and had to be carried out during the dive. Each contestant was limited in terms of the total number of images they could shoot.

Deletions not allowed

To enforce these rules, each camera had its memory card formatted while being overseen by a judge and the housing was then sealed. It could not be opened, except under the supervision of an official. A verification image was then taken, and the camera was reset to a (standardized) random date.

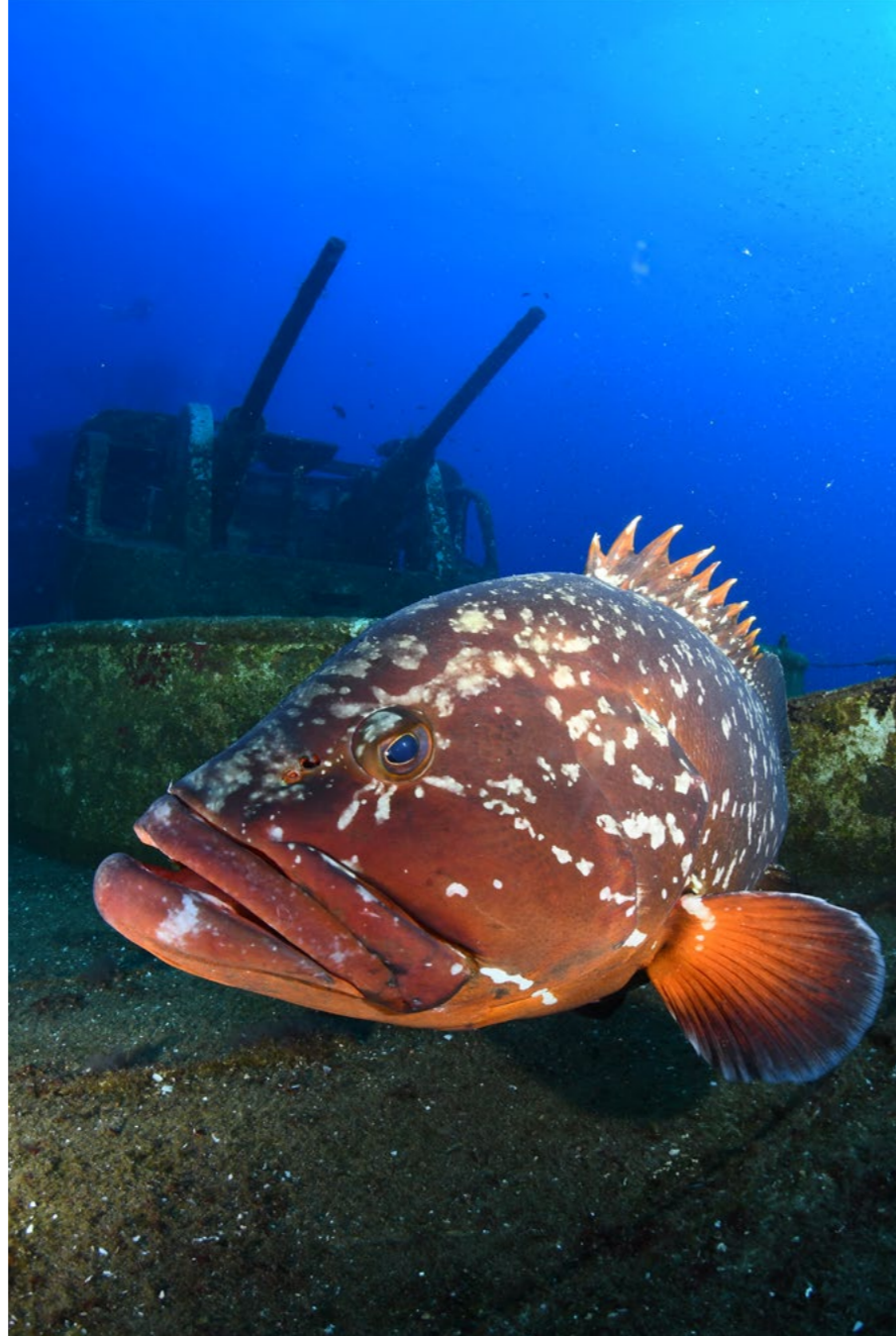
At the end of each day, a final verification image was taken, and then the organizers broke the housing seals, collecting the

