Underwater Photography

a web magazine
Issue 42
May/June 2008

Aquatica Canon 1DS Mk111
Subal 45° viewfinder
Olympus E3 / Nexus E3
Subal ND3 Nikon D300

Sealux CD300 Nikon D300
Heinrichs iTTL Converter
Strobes and water colour
Djibouti whale sharks

Seasons
Wakatobi
FakFak
Parting Shot


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Digital
300 ft depth rating.
Sturdy aluminum construction.
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A web magazine UwP42 May/June 2008

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Editorial

Questionnaire findings

It appears that I didn't need to don my tin hat when reading your responses to our questionnaire. 134 readers have completed it over the past two months and it has, for me, thrown up some interesting results.

For instance. The split between DSLR and compact users is approximately 50/50 with around 22% using both and about 17% shooting film. In truth nearly all of the film users also had some digital capacity so I would read that as 'have the capability of shooting film' rather than 'only shoot film'.

It surprised me that 41% dive temperate/green water although in fairness maybe we should have given the option to answer 'both'. Even so it's an interestingly high figure. Going the other way I was surprised that only 25% chose liveaboards. They have always seemed to me to be the most efficient way to maximise dive time but, obviously, what do I know.

One statistic which amazed me with envy was that 65% go on 3 or more trips per year. Another which impressed me was that 51% said they had bought equipment as a result of seeing an advert in UwP (potential future advertisers, please take note...)

The serious side of the questionnaire asked about what sort of articles you would like to see in the future and 67% said equipment reviews and theory/tutorials, while 87% wanted Tips & Techniques. Only 30% wanted Photographers profiles but 58% wanted Destinations and more Marine life.

Finally and most reassuringly 97% of readers thought that UwP was as good as, if not better, than printed magazines which only leaves 3% who begged to differ. Now 3% equates to just 4 readers, one of whom, you've guessed it, works for a printed magazine. 1 out of 4 is 25% so that's a quarter who are biased leaving only 75% of the original 3% who are not happy with UwP. Of those 75%, 33% (i.e. 1) still shot film exclusively and somehow managed to go on 'less than 1' dive trip a year.

Somewhat depressingly, as far as I'm concerned, only 25% wanted more Humour.

Peter Rowlands
peter@uwpmag.com

News, Travel & Events

Mark Webster's Underwater Photo Workshops 2008

13 - 20 June & 1 - 8 October

The Red Sea is a perfect photographic studio and has long been a favourite location for underwater photographers and with very good reason. The variety of corals, fish, spectacular colour and water clarity are hard to beat.

Mark Webster made his first visit here in 1976, when things were much more basic, and has been returning here every year since. There are so many subjects here that whatever your experience or interest in photography you are going to be spoiled for choice.

For 2008 we have two live aboard photo workshops on offer. The first in June will depart from Hurghada and move south initially towards Safaga and then make the crossing to the spectacular Brothers islands when the weather is right.

The second workshop in October will depart from Port Ghalib near Marsa Alam to dive the reefs of Fury Shoal, Sataya and Ras Banas in the southern Egyptian Red Sea .

www.oonasdivers.com

Ocean Optics Relocates to Action Underwater Studios

Ocean Optics and Mavericks Diving has relocated to Essex based Action Underwater Studios. The move will provide the underwater photography and diving specialists with access to Action Underwater Studios unique filming tank. The 10 x 12 metre tank is fully 6 metres deep. According to Steve Warren, owner of Ocean Optics and Mavericks Diving, " sharing Action Underwater Studios facilities means that we can provide our underwater photography equipment clients with a basic in - water camera familiarisation session at the time of purchase. We're also consulting with underwater photography guru Martin Edge on constructing a dedicated underwater set to meet the needs of wide angle and other specialised underwater photography courses. Ocean Visions has already signed up to run underwater photography courses at the tank".

For teaching complex skills, like underwater photography or buoyancy control, being able to talk to the student is highly effective and makes time in the tank far more productive. We think we may be the only UK dive school that offers this service", explains Steve. Action Underwater Studios, located at Archers Fields, Basildon, is equipped with classrooms, individual changing rooms with showers and free car parking. The studio is associated with the filming of the "Star Wars", "Bourne", "Bond" and "Harry Potter" blockbusters.

www.oceanoptics.co.uk

We are excited to announce a very special trip for 2009 to the Revillagigedos Archipelago, more commonly called Socorro, located in the eastern Pacific Ocean approximately 250 miles south of Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, at the tip of the Baja peninsula, on the live aboard dive vessel the Solmar V. These islands have been compared to the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador or Cocos Island in Costa Rica because of the big animal encounters they provide.

The Solmar V and crew have dived this area since 1992. They have hosted many underwater photographers and film crews and have the knowledge to maximize our big animal experience. We are seeking the best opportunities for giant Pacific Manta Rays, various shark species including schooling Hammerheads, Dolphins, dense schooling fish, Whale Sharks, large Tuna and Humpback Whales.

We have scheduled this expedition for late March when the water varies between around 70F - 74F, when the humpback whales visit Socorro during these cooler water months. You can usually hear these gentle giants singing on almost every dive and underwater encounters with these whales are increasing every year.

www.divephotoguide.com

Upcoming International Photo & Video Competitions

As the summer kicks in, several competition deadlines approach. Good luck!

June 1st
Subios 2008 - Seychelles
www.subios.com

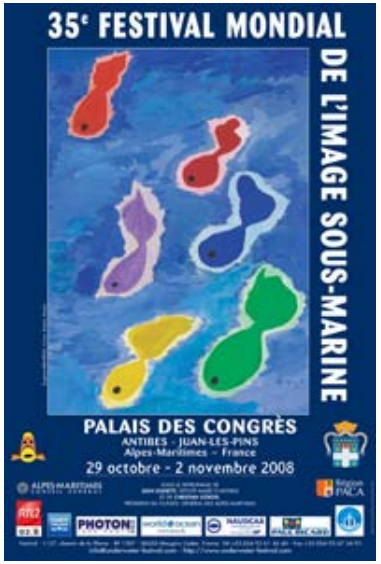
June 26th
GDT European Wildlife Photographer of the Year
www.gdtfoto.de

June 30th
4th annual underwater.com.au photo competition
www.underwater.com.au

July 1st
San Diego Undersea Film Exhibition
www.sdufex.com

July 1st
38th Annual National Wildlife Photo Competition
www.nwf.org

Antibes Film Festival 2008



The 35th World Festival of Underwater Pictures will be held in Antibes – Juan-les-Pins – France, at the Convention Centre from October 29th to November 02nd 2008

During the Festival, the competitors' films, slides and slides-show will be screened into three rooms.

1000 m2 of space will be reserved for exhibitors. The main hall of the Convention Centre will host magazines, the exhibition of works in competition (still photographs)... and the bar of the Festival.

www.underwater-festival.com

Shoot to thrill

Photographers and photojournalists Jeremy and Amanda Cuff have recently published a new brochure called "Shoot To Thrill Policy" which showcases a sample magazine feature article and an accompanying selection of images.

Jeremy said, "The aim of producing "Shoot To Thrill" is mainly for the purposes of expanding our portfolio of photojournalism work and is a good example of the type of commission that we can produce. It will be sent to editors and publishers, but we're also happy to send a copy to anyone who may be interested in our work."

Copies of "Shoot To Thrill Policy" can be requested from Jeremy and Amanda's website.

www.ja-universe.com

Marine Conservation Society

Plymouth Local Group

Marine Conservation Society
25th anniversary year

OPEN PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

MARINE CONSERVATION
THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

Photos should illustrate some aspect of marine conservation – they could include wonderful coastal landscapes worth conserving, people working with conservation, marine or beach pollution or litter, marine related animal or plant species at risk……let your imagination roam!

Classes for land and underwater, for adults and juniors.

For a full list of
- rules
- judges
- prizes
- copy of the entry form

go to www.mcsplymouthlocalgroup.co.uk/photocompetition

Closing date is Friday 18th July 2008

The winning and highly commended photographs will be displayed at Wembury Marine Centre from 9th to 16th August
Prizes presented Wednesday 13th August

Prizes include
£100 in vouchers sponsored by *Bags2Keep* in conjunction with *London Camera Exchange*
£100 in dive shop vouchers sponsored by *Aquanauts* and *In Deep*
plus entrance tickets for *Paignton Zoo and Living Coasts* and more!

bags2keep eco bags with style

LCE

indeep dive centre

aquanauts DIVECENTRE

PAIGNTON ZOO

Wembury Marine Centre

LIVING COASTS

First Annual Fish ID Challenge

August 9 - 16 or
August 16 - August 23, 2008

Join Sand Dollar and Bonaire Dive & Adventure this summer for their First Annual Fish ID Challenge in conjunction with Fish ID experts Patti & Scott Chandler of ReefNet, Inc. and the island of Bonaire's Dive Into Summer Program.

For many years, Sand Dollar and Bonaire Dive & Adventure have actively supported education and conservation programs designed to contribute to the preservation of Bonaire's magnificent underwater Marine Park. Join them this summer for their latest endeavor, in conjunction with Fish ID experts Patti & Scott Chandler of ReefNet, Inc.. Well known for their work in marine life identification and documentation, the Chandlers have spent the last 17 years documenting fish species, behaviors and creatures for future study and identification.

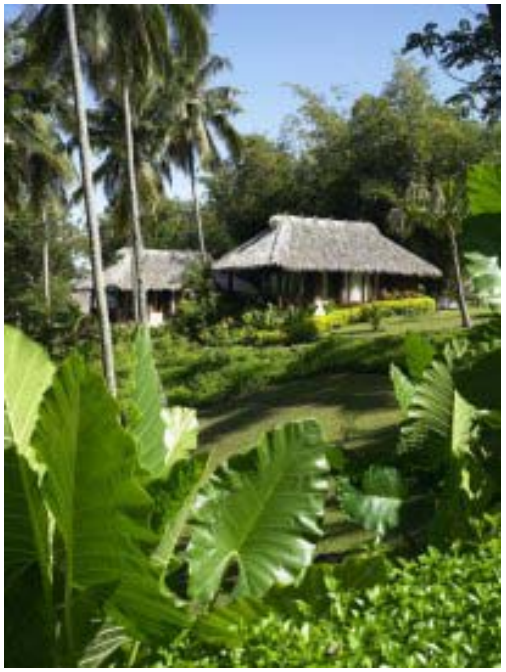
Participants will enjoy multimedia Fish ID seminars targeting novice to advanced fish watchers during their stay. Attendees will receive a Bonaire specific, custom printed Fish ID guide of the top 100 most commonly sighted fish found in Bonaire's waters as well as a H2YO Noisemaker (underwater signaling devise designed by ReefNet, Inc.) plus one Reef Fish Interactive DVD per couple. During the week, Patti and Scott along with Bonaire Dive & Adventure Naturalist Jerry Ligon will lead guided shore dives on Bari Reef. Several evenings each week, Patti and Scott will share raw, uncut video of these and other dives with participants discussing fish ID and swapping the days "fish stories." One of Scott's specialties is shooting in Hi-Def macro, capturing on tape, interesting fishes and creatures too small to be noticed by the naked eye and fish behavior not normally seen by most divers.

www.sanddollarbonaire.com

Eco Divers - new diving at luxury resort Kima Bajo

From May 2008, Eco Divers will be offering diving and snorkelling services at the attractive upscale boutique Kima Bajo Resort, Manado. The resort beautifully compliments Eco Divers' Kungkungan Bay Resort in Lembeh being of the same high standards. This exciting development sees Kima Bajo and Eco Divers offering highly competitive new dive package prices.

With its own private beach, this phenomenal, unspoilt location is idyllic for diving and relaxation, located just a short boat ride away from world renowned dive sites of the Bunaken National Park. This means that Eco Divers will offer two dives in the morning and one dive in the afternoon with a leisurely lunch back at the resort.



Kima Bajo is the ideal place for divers and non-divers alike with its bar, restaurant, Mayana Spa, private beach and excursions to nearby places of interest.

Accommodation includes 19 luxurious villas with a sunken outdoor bathtub and shower, an exclusive two-villa suite with its own private swimming pool and 12 spacious longhouse suites. The design is constructed from the finest natural materials available locally to create a style that is contemporary and yet very much in keeping with the North Sulawesi image.

Eco Divers will be offering its usual high calibre of customer service to the diving guests and will

be operating brand new, purpose built boats designed by Eco Divers with the diver in mind. They are spacious, built in traditional design but with contemporary interior facilities such as sundecks, rinse tanks, WC, shaded salon and powerful, energy efficient double outboard engines.

The result being that guests travel to the dive sites with speed and in extreme comfort. As with all Eco Divers' diving, the guest-to-guide ratio is kept small at 4 to 1 and with a maximum of just 8 guests per boat. Snorkellers and non-divers are welcome to join any of the trips.

"We are delighted to be involved with Kima Bajo – our experience of Kungkungan Bay and Tasik Ria stands us in good stead and the team is looking forward to welcoming our first guests," explained Eco Divers' owner, Jim Yanny.

www.eco-divers.com

Turks & Caicos Uw Photo Competition

June-Sept 2008

This Event has become a major Competition offering $10,000 US in cash prizes and approximately $15,000 in subsidiary prizes such as dive travel, cameras, photographic equipment and SCUBA gear from leading manufacturers.

Also, the best twelve photographs taken during the Competition will also be included in the Turks & Caicos annual, international "Out Of The Blue" Calendar with each photograph assigned to a particular month of the year.

Underwater photographers who wish to enter the Competition must take their photographs in the Turks & Caicos during the months of June, July, August or September of 2008 when diving conditions and tropical water temperatures are optimal. Each participant must apply either online or in the Islands for an Official ID Card so they are recognized as a competitor, but the Competition imposes no restrictions on artistic expression.

www.underwaterphoto.tc

The wreck of the El Arish El Tor, Safaga

By Laila Popper, Emperor Safaga dive centre Manager

Captain Karmi starts the two outboards and the speed boat 'Mimi' roars to life. It takes only a few minutes until we reach the site. A back roll gets us into the water where we descend on the line.

All I can see in the beginning is blue water and a school of fusilier but as I continue down, at 17 metres we reach the wreck. She came to rest on her starboard side and we start our dive right at the bow. The name 'El Arish El Tor' is still legible and the anchor chain is covered with soft corals.

We dive past what has once been the bridge, descend further to 35 metres and shine our torches beneath the vessel. The orange rescue boats are tucked underneath and life vests are hanging all over the place. It's an eerie scene, but fortunately the sinking

of this ship did not cost any lives.

On the chimney we discover the logo of the Sayed Nasr lines and I spot a blue spotted sting ray that has made its home here while a very large school of soldier fish attempt to hide in the wreck. We swim through what once was a shaded seating area. Now only metal frames and the roof of corrugated metal are left; fire sponges and purple fan coral give it new life. As we round the stern the two enormous propellers are silhouetted against the surface, covered with huge soft corals and I stop to take a few pictures.

