

# For Nature's Sake

*by Christine Danger*





As people, if we care about the environment, nature and wildlife, we ought to care about trying to preserve them so they will still be around in the future.

As photographers, we have a role to play. At the very least, we should do our bit to minimise our environmental impact. A valuable goal would also be to actively contribute to conservation by making others aware of what is going on around us, what is at risk, and making a difference with our pictures. In this article we first of all look at some simple tips about preserving and protecting; secondly we introduce some project ideas to help conservation efforts through our photography.

**Preserving and protecting**

Due to the pressures of population, the environment is being degraded, sometimes permanently. Few places in the world remain pristine, unspoilt, such as the wilderness in the photo of the Bathurst Channel in Southwest Tasmania, or of Lord Howe Island. But those areas which are less remote, more accessible, are probably even more at risk.



Bathurst Harbour

How do we ensure precious places remain unspoilt? It is not just through environmental legislation, ethics and education. It is also down to our own personal behaviour. Here are a few tips.

**Respect Wildlife**

*“The subject and the habitat are more important than the photograph.”* (Nature photographers' Network)

Have you ever run after a bird on the ground to make it fly away and grabbed a shot? Have you ever swum with dolphins or a sea turtle and wish you could get a ride... and a selfie? This sort of behaviour used to be acceptable decades ago, when we were far less aware of its impact. These days, things are

changing, thankfully. It is not acceptable to stress an animal just to get our shot. In fact, we ought to study the species we want to photograph and learn to recognise signs of stress... and back out if we notice the animal is disturbed by our presence.

A recent shocking example of the terrible impact humans can have is the story of a baby dolphin on a beach in Argentina which was swimming near the shore. It was pulled out of the water by tourists, and dozens of people crowded around to get a look at the squirming calf, straining to touch it and take selfies with it. But, like many species of dolphin, the animal was not able to spend long out of the water without overheating. Tragically the baby dolphin died while still being passed around for selfies.



Bennett Wallabies

A lack of awareness of animals' extreme vulnerability can have disastrous consequences. Learn about wildlife through quiet observation. Quick movements and loud noises are stressful to animals. Travel quietly and observe wildlife from a distance so they are not scared or forced to flee. Threatening, touching or stressing the animals in an attempt to grab a shot is not ethical. If you want a close up shot, use a long focal length, which will enable you to stay far enough away.

**Baiting has no place in photography**

You should think twice before feeding wild animals to entice them to get close for that “award winning shot”. This goes for birds, land or marine animals.

Feeding wildlife causes them to change their natural behaviour, teaches them to associate humans with food and acclimatises them to human dependency. Often disease can be introduced through food or bait.

Feeding wildlife to get a shot is wrong and in some places illegal. As photographers, we need to create the best image we can when presented with the opportunity, without staging a setting. Let's show integrity and dedication to representing wildlife as it is in the wild.





Shy Albatross

### Should you be here?

Sometimes the temptation to jump a fence and enter to get that special shot is strong. But we should resist it and do the right thing. If an area is fenced off for revegetation, don't enter. If on public land, respect restrictions for entry and obtain any permit required. If you wish to photograph on private land, obtain approval from the owner. Leave gates as you find them. If a gate is open when you arrive, leave it open when you depart, and vice versa.

### Bin it

... Take your rubbish with you and bin it – “leave only footprints, take only photographs” ... Food wrappers, bits of tissue, toilet paper left behind like trail markers... Take them with you; put them in a zip lock bag in your backpack for later disposal in bins, not along a nature track.

### Plastic Horrific, not Plastic Fantastic

Plastic bags that end up in the ocean often look like jellies to animals that depend on these drifting creatures for food. Thousands of turtles and birds die each year after swallowing indigestible wads of plastic mistaken for jellies. You can help by picking up plastic on the beach and by not adding to the problem by leaving plastic bags behind yourself.

Helium balloons can be an ecological disaster too. While some balloons burst, others just gradually deflate. But they all fall back down to Earth where

they can wreak havoc on wildlife on land, sea and air. Animals such as dolphins, whales and birds are usually killed from the balloon blocking their digestive tract, leaving them unable to take in any more nutrients. They slowly starve to death. They can also become entangled in the balloon and its ribbon making the animal unable to move or eat. There is a saying: “Balloons blow, don't let them go.”

A lot of the above suggestions are about being a good steward. But let's not just leave it to that. Let's move it up a notch!