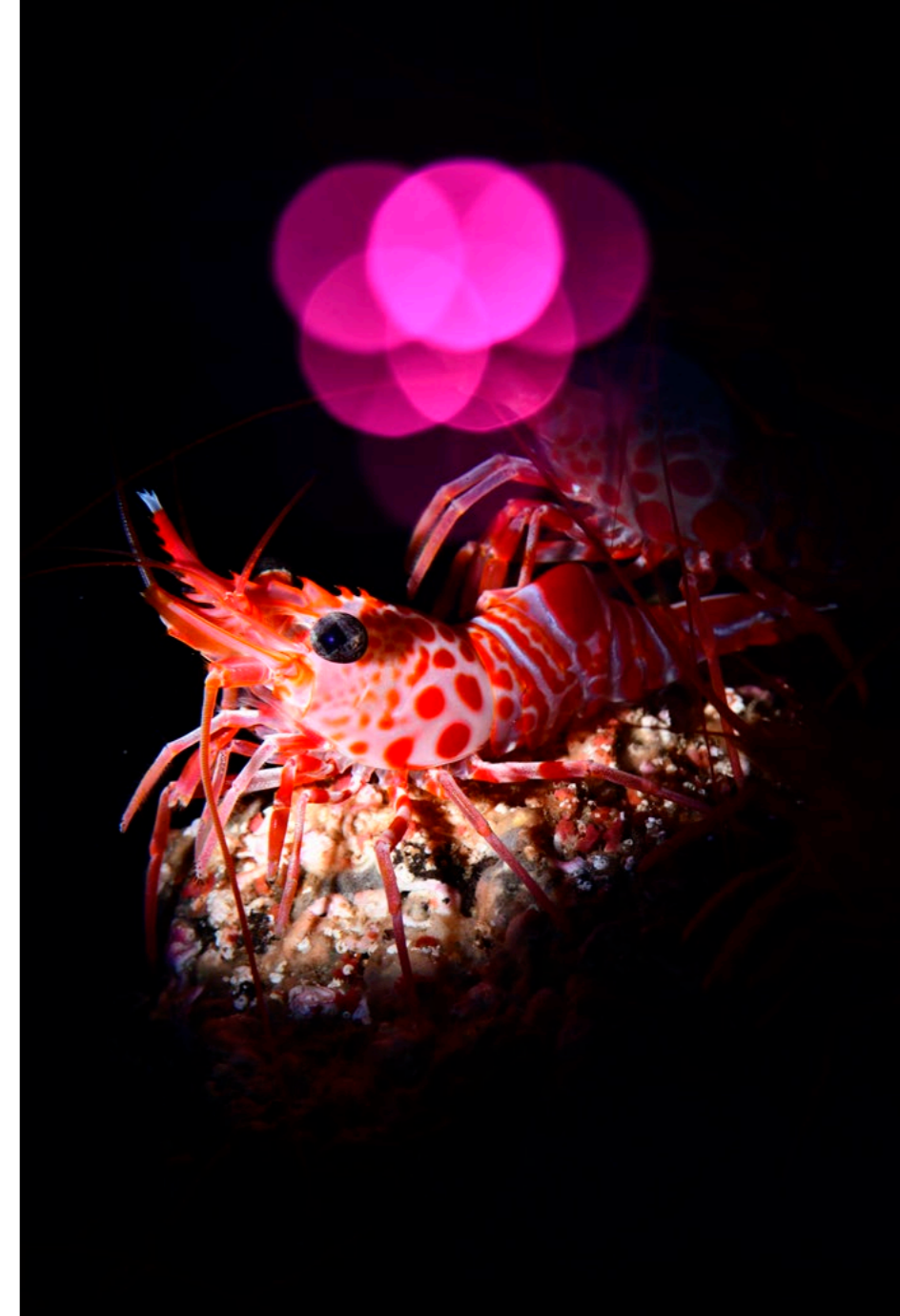
memory cards, which were then stored in sealed bags. At the beginning of the next day, the cards were distributed, and the housings were sealed again under supervision. All this took huge amounts of organization, with numerous moving parts that needed to be practiced by both contestants and staff alike.

So, at 8:00 a.m. sharp, buses promptly set out from the contestants' hotel, bound for the con-

test site at the harbor. Upon arrival, the teams got their dive gear set up and went through the process of formatting their memory cards and having their housings sealed (as described above).

Boat and dive site allocations had been selected in the draw at the technical briefing, and once the formalities had been completed, there was a mass exodus as people headed out to their boats. Once at their boats, and after sort-





Theme Category. 1st Place: Damir Zurub and Katarina Mihaljinec, Croatia (right); 2nd Place: Rui Bernardo and Sonia Bernardo, Portugal (above); 3rd Place: Marino Brzac and Sandra Sertic, Croatia (left)

the contestants would dive each of the sites, they all faced the same difficulties. The format of the competition was based very much on recognizing the best images captured during the contest, where each participant would encounter the same difficulties.