On our way back we encounter thousands (!) of yellow tail barracudas that are forming an actual layer of fish over the top of the wreck, sweeping back and forth as some large mackerels shoot through them in pursuit. It's time to ascend and during our safety stop we watch a group of Indian mackerels fishing for plankton, their mouths wide open as they swim in synchronised splendour.

As we finally break the surface the captain is ready to help us with our kit and during the swift ride back we start to discuss all the things we've see on this dive!

We continue recalling more and more details all the way through the beautifully cooked BBQ at the Safaga Beach Club restaurant until it's time for our next dive.

www.emperordivers.com

International Kemer Underwater Days

16 - 19 May 2008

International Kemer Underwater Days (IKUD) is a week of activities organized jointly by the Center for Mediterranean Underwater Archeological Research (AASAM) (www.aasam.net) and the Foundation for the Promotion of Kemer (KETAV) (www.ketav.org) , whose goal is to introduce to the world the natural and the archeological beauties of the deep waters of Kemer - Antalya (Turkey) in the Mediterranean. This activity is a member of EUIFA and the partner of UNEP/MAP – Info RAC.

International Kemer Underwater Days includes many activities and a meeting program on underwater imaging and underwater archaeology. It also contains underwater photography and videography competitions which happen in the crystal waters of Kemer at every year in May.

www.kemerfest.net

SNAPPER SCHOOL

Underwater photography courses by Cameras Underwater

With: **Scuba Travel**

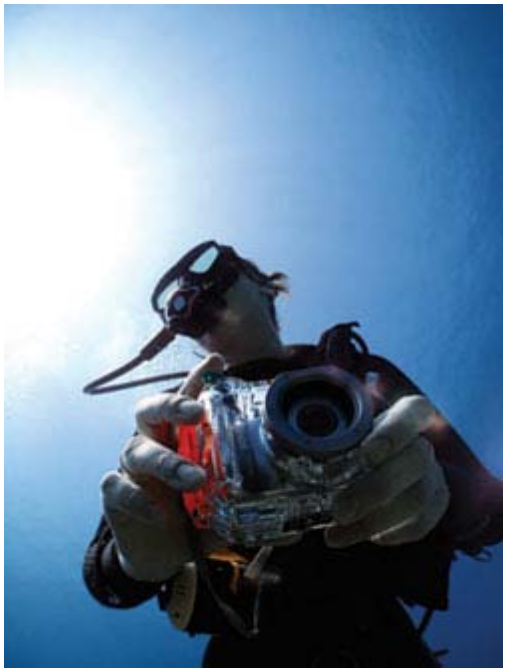
Tony Backhurst

Experience the best in liveaboard diving and learn how to take great pictures underwater at the same time.

Cameras Underwater have teamed up with Tony Backhurst Scuba Travel to bring you "Snapper School" - the opportunity to enjoy diving at its very best and whilst you're at it we'll show you how to get the best out of your camera underwater.

Aimed at the diver who is just taking their first pictures underwater or someone who feels they could do with a little help, you'll learn simple techniques like how to use manual white balance and the benefits of wide angle lenses to more elaborate ideas like using exposure compensation. We'll have equipment on board so you can try out the latest kit without any commitment to buy. This is underwater photography for all, no exotic equipment and no terrifying price tags. You'll work with down to earth guides like Paul 'Duxy' Duxfield.

You'll be staying aboard Typhoon, part of the illustrious Tornado Marine Fleet. They are fitted



out to a standard of luxury that puts the rest most definitely in the shade. Jacuzzi, plasma screen and a host of other mod cons including a fridge in every cabin! Are we talking about a liveaboard here or a five star hotel! Price for all this? Just £995.00.

See you on board.

www.camerasunderwater.co.uk

Bali Scuba

Diving Bali with Bali Scuba

With some of the most diverse macro underwater photography dive sites in Indonesia, classic Indonesian muck diving, and great wide-angle underwater picture and underwater video opportunities, it's no wonder the best underwater photographers visiting Indonesia always dive Bali. Whether you are just starting out in underwater photography, or are already an experienced marine photographer, our specialist underwater photography guides can help you achieve your goals in Bali.

For underwater pictures or underwater video of big pelagics in Bali, Manta, and Oceanic Sunfish/ Mambo (Mola mola) then join us for speedboat diving in Nusa Penida.

For macro underwater photography in Bali, Tulamben is the most well-known dive site. Those with more time can also dive 'Secret Bay', Seraya, Pemuteran and PJ dive sites, all of which offer classic muck diving with a wide variety of underwater critters.

Our specialist underwater photography macro guides have been guiding underwater photographers around Bali for years, and have a practiced macro photographer's eye.

From a simple one day (two dive or three dive) trip, up to an extended Bali Diving, Transport & Accommodation custom diving safari, let Bali Scuba handle all the diving logistics leaving you to concentrate on capturing your perfect marine image.

Depending on your diving itinerary we are happy to provide FREE NITROX to divers already Nitrox certified.

Let us know how many divers & how many diving days, and any special requests, and we'll get back to you with some suggested dive itineraries.

www.baliscuba.com

Discover UNDERWATER Photography

SLR-DC Housings

The Ikelite SLR-DC housing takes full advantage of the digital SLR camera's innovative features. The housing is injection molded of clear, lightweight polycarbonate for strength, visual access to the camera, LCD screens and camera controls. The housing provides controls for most camera functions. Most Ikelite SLR-DC housings include conversion circuitry that provide TTL compatibility with the latest Ikelite DS Substrobes. Many housings also include a Flash Compensation Module which provides over and under-exposure compensation in the TTL mode and easily allow you to switch to Manual Exposure Mode which provides eight power settings. All exposure compensation is done on the back of the housing. There is no need to access complicated camera menus.

Canon
EOS 5D
EOS 20D
EOS 30D
EOS 40D
EOS 350D, Rebel XT
EOS 400D, Rebel XTi
EOS 450D, Rebel XSi

Fuji
S-5 Pro

Nikon
D40, D40x
D50
D60
D70, 70s
D80
D200
D300

Olympus
E-330
E-410
E-500
E-510
E-3

Sony
A100
A-700

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Indianapolis, IN
46208
317-923-4523

www.ikelite.com

Ikelite Compact Digital Still Housings for

Canon • Fuji • Nikon • Olympus • Sony

Ikelite offers housings for more than fifty different digital still camera models to meet the diverse demands of the underwater photographer community. Ikelite's Compact Digital Still Housings are molded of clear polycarvbonate. Dive while knowing your system is safe and have complete visual access to the camera, LCD, monitor and control functions. Most housings are rated to 60m (200').

Ikelite AF35 AutoFlash Kit

Fits most compact digital camera housings.

Ikelite • Canon • Olympus • Sony

The AF35 AutoFlash replicates your camera's flash for automatic exposure in any situation. You only have to know how to point.
The AF35 AutoFlash kit is an effortless and affordable way to add an external flash to your point-and-shoot camera system. Everything you need to get started is in the box - just attach it to the bottom of your housing and start taking pictures!

New Products

Aquatica Canon 1DS Mark III housing

Aquatica is proud to announce its latest addition, the housing for the fabulous Canon 1DS mark III, with 21.1 mega pixels this camera/housing combination will push the boundaries of underwater photography to another level. Machined from solid aluminum, treated and anodized to military specification, then painted with a robust weather and wear resistant finish, this addition to our already wide selection of housings will benefit from the same 300 ft. depth rating that set us apart from our competitors.

The 1DS Mk III housing has the same mounting bayonet that will accept our existing accessories as well as ports, including our tack sharp Megadome, Aqua View finder and remote control cord, it is therefore in a position to address every aspect of this demanding activity that is underwater photography.

Key features:

Bayonet Port: Positive bayonet mounting and locking leaves no doubt that your ports are secure in place and water tight. The bayonet system dome, macro ports and extension rings, offers the fastest access to

lenses for rapid changing without having to remove the SLR from the housing. Allows use of lenses from a 15mm fisheye lens to a 180mm macro lens. Tele-converter port extensions are also available.

Fingertip access to all camera menu controls include On-Off, Mode, bracket, Meter positioning, focus control and AE/AF lock as well as AF preferences. Access to all menu features include review, enlarge and delete, histogram and internal SLR preferences.

Lens release lever for easy lens changing through the front port with camera installed.

Built in remote control compatibility, no modification or special connectors to install.

The most critical aspect of underwater SLR photography is the viewing system. The Aquatica 1DS Mk III uses a viewfinder that derives the biggest and the brightest image possible in full frame viewing to your eye. An accessory Aqua View Finder is also available giving the user unparallel viewing of the camera's viewfinder for sharp focusing and exact composition.

SPECIFICATIONS

Depth rating: 300 feet/90 meters

Precision machined from a single aluminum block. It is fully anodized to military specifications and coated with robust wear resistant coating. All function labels are pad printing so they will not peel off or fade.

Accurately balanced ergonomic design - all controls are within easy reach.

Excellent underwater balance.

Replaceable sacrificial anodes protect the housing from electrolysis.

www.aquatica.ca

Heinrichsweikamp Remote Slave Unit

The Remote Slave Unit RSU is a very sensitive microprocessor controlled photosensor that triggers underwater strobes over large distances. No TTL function is build in the RSU as in the Digital Adapter. The RSU does not work with active preflashes. Hence in most cases an additional external strobe is necessary to suppress the TTL preflashes of most digital cameras. Under mint conditions distances exceeding 25 meters can be covered with the RSU system underwater. The major application range is creative pool, wreck and cave photography.

All underwater strobes (TTL and non TTL) with 5 pin Nikonos connector are working fine with the following limitations. The strobes are equipped with a strobe ready signal of at least 4 Volts on the connector to power the RSU. The trigger voltage can be up to 30 Volts. Instructions to measure the voltages can be given on request.

Furthermore all strobes known to us with 4-pin Sea&Sea Motormarine connector are compatible to the RSU-S version. Modifications to the strobe could be necessary. A dual sync cord can also be used without limitations.

www.heinrichsweikamp.com

Fantasea Canon housing

Fantasea Line announces the release of a new housing specifically designed for the Canon PowerShot SD1100 IS / IXUS 80 IS digital camera.

The FSD-1100 housing, depth rated to 60 meters/200 feet, is fully functional providing photographers with access to all camera functions.

www.fantasea.com

Subal 45° viewfinder

The new WS45 Finder affords a comfortable view of the camera viewfinder at 45° viewing angle. As the GS180 viewfinder the WS45 features an enlargement factor of 150%, with the visible finder area enlarged to 2 ½ times of the original. WS45 pivots through 360°, with stops every 90°.

The 45° viewing angle offers distinct advantages when taking close-up pictures close to the sea floor or when shooting above/below type situations with semi immersed camera housing. Top quality optical elements assure a bright and brilliant finder image.

www.subal.com

Tokina 10-16mm

An interesting lens announced by Tokina is the AT-X 116 Pro DX, a wide 11-16 f2.8 zoom for Nikon and Canon crop sensor cameras boasting a focal length of 11-16 mm and constant f/2.8 maximum aperture. Whilst the zoom range is not exactly what you might call extensive, this lens is likely to generate considerable interest with its 17-25 mm approx. equivalent focal length (on Nikon DX, Canon APS-C users will get around 18-26 mm).

www.kenro.co.uk

Sealux JVC housing

The Sealux Universal JVC housing has an integrated high-resolving 16:9 color monitor . All JVC camcorders can be used which are equipped with IR for remote control. They must not be larger than 190mm, wider than 132mm and higher than 116mm.

www.sealux.de

usaNexus.com
858-481-0604

45 degree finder

Fiber optic sync

D70

D2x

D200

D80

1Ds MarkII

5D

Nexus 1017 Tokina Dome Port

Nexus introduces the new super coated glass dome port DP1017-10 made specifically for the Tokina 10-17 fisheye zoom lens. This small dome, only 4.75 inches diameter overall, is another in the line of dome specific ports that Nexus offers. Rather than use big oversized domes the Nexus approach is to match a glass dome, small in size, to individual lenses.

With a zoom lens like the Tokina 10-17 you have a zoom range for wide angle coverage from 180 degrees to 100 degrees of coverage. The small dome port keeps the camera housing manageable underwater and very small for travel. The HG 725 zoom gear is used for the zoom control.

www.usanexus.com

Light & Motion Stingray HD and Bluefin HC7 compatible with Sony HDR-HC9

Light & Motion is announcing that its Stingray HD and Bluefin HC7 Video housings are now 100% compatible with the new Sony HDR-HC9 HDV camcorder. The Sony HDR-HC9 camcorder offers high quality video and is compatible with a wide range of editing suites. Pairing it with either the Light & Motion Stingray HD or the Bluefin HC7 video housings allows you to take your video to a new level…underwater.

www.uwimaging.com

Aquatica Nikon D300 housing

Aquatica is pleased to introduce the Aquatica D300 housing for the Nikon D300 DSLR camera. This new housing has an ergonomic design and gives the user easy access to vital controls to deliver a high performance, user-friendly experience for the underwater photographer. Accessible from the right hand are the Main and quick dial controls as well as the shutter release and AF-lock control all this with out having to remove your hand from the grip.

Developed based on our tested and proven port system, the rugged yet compact Aquatica D300 is compatible with all of our bayonet ports and accessories, The 100 meters (over 300 feet) pressure certification is sure to please even the most technical of diver.

The housing is supplied with two universally accepted Nikonos-type strobe connectors, giving the user a wide array of underwater strobes to choose from and the flexibility to mix brands and models of strobes as desired. The secondary connector is ready to accept the new underwater remote control for pole camera use or for long exposure in low light situation. There is a tapped hole on the top of the housing in the same axis as the lens for mounting a focusing light.

www.aquatica.ca

Olympus E3 / Nexus E3

By Karin Brussard

The Olympus E3 is the new flagship based on the Four Thirds standard E-System. The E3 is an extremely advanced camera that can be used for every assignment and fully complies with the strict requirements of DSLR photography.

Olympus have put their own underwater housings, made of polycarbonate, on the market for the E-330, E-300 and E410. For their underwater housing of the E-3 Olympus have sought to cooperate with Nexus. Nexus have been producing aluminium underwater housings for many years now, initially for traditional SLR cameras and now DSLRs of various brands.

Nexus has a lot of experience developing underwater housings and you can tell by the E3. The underwater housing looks neat and well thought-out. The Olympus E-3 fits nicely in the housing and the way Nexus has built the housing it enables the internal flash to be folded up. This allows operating the flash with an optical cable. Despite this Nexus was able to keep the housing compact. The Nexus housing is suitable for a depth up to 70 meters.

