Photo gallery: Diving into the UK’s seas

The Marine Conservation Society has gathered a selection of incredible ocean photography to celebrate life in the UK’s seas. Hear from seasoned divers and photographers about how they captured their images and get inspired to dive in yourself.

While the images below show the colourful and curious world under the surface of the UK’s seas, the fragile ecosystems are in urgent need of protection and restoration. Without a healthy ocean, we cannot have a healthy planet.

For divers and snorkellers, the Marine Conservation Society’s Seasearch programme is a great way of giving back and exploring the UK’s waters. Seasearch volunteers conduct underwater surveys, providing an insight into the state of the UK’s seas. Learn more about the programme, and how to get involved, by visiting www.seasearch.org.uk.

Painted goby in shell by Dan Bolt.

“Springtime along the edges of a Scottish sea loch are full of hope and renewed life. Below the cool waters of the loch itself a similar scene is echoed.

“This small painted goby is among many species of fish who prefer to make a nest to lay and look after their eggs. A favoured nesting site is within the hard shell of a dead sea urchin. This provides an excellent haven for the eggs and an easily defended entrance from the claws of hungry crabs. The still-vibrant colours of this shell prove it was not long deceased before this goby moved in.”

Catshark by Sam Mansfield.
“As a kid on the coast, I’d look for curious leathery ‘mermaid’s purses’ (shark egg cases) washed up along the shoreline. Snorkelling off Cornwall last year, I was ascending from the kelp as the sun dipped toward the horizon and was taken by surprise as this shark brushed past me in the shallows. With the last of my breath I grabbed a picture and watched it glide into the green.

“Snorkelling is a wonderful way to see many of the beautiful, weird and gigantic sea creatures that call the UK home. After these years of lockdowns and travel restrictions, wading into the sea with a mask and a lungful of air can bring much needed moments of joy and connection. “

Bobtail squid by Saeed Rashid.
“Bobtail squid are one of the smaller squid species, growing to just a few centimetres in length. Living in the shallow waters around the UK all year round, they often bury themselves in sand only showing their eyes. They do this to hide from both their predators and their prey.

“Like their larger cousins, octopus and cuttlefish, they have the ability to change their colour. They can also sometimes change the texture of their skin to help camouflage into their surroundings. This makes them incredibly hard to spot but, at night, they’re often attracted by diver’s lights so will come out of hiding for a sneak peek. “

Anemone in mussels by Kirsty Andrews.
These mussels are jostling for position at the entrance to an underwater arch where currents, which normally flow freely around the Farne Islands in Northumberland, are forced through a relatively small opening. This unusual water flow causes a ‘high energy’ hotspot where fields of tiny mussels are poised to feed on the nutrients travelling past at high speed. The mussel bed extends as far as the eye can see, only broken up by the occasional hardy anemone. To the naked eye the mussels look brown-black but torchlight brings out their enticing colour.

*Crabs fighting by Martin Stevens.*
“Spider crabs are common in the summer in Cornwall, often venturing into shallow water.

“These two crabs were inshore quite early in the spring and I spotted them while snorkelling and freediving between the kelp. At first I thought they would simply pass each other by as they moved between the seaweed. Instead, they jumped at each other and began vigorously fighting, before one gave up and scurried off. Fortunately, I managed to get a few quick shots while the action lasted.”

Starfish by Billy Arthur.
“This image was taken during a night dive at one of my favourite local sites, the wreck of the Queen of Sweden, which lies at depth of around 16 meters of water in Lerwick harbour.

“This brittle star bed has an otherworldly feeling about it, especially when lit by torch on a night dive. It always rewards with some sort of alien-like scene playing out. This image of a common sunstar being given a wide berth as it feels out for its brittle star quarry shows we don't need to look far to encounter the wonders of the natural world.”
Sea squirt by Ally Moore.

“As an artist, the colours and textures of organisms found underwater can be completely inspiring to see. This wonderful habitat of sea squirts, sponges and red seaweeds all live side by side on a mooring rope in relatively shallow water in the Orkney Islands.

“The intricate and delicate detail of some of these creatures is quite mind boggling to see. The transparent sea squirt Diplosoma listerianum seen here, is actually a colony of animal called zooids. Colonial sea squirts can form beautiful and very individual patterns, some of which form star and flower shapes, which makes looking at these relatively common creatures, such a delight.”

Sea angel by Kirsty Andrews.

“The sea angel is the rather romantic sounding common name for what is actually a free-swimming sea slug.

“Sea angels patrol the open ocean, feeding on sea butterflies, which themselves have an overly pretty name, being tiny swimming sea snails. The ‘wings’ of the sea angel are actually its feet which have developed to propel the sea angel through the water. This angel appeared in torch light during a night dive in the farthest reaches of North West Scotland.”
“Common cuttlefish can grow to ½ metre in length. They’re the largest cuttlefish found in UK seas and are often spotted by snorkellers and divers.

“You’re more likely to spot them in spring, when cuttlefish venture up from much deeper water to breed in the warmer shallows. This happy guy (I think male) decided to become my dive buddy underneath Swanage Pier in Dorset. He stayed swimming next to me for at least half an hour and at times it seemed he was more curious of me than I was of him. Cuttlefish, like octopus and squid, are known to be incredibly intelligent, often outwitting human scientists in their own experiments.”
“Nature is amazing! She can turn her hand to reclaiming just about anything we leave in our wake, and this old diver’s torch is no exception. It’s now home, and shelter, to a lobster, anemones urchins, starfish and worms, slowly becoming part of the marine environment itself.”

**Humpback Whale by Peter Shucksmith**

“I was sat on the pier with all my kit waiting for my boat support for the day. The weather was incredibly calm and sunny a very rare mid-winters day, perfect for what we wanted to try, snorkelling with humpbacks. Time was limited due to the short days in Shetland at this time of year and with the sun being low it can make it quite challenging underwater. We soon found the whales and within seconds a head came out of the water. I heard a blow and lifted my head to see the back of one of the whales that were heading towards me. Putting my eye back to the camera two large shadows appeared at the periphery of my vision and suddenly they were there right in front of me. “

To learn more about the Marine Conservation Society’s work, and how to get involved with the Seasearch project, please visit the charity’s website: [www.mcsuk.org](http://www.mcsuk.org).

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**Images**

Please find the selection of high-resolution imagery linked [here](http://www.mcsuk.org).

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**Notes to Editors**
The Marine Conservation Society campaigns for clean seas and beaches, sustainable fisheries, and protection of marine life. Through education, community involvement and collaboration, the charity raises awareness of the many threats that face our seas and promotes individual, industry and government action to protect the marine environment. The Marine Conservation Society provides information and guidance on many aspects of marine conservation and produces the Good Fish Guide as well as involving thousands of volunteers in projects and surveys such as Beachwatch. www.mcsuk.org.