Safety

CMAS takes safety at their events especially seriously. To this end, there was an

ambulance and a doctor continuously in attendance. After the dive, a member of the Netherlands team was unfortunate enough to fall over while rinsing his equipment, and in doing so, managed to injure his knee badly.

The paramedics and the doctor onsite splinted his leg, and he was then taken to hospital. Once his leg had been X-rayed, it was determined that he needed to be evacuated to Madeira in order for his injury to be treated. The

Portuguese military arranged for a low-level flight.

Second practice dive

After lunch, a second "practice dive" was carried out. I was able to join some of the contestants underwater, diving on the wonderful wreck of the NRP *General Pereira d'Eça*.

I used a Nauticam Extended Macro Wide-Angle Lens (EMWL) in blue water for the first time and was very impressed with its image quality and the perspective that the lens provided. It is perhaps the ultimate close-focus wide-angle tool. Despite being used with a SAGA adaptor on my Seacam housing, it balanced beautifully underwater and was much easier to handle underwater than expected. I used both the 130° and 110° objective lenses.

At the end of the day's diving, the administration team collected the contestants' memory cards and secured them, ready for the start of the first actual day of competition shooting on the next day.

The contestants were all very focused now and had formulated plans that they hoped would give them an edge over the other teams. As an observer, I was excited to see how these plans would pan out.

Day Three

Today was the first day of the Championship proper, here in Porto Santo. The spring tides caused some issues with current on some of the allocated dive sites the day before, so the start time was brought forward to allow dives to be timed to minimize their impact. In addition, most of the procedural and equipment issues that became apparent during the dress rehearsal were ironed out, making for a super-efficient start.

As before, the image-makers had to format their memory cards while under the watchful eyes of the judges, and to reset their cameras' dates. In addition, once

the cards had been formatted, the housings were sealed. Lastly, each contestant had to shoot a picture or a short video clip of a printed sign on a nearby wall.

The boats all left by 10 o'clock. Once they got out of the harbor, they encountered some pretty rough conditions, and the large boat carrying the video teams was struggling to maintain station on the dive site. This led to some rapid reorganization, and the boat shifted to a site that was less exposed.

After the first dive, the contestants returned, and if they needed to change lenses, did so under the watchful eyes of the judges.

Modern technology has made the

ing out an islandwide shortage of lead diving weights (!), the boats headed out to the dive sites. The maximum time allowed on each dive was 90 minutes, so predictably, after around two hours, the flotilla all returned.

Many of the contestants reported significant current on some the allocated sites, which made conditions challenging. While this may have seemed somewhat unfair to the observer, it was important to remember that given that all



photo & video

Wide-Angle Category. 1st Place: Lorinc Ferenc Lorincz and Yvette Takár, Hungary (right); 2nd Place: Niklas Nilsson and Catarina Josteus, Sweden (far right); 3rd Place: Fredrik Blomqwist and Andreas Kron, Sweden (bottom right)

organizers' job somewhat harder. The ability to transfer images to mobile devices via Bluetooth or Wi-Fi creates a potential for people to edit their images on these devices. Hence, the rules forbid people from having these devices near their cameras during the contest. Given that most of us tend to have such devices with us most of the time, many contestants had overlooked this rule.

Organizer Vasconcelos was forced to call a meeting with the team captains, reminding them that having or using a mobile device near their cameras would cause them to be disqualified.

The head of the photography judging panel, Renee Grinnell Capozzola, arrived today and joined the head of the video panel, Julie Ouimet.

After lunch, the teams all left for a second dive. Due to the time lost due to the conditions, the video teams actually had packed lunches brought to them. Given that the video contestants had the added burden of editing and rendering their videos, the time saved by doing this meant that they were able to get on with

their edits.

The day concluded with the breaking of the seals on the contestants' cameras and the collection of memory cards. The cards were downloaded, formatted and returned, so that they could be used on the next day.

As is perhaps inevitable, there were several reports of contestants having breached rules during the dives. In fact, one team was observed sharing air in order to extend their time underwater. The result was that the judges disallowed the images from that dive.

As mentioned yesterday, the Championship has huge support from an army of local dive center owners and employees, students and members of the local CMAS federation. They were the unsung heroes of the whole event!