Besides underwater housings Nexus also manufactures various bayonet mount lens ports. Olympus also has a pack of ports developed for use on their own underwater housings but they have a screw mount. An adapter can be used to utilize ports from Olympus and other brands that also work with screw mounts (Inon for example) on the Nexus housings. This is very convenient for photographers already in the possession of Olympus ports but also for those who don't own ports yet and can thus choose Olympus compact ports.

I have tested the camera with some Olympus ports. The PPO-E3 has been designed specifically for the 50mm macro lens. This port has a wide base at the screw connection and tapers towards the end, making it extremely compact. This is very convenient when photographing macro subjects. The 7-14mm wide-angle lens not only requires the dome port PPO-E04 but also an attachment ring (PER-E02). The wide-angle lens is that long it won't fit directly on the dome port. The dome port is strikingly compact. The dome port shows some distortion at 7mm but I find that very acceptable for a wide-

angle lens like this. Olympus delivers a special zoom ring for this lens but unfortunately it can not be used with the Nexus housing. The cogs on the zoom ring don't coincide with those of the cog-wheel of the Nexus housing (contrary to the cog-wheels of the Olympus housings). I think this is a real pity because you have to decide which setting the lens has to be in before going into the water. Hopefully Olympus and Nexus will develop a new zoom ring for this.

For the 8 mm fisheye lens the same port can be used but without the extra ring. It makes the system travel-friendly since you only need one dome port for two lenses. The dome port has been equipped with a lens hood that is attached to the port with a number of socket screws. There was one problem I encountered when using it. The lens hood was in the correct position when I used the port with the extra ring. But when I attached the dome port directly to the housing, the lens hood stayed on one side. And no matter how I tried, I couldn't get the word Olympus to appear on the top, but only a quarter turned. We did two dives on the same location that is why I wanted to change lenses in between. The whole of Dahab went looking for a fitting hexagon socket wrench, because mine stayed behind in the hotel room….

The Nexus housing is standard equipped with two flash connections for electronic cables and two connections for optical cables. The electronic connections have a standard Olympus mount and are meant for connecting Olympus flash units. Using the FL-36 in the PFL-E01 underwater housing or its smaller brother FL-20 in the PFL-01 housing TTL flash is enabled. However; I have used two Sea & Sea YS 110 flash units that can not directly be attached to the flash connections. They require a special Athena adapter. Unfortunately this adapter was delivered to my house one day too late.

If you want to operate the flash units through the optical cables you should not forget to fold up the flash of the camera because there is no button on the underwater housing to do it.

The underwater housing has a handle on both sides. My hands are quite small and I am very well capable of operating the shutter release button and the command dial without having to move my hand. The handles have grooves on them which I did not find very pleasant to hold. Although I can imagine other photographers liking them.

The underwater housing comes with two magnifying glasses that you can place in the viewfinder of the house. The magnifier strongly magnifies the image but it only leaves a small part of the viewfinder visible. This is excellent for macro shooting as you will have an excellent view whether your object is sharp or not. The disadvantage however is evident; you miss a large part of the image which makes it hard to decide on an accurate composition. About the other glass unit, the pick-up unit, I am not entirely sure of its purpose. I thought afterwards that it might be meant for people wearing glasses, as some sort of correction. I have used both glasses a few times but I really prefer working with the housing without magnifier or pick-up unit.

The capacity of the battery lasts for about two dives. Since I operate the flash with an optical cable the flash of the camera has to do a lot of work. Thankfully it does not influence the battery life significantly. It means that I don't have to open the underwater housing.

All camera functions are operable underwater with the exception of folding up the flash. The functions are not displayed on the housing and due to the fact the housing is not transparent you can't take a peek as to which button you have to use for a certain function. This can be very tricky if you still don't know the camera that well. I had set the camera in the manual mode during the first dive, with an aperture of f/5.6. During the dive I could not remember how to change aperture. I had to work with the same aperture the entire dive. And because of using the 50 mm macro lens I had a limited depth of field. Still I carried on shooting and in the end I got some surprising and unusual results.

The auto focus on the E-3 works fast and very precise and the 11 focus points are ideal to capture fish. Although the camera fits perfectly in the housing, it once shifted and I was unable to operate the camera underwater. It meant I had to ascend, take my diving gear off, get out of the water, dry myself and the camera, open the underwater housing, fit the camera properly, close

the underwater housing, go back into the water, put diving gear on, descend and finally shoot. My buddy was not amused!

The Olympus E-3 has been equipped with Live View just like its younger brothers. The LCD monitor of the E-3 has a nice large size (2.5 inch) and its brightness can be adjusted in 15 stops. It makes it easy to decide a composition even underwater. I have tried out Live View while making pictures of my buddy. That is not as easy as it sounds. I decide on the correct composition, I see my buddy in the right spot, not breathing out and press the shutter release button. When I view the picture I see bubbles in front of her eyes because of breathing out, due to the shutter lag when using Live View. Live View works great for still objects but not for moving objects, it needs an experienced photographer to deal with the limited focus speed.

The Olympus E-3 and the Nexus housing make a great combination. The E-3 is a DSLR camera with fast auto focus and 11 focus points. The Olympus E-3 has absolutely no problem with the light areas caused by the sun. The shutter lag makes Live View less suitable for moving objects. The Nexus housing is well built and has a number of special specifications. External flash units can be operated through electronic as well as optical cables. When using the optical cable, do not forget to fold up the camera's flash before closing the housing. The Nexus housing comes with an adapter so the Olympus ports can be used also.

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Nikon D300 and Subal ND3

by Martin Edge

When the Nikon D300 was released last summer (07) I along with many other underwater photographers recognised that its introduction coupled with the relatively low retail price would substantially influence uwp world over. In my role as uwp educator I decided to 'jump on the bandwagon' and up – grade from my trusty, reliable and much loved D200.

You need to know that I have favoured Nikon since my days with a Nikon F2 and Oceanic housings of the 80's. I have owned and used Subal housings since the introduction of the Nikon F801 in the early 1990's. In my teaching role I regularly instruct in Ikelite, Sea & Sea, Nexus and Hugyfot DSLR housings. Whilst I'll endeavour to be impartial as I can, the influence that Nikon and Subal have had on my own photographic career cannot be ignored. I am unable to compare the D300 against our Canon cousins but I do have sufficient experience using the D200 to compare against the Nikon D300

On first appearance the Subal ND30 is very similar to the ND20 (Nikon D200). It weighs the same, looks the same and when you take hold, it feels the same. But then you notice the huge 3" LCD screen. Now, I am a firm believer that the larger the LCD the easier and more accurate it is to review the result underwater. I cannot emphasise this enough. It's no use finding out that you have clipped the composition or chosen the wrong angle when you're back on dry land! The time to review and correct an error or to pursue a new idea on a subject is underwater at the time of shooting. The 3in LCD of the D300 is bright, clear and easy to view even in shallow water. There is a one finger - press - zoom button on the rear of the housing. In practice I was able to determine sharp focus on my macro/close up subjects and on many occasions I persisted with the subject to correct my focusing/compositional mistakes. I doubt if I would have noticed underwater (at the time) these small imperfections/mistakes by viewing my Nikon D200 LCD.

I receive many enquiries concerning whether of not the Subal GS viewfinder is worth the money. In my opinion the viewfinder of any camera housing is without doubt the most significant feature of the entire

design. If we cannot see clearly and accurately what we are trying to shoot then what is the point? Doesn't it frustrate when a manufacturer produces a housing where the user is unable to see all four corners of the viewfinder to compose a subject correctly. Enhanced viewfinders like Subal and other housings, though expensive are definitely worth the money IMHO.

The front main dial (aperture) the rear main dial (shutter speed) and shutter release control are in exactly the same position as before. I have heard criticisms that for users with small hands the shutter release is too far away from the right handled grip. My suggestion is to simply release the velcro strap to allow the right hand closer access.

The On/Off switch has changed to a circular design. In my opinion this is an improvement and I feel the sensitivity to turn the camera on and off both on land (without the back plate) connected and underwater have a more positive feel to it.

The Mode and +/- exposure compensation push down controls

situated behind the On/off switch are now raised up slightly. Whilst on first glance this would not appear to make the slightest difference, underwater I noticed that it was much easier for me to locate both the 'Mode' and +/- to push down and make changes without looking at either dial. I'm unable to comment on whether or not these dials are as easy to manipulate when wearing gloves.

A similar design improvement is evident on the left hand side of the housing with the 'QUAL' quality, 'WB' White Balance and ISO push down controls. With the ND30, Subal have disposed with the small black circular base on which these three push buttons were situated on with the ND20.

Now, I always change the 'Quality' and 'ISO' setting via the 'My Menu' in the rear LCD screen but with 'WB' White Balance I do need easy access to this button. My WB settings fluctuate between 'Auto' and 'Preset'. To set Preset WB via the housing I first use the LCD screen to locate and change it. This brings the 'PRE' setting up in the bottom right hand corner of the camera viewfinder. Once done, you push down and hold the 'WB' control for about three seconds and press the shutter. If this attempt to 'preset' is successful you will see the 'Gd' sign (which signifies the preset reading is 'good' and has worked).

I find it much easier to locate this WB push button control on the top left of the housing than it was before. With a little practice, 'preset' WB readings can be set quite easily without having to fiddle around to locate the control.

The ND30 now has a lever on top of the housing which activates the flash exposure compensation button situated just below the 'pop up' flash button of the camera. The addition of this control is for users of Nikon SB flashguns in housings to control exposure compensation.

Moving down the rear back-plate towards the LCD screen the BKT 'bracket' button of the ND20 has been replaced with the 'playback' button and next to it remains the 'Delete' button. Below this in order are the following five push down buttons: Menu, ? Info and Lock, Zoom out –, Zoom in +, OK

Many readers will be familiar with the above but I'll just mention the highlights.

Press the Info/Lock button and the shooting display information comes up on the LCD screen. Information including the Aperture, Shutter speed, Exposure Mode, etc are displayed on the LCD monitor. The implications of this I found to be a significant I did not have to look through the viewfinder to ascertain my exposure settings or exposure mode

The viewfinder's built in exposure meter is also displayed. Indicating if a scene will be under or over exposed.

I could easily change and determine my settings i.e chosen aperture and shutter speed by simply turning the appropriate dials and having a clear unrestricted view of my progress in the 3in LCD monitor.

In practice, I could swim towards a subject (turtle) whilst at the same time, adjusting aperture and shutter speed and without taking my eye off the of the turtle

The Zoom in or out is a one push zoom feature which can magnify the LCD by up to 27 times. Whilst this is not a new, it has been developed and I found it so much more ergonomic.

The MSC focus mode selector, lens release, shutter release, AF On lever have not changed to any degree. The spot, matrix and center weighted dial are also unchanged.

The multi selector push down controls now have an additional

push button in the center. I found this very useful in order to activate a full size histogram overlay on top of the image and most importantly – activate it at your own convenience. This histogram can be set by going to Custom Setting F1

I used the camera and housing during a 10 day photo workshop at Kasai Village Resort in Cebu Philippines. Now, I'll point out that I am unable to thrill you with images of the likes which Berkley White produced with the sailfish but for everyday subjects then read on.

The ND30 felt no different in water than the ND20 but soon into the trip I noticed the improvement of both 'S' and 'C' auto focus (center point)

to lock onto subjects. For the last eight months I have been using the Nikon VR 105mm macro lens with mixed results, the jury is still out on this! I love the results on land and the quality of blur (bokeh) but underwater I've found it difficult to lock on to macro subjects because the focus is so damn quick from minimum to maximum. Using this lens early one morning, I dropped to 30m to shoot a longnosed hawk fish which I had found the previous day. Once in the water I realised I had not attached my focus torch. I shot it all the same and was surprised and very impressed by how the focus locked-on in such poor ambient light. After 700 frames with my Nikon 105m macro VR - I can see substantial improvement in the focusing abilities of the D300 and this lens now has a permanent place in my camera bag.

Sunbursts and highlights

Just so you know where I stand

on this: By choice, I don't often include the sun ball itself within the frame. I find myself leaving it out and using the beams of light in the corners to add sparkle and 'jazz up' an otherwise monochromatic blue void in my wide angles. Will the D300 provide our sunbursts with the appeal they had on film? I think so but I'm unable to evidence it! Our 10 days in Cebu, suffered with poor visibility and whilst the sea was not rough it was often choppy. I shot sunbursts at various depths down to 25m but the beams were so scattered and diffused, it's hard to pass an informed opinion. As I recollect, shooting sunbursts in these conditions on film, the results were not that impressive either. What I can confirm is that low light shallow water sunlight shots worked very well and there's a significant improvement over the Nikon D200.

On four consecutive mornings I shot sunlight with a 10.5mm fisheye in 1m to 6m of water. The sea conditions were glass calm and visibility was at its best for the day – 20m. I used shutter speeds of 1/320th sec with an whole range of apertures. I shot Raw at the 200 ISO default and Auto white balance. The sunbeams appeared more accentuated with the fast shutter speed of 320th as opposed to 125th. But I was forever minded that this could also be affected by the height of the sun in relation to the horizon. The 'highlights' warning

seldom indicated the sunbeams as 'clipped' but when the ball of the sun was present - this would 'blink'. In Raw postproduction – CS3, it was easy to recover the highlights as long as they were not excessively overexposed.

I have no doubt that the ability of the D300 to handle the nature of highlights so often associated with underwater is a substantial improvement over Nikon DSLR cameras which have gone before. Together with my photo buddy Shannon Conway we compared almost identical images taken with my rig and his own Nikon D2x and we both agreed the D300 was superior for highlights. We also compared how similarly the D300 rendered saturation and colour, particularly with the tones of blue mid-water. An aspect of the Nikon D2x, which I have always been jealous of. For my own photography these improvements, together with the low light focusing abilities and almost double the pixel count are good reasons to justify an up-grade.

Noise

At 400 ISO I saw no evidence of digital noise. At 800 ISO I made the mistake of underexposing several blue water examples and when these areas were magnified, noise was slightly visible. Expose correctly at 1600 ISO and the noise effect diminishes. In Berkley White's review of the D300 and sailfish he warns of the importance to shoot accurate exposures to avoid the noise enhancing effects of brightening a dark image in post processing. This is excellent advice and I would recommend readers revisit his review at UwP41

Live view Mode

During my 10 day workshop I looked for numerous opportunities to use the Liveview Mode as an advantage to normal viewfinder composition. Whilst it is quite easy to set 'liveview'on a Subal housing, all my attempts to use it in some meaningful way failed. Perhaps I was not selecting appropriate subjects or opportunities; perhaps the GS viewfinder is so outstandingly clear as not to warrant in the circumstances, which I found before me. Whatever the reason, at this time, I fail to see a purpose to use 'live view' mode underwater when used in conjunction with the ND30. Perhaps a housing with poor viewfinding characteristics would benefit.

Battery Life

Compared to the D200 the battery life is a very comforting and a much needed improvement. I averaged 700 frames with both 60mm and 105mm macro lenses.

