

All in a Day's Work

Paul Kay - Marine Wildlife Photographer

Paul Kay is a marine wildlife photographer and specialises in taking photographs of marine life in the cool waters around the UK and Irish coasts. He lives in North Wales.

www.marinewildlife.co.uk



Paul Kay

Images courtesy of Paul Kay

How did you become interested in underwater photography?

I studied photography in college because I enjoyed taking photographs but didn't really know what sort of photographs I wanted to take. Then I volunteered to work at Sherkin Island Marine Station where I got hooked on capturing images of marine life. I went away and learned to scuba dive and have now been taking underwater photographs for over 30 years.

Why do you like photographing marine life?

Our marine environment is very important and we have to look after it. It supplies us with oxygen - healthy plant life in our oceans is essential for this - and food. As few people can scuba dive and even fewer take underwater photographs, I feel it is important for underwater photographers to use their skills to show people what lives below the surface. This will encourage people to protect the marine environment and help keep it healthy.

Why do you scuba dive?

Scuba diving is something that I simply have to do so that I can take photographs underwater. The skills

involved for diving have become second nature and the people that I dive with have to be qualified and experienced too.

What special equipment do you need?

Around the Irish and British coasts the water can be cold so we have to wear drysuits, which keep us dry. These suits have watertight seals around the neck and wrists. I wear a one piece under suit, which looks like its made from sleeping bag material - that keeps me warm. Our diving equipment is heavy, weighing 40-50 kilos and the camera another 5-10 kilos. Underwater of course it all becomes weightless, which is a relief! We tend to dive in relatively shallow water (down to about 30m) and for around an hour which is how long our tank of compressed air will last.

What type of camera do you use for taking underwater photographs?

My camera is the same one that I use above water, but in a strong and waterproof aluminium casing. It has a waterproof flash attached on an arm so that it can be moved and positioned just right for each photograph.

The quality of digital images that good cameras now produce is very high. I use either macro lenses for close up photography of small creatures or wide angle lenses to take underwater scenery. Long lenses such as those used for birds or sport are of no use underwater.

Do you always know what you are going to photograph on a dive?

Once we get underwater we never know exactly what we might see. We may know what the seabed will be like - whether its a rocky reef, sand or muddy - but there will always be something unexpected. It might be a brightly coloured fish, a sea slug 30 cm long or a passing shark. Underwater scenery can be dramatic too, especially when conditions are really good. The Fastnet Rock off the West Cork coast is an extraordinarily colourful, jagged rock covered in kelp and brilliant jewel anemones. The Aran Island

in Galway Bay have tunnels through their limestone, one of which opens into a natural 'swimming pool' in the sloping southern coast - swimming into this is quite surreal.

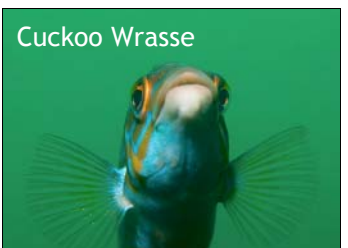
Is it easy to take photographs underwater?

Conditions underwater can vary, which is the biggest problem we face. In calm, sunny weather, with water as clear as can be, we might see for up to 30m. It is then the undersea world becomes like a fairyland and a photographer's dream, with lots to see and photograph. Often though the water is disturbed and murky and may even become so bad that we can see no more than a few centimetres ahead. It is impossible for the photographer to work in such conditions.

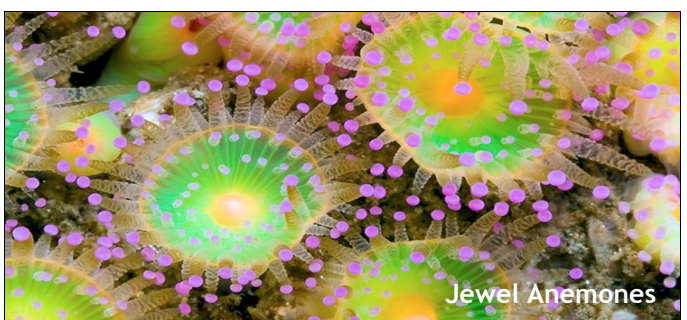
When conditions are good however, I can think of nothing that I would rather do than take underwater photographs - after all these years it is still a passion.



Common Starfish



Cuckoo Wrasse



Jewel Anemones

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