Tomorrow would largely be a mirror image of today, with the teams rotating through the allowed dive sites.



Day Four

The cards have been submitted, the images selected, and the diving gear packed away. The fate of the teams and contestants now rested in the hands of the judging panel. The teams had all completed dives on each of the four selected sites.

Another early start saw all the competitors descend on the Club Navale. The contest worked like a well-oiled machine, with the format-

ting of memory cards and sealing of housings being done swiftly and efficiently.

Today was the final day for the contestants to capture images or video to enter into the contest. To some extent, the pressure was really mounting on them to "come up with the goods." Given that the contest was an individual, team and international event, the pressure to do well was very high.

Due to high tides produc-

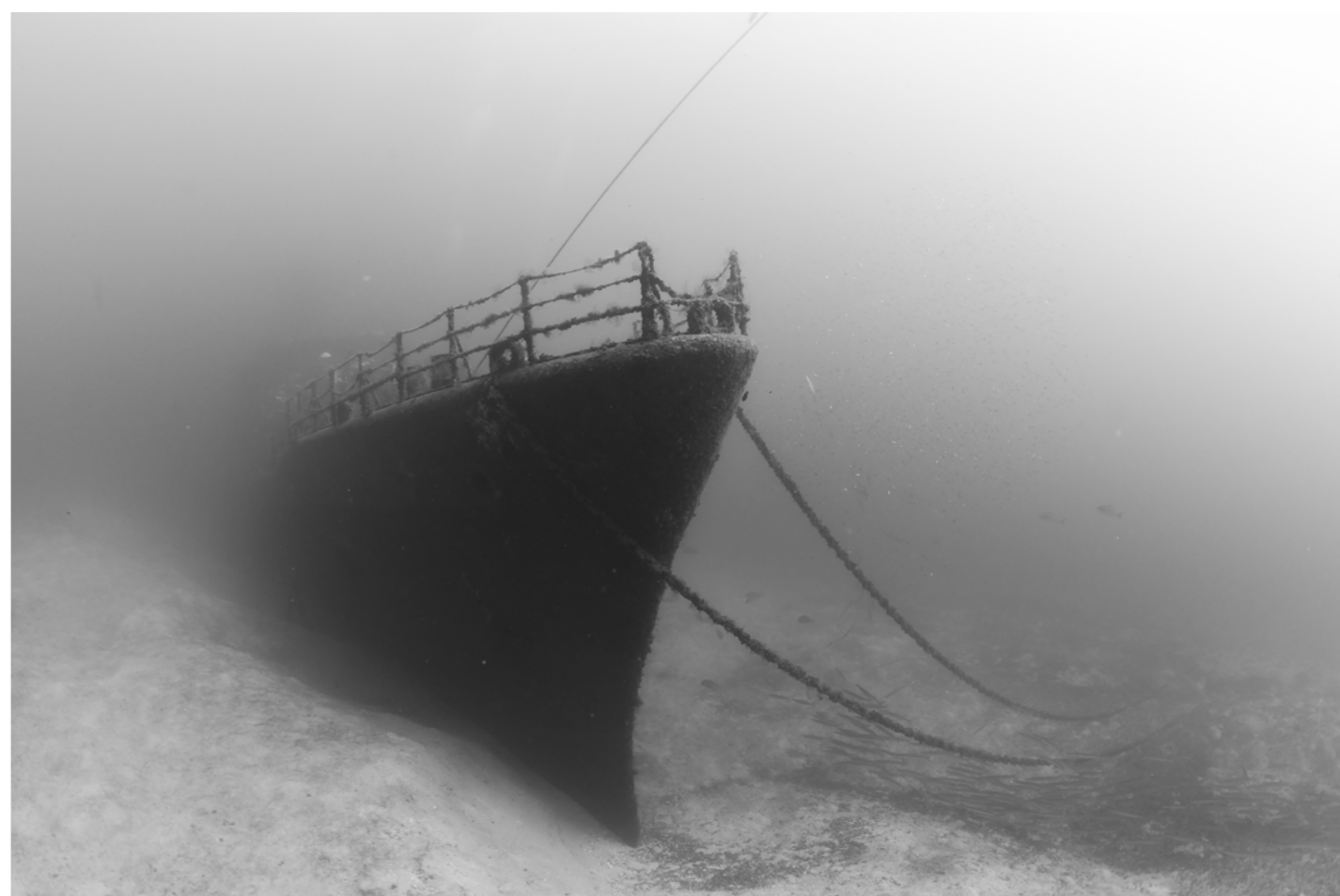




photo & video

Wide-Angle with Model Category. 1st Place: - Guglielmo Cicerchia and Iwona Molsa, Italy (right); 2nd Place: Francesco Sesso and Alessandra Pagliaro, Italy; 3rd Place: Jesus Yeray Delgado Dorta and Abigail Martin Hernández, Spain (bottom right)

ing strong currents, the boat departures were staggered, with the video contestants leaving after the photographers. In fact, one of the sites proved impossible to use, due to the current, and the organizers had to use a contingency site.