With the 10.5mm and Tokina 10mm – 17mm the average was 800. I allowed the battery to 'run down' to 3% and it continued to function adequately until it reached 1% when it died. At 10% power I could find no difference in performance from 100%

Weight and Transport

The Subal ND30 housing with the Nikon D300, a Nikon 60mm macro lens and port. Two Inon Z220's with leads and a couple of Inon flash arms have a combined weight of 7 kilos. I carry this equipment in a large but light weight ruck-sac which can be crumpled up and made to fit the luggage rack dimensions at airports. I wear a photographer's vest (at the last count I found 15 pockets). I carry flash guns, a variety of lenses and other essential bits and bobs. My vest (on average) weighs between 10k and 13k. Once through all the check-in hassle I re-pack the contents of my jacket into the ruck-sac. This method is working well for me at international airports and I include it in this review for those who may find it helpful.

To Upgrade or not

For those of you who may be contemplating an upgrade to the Nikon D300. I would suggest you visit the most comprehensive review, which I have seen - by Thom Hogan. http://www.bythom.com/nikond300review.htm It's a long read but at the bottom of the review, Thom compares the D300 and offers his opinions on upgrades under the heading of 'Should I get a D300'.

For use underwater I recommend the Nikon D300 very highly and after using and reviewing the ND30, I am unable to identify any particular aspect of this housing, which I believe could be improved upon.

Martin Edge

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Sealux CD300 for the Nikon D300

by Colin Gans

Mastering the operation of an underwater housing is a journey of familiarization. You move through a process of engaging its functionality, employing its ergonomics and adapting to its idiosyncrasies and so become at one with it; through lots of practice. It's like learning to play an instrument.

Sealux's CD300 housing for the Nikon D300 DSLR has a similar feel to the earlier D200 housing only with improvements in performance and functionality. All the controls just seem right and the changes I have so far encountered are for the better.

Key improvements with the D300 camera over the D200 which I have found to be useful in a practical context for underwater photography are:

∑ excellent monitor resolution and response, enabling effective in-camera decision making while underwater;
∑ the ability to view camera settings, previously only visible in the top LCD window, in a large clear format in the monitor window;
∑ improved image quality (if nothing else, this allows for more leeway with cropping);
∑ significantly longer battery life;
∑ slightly increased dynamic range with 14 bit RAW images;
∑ slightly less noise at higher ISO levels;
∑ self cleaning image sensor;
∑ Nikon D2X plus-some in a compact D200 style body.

Whilst my previous two Sealux housings were functional and durable (see www.underwaterdisplay.net/rig for reviews) the CD300 shows an improvement in aesthetics and ergonomics with the introduction of some subtle changes including: curved handles and conically tapered flat ports for close-up and macro work.

A feature on Sealux housings which I think is a good design attribute is the raised inner lip on the housing body which stops water falling back into the housing when the housing back is removed after a dive. This also serves as a guide to placement of the lid on the housing body for sealed closure.

Attention to detail is evident in the design of the CD300. Mineral glass rather than polycarbonate is used for the window over the D300 monitor display and this does justice to the resolution and clarity of the D300's display. This is an important feature and one which rated highly in my deciding whether to purchase. The monitor window is visible with the 150 degree viewfinder rotated to any of its selectable positions. As with other Sealux DSLR housings, tested depth rating is given as 90 metres.

The CD300 allows for an additional ball mount to be installed in the threaded socket provided on the centre top of the housing to mount a focus light or other accessory. This effectively gives four possible mounting points on the housing for strobes and accessories; one on each arm, a third one on the left hand side and the ball mount at centre top. Two different size ball fittings are available. The additional ball mount can be unscrewed to allow the housing to fit in my cabin bag without the ball protruding.

My CD300 sports the new 150 degree optical viewfinder (GV150). Sealux viewfinders have in the past been very successful and this one appears to be no exception. The prism model GD Viewfinder made by Sealux is also on-sold to Subal for their underwater housings. The GV150

viewfinder provides an enlarged 150 degree view which is bright, sharp and complete; it rotates to allow portrait and landscape views and is useful for over-under images. A detachable sunshield is fitted to the eyepiece. The viewfinder can be turned downwards when transporting or removed by hand by disengaging the plastic circlip on the inside of the housing cover. Dual o'rings on the viewfinder shaft provide a watertight fit onto the housing. I found the GV150 to be as good as the GD Viewfinder in coverage and clarity with the added advantage of being angled and able to rotate.

The housing is made of aluminium milled monoblock CNC, hard anodized and is sealed for resistance to saltwater corrosion. The colour, described as titanium grey, is a little darker than my earlier D200 housing. The controls appear to feel better but whether this is a case of 'new broom' syndrome or not, time will tell.

The Controls

One improvement which is welcomed is a change in design to the previously quirky focus mode control which switches between continuous, single, or manual focus (C/S/M) modes. This has been re-engineered and works very well with a good tactile feel when switching. Some controls described below are available optional extras. I suggest visiting the Sealux website for current details on options (www.sealux.de).

Live View Release Mode Dial

The release mode dial which allows control of Live View, Single Frame, Continuous, Self Timer and Mirror Up is engineered as a single control; a clever solution. When engaged it depresses the locking button while rotating the dial on the camera. I would be interested to see how other housing manufacturers' solve this.

Focus Priority Override

The AF Lock lever is well positioned to be used in conjunction with the shutter release lever to override focus priority. This is handy for lenses like the Nikon 105VR micro when used with the focus gear as it allows focus priority to be

overridden on demand simply by squeezing the AF Lock lever with the thumb while operating the shutter release with the forefinger; a perfectly natural movement.

A Centre Multi Selector Button

Some underwater housings I have tried lack the centre control for the camera's multi selector. Sealux have provided access to the centre button by engineering four of the shafts at slight angles allowing the buttons to be spread a little further apart on the outside. The five controls (North, South, West, East and Centre) are symmetrically placed. I found the response of the multi-selector quite sensitive but after a day or so of using the housing I have now become used to this.

The Flash Mode Button

The Flash mode button is another challenging control to engineer due to its position on the camera. This button is controlled via a lever and is well situated for access to enable switching between normal flash mode and rear curtain sync as well as flash compensation when using a housed speedlight.

The Mode and +/- Control

Both the mode and +/- buttons on the camera are controlled by a single lever, neither of which are engaged when the lever is in centre position. Pushing the lever to the left engages +/- exposure compensation. Pushing the lever to the right engages camera mode. In either engaged position the respective button stays down until the lever is returned to the centre position. In practice I have found this to be useful since both of the underlying buttons work in conjunction with the front command dial which needs to be rotated. Having these buttons stay down until disengaged allows the front command dial to be operated with thumb and forefinger.

Func Button Control

A Func button control lever allows the D300's user-defined function button to be accessed. With the D200, I viewed this as a 'nice to have'. Now that its available I've had to think what I'll use it for. I have since decided that assigning the Func button to 'Flash Off' is a good choice. There have been times when I've wished for a convenient way of cancelling flash without taking my eye off the viewfinder and this approach works very well. I can override the flash to do an ambient light shot with

my ring finger, override autofocus with my thumb and press the shutter with my forefinger; feels like I'm playing a saxophone! This is certainly more convenient than having to manually switch off strobes. The location and feel of each of these three levers is ergonomically good.

Lens Release Lever

A lens release lever in the housing body allows the easy removal of lenses from the front port. This is handy when switching lenses between dives. Prior to using this control I had placed it in the 'nice to have' basket of features. Now that it is available I'm finding that I use it more frequently than expected.

QUALity, ISO and WhiteBalance

While the more important WB and ISO button controls are available, there is no direct control button for the third member of the trio, the QUAL button. This control can be set as a shortcut and then accessed by pressing the Menu button. In my opinion having a QUAL button is not missed as it's not often that I would choose to switch image quality and should I wish to do so then 'My Menu' is sufficiently convenient for the job.

The Lens Port System

Sealux ports use glass and I do like their dependable design. They have a large diameter bayonet fitting with good o'ring seals making for a reliable seal. I have used the housing with a dome port, towed next to a boat, photographing spinner dolphin and have experienced no leaks despite such turbulent motion at shallow depth. The port system is modular and allows the use of extension rings to match ports to be used with a wider range of lenses. All port windows are high quality optical glass. Barrels are made of Delrin. The ports are durable, well designed and I have yet to experience a leak from either port or housing body in hundreds of dives over a four year period. The effort experienced in changing ports can be reduced with the use of a lightweight strap wrench as described in the 'Niggles' section. The tight and positive bayonet fit of the Sealux ports may in fact contribute to their very low flood rate.

Port extension rings allow a modular approach and the same rings can be used on flat and dome ports to cater for most popular lenses. Since the same tried and tested bayonet fittings have been used for many years, there is protection of existing investment and as we know, our lasting investment is more in the glass (lenses and ports) than the ever changing cameras and housings which fit them.

The large dome port (180F) has been available for some time and is excellent for 10.5mm Nikon, 10-17mm Tokina and the 12-24mm Nikon with the addition of an extension ring. What's new is the PS series of flat ports which are conically tapered from about 126mm at the housing side down to approximately 92mm at the glass end. The tapering allows better positioning of strobes for macro work

and has a more aesthetically pleasing look.

In addition to this, Sealux have come out with a series of good quality wetmate diopters for the new flat ports which fit neatly onto the front of the ports with a bayonet type lock. I ordered one of these on a whim and am very impressed with how well it fits on the port. The diopter works with both the 60mm and 105mm micro lenses.

The following are examples of port options for popular lenses for underwater photography:

- o Nikon 10.5mm fisheye: 180F Dome Port
- o Tokina 10-17 fisheye zoom: 180F Dome Port
- o Nikon 12-24mm: 180F Dome Port + 28mm extension ring
- o Nikon 60mm micro: PS104
- o Nikon 105mm micro (both VR and classic): either PS114; or PS 104+ 28mm extension ring with manual focus gear option available either in the port or in the extension ring if this latter combination is chosen.

Strobe Wiring and Bulkhead Options

Strobe ports are available in three forms, Nikonos style flexible pin, Nikonos style all pins fixed, or S6. Either one or two strobe ports can be ordered in various combinations.

The strobe bulkhead wiring allows choice of TTL (5 pins active) wiring or just two pins active for traditional strobes and these can be changed at a later stage by ordering a different wiring configuration. Having all 5 pins wired allows use of a single housed SB800 to be electrically connected as well as third party TTL adapters such as Ikelite's #4302. Careful thought should be given to the choice of ports and wiring. My personal choice is for two Nikonos style flexible pin ports with all five pins active as this provides wired connections for either a single housed speedlight or two Ikelite DS125 strobes.

I chose two Nikonos style strobe bulkheads. The Nikonos bulkheads are offered in two flavours, the traditional with two flexible / three fixed pins and the other form with all five pins fixed. Whichever flavour is chosen the option exists to order either as TTL capable with all five pins wired or just the two GND and TRG active, i.e. wired. From past experience I have found switching wiring on Sealux housings to be a relatively straightforward exercise once the strobe logic is understood.

Niggles

Whilst this review is for the most part positive there are two niggles, still present, which I have experienced with earlier housings. The first relates to the degree of effort involved in changing ports;

yes, unnecessary physical effort! The second issue arose with the D200 housing as a symptom of downsizing in the drive to keep things compact. The D200 and D300 housings became more negatively buoyant with these cameras which were heavier than the similar sized D70. Effective workarounds exist for both of these issues and I do not see them as detracting from the overall qualities of the housing once the workarounds are applied. Each particular brand of housing has its quirks and after all, where would the challenge lie in underwater photography without having to problem solve?

I previously found switching ports on dive trips to be tedious with some effort required, to coerce the installed port off the housing. Enter the 'Baby Boa strap wrench', a lightweight plastic strap wrench perfect for the job of removing ports by gripping the barrel and allowing sufficient leverage to be applied. It would be useful to have these, or similar supplied with Sealux ports. The strap wrench has made changing ports easy for me and can be found in many hardware stores or you can try online using 'strap wrench' for your search.

10-17mm lens, Sealux 180F dome port, 1/200sec, f/13, ISO 200

The issue of a negatively buoyant housing should only be of concern for macro photography and I have found that using Stix buoyancy arms with my two Ikelite DS125 strobes resolves this neatly. I use four of the SX-109 sets and UCLS butterfly clamps to hold them.

With this setup and the heaviest lens / port combo I own (105mm Nikon VR / PS114 port) plus focus light the rig weighs 330grams negative in fresh water.

The Housing In Summary

In brief, I see the CD300 as a step forward; it has, so far, exceeded my expectations.

The good points

∑ Optics: the ports, the display and the 150 degree viewfinder; all precision glass optics

∑ Ergonomics: the location of key controls in relation to each other

∑ Functionality: almost every camera control one could wish for including controls for Live View, C/S/M, Func, Multi-selector centre, Flash mode, AF Lock and Lens release.

∑ Durability: good seals, raised inner housing lip, robust construction

∑ Portability: compact and relatively easy to pack and transport for a DSLR housing

∑ Depth rating: 90 metres (295 feet)

The niggles

∑ Negatively buoyant: remedied by flotation arms

∑ Effort in removing lens ports: remedied by using a lightweight strap wrench

60mm lens, Sealux PS104 port, 1/60sec, f/22, ISO 200

Notes from the Field

For this review I tested the housing dry; in a pool and then followed up with a week of diving off Niue Island. I used 60mm, 105mm, 10-17mm and 12-24mm lenses with respective close-up port / wetmate diopter combinations and dome port plus extension ring combinations. I was happy with results from all combinations tested; particularly when using the PS close-up ports as these were

10-17mm lens, Sealux 180F dome port, 1/200sec, f/14, ISO 400, natural light

new to me and showed improvement over the bulkier traditional Sealux flat ports.

Conclusion

I see the CD300 as a step forward from its predecessor with design features which are compact, aesthetically pleasing, ergonomic and durable. In forming a complete system, individual components exist for most needs and integrate well with the modular port system. Different options cater for various lighting interfaces be they a housed speedlight, Nikonos style strobe fittings or European style S6 plugs. This housing makes music - highly recommended.

Colin Gans
www.UnderwaterDisplay.net

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Heinrichs Weikamp Nikon iTTL Converter

by Mark Webster

It's funny how things turn full circle – they say that fashion repeats itself and I suppose it must be true of certain trends in photography, particularly underwater photography. My first steps with underwater photography were with Nikonos II's and III's followed by Nikon F's and F2's. These cameras were of course entirely manual, without even light metering, unless you had a photomic head for the F2a or a Sekonic marine meter for your Nikonos, and of course flash exposure was calculated via guide numbers followed by an anxious wait for your film to be developed. Then Nikon introduced TTL flash control with the F3 and the Nikonos V (there had been a brief flirtation with auto flash and the Nikonos IV but this was not a resounding success) and our lives changed – we could confidently expect predictably good flash exposures, especially in macro, and concentrate more on composition. The even better news was that the TTL protocol remain unchanged for many years right up until the final generations of film cameras, so we could use the same flashguns with each camera upgrade.