### Conserving through photography

Images about something rare or endangered create awareness and interest. People don't know what they don't know, and can't care about what they don't know. But inform them, show them through your images and influence them. Educate, inform, and hopefully engage others to take action.

We can make a difference through photography. A practical and purposeful thing to do is to put our photography to good use. Here are a few ideas for projects you might like to engage in. These will often combine photography and writing.

I have provided some examples for each project, which are in the main linked to my nautical interests. But you can adapt each project to your own environment and passions.



Storm Bay





Rag Island Seals



Project 1

WHAT: Photograph a Love Letter

HOW: A major challenge with conservation photography is the difficulty of reaching people who don't already care. Not all people are nature lovers, but chances are, they can relate to the way nature makes you feel. Tap into your sensitive side. Write a love letter about your favourite place. Ask yourself why it is so special to you. Imagine all the things about it that pull at your heartstrings. Is it beauty? Is it different? Does it challenge you? Do you feel sorry for it? Is it your escape? Now turn words into images. Capture your emotions into your images.

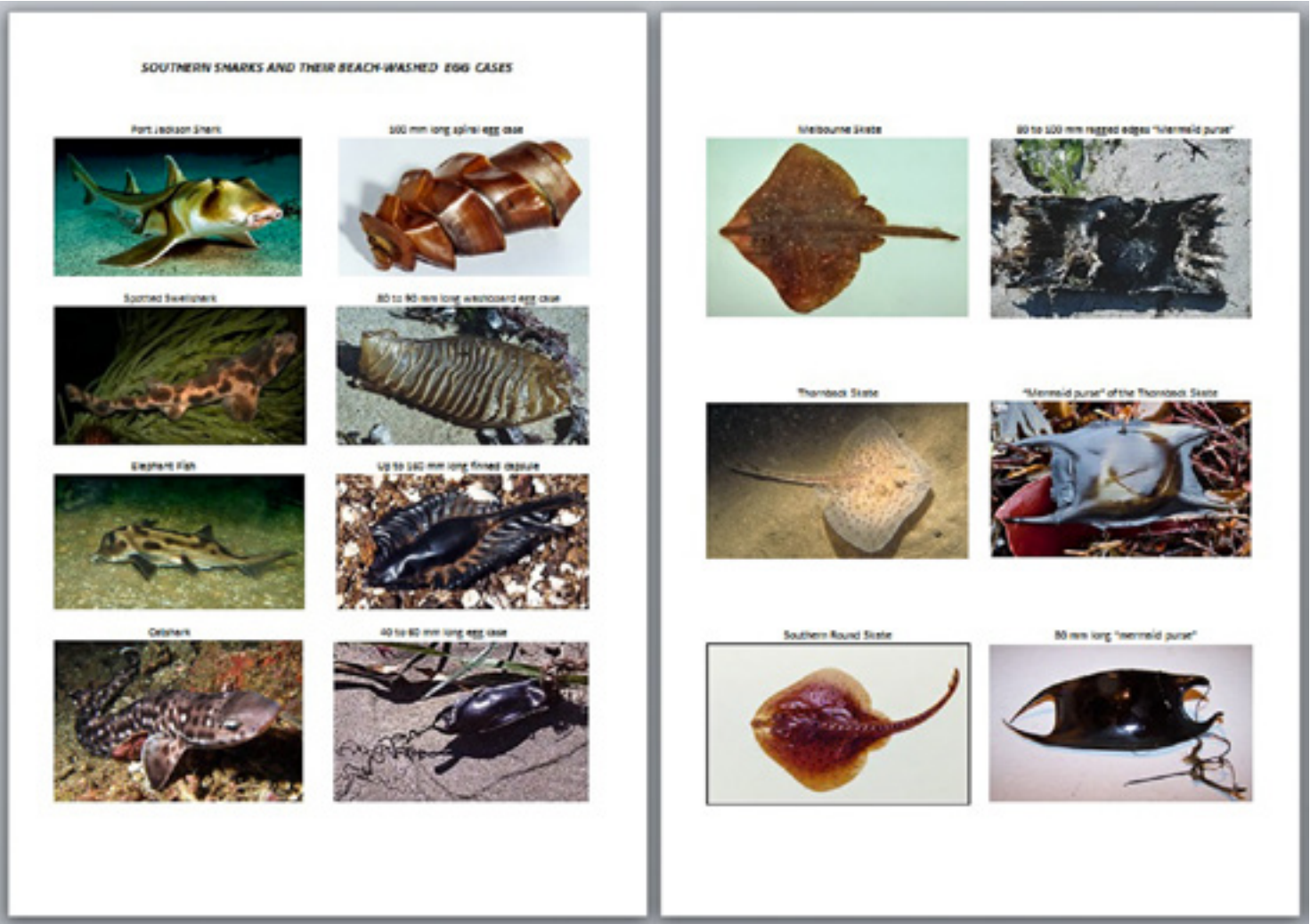
WIIFY (What's in it for you): When you are done, submit the project to a conservation organisation which can use your photos in their publication, and contact at least one magazine editor. If your photos capture your emotions and inspire others to take action or even donate their time and money to help protect special places, you have made a difference.