These mishaps showed that despite excellent planning, the "sea always wins." What was great to observe was the contestants taking these challenges in their stride and were able to adjust their plans to cope with them.

It was also notable how good-natured and positive they all were too. Perhaps the nature of team-based photo-sub-style events involve accepting the fact that dive sites are simply what they are and trying to use vision and skill to work with the elements available.

All the teams completed two dives without mishap, and now the familiar process of handing in their memory cards began. Like image-makers everywhere, they all spent lots of time

talking about equipment!

Once again, it was important to stress the role that support teams played in the success of the event. Organizer Vasconcelos had garnered support from a multitude of people from mainland Portugal, Madeira and Porto Santo, who worked tirelessly to make the contest safe, efficient, fair and successful.

The process from this point on saw the memory cards of each contestant downloaded and each contestants' images were placed in a folder. These folders were then shared with the contestants, and in collaboration with their team captains and fellow teammates, they chose which of their images to enter.

It was slightly different for the video categories. As they were producing short films and were allo-

cated eight hours of editing and rendering time. Prior to the deadline, they had to edit and prepare the films in the contest's specified format.

Having done so, the organizers distributed the contestants' selected images to the judging panels. It was my understanding was that Technical Director Ceylanoglu and Director of Visual Communications Sabuncuoglu completed

this process at 4:30 in the morning!

The heads of both judging panels, Capozzola and Ouimet, were present in Porto Santo. The other judges, who had received the images online, submitted their scores back to Capozzola and Ouimet. The results would be announced the next day at an awards ceremony, followed by a gala dinner at the hotel.