Then the digital day dawned and with it a completely new TTL protocol which (with the exception of the Fuji S2) did not communicate with our flashguns. So we came back to basics making our flash exposures manually once more, only now we could see success or failure immediately on the review screen. One feature our flashguns required though were multiple manual power settings to adjust the exposure, particularly with the high base ISO's that cameras like the D100 came with. This was a concern for me as I wanted to continue to use my trusty Inon Quad flash which only had three power settings and of course, as it is mounted on the end of the port, would always be close to the subject. I got around this by using the Light and Motion Titan housing with the ROC system which gave me the flexibility of 12 power settings for any 'Nikonos TTL' flashgun. I eventually upgraded to the D200 which has a base ISO of 100 and so did not present such a great problem, although I rarely shoot with the Quad above 1/4 power.

And so at last to the purpose of this review! I am again on the upgrade path , most likely the D300 which has returned to a base ISO of 200 – although it does offer a ISO100 'slow' setting, this is apparently does compromise image quality a little. The flashgun market has also moved on and now we can buy amphibious guns with iTTL and eTTL circuitry to give us that perfect exposure and, for those of us with a shelf full of older 'Nikonos' protocol TTL flashguns, there are also converters available from Heinrichs Weikamp, Sea & Sea, Athena and Ikelite. Although these converters may not work with all flashgun models the added attraction of them is the manual control they offer which effectively extends the number of power settings available on an older flashgun.

The Heinrichs Weikamp Nikon iTTL Converter is relatively compact (compared to the competition) and connects in line with your strobe. To use two strobes you will need a dual cable.

A couple of years ago I bought a TTL converter from Heinrichs Weikamp for my wife's Olympus PT30 housing which has been a great success, so when our illustrious editor offered to let me trial his new external iTTL converter I jumped at the chance. This unit is relatively compact

The Heinrichs Weikamp Nikon iTTL Converter installed on my Inon Quad flash and Subal ND20. Older flashguns like this will not communicate in iTTL but can be controlled on MTTL via the camera's exposure compensation dial. This extends the range of manual power settings significantly – down to 1/32 power at -5EV.

Leopard spotted goby. Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, Heinrichs Weikamp Nikon iTTL Converter, ISO200 f16 1/60

Limacia clavigera nudibranch. Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, Inon wet lens, Heinrichs Weikamp Nikon iTTL Converter, ISO200 f22 1/60

and connects in line between the flashgun and the housing converting a wide variety of 'Nikonos' flashguns to work effectively with the D40, D50, D80, D200, D300, D2X etc., but not the older D100 which uses the older dTTL system. The unit can be used with two matched flashguns with the addition of a dual synch lead, but you should check the website for a full list of compatible flashguns and cameras.

First the converter must be charged via a USB lead from your computer. Having done this check the comprehensive manual to see if you need to change the unit settings for your flashgun – there is a small board of eight micro dip switches which must be configured before you close the unit for use. When you switch on the flash and the camera there is a small green LED that flashes to indicate that the two are communicating and you are then ready to go.

My local marine studio is a chilly 9c at this time of year and I had to wait a couple of days for the strong south west winds to abate before I could make my first of two trials. I have a pair of Subtronic Mini TTL's which are fully compatible which I found gave consistently good exposures through most aperture settings at both ISO 100 and ISO 200 with my D200. Apertures of f4 and wider proved a challenge dependant on the distance to the subject, but his would be common with most TTL guns which would struggle to quench the flash output for a macro shot at a wide aperture.

My second test, and perhaps main objective, was with the Inon Quad flash. Christian Weikamp had told me that the unit 'might' work in TTL with the Quad even though it is listed as not compatible on their

Velvet swimming crab. Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, Heinrichs Weikamp Nikon iTTL Converter, ISO200 f16 1/60

website. However, I was quickly disappointed on this score as the Quad would fire only on the pre-flash signal and thus leave me with a blank review screen. All was not lost of course, as the unit can be configured to control the gun in 'manual TTL'. A flick of a dip switch and setting the camera to rear curtain synch now gave me control of the flash output through the exposure compensation settings on the camera – very neat! You have to use the camera in manual mode for this to work, but it gives very flexible control of the flash power in fractions of a stop all the way down to -5EV which is the equivalent of 1/32 power. So I was back to manual exposure settings but with a far greater level of control over the flash power. Not as convenient as TTL but it does mean a new lease of life for your older TTL flashguns if you want to continue to use them.

In the final analysis we have to ask ourselves if we need or desire TTL flash control for our digital systems. As with film, TTL is only really reliable in macro or with stand off subjects that fill the frame and provide good reflection of light back to the camera. TTL can be made to work in wide angle if you are careful with your main subject placement, but for the classic wide angle composition with an open blue water background TTL will struggle and often fire the strobes at full power. Personally I have not found it a struggle to get consistently accurate exposures using manual settings and if you are the same then this converter may be an expensive luxury at €350. However, if I follow my upgrade path and find I need one to continue using the Quad flash effectively then for me it will be worth every cent!

Mark Webster
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Strobes and water colour

By Alexander Mustard

I expect the title of this article will be causing a bit of head scratching but please bear with me, this is a relatively new concept but one that is well worth consideration. In this article I want to discuss how the colour temperature of our strobes has the potential to affect the background water colour in our digital photographs.

It certainly sounds confusing to begin with. How can firing a strobe that illuminates the subject and not the water alter the water colour? It requires a different way of thinking about colour in images because of the adjustable white balance of digital cameras. Therefore this is a digital issue and not something that is relevant to slide photography.

I should also say that this is an article about subtle differences. Strobe colour temperature does not make day or night differences to images, it is about that final polish. However, it is often those final finishing touches that make the difference between the good and the excellent. To ignore this issue means giving up an important tool that controls water colour in our images.

I first raised this topic in UWP a couple of years ago, back in Issue 31, but I felt it was worth revisiting in detail. The root of this phenomenon is that the various underwater strobes on sale produce light at different colour temperatures and digital cameras have adjustable white balance that reacts to this.

To keep things simple I am going to lump strobes into warm coloured and cool coloured – using my own strobes as examples. My Subtronic strobes are warm or red biased (my Alphas produce light at 4300 K and the newer Midis at 4800 K), while my Inon strobes are cool blue biased (my Z240 produces light at 5500 K).

When you take a picture illuminated by 5500 K or 4300 K light you will need a white balance close to this value to render neutral colours (see Figure 1). This setting is applied to the whole image. In the real world this means that both strobe lit and non-strobe lit areas are affected, and therefore strobe choice can affect the background water colour (see Figure 2). To prove this to yourself, open up one of your own wide angle images in a RAW converter and try moving the colour temperature slider between 4300 K and 5500 K. Ignore the foreground colour and watch how much the water colour changes.

Many factors influence the background water colours of our images, such as conditions and exposures. In this article I want to discuss the importance of strobe choice. Here I used warm Subtronic Alphas, which produce light at 4300 K. This image was processed with a colour temperature in the RAW converter of 4300 K, which rendered a correctly coloured foreground and rich blue background

Figure 1. The colours of these two test images are almost identical. The top image was lit with an Inon Z240 strobe and the lower one with a Subtronic Alpha. The top image required a white balance setting of 5500 K to produce this neutral look. The lower image needed a much lower setting of 4300 K to get the same neutral colours. Different underwater strobes produce light at different colour temperatures and therefore require different white balance settings to produce correct neutral colours. Apologies for the subject matter these were taken during my own tests.

Another way to explain this concept is to compare the similarities and differences between film and digital. On both media the main factors that will control the background colour we get in our photos are environmental conditions (water colour, depth, climatic conditions etc), camera angle, lens and exposure.

On film we have another important factor to consider. Film choice. Certain films are well known to make big differences in the water colour they record. Even within the Kodak stable photographers used to spend much time debating the differences between the true look of Kodachrome blues compared with the rich royal blues that Ektachrome delivered in the same conditions. Stunning blue backgrounds were known as 'Ektachrome blue' for many years.

When shooting slides strobe colour temperature made no difference to the water colour. If we used a warmer strobe then the only effect would be warmer hues in the foreground lit by a strobe. The background would remain unaffected. This was/is a popular technique, with many photographers favouring warm strobes or warm filtered strobes to improve the skin tones of people in their images.

Digital is different. An approximate analogy to film choice is the camera's adjustable white balance. Shooting underwater, a digital camera will try to make the foreground subject appear neutral, deciding on the appropriate white balance setting for each shot based on the colour temperature of the foreground

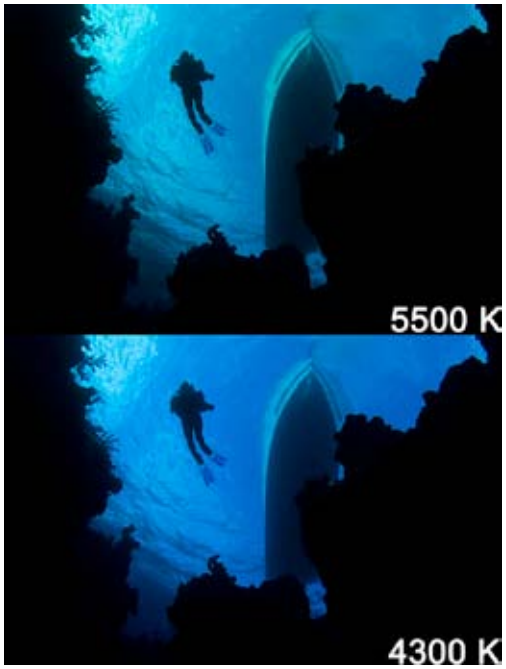

Figure 2. These two available light images are the same shot – simply processed at different white balance values. Compare the blue water colour – the difference is small but is clearly a richer blue in the lower frame. The upper frame is at 5500 K (the value required for the Inon in Figure 1) and the lower frame is at 4300 K (the value required for the Subtronic in Figure 1).

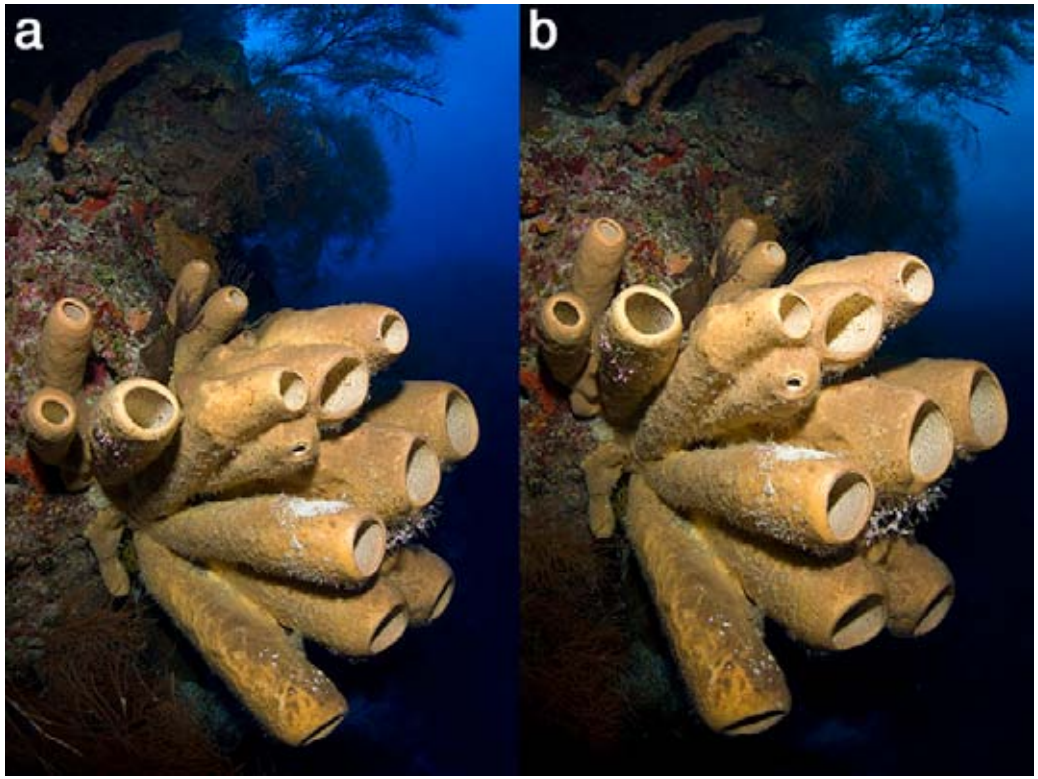

Figure 3. Compare the water colour in these two images that were taken at the same time with the same camera, lens and exposure. Nikon D2X + Tokina 10-17mm @ 10mm. F9 @ 1/50th. Single strobe. The only difference is the strobe used for each. In a) I used a warm light producing Subtronic and for b) I used a cool light producing Inon. If I had taken these images on slide film, both background colours would be the same colour, but the foreground in a) would be warmer coloured than the foreground in b). As these were shot on digital, the white balance is adjusted so that the foreground is correctly coloured and neutral (note that the sand on the sponge is white in both). However the background water colours are noticeably different because of the different white balance settings required. The warm strobe produces a rich blue background, while the cool strobe produces a murkier blue.

illumination. When you adjust white balance in the RAW converter you are doing the same thing. Since different strobes require different white balance settings (therefore affecting the colour of the water in your images) – strobe choice on digital is comparable to film choice on slide.

To run through an example, if we use warm strobes then the foreground subject will appear to the camera (or to us white balancing the RAW file in post processing) as too warm and the white balance will be used to cool the image (the Kelvin value will be lowered). Importantly this adjustment is applied to the entire image. Cooling the white balance results in a correct looking foreground and bluer background. If we use cool strobes then the foreground will be too cool and the camera (or us) will attempt to warm it up with the white balance. This will again result in a correct looking foreground and a less blue background. You can see this visually in the real world example in Figure 3.

It is clear from the examples (Figures 2 & 3) that the effect is subtle, but this difference will there in all your images. The only difference between the two shots in Figure 3 was the type of strobe I used. Once the foregrounds are adjusted to the correct neutral colours the blues are clearly different.

Many of you may now be worrying that you have the wrong strobes – don't. We don't have to settle for what the manufacturers give us – we can warm and cool our strobes by attaching lighting gels to them. Lighting gels are not expensive (because they are not made to optical quality like lens gel filters) and can be bought easily from film and theatre lighting suppliers. Compared with typical underwater lens filters, the strength of filter required is very weak – to change an Inon Z240 (5500 K) to match and Ikelite DS200 or DS125 (4900 K) you need a +22 Mired shift colour conversion filter – a Lee (Number 444) Eighth CT Straw Filter is perfect and can simply be cut to fit the strobe. To see how mild a filter this is, have a look at Figure 4 where I have compared this filter with some common underwater lens filters.