AN EXAMPLE: Deal Island

Deal Island is a located in the middle of Bass Strait and a favourite place of ours. I wrote an article about Deal Island for the yachting magazine *Australian Multihull World*. It highlighted the sense of achievement and awe when one reaches this isolated, pristine, stunning island in the middle of the ocean.



Deal Island



Sharks and their egg cases

Project 2

WHAT: Something Special

HOW: Do some research. Think about a place you go to regularly. Are there plants or animals that are protected? Does anything need protecting? Is it in the process of being protected? Does anyone know about it? Go out to your location as often as you can for a month, and photograph everything you can think of that makes that place or species special to you.

WIIFY: Write an article or a blog post about what you found. The idea is to share what you saw and what you learnt and get others engaged too.

AN EXAMPLE: Egg cases and the sharks laying them

One of the frequent sightings when beach combing along the shores of Wilson's Promontory or the Ninety Mile Beach in Victoria, are the different egg cases washed up on the beach. After doing some research, we linked the different egg cases to their owner: either a type of shark or a skate. This research was published in a web post and picked up with enthusiasm by the kids of a Gippsland school whose curiosity was piqued.



Project 3

WHAT: A Local in Danger

HOW: Find the most endangered location or animal near where you live. Through your photographs, record what you see. It might be beauty shots, or striking shots, even the threats to a place, plant or animal. At the end of a month, edit down to your favourite shots and take a portfolio around to at least two places that care about your subject matter.

WIIFY: Throughout the course of the project, you may have already developed some contacts with an organisation, but if not, most places have a public relations or other communications people you can approach. You can contribute an informative and well-illustrated article to educate others.

AN EXAMPLE: Shy Albatross

The Shy Albatross is a local in danger. Breeding at only three islands off the coast of Tasmania, the population of these beautiful giants is in decline. Writing about the species and publishing images in *Birdlife* and Tasmanian magazines may help raise awareness amongst the public who rarely get to see these ocean drifters. If you inspire people to change the way they interact with the environment and to somehow donate time or money to protect these creatures and their habitat, you have made a difference.



Shy Albatross, Tasmania



Chrysaora

Project 4

WHAT: Become a Citizen Scientist

HOW: Google environmental non-profits or parks departments in your area. Then volunteer for one of their citizen science projects. You will contribute in two ways: first by collaborating to mainstream scientific investigations and secondly by photographing the conservation effort as it happens.

WIIFY: The fact that you are working on one of the campaign issues for a non-profit organisation increases the value of your images to them, and you will get issue and location knowledge that will help you take photos others might miss. This is one of the best examples of conservation photography at work in tandem with practising conservation. Get your images published with the non-profit organisation and pitch it to some local papers or magazines. Make sure you write captions so viewers and potential editors learn the stories behind the photos. Try to collect names, place, time and a quote or fact about what is depicted.

AN EXAMPLE: Spaceships in the ocean and fire in the water – fascinating jellyfish

After taking striking images of unusual creatures such as the comb jellies and chrysaoras, it was exciting to research these with help from the Jelly Watch Organisation and assemble a series of informative posts and articles about these marine wonders. The images were taken at Wilson's Promontory. The red jellies had never been seen at this location before. Organisations such as Jelly Watch or Red Map don't know particular species are there unless people volunteer their photographs and efforts. They rely on a vast network of interested people to further their research, to inspire us to interact differently with the environment and to communicate the need to protect wild places. Why not take part yourself?