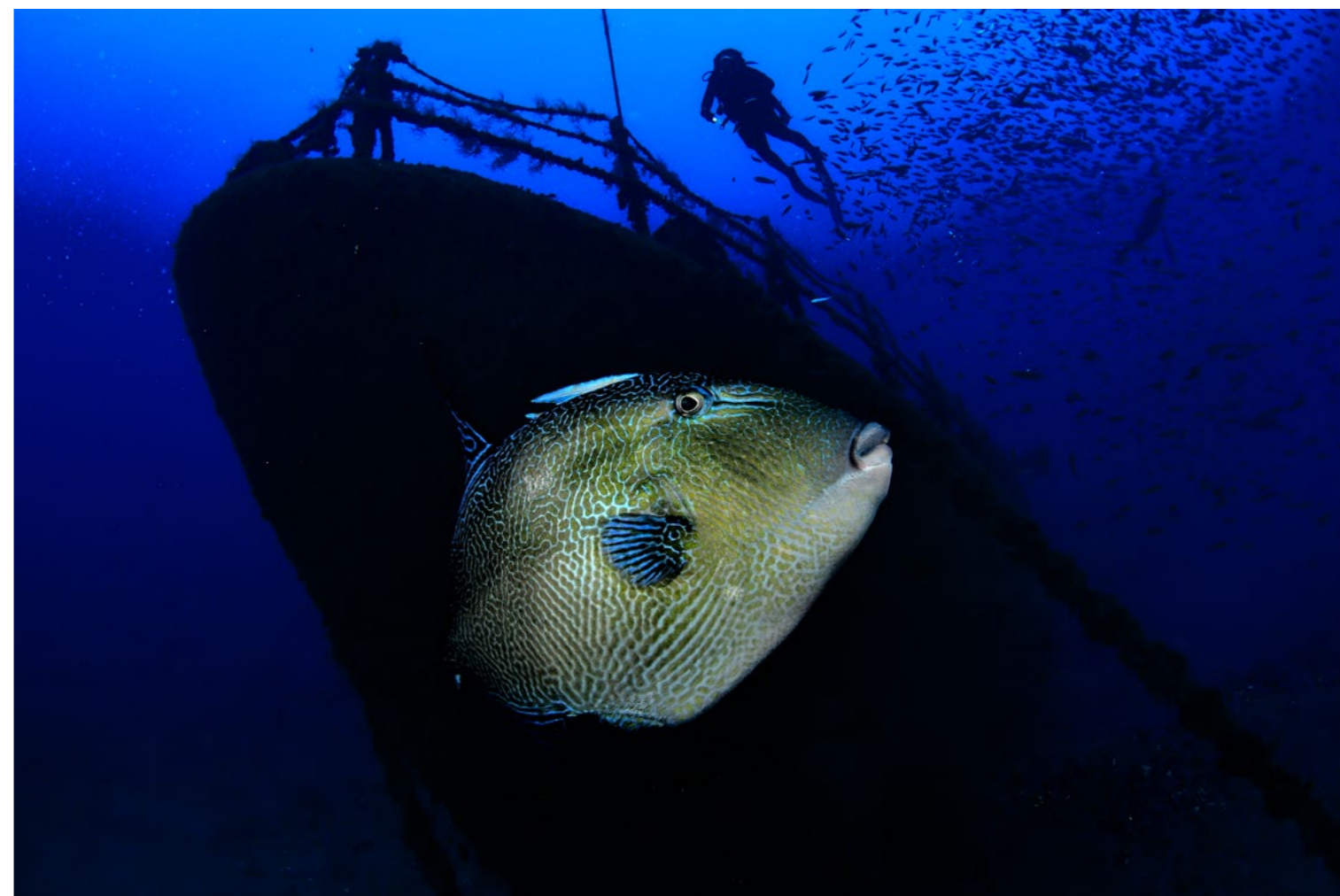




photo & video

TOP ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:
Four-Minute Video Category.
1st Place: Jorge Candan and Pilar Barros, Spain OCEAN ...
2nd Place: Héctor Gasco and Lledó Ferrer, Spain;
3rd Place: Enrico Rabboni and Roberto Grandoni, Italy

MIDDLE ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:
One-Minute Video Category.
1st Place: Laurent Maignot and François Locqueneux, France;
2nd Place: Héctor Gasco and Lledó Ferrer, Spain;
3rd Place: Gui Costa and Paulo Correia, Portugal



BOTTOM ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:
One-Minute Unedited Video Category.
1st Place: Joerg Boettcher and Riko Riegel, Germany;
2nd Place: Jorge Candan and Pilar Barros, Spain;
3rd Place: Katja Kieslich and Frank Pastor, Germany

Awards ceremony

The last two days of the 2021 CMAS World Championship had given the organizers time to collect, collate and process all the entries. In addition, there were parties, ceremonies and dinners!

As mentioned earlier, the teams submitted their entries for each category late on Thursday night. These were then collated and distributed to the two judging panels. Capozzola and Ouimet were on hand as the heads of the judging panels for still and video images respectively, but the actual judging was carried out online

by a panel of judges. For still images, this included Henley Spiers, Pierre Yves Cousteau, Simon Shin, Nicholas Samaras, Imran Ahmad and Rodney Bursiel; and for video, Kay Burn Lim, Jason Isley, Fan Ping, Luftu Tanriover, Jeff Goodman and myself.

As the panels were globally based, there was inevitably some delay in getting some of the scores back. Hence, the process of tabulating the scores took most of the day. So, we went diving!

The day concluded with a party at the contestants' hotel. Despite there being a serious emphasis on the com-

petition during the event, now that the entries were all in, everyone just got on with partying, like a big happy family! High jinks and crazy dancing ensued, accompanied by an eccentric one-man-band/accordion player.

The final day's schedule started off with the formal awards ceremony back in the center of Porto Santo, and was attended by local dignitaries. Alongside the World Championship was a contest for local school children, who produced marine-related drawings.

Each video and photo category was

then awarded, with bronze, silver and gold awards. There was a lot of celebration! The final event was a gala dinner, celebrating the contest. As was tradition, team Italia finished it off with a spirited guitar rendition!

The 2021 CMAS World Championship of Underwater Photography and Video was an amazing event. The style of the competition was designed to find and award the best photographer "of the day." The organizers are too numerous to mention, but Kerim Sabuncuoglu, Cenk Ceylanoglu, Pedro Vasconcelos, and the amazing

Portuguese host team made it not only a challenging contest but also a happy and very enjoyable event. I look forward to the next championship in 2023! ■

*Underwater photographer Adam Hanlon is the editor and owner of **Wetpixel**, one of the world's leading resources on underwater imaging. Through **Wetpixel Expeditions**, he leads regular photography expeditions and workshops around the world. He also owns a successful **dive school** based near Lancaster, United Kingdom.*