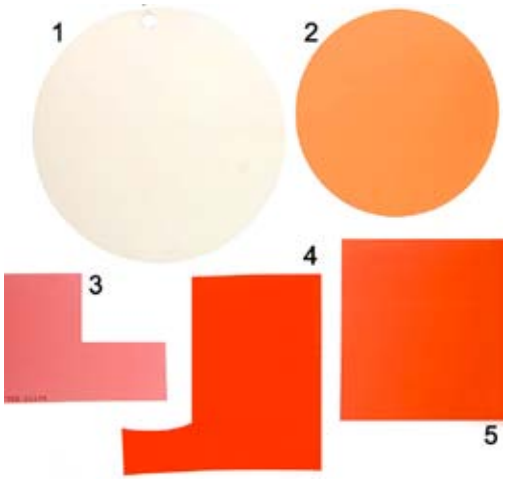

Figure 4. This is photo of some filters on a lightbox. Note that the strength of filter 1, a Lee 444 Filter - required to adjust a Inon at 5500K to a IkeliteDS125 equalling 4900 K is much, much weaker than other standard lens filters for underwater photography. It is also cheaper to buy as it is not made to optical quality. For information: 2 is Magic Filter, 3 is CC50Red, 4 is Wratten 22 and 5 is Auto-Magic Filter.

We have seen that warm strobe lighting forces a cooler white balance on the image which renders richer blues in the background. Therefore it follows that any factor in our photographic technique that lessens the warmth of the foreground illumination will reduce the richness of the blue. If we are too far from our subject the light reaching it will be cooler and the image will require warmer white balance, weakening the blue. This is a common symptom in many underwater images. Similarly if we are shooting a balanced light image and we use too little strobe on the subject (so that the subject is illuminated by a mix of strobe and ambient light) the blue will be less rich, if we try and correct the foreground colours.

So far I have only considered blue water shooting. What happens when we get into greener waters? If we use warm strobes in green water our foregrounds are again a bit too warm requiring a cooling of the white balance to create a neutral foreground look. If we cool down green water we actually push it away from green towards a blue-green colour (Figure 5).

Personally, when I shoot in green waters I like to try and record a rich green colour and warm strobes erode this. Instead I prefer cooler strobes, like the Inons. A cool strobe will require a warmer white balance setting, which will increase the greenness of the greens, producing that desirable emerald look. Again you can prove this to yourself with your own images. Open up a green water wide angle image in your RAW converter and try moving the colour temperature slider between 4300 K and 5500 K. Ignore the foreground colour and watch how much the water colour changes.

Personally I have quite a bi-polar view of the ocean's many colours: I like my blues to be rich blues and my greens to be rich greens. However, many photographers diving in green waters actually like them to look quite blue. Here in the UK photographers often wait for the bluest conditions before shooting wide angle, blue water makes temperate water look particularly inviting! Either way it is important to appreciate the importance

Figure 5. These two frames show the same green water image processed at different white balance values. This image was lit by my Subtronics and the upper frame at 4300 K, produces a neutral foreground. However this setting has "blued" the green water considerably. The lower frame is processed at 5500 K, which has produced a greener water colour. However, this white balance has also made the foreground lighting too warm. Had I used my Inon strobes for this photo, then I would have been able to combine the green background of the lower frame with the neutral foreground of the upper frame.

In temperate seas I like to try and capture rich emerald green backgrounds. Cooler strobe lighting forces the camera to warm the image with its white balance which enriches the greens. In comparison to Figure 5, note how this image, taken with Inon strobes, has a neutral foreground and a rich green background. Nikon D2X +105mm VR. Subal housing. Inon Z240 strobes. 1/50th @ F14.

of strobe choice in this regard. If you want to enhance any blueness in your temperate waters go with a warm strobe, if you want to boost its emerald green, then a cool strobe is better.

I am certain that many of you will be reading this article thinking "Why worry? I can adjust it all in Photoshop anyway." This is true, but I believe that it is important to strive to get the best possible results from the camera for several reasons. First, there is the ethical consideration of presenting images as shot as well as personal satisfaction. Perhaps more relevant today is the image quality issue. Strong individual colour adjustments either in Photoshop or even in a RAW converter are one of most damaging adjustments to image quality, introducing plenty of colour noise, particularly in gradients. Second, there is a time issue. I recently noted that my Nikon D2X had taken 93000 photos, nearly all of these underwater. Even if a colour fix takes less than 10 seconds applying it soon mounts up if you take a lot of images. Most photographers who shoot a lot soon learn to discard any images that will cost additional processing time. It makes sense to make adjustments to your shooting technique that minimise your computing requirements.

The other crucial concluding comment is that there are no rights or wrongs when it comes to water colours, only personal preference. As I said above, I like my greens to be green and my blues to be blue. That's me, and for this reason I use my cool Inons in green waters and my warm Subtronics in blue waters. You may well be different.

When we all shot slides, our choice of film stock had an important effect on the water colours recorded in our images. These days it is the colour temperature of our strobes that has a similar effect. Neither factor makes a massive difference, but their affect is plain to see in every image we take. Understanding the importance of the colour temperature of your strobes is very much like choosing the correct film stock to achieve the look you are after. It is one of the small factors that can make the difference between getting a nearly image and the one you really wanted.

Alexander Mustard
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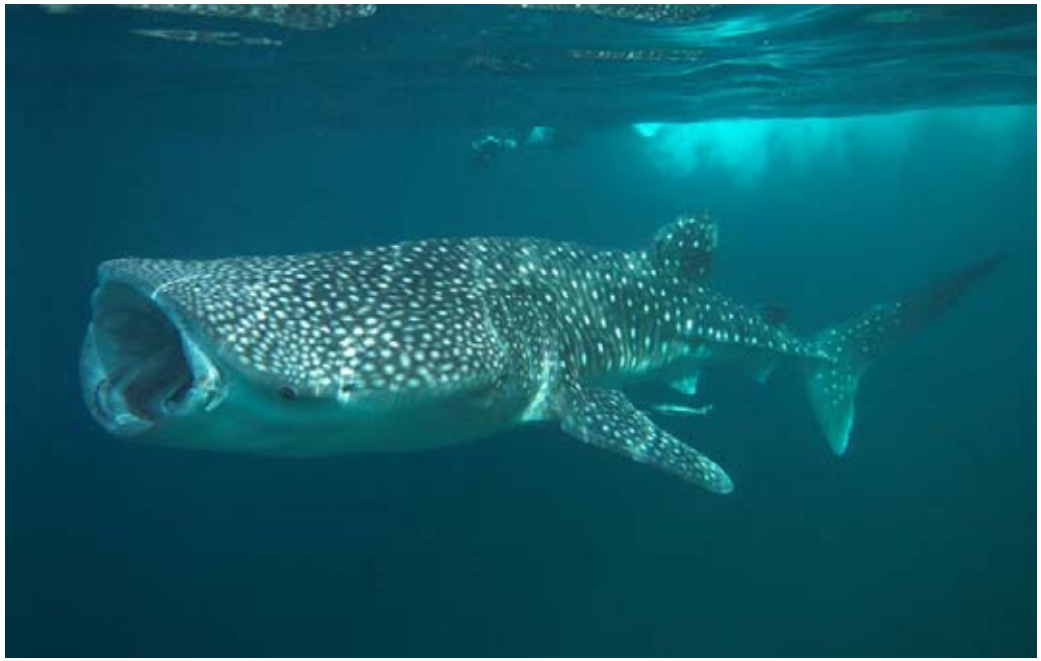
Juvenile Giants of Djibouti

by Morris Gregory

I jumped out of the boat and finned furiously to maintain pace with the 6m long, white spotted object next to me. After a minute or so I had to give up and let it continue on its leisurely journey sifting plankton in the warm waters of the Gulf of Tadjourah. It was only my second sighting of a whale shark in 15 years of diving, the previous one being a brief encounter at Ras Nas Rani after surfacing from a macro dive with no frames left on my film camera. This time I was much better prepared with a 12mm -24mm Sigma lens in my Subal ND70 housing and plenty of space on my compact flash card. Like Ras Nas Rani this encounter was also short but it whetted the appetite and there were still several diving/ snorkelling days to go. For some others on board it had been their first meeting with a whale shark and there was a great buzz of excitement over the breakfast table at the prospect of further encounters to come.

Djibouti has recently become known in the diving community for the concentration of juvenile whale sharks to be found in the Gulf of Tadjourah (sometimes called the Devil's Cauldron) roughly between the months of October and January. It was the high possibility of seeing these magnificent beasts close up and taking photos of them that persuaded me to book on Djibouti Divers1 for the mid November trip through Tony Backhurst. The flight to Djibouti, via Paris, takes about 9 hours on Daallo Airlines, currently the only operator that services Djibouti. The reports of Daallo I had read on line left me a bit apprehensive about the flight but, while it wasnít the most comfortable journey with poor food and no in flight entertainment except for the musical chairs when more passengers got on at Paris, it was a lot better than I had expected.

The first couple of days on board Djibouti Divers 1 were spent diving the coral reefs of the Gulf. I had hoped that as dive tourism has yet to have significant impact on Djibouti, the reefs would be in near pristine condition with a large variety and density of marine life similar to that found further up the coast in Sudan. Unfortunately that was not quite the case. The reefs were certainly in very good condition but mostly covered in various shades of dull beige coral with none of the brightly coloured soft corals found further north in the Red Sea. Having said that the reefs were patrolled by a number of rather camera shy humphead wrasse and some sites had huge numbers of juvenile blue trigger fish on them and large shoals of rainbow runners. A few of the group also saw a lone turtle and a shoal of barracuda.



A snorkelling photographer tries to keep pace with the whale shark, 1/20th, f6.3

All underwater shots were taken on a Nikon D70 in a Subal housing with a Sigma 12-24 lens at the 12mm end of the range, using aperture priority mode, iso 200, available light only.

On one dive we came across a group of divers from another boat that were in a circle holding hands and peering into a crevice in the reef. I took a closer look to see what was attracting their attention but came to the conclusion that they werenít looking at anything in particular but taking part in some kind of ceremony. Perhaps they were praying for whale shark sightings. If so it certainly worked for our party of divers.

On our third day we split into two groups and went whale shark spotting in the small fibre boats that are towed behind the main boat. Our dive guides and crew scanned the

A fleeting glimpse of a whale shark as it passes by the boat

One of the two fibreglass boats used to take us to the diving/snorkelling sites.

Our well appointed liveaboard boat.

waves for the tell tale sign of a dorsal or tail fin breaking the surface. The water was quite choppy making this a difficult task and after half an hour or so we had seen no sight of a whale shark. The sun was beating down on us relentlessly so the divers in the other boat decided to go for a snorkel to cool off. It turned out to be a fortunate and brilliant decision. After only a couple of minutes in the water we could see from our boat that leisurely and aimless snorkelling had suddenly become a much more purposeful activity. Arms were raised in the air to signal a whale shark had been sighted and legs propelled fins as quickly as possible to get to the scene of the action. Our boat chugged slowly over to join the others and we were also treated to our first Djibouti encounter with a whale shark. It may ëonlyí have been about 6m long but was a very impressive sight as witnessed by the beaming faces of everybody as they clambered back on to the boat to manoeuvre into position for another meeting.

During that first encounter the whale sharks swam along at what looked like a pedestrian pace but it was deceptively fast. After I'd snorkelled hard to keep up with them to take some photos and hauled myself into the fibre boat a few times I was exhausted but nevertheless elated.

The following day proved to be even better as we found not one but at least six whale sharks close to shore. So close in fact that after snorkelling with one of them I was able to stand up in the water and watch through my mask for the next one to come drifting by. During this encounter they often stopped and took several gulps of plankton rich water before carrying on again, great for taking photos. At one point I had snorkelled out to one of them and was concentrating hard on getting the composition I wanted, with the fish opening it's huge mouth, when suddenly I felt a bump against the inside of my thigh. I quickly looked down to see a whale shark right beneath me and realised it had made contact with its dorsal fin. Almost immediately I felt a second bump as this time its tail gently swept against the outside of my leg. Our dive guides, Lionel and Emily, had briefed us to look at but not to touch these gentle giants and we had all obeyed these instructions religiously. However, when one of them decides to purposely nudge you out of the way, there is nothing that can be done to avoid it so I just relaxed and accepted the experience.

Over the several days of snorkelling our group gave up trying to count the number of individual whale sharks we saw, probably a dozen or more, and ran out of fingers and toes to assess the total number of encounters. We just enjoyed every moment of it, especially when the sharks slowed down a little allowing for photos to be taken from a variety of angles and at very close range. At times I was no more than a foot or so away from the mouth of them, only realising just how near I was when taking my housing away from my eye.








All underwater shots were taken on a Nikon D70 in a Subal housing with a Sigma 12-24 lens at the 12mm end of the range, using aperture priority mode, iso 200, available light only.

The whale sharks werenít the only creatures that got up close and personal. There were also large numbers of orange coloured free swimming crabs that adopted the ìattack is the best method of defenceî strategy. The nip they gave with their claws was more of an irritation than anything but at one point I did find myself adorned with a crab earring. Similar crab related stories were shared by other members of the group over the evening meals which were always excellent. The whale sharks had their own way of dealing with these creatures, on occasion they would gulp down a few with the plankton and realizing they had something crunchy and inedible in their mouths would cough them back up again with some force, the crabs spinning around uncontrollably in the water.

I had taken some ëmagic filtersí with me for the trip and debated with a couple of the other photographers on board whether to use them with the whale sharks. Opinion was divided on whether they would be helpful at the shallow depths we would be taking photos. I decided to go without to start with, preferring the extra stop of exposure I would get by doing so in the fairly murky water, only changing my mind if the results had too much of a colour cast. I was pleased with the first download of pictures to the laptop so continued without them. Others who had opted for the magic filter also got good but slightly warmer results so it was really just a question of personal taste.

Our encounters during the day were fantastic but we were also treated to the sight of a whale shark

The 750 metre deep gorge and surrounding area on the way to Lake Assal.

A wide angle view of the salt flats of lake Assal

sculptures and crystalline rocks, a pleasant change from the mass produced trinkets at most tourist destinations.

I suspect that Djibouti is unlikely to become a place of mass diver tourism in the same way that Sharm El Sheik and other parts of the northern Red Sea have but the almost guaranteed presence of whale sharks will undoubtedly tempt a few more liveaboard operators to the area. My advice would be to go now while the only other divers you are likely to see underwater are ones from the same boat as yourself.

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www.morrisphoto.org.uk

at night right next to our moored up boat. The lights from the boat attracted the plankton and the whale shark took advantage of the easy meal. We were told that shining torches at the whale shark or setting off our camera strobes would frighten it away so any underwater photography would have to be using the available light from the boat only. However, flash photography was allowed from the boat, so while a few people snorkelled with the shark and some managed to get good video footage of it, I stayed on board and, from the deck, took a few shots of it swallowing vast quantities of water, expelling most of it through its gills and consuming the plankton that was left behind.

