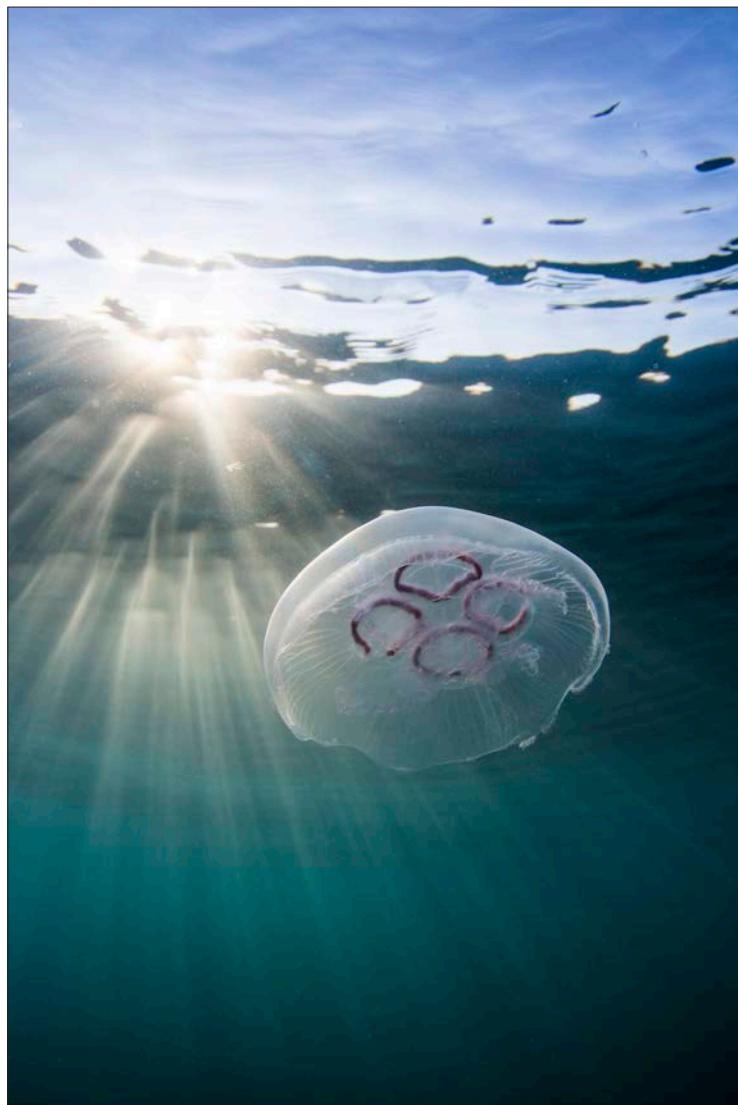


The Art of the Photograph

This month featuring **Jon Bunker**



Moon Jelly off Portland (Aurelia aurita) © Jon Bunker

JON BUNKER is not your average English teacher. While he spends his days imparting knowledge about literature and language to his students at The Sir John Colfox Academy in Bridport, his true passion lies beneath the surface—literally. An avid underwater photographer, Jon has spent years exploring the depths of the ocean, capturing its hidden wonders and sharing them with the world. His journey into underwater photography is as fascinating as the creatures he photographs, and his story is one of curiosity, perseverance, and a deep love for the marine world.

Jon's journey into photography began in an unconventional way. 'It was actually the diving first, really,' he explains. 'I started that in 2004, and I picked

up a camera mostly because I was just interested in the kind of stuff I was starting to come across, which was very new.' Growing up by the coast, Jon had always been fascinated by the underwater world, but it wasn't until his early twenties that he decided to take the plunge—literally—into scuba diving. 'I'd always meant to scuba dive, but I'm quite disorganized,' he admits with a laugh. 'I started foolishly in Australia, really should have done it here first, and then got more time actually out on the Barrier Reef.'

It was during these dives that Jon's interest in photography began to take shape. 'I got a little compact shoot with an onboard strobe around 2008. The lighting is obviously a huge thing underwater because it's so much darker down there, and natural

light drops off. Everything becomes blue after a bit.'

Jon's early attempts at underwater photography were far from perfect. 'I had no idea how any of this stuff worked' he tells me. 'I mean, I was a barely competent diver, really. So getting into something else like that at the start didn't seem like a great idea.' But his curiosity and determination kept him going. 'I just kept on finding I was using the camera more and more. I came across GoPro back in 2012 or 2013 when they were just becoming big. There was a guy on the boat who said, "Look at this little camera. It's the next big thing." While the GoPro was a good starting point, Jon soon realized its limitations for capturing the intricate details of underwater life. 'It's the fantasy of having a tiny little sensor taking so much in, but it's not actually very good for photography.'

By 2017, Jon had fully embraced underwater photography as more than just a casual hobby. 'It's just become an obsession, obviously, as these things do with gentlemen of a certain age,' he jokes. His passion for photography has grown to encompass not just underwater shots but also other genres, including low-light and astrophotography. 'It's ironic. It kind of happened backwards because



Images:

Sea kayaker at Durdle Door © Jon Bunker
A pair of courting velvet swimmer crabs
(*Necora puber*) © Jon Bunker





*Blue Shark *Prionace glauca*. Off Penzance © Jon Bunker*

some people start off as wildlife photographers and then do a bit of snorkeling or diving. But with me, it was completely the opposite way around. I did the diving first, and then I was like, ‘Oh, f-stop, exposure triangle.’ That all came the other way around.’

Jon’s love for underwater photography is deeply intertwined with his fascination for marine life, a passion he attributes to his father. ‘My father was a science teacher, so I grew up literally in a lab filled with lobsters, salamanders, and tadpoles. There was always some fascinating creature on display. A lot of this is basically my father’s fault,’ he says with a smile. His interest in marine life has led him to develop a keen eye for fish identification. ‘I pride myself on having pretty reasonably good fish identification. I’m not so good on the squishies, the mollusks and things like that, but I’m getting better.’

One of Jon’s most memorable underwater encounters happened in 2012 when he came across a lump sucker, also known as a sea hen. ‘They’re this fish that looks a bit like a basketball. They’re orange and have these ridiculous little things at the side. They can suck onto a rock, and you can’t shift them because they form this suction with their fins. I couldn’t even imagine something like that, let alone actually take a picture of it.’

Leading the Sir John Colfox Academy’s Blue Planet Club, Jon was proud to see the school awarded ‘Ocean Friendly School’ status by the Marine Conservation Society in 2024. His passion for underwater photography has deepened his desire to

be more environmentally responsible. ‘It stopped me taking things,’ he says. ‘As a diver, I used to snaffle a good-sized crab or fish, take it home, and cook it. But I haven’t done that in years. It feels far too unsporting, really, because it’s just so easy—they’re just there. Now I shoot them with a camera, and that has utterly transformed my attitude.’

The state of the oceans is a topic that weighs heavily on Jon’s mind. ‘It’s terrifying, the whole plastic situation. You see a lot of plastics in the sea all the time. The really scary stuff is its capacity to turn everything into microplastics, which are now even in the air. The thing we see an awful lot of is hooks, nets, gill nets. Chesil Cove, a really popular dive site, has been rather overfished in just the past 10 years I’ve been actively diving it. It’s transformed from quite a busy environment to something that’s really quiet.’

Despite these challenges, Jon remains optimistic and dedicated to his craft. ‘There’s amazing stuff literally just tucked under a rock in the shoreline. You don’t have to go right into the depths to get much at all.’ His dream dive? ‘I’d love to see a basking shark. That’d be amazing, just to come across it naturally. The only place you can reliably dive with them off a boat is off the Isle of Coll in Scotland. Even then, their migration patterns seem to be changing.’

When it comes to equipment, Jon is pragmatic. ‘Photography is not a cheap hobby, but underwater photography is 10 times worse. I mean, just to get started, scuba equipment has gotten more expensive over time. I still mostly use compact rigs. Sometimes

it's just a GoPro and a pole, or a little Sony RX100. I've done an awful lot of my stuff on this little Sony compact camera. The dream would be to go up to a full-frame camera one day, just because there's nothing like it for capturing stunning detail, especially with the small stuff.'

Jon's passion for underwater photography has also connected him to a vibrant community of like-minded individuals. 'It's a lovely community. We all know each other, talk to each other quite regularly online, and there's the British Society of Underwater Photographers, which is great with their regular meetings. It's fantastic just talking to like-minded folk about it.'

This sense of community extends beyond photography as well. Jon often shares his images with organisations like the Marine Conservation Society. 'Anything I get that's useful, like a clear species shot, I try to catalogue and put into the Marine Conservation Society. They've got quite a few of my pictures and actually put one of mine on a front cover of their magazine.'

To see more of Jon Bunker's photography and learn more about his underwater world, visit www.jonunderwater.co.uk.

Octopus (Vulgaris/common) © Jon Bunker