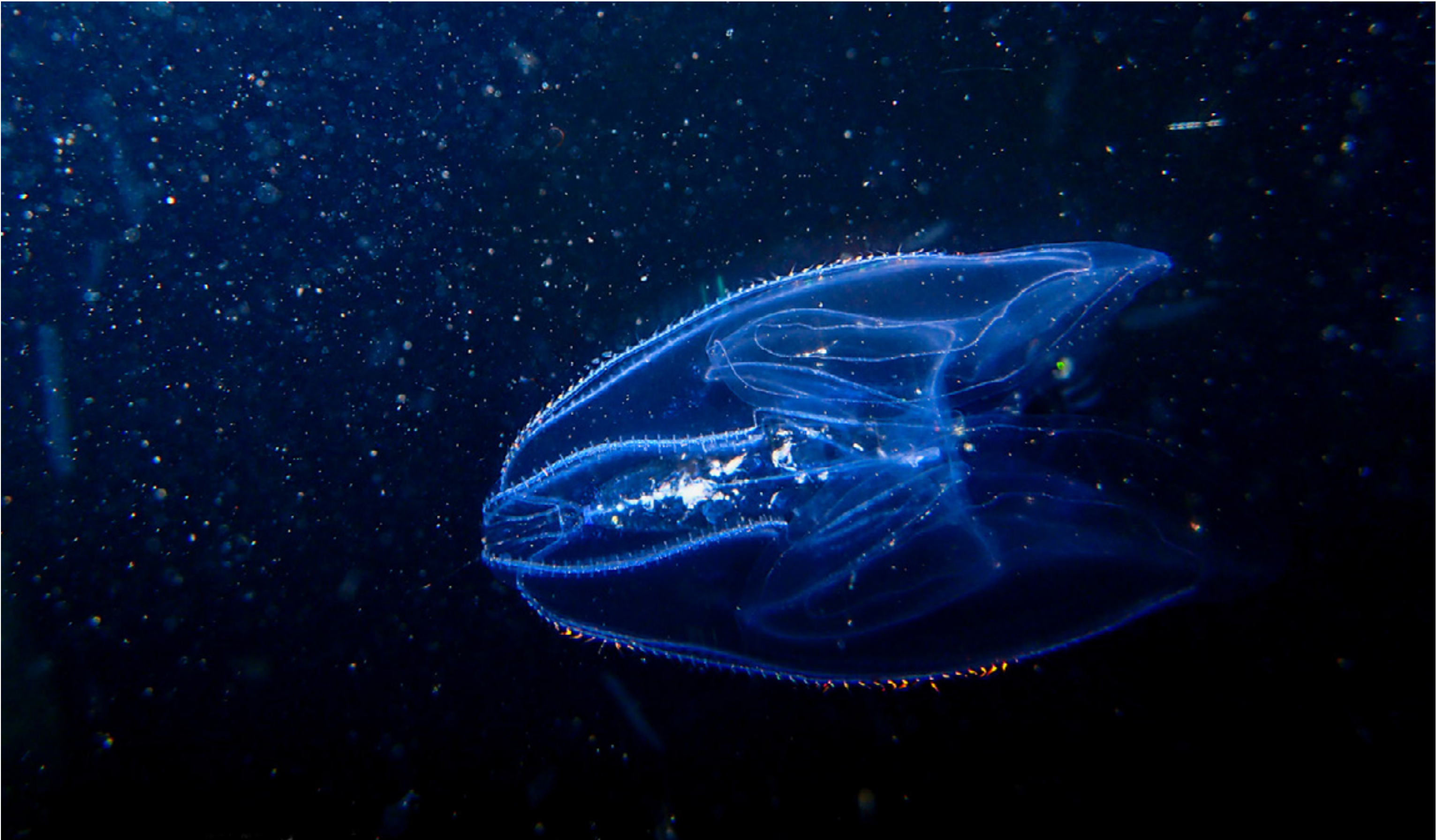
Caring enough

There you have it, a few ideas about conservation photo projects. This approach won't get you a quick buck, but it will set you in the right direction of doing

something worthwhile and making a difference. That last part especially is what conservation photography is all about – caring enough about the environment to take action with your camera, but in an ethical, purposeful, respectful way.

Christine Danger is a keen amateur photographer who focuses on nature and nautical subjects. Combining a love of the ocean, photography and writing, she shares her passion for the precious wild places and endangered species she is lucky enough to encounter during her sailing adventures. She shoots with a Canon 7D Mark II.

To see more of her work, go to [www.sv-takeiteasy.com](http://www.sv-takeiteasy.com)



Ctenophore