The final highlight of our Djibouti trip was on land rather than underwater, an excursion to Lake Assal. Itís one of the saltiest lakes in the world and also one of the lowest at 155m below sea level. Reputedly it is also the hottest place on Earth with temperatures reaching up to 60c in the summer months. Fortunately we were there in winter and the temperature was an almost bearable 35c. On the way to the Lake we stopped off at the Djiboutian equivalent of the Grand Canyon, a 750m gorge carved through the rocks that provided a magnificent spectacle, particularly for those without a fear of heights. Just before reaching the lake we were shown a geothermal area of hot bubbling waters that provided a reminder of the volcanic nature of the surrounding landscape. There were even some small fish in the waters that seemed to thrive in temperatures of 80c or so. The lake itself is bordered by a vast shoreline of white salt and gypsum that contrasts with the blues, greens and pinks of the water and the hazy blue of the distant mountains. Salt is still harvested commercially at the lake but the locals have also turned their attention to the tourist trade, selling a variety of salt

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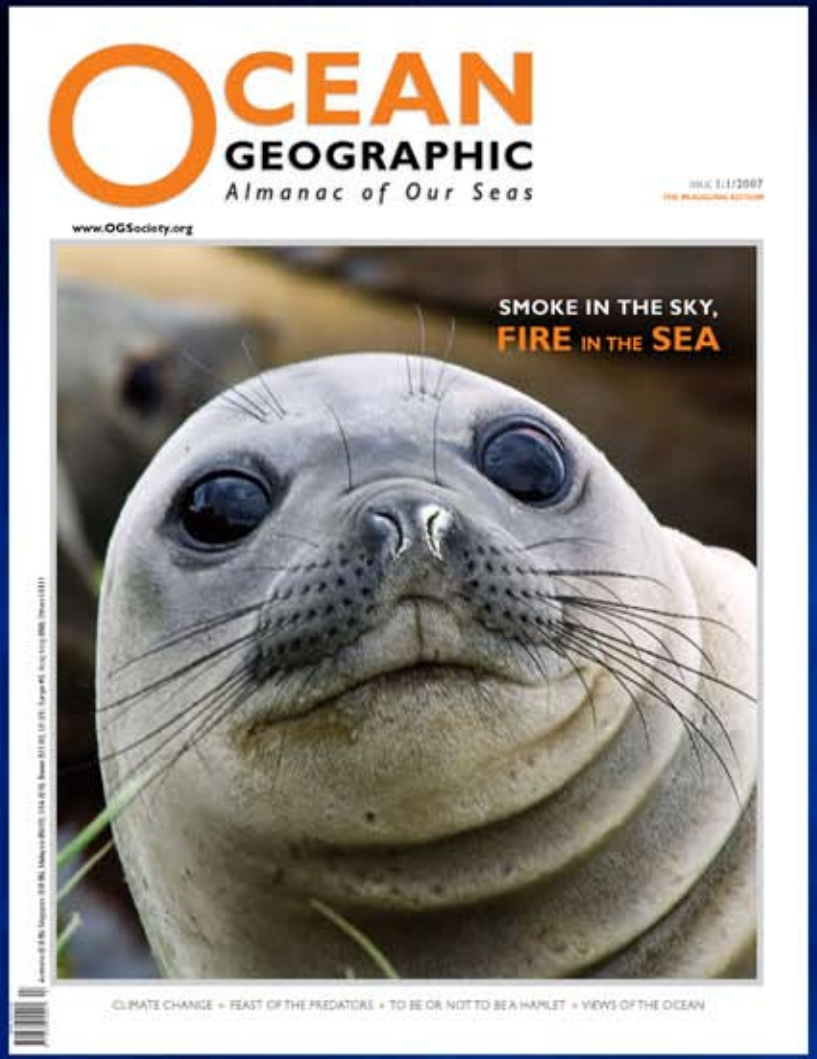

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Wakatobi

By Michael Wicks

I chose the title more for its oxymoronic inference than any other reason. For in truth the chances that you will see at least one Pygmy per day are almost as high as seeing clown fish. As a dive guide told me at one point over a pint of Bing Tang, "Mate, everyone comes here looking for THE Pygmy shot but there's so much more here." And he was so right.

We really did see seahorses almost every day. Some pregnant, some more colorful than others but the real draw to Wakatobi is what it's known for; the ever reaching spectacular coral reefs. You will start around 6:30 in the morning in order to give enough time for breakfast before your first dive briefing; some of us were already up at 5:30 downloading pictures from our memory cards to prepare for the day. It may sound early but since 9 PM is Wakatobi midnight it's not too grueling. Most everyone is in their bungalows by 9 and asleep not to long afterwards. Some divers will tend to stay a bit longer at the Bar on the Jetty some nights. But for the most part it was lights out at 9.

A dive guide from your boat will give the ever so brief dive briefing and then you're off to the boat. The local crew not only takes care of your every need, including carrying your camera gear to the boat, but if they hear your name just once they will commit it to memory. Each boat has 2 dive guides, one captain and local crew that insist on swapping your tanks, assist in donning your gear and will bring you water, cookies and sandwiches after each dive. In fact, unless you do a house reef dive, you won't touch your 1st stage after your very first dive. There are only 12 divers per boat (not including any snorkelers) with the ratio of guide to diver kept at 1:6. This leaves ample room to move about on the boat as well as aiding in keeping the under water space from getting too cramped. All the dive boats venture off to different dive sites also alleviating any congestion under water.

The dive guides you have on the first day will be the same dive guides you'll have for the rest of the trip. Sometimes there will be a substitution. As in our case management felt that they had to give Alex and Ramone, our guides, a day off. Roel was our pinch hitting diver on those days. All three dive guides were superb in pointing out all the critters, large and small. It's always worth taking a moment to alert your guide as to what your plan on doing with regards to your shooting. If you tell him or her you want to hang back after each sighting and wait for others to view, he'll understand and will give you your time and space whilst leading others to the next attraction.

A standard dive day will consist

Reef and Diver
Canon Rebel xTi, Ikelite housing, 17mm EF17-85 IS USM, DS51 single Strobe, 1/100, F5.6, ISO 400

Clown Fish
Canon Rebel xTi, Ikelite housing, 100mm macro, DS51 single Strobe, 1/125, F2.8, ISO 200

of 2 dives in the morning, a break for lunch and then one dive in the afternoon. Although this doesn't sound like a lot of dives, each dive lasted on average 55-60 minutes with some breaking the 70 minute mark. You'll do all your safety stops whilst still viewing creatures and critters as well as the reef. It really doesn't get much better than that. After returning from the 3rd dive you're free to do a twilight dive. Wakatobi's security constantly monitors the house reef from about 7 in the morning to about 7 at night helping to keep you safe and secure whilst in the water. The local crew will assist you with getting your gear and you out to the beach. From there you can either take a water taxi or just swim out to the house reef. The house reef starts less than 50' from shore. None of the reviews come close to truly portraying its incredible beauty. Spotted Rays, brilliant coral, and clown fish abound right under the Jetty as does the house octopus. He

Pygmy Seahorse
Canon Rebel xTi, Ikelite housing, 100mm macro, DS51 single Strobe, 1/125, F2.8, ISO 200

must like the music from the Bar as he's made it his home. If you time it right you can ascend right next to the bartender and he'll have your drink waiting for you.

Every one gets one night dive. On that day you'll skip your afternoon dive from the boat. Some will go for a dive on the house reef, take out the kayaks, snorkel, or take in a massage. You won't go wrong with any of these choices. Fair warning, however, as there are "massage miser" out there who will sign up for massages every day within

Crocodile Fish
Canon Rebel xTi, Ikelite housing, 100mm macro, DS51 single Strobe, 1/200, F3.2, ISO 200

the moments of arriving on the island. So sign up quickly.

Waktobi Dive sites include Nunia Danir, Pastel, "38", Pinacles, Table Coral, Spiral Corner, Pockets, and Cornucopia to name a few. One of my

Rock Fish
Canon Rebel xTi, Ikelite housing, 78mm EF17-85 IS USM, DS51 single Strobe, 1/160, F5.6, ISO 200

Reef and Diver
Canon Rebel xTi, Ikelite housing, 17mm EF17-85 IS USM, DS51 single Strobe, 1/100, F5.6, ISO 400

favorites, though, was Sandy Chute. On this dive you'll descend down to a sandy bottom where you'll see eels, lion fish, puffers, flounders, sea moths. I was mesmerized by the sea moth's behavior. I could barely tear my eyes away from them until I saw a classic cleaning station. The scene was right out of Pixar's "A Shark Tale." A lion fish swam in one side where a dozen or so cleaner shrimp went to work on him. Afterwards he swam out making room for the next customer.

Many of the dives are drift dives. There are no rides at Disneyland that can rival drift diving along Wakatobi's reefs at a leisurely rate of 2-3 knots. In many cases the current changes so dramatically, as if sensing our dive was half over, it reversed itself and swept us back to where we inserted.

Two groups not more than 50' away from each other will see completely different life forms on the exact same dive. There would be a lot of ooh'ing and ah'ing during our surface intervals as we all compared and contrasted our pictures showing others what we saw that they didn't and vice verse.

I was finally able to get a decent, useable shot on the last dive of my last day at a site called Pockets. We saw 4 sea horses, but I concentrated on the first one. A little too much I think, as I went in to deco mode whilst shooting. I ascended to 20' and continued on to catch up with the group. Ramone, our dive guide, motioned for me to come back down to about 40' to see something. Knowing that my deco time was ever increasing, I made it a quick descent to view. It was worth it as I was able to see the pregnant seahorse. It was just so "tedious" ascending to my deco stop depths, having to swim around for an extra 15 minutes viewing more and more brilliant coral colors and lion fish than one should be allowed to see at one time.

The group I was traveling set many firsts at Wakatobi. Probably the most prolific being the first group to have a member fall off the Jetty Bar. The Jetty Bar is the happy hour place to be. Well truth be told, it's the only place to be if you're not diving or eating. If you time it right you can surface at the bar after the house reef dive and the bartender will have your drink waiting for you.

I would be quite remiss if I didn't comment on the dive staff and local workers. The guides hailed from all over the world. We were surrounded by Kiwis, Aussies, Brits, Austrians and Belgium to name a few. Our dive guides, Alex, Ramone, and Roel were not only extremely knowledgeable, but also extremely patient with us photographers, and more than willing to listen to our needs. Wendy, our hostess extradinair and organizer, made sure we were all content and saw to our every need on land. The

local crew was amazing as well. All are learning English and always with a smile on their faces.

The food was amazing and bountiful. Although I personally didn't gain weight, it was extremely easy to do so. The menu for lunch and dinner was ever changing. One afternoon I saw a local man carrying 2 huge Tuna's. When I asked one of the dive guides about it, his eyes lit up and he beamed "Mmm. Looks like Tuna Sashimi tonight." It was THE freshest sashimi I've had in a long time. There really is something on the menu for everyone. Should you decide that you want to dine outside, there are a few tables alongside the dining building, and Wendy won't hesitate to bring out candles and place settings to complete the outdoor ambiance.

On your last day you'll dive in the morning. Then in the afternoon you'll have the opportunity to visit the village on the other side of the island. Bring some rupees (the locals don't take other currency) if you want to buy hand made sarongs. But prepare yourself as this villiage is just emerging from what can only be classified as 3rd world status. Wakatobi Dive resort is doing their best to help them by providing electricity, education, arranging for medical care and helping to build new houses and schools. It was an incredible experience though and all the villagers were kind and the children love posing for pictures and following you around to talk and describe things.

It would be extremely difficult to find anything negative about the resort or the people in Wakatobi. The camera room is not only set up perfectly for many shooters but it's also the coldest room on the island. They also have a lounge with one computer that has internet access and wifi in the long house. But the internet is very slow and sometimes doesn't work so don't stress over not getting that email out. Some other things should be noted before you go. 1) 110-120 is only available in the Camera room I highly recommend bringing along adapters so you can charge your iPod and batteries in your room. 2) If you do charge batteries in the Camera Room plan on it taking about 24 hours and for your batteries to get extremely hot. 3) This is a resort BUT the air conditioning is just enough to make it manageably at night to sleep. As our organizer Wendy stated "it's good but it's not American industrial strength A/C." I found that by true midnight it was quite pleasant in our bungalow. 4) Nitrox is available but it's kind of expensive. I originally signed up but then decided not too go that route and I was one of the divers staying up past Wakatobi midnight.

Over all Wakatobi is a definite must visit resort. The staff, the service, and the diving is top notch and worth all the hours in the air to get there.

Michael Wicks
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Exploring Uncharted FakFak

With Tim Rock and Miyuki Konda

The last best place. Natural Wonder. Heart of Diversity. The new Mecca for divers. So many superlatives have been heaped upon Indonesia's Raja Ampat region that I was a bit skeptical. But when The Seahorse's cruise director Alberto Reija called me and told me about an exploratory cruise to Triton Bay and other Raja regions I told him I was in. I had to see this place for myself. And you know what? It's really good diving. It is all that it's cracked up to be. It's a pretty special place.

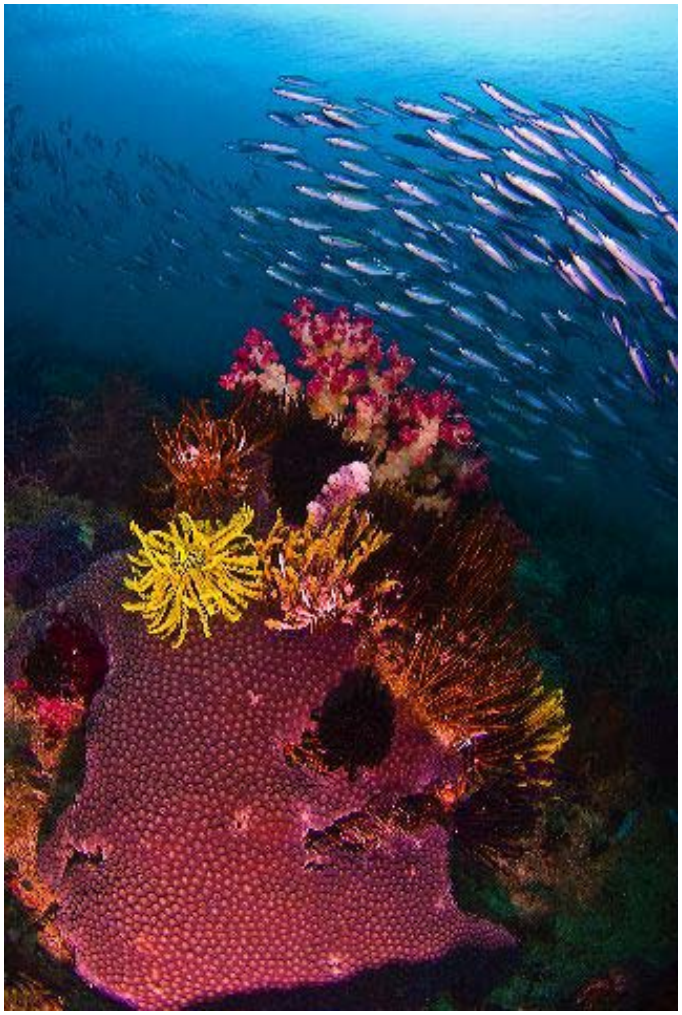
But what was even more special was the area we explored at the start of the trip. This was Triton Bay and FakFak. And it's simply amazing. Reefs in this oddly named "coral triangle" include tracts off the coasts of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and East Timor. They are the ocean's more diverse and are home to roughly 600 species of reef-building coral.

