Introducing: Kurt Arrigo

You are a renowned specialist in marine photography. When and how did you set off on a mission to capture the unpredictable nature of the ocean?

I never really set off on a mission. It was more of a natural progression in my career and it is something which still gives me a lot of satisfaction and fulfilment. I feel very connected to the marine world. Being underwater reenergises my spirit and wellbeing. It keeps me alive.

Growing up on an island has definitely influenced my love and passion for the underwater world – I was only 10 when I first started diving. My dad, being one of the first pioneers of scuba diving in Malta back in the 1960s, was a huge inspiration on me growing up. I would accompany him at sea from a very early age. Then, I got into photography when I was 15 and underwater photography was an obvious thing to do.



Till this day, I very rarely go for a dive without a camera. The camera has become an extension of my hand! I've been doing this for the past 30 years and I still enjoy the challenges. So ultimately, I'm still on a mission.

What draws you to the underwater world?

To me, the underwater world has always presented an element of unknown. No matter if I'm diving in the same location or using the same equipment, I'm constantly experiencing something which is different.

And so I'm constantly learning ways of dealing with new challenges — I feel that through diving, you learn to become a problem-solver.

So what are the main challenges of underwater photography?

The challenges of being underwater are very different from being a photographer in a fixed studio or on land. Diving brings with it a lot of variables many of which are hard to predict and beyond our control, namely, the current, visibility, lighting, nature. As you start to read books about the subject, you'll come to realise that successful marine photographers must possess a good sense of humour because you never know what's coming your way! And it tests you — it tests your patience, tolerance, creativity, it tests your self as a person. One of the main challenges is actually having to work with marine life. There might be instances when you go for a dive with something in mind and it's simply not happening. It's there where you learn to appreciate the little things, or the topography, the stones, the caves. Then there's the preparation. Before you embark on your assignment, you need to make sure you have the right diving and photography equipment since you're limited to the amount of camera gear you can take — it's not like on land where you can simply change a lens. If you're down there with a wide-angle lens you're limited to that style of imagery. Also, an average underwater shoot would take an hour, so time is also a limitation.



"I very rarely go for a dive without a camera. The camera has become an extension of my hand."

You're a precocious swimmer, diver, and sailor. Has this helped you take your images?

I feel lucky I was constantly by the water's age as a young boy, and that I enjoyed it all tremendously — from the challenges to the preparation. When I talk to other marine photographers, I tend to tick a few more boxes: some might be more comfortable sailing and others not so much. So understanding all these

areas has helped make my career as a marine photographer a lot easier.

In your career, you've swum with hammerhead sharks and undertaken intrepid environmental projects in the Galapagos Islands. How would you describe these experiences?

Overwhelming. Swimming with hammerhead sharks and spotted dolphins in the Bahamas, diving with bull seals — it made me feel insignificant. And especially for someone who like me has such a connection with the underwater environment, the feeling of sharing their territory is just so deep. When you do experience something bigger than you in terms of nature there's also the element of risk which makes it exciting.

"It tests your patience, tolerance, creativity – it tests yourself as a person."

You have almost 69K followers on Instagram. How has social media changed the way you capture images and tell your visual stories?

Social media has definitely helped creatives express themselves and Instagram is a great platform to help me showcase my work. It hasn't changed the way I take pictures, but it has changed the way I share them. Whereas before I took pictures for myself or to show a handful of people, now I have an audience. So it has certainly helped me carry on expressing my passion. People started engaging with my work, by commenting and passing on lovely feedback. Before I would get some work published on a couple of magazines here and there or perhaps participate in a competition to get recognition. But now it's easier. The social platforms available have reignited me to carry on. I share an image each day to keep my audience alive and I'm very happy to communicate with the people I'm doing this for.



If you were to recommend one thing to Alert Diver readers, what would it be?

Diving is all about knowing your parameters. Be sensible and aware. If you're aware that things could go wrong, you will act sensibly within the diving environment.

Hometown: Malta

Years diving: Over 30 years

Favourite dive destination: Each and every destination I've been to has challenged me in different ways. But if I were to choose, I think the Galapagos was the most exciting and diverse.

Why I'm a DAN member: I first joined DAN when I started travelling. Knowing I was part of a community dedicated to the underwater world gave me a feeling of safety and a sense of security. Apart from that, it's also formative for me to be part of an organisation committed to understanding the nature of diving and divers.