I was happy to get there. It took a couple of days to do it. Triton Bay has yet to be dived regularly by recreational divers. There are some local planes that fly into Kaimana and FakFak but nothing on the order of those that service places like Manado. They're just local flights in rather small planes. But the place has so much promise that you put up with a few overnights in Bali and Balikpapan and a few more stops along the way.

This is where scientists keep on breaking the record of diversity and new species. This Bird's Head region in Western Papua, which is part of Indonesia, may be the most biologically diverse in all the oceans according to scientists from Conservation International. One survey revealed 20 corals, 24 fish and eight mantis shrimp believed to be new to science and they find more every time they go. Even lowly sport divers come up with new or very odd critters on a typical trip.

The most famous may be the odd epaulette shark that has adapted to the bottom. It's called a "walking" sharks. There are also drab wrasse that make colorful male courting displays. This is commonly called a flasher wrasse. MSY Seahorse is the first dive live aboard to start operating FakFak route in 2006. Since then the crew has been discovering new dive sites on every voyage in the FakFak-Triton Bay area.

So we embarked one evening for the hidden coves and scenic backdrops that would be the ship's home ports for the next two weeks. The Seahorse is a roomy ship that was built under watchful eyes. Special attention was paid to the shape of the bow and keel weight and other nautical aspects. So even though it looks like a traditional phinisi, it is much more stable and knifes through the seas more like a modern yacht. The ship has a cruising speed of 9-12 knots to ensure swift travel. But the natural wood still creaks a bit and gives it a warm and rustic



(Top) The Seahorse rests in the straits at Triton Bay. Nearby are ancient cave paintings.
(Right) Corals, crinoids and a gazillion fusiliers punctuate the dive at David's Rock in the Iris Strait. (Tokina 10-17, Nikon D200, Aquaitica Housing and Ikelite DS125 Strobes)

The Windows at Misool offers a great spot for the use of creative lighting. (Tokina 10-17, Nikon D200, Aquaitica Housing and Ikelite DS125 Strobes)

Coral reef runs right up to the mangroves at Blue Water Mangrove. (Tokina 10-17, Nikon D200, Aquaitica Housing and Ikelite DS125 Strobes)

(Top right) Moving through the islands near Barunusu. (Sigma 10-20, Nikon D200 at 1/15 shutter speed)

(Right) A brilliant yellow fan opens its polyps to feed at David's Rock. (Tokina 10-17, Nikon D200, Aquaitica Housing and Ikelite DS125 Strobes)

feel. It made a superb dive platform for this kind of adventure.

The fish and soft corals just in the shallows around Saruenus Island were abundant. Most of the islands are limestone uplifts and outcrops. Even in the very shallow water only 3 feet deep, brilliant soft corals abound. They were visible from the dive boast as we entered the water. The beauty of a great deal of the diving here is that many of these bays and passes aren't deep. 60 feet was about as deep as we went on many dives and a lot were in the 20-40 foot area.

The next day we moved to Aiduma Island. As we sat at anchor sipping coffee and preparing for the first dive of the day, a tiger shark was seen cruising near the surface right by the ship. Not far off the ship's bow an interesting looking rock island jutted from the sea. We decided to explore it and it was truly awesome. Huge black coral forests harboring shoals of sweepers and hungry lionfish covered some of the bottom. Other boulders had big stands soft corals, sea fans and walls of tubastrea corals. The brilliant reds of the soft corals and the hot salmon of the tube corals gave the place a kaleidoscopic effect. Currents brought out the fish. It was a great dive. When I told the crew I always wanted a dive site, the promptly named it Tim's Rock. Sweet. We went back for more and found sweetlips, big jellies and lots more. What a great surprise.

There appears to be a lot of discoveries like this place just waiting to be found. Bird's Head Peninsula along the western tip is the focus of a lot

The back of a sea cucumber carries this commensal shrimp at Little Komodo in Triton Bay. (Sigma Macro 50mm, Nikon D200, Aquaitica Housing and Ikelite DS125 Strobes)

A sea snake heads out of the arch at Triton Bay. Tokina 10-17, Nikon D200, Aquaitica Housing and Ikelite DS125 Strobes

boulders. Looking like something out of Sesame Street, these sharks were ubiquitous under the many ledges in the bays. Again shoals of fusiliers roamed the reefs and anthias played in the currents. Sea snakes were also plentiful here.

At Momon there's one of the most awe-inspiring natural sites anyone could wish for. A big river runs down through the cloud-covered forest. This are looks like Thailand's Phi-Phi or Palau's Rock Islands on steroids. Everything is big, full and natural. This river falls directly into the sea making a fantastic waterfall right at the ocean's edge. Snorkelers can actually push through it and look back out to sea from behind the falls. Its cool and refreshing and a sensory overload experience. One of the crew hiked up the river a bit and saw a rare tree kangaroo in the jungle as well.

The instances of rarely seen fish and the abundance of more common fish life is one of the main attractions. Outstanding corals, especially the multi-hued and oversized soft corals, are also a big draw for the sport diver. Current fed channels and inner passes keep the coral blooming and growing at a spectacular rate. Some soft corals grow just below the surface and attach to everything from mangrove roots to rock islands.

Triton Bay also offers an ancient history that can be seen in ancient cave paintings. These uplifted drawings sit in a board channel. Exposed stalactites and stalagmites give way to odd drawings. At the mouth of this channel we spotted a resident pod of pilot whales.

As we headed back toward a bit more of civilization, famed Misool made the macro buffs happy. On each dive we regularly found critters. Pygmy seahorses came in more than one species, nudibranchs, devil scorpionfish, wonderpuss, frogfish, leaf fish, ornate ghost pipefish and some rarities including

Snorkeler Miyuki Konda glides past the Momon falls on snorkel. (Tokina 10-17, Nikon D200, Aquaitica Housing and Ikelite DS125 Strobes)

a sea fan pipefish were all snapped by eager photogs. Archerfish in the in Nampele's Blue Water Mangrove came in schools. We also found the very photogenic juvenile batfish. And floating along in perfect camouflage was a juvenile tripletail, a fish that comprises but a single species.

The diving here offers so much varied topography that there really was never a dull moment. We explored caves, caverns, swim-throughs, walls, current-fed points, islands, channels, passes, rock falls and lots more. We didn't dive any wrecks but I bet there's one or two of those as well.

The future for this odd and new region is bright as it has caught the attention of environmentalists. Many conservation partners are now working with the Indonesian government to protect the special areas of the Bird's Head peninsula and Raja Ampat. It is the goal to see the area managed in a sustainable way. With inevitable development and increased fisheries, fishing using explosives and cyanide will surface as it has in other parts of Indo, and will have a negative impact.

We anchored in a secluded bay. Islands fell into the ocean and dotted the seascape. Small, idyllic beaches with a handful of coconut palms were bathed in the warm glow of the sun. After two weeks of diving this rich new venue, we actually wanted more. Flying out the next day, we cruised high over the West Papuan Bird's Head. Its beauty and isolation will keep it special for quite a while as it slowly gains its popularity. Maybe the smitten authors are correct. It may be the last best place.

Tim Rock
www.doubleblue.com

Seasonal Selection

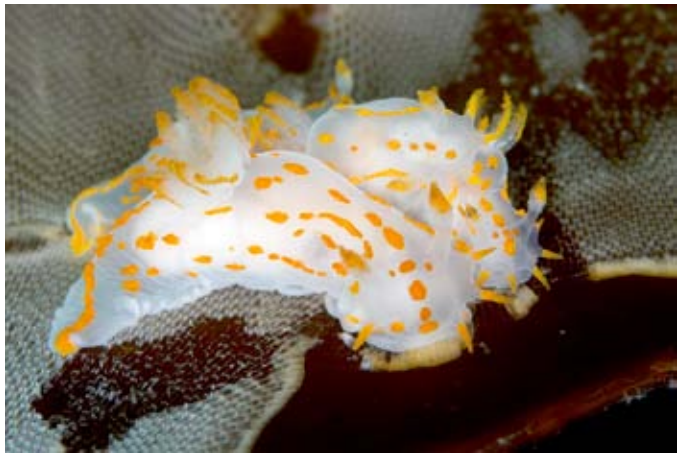
by Mark Webster

Those of us of a certain age will remember the days when our mother's used to plan the family menu based on the produce available during the prevailing season. Now of course we have global distribution and delivery of almost any food you can imagine at any time of year, which means that we can buy strawberries at Christmas time in the UK for example. Progress to be sure, but is it for the best? Despite the gloomy predictions of global warming the seasons do still prevail in the temperate seas around my home coastline of Cornwall in the UK. These changes provide an interesting variety of different photographic subjects to be pursued dependant on the time of year.

Although there are hundreds of excellent dive sites around this coastline, I find that I make many of my dives in two of the bays in this area – Falmouth Bay and Porthcurno Bay, which is close to Lands End. Both of these areas offer differing topographies and habitats and between them offer almost the whole selection of marine life you are likely to encounter elsewhere on this coast. The advantage of repetitive diving individual sites is of course familiarity with the marine life, but also the opportunity to observe the changes as the seasons progress.

January to March - Nudibranchs, Sea hares and Lumpsuckers

Depending on how cold the winter has been the nudibranchs begin to appear as early as January.



Like all nudibranchs Polycera quadralineata are hermaphrodite and whenever they meet will begin to copulate. Nikon D100, L&M Titan housing, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO 200 f16 1/30

Mating sea hares – unlike nudibranchs, sea hares appear to adopt a more traditional method of copulation. Nikon D100, L&M Titan housing, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO 200 f11 1/60

The largest and most common species will be the sea lemons (Archidoris pseudoargus), which can be as long as 50mm (2") and are seen in a variety of colours. Their arrival is heralded by the appearance of rosettes of delicately coloured eggs on the reef and you may be lucky enough to find them in the act of laying or mating, but if not the animals will not be far from the egg masses although they can be remarkably well camouflaged. Other species include Polycera quadralineata and Limacia clavigera which are white with bright yellow markings but much smaller and mostly found on kelp or the red lettuce seaweed they feed on. These little critters really need additional magnification, perhaps 2:1, to photograph effectively.

Sea hares are closely related to nudibranchs and are normally also common at the beginning of the year when they congregate in shallow water to breed. Although not as striking as the nudibranchs they do come in a wide range of colour variations and patterns and average in size between 2cm to 12cm. At the end of 2007 we had an unusual event – an invasion of giant sea hares! The late summer and autumn had been very warm and unusually calm and in late October reports of sea hares as large as rugby balls began to surface. The exaggeration turned out to be only marginal and we soon discovered hundreds of the large (up to 30cm+) sub tropical species Apylsia depilans busy mating in pairs or in groups of five or six the shallows of Helford river and throughout Falmouth Bay. Whilst these monsters are not particularly colourful it was an impressive sight to see the seabed so well populated with them and their coils of colourful egg strings. The first big storm in late November soon chased them off.

One of the strangest looking spring visitors is the lumpsucker which looks a little like a cross

between a frog fish and a gurnard. Although the lumpsucker is quite common in our northern waters it is not often found in the warmer waters of Cornwall. Early to mid spring is the breeding period for these fish when the female will lay her eggs in shallow sheltered waters, often amongst the kelp stypes or in some fissure in the reef to protect them from heavy swells. She then abandons them to the tender care of her mate who will stay with the eggs to tend and guard them until they hatch. This incubation period normally lasts from two to four weeks and throughout this time the male lumpsucker will almost continuously oxygenate the developing eggs by puffing water over them through his mouth, whilst also seeing off predators seeking an easy meal. Throughout this period the male lumpsucker changes colour to a bright red to orange livery instead of his more normal and effective camouflage colours of drab brown and green. Whilst guarding the eggs they do not eat and gradually get weaker and are often covered in sea lice. When the eggs hatch it is often too late for the male and they rarely survive.

March to May – Nest Builders and Egg Watchers

One of the more common wrasse encountered on the reef is the corkwing which seems always to be on the move and can be difficult to photograph well. In the spring time the males are more concerned with building a nest in preparation for spawning and will be observed diving in and out of the kelp collecting loose bit of weed and debris from the sea bed. If you watch patiently for a while a pattern of movement will emerge and you can follow the fish cautiously back to the location on

A face only a mother could love – male lumpsuckers certainly have interesting facial features to produce a striking portrait in their bright orange breeding livery. Nikon F801, Subal housing, 60mm micro, Sea & Sea YS50 and YS30 flash, Fujichrome Velvia 50 ASA, f8 1/60

When the male corkwing wrasse is nest building they are constantly on the move. Follow them slowly until you see the nest site and then wait patiently for your opportunity. Nikon F90X, Subal housing, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, Fujichrome Velvia 50 ASA, f8 1/60

Black gobies also guard there eggs during spring time and will firmly stand their ground even when a photographer gets close. His eggs are below the shell he is resting on. Nikon D100, L&M Titan housing, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO 200 f11 1/180

Even though these sharks can be as much as 10 metres in length a fish eye lens is often too wide. A short range zoom is the best tool or a lens which gives you the equivalent of 20mm on a 35mm frame. Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 12-24mm zoom, ISO 200 f8 1/60

the reef where the nest is being built. During the nest construction and after spawning when the male is tending the egg mass the corkwing will remain close to the nest site and often settle on it for a few moments. These are the best opportunities to capture these strikingly patterned fish and if you are patient enough the male will soon relax and present good opportunities to get some close up shots.

During the same period there are other male species left to tend their developing offspring. Amongst these are common and black gobies, Butter fish or Gunnels, Tompot blennies and Shannies. The male Shanny changes from its usual camouflage livery to dark grey or black with pale lips when guarding the eggs whilst, unusually, both the male and female Butter fish take turns to guard their eggs. All these species lay their eggs in small crevices on the reef or under stones and shells and will often be seen moving around them to flush water across the eggs and oxygenate them.

May to July - Basking Sharks

If you are keen on big animal action then it is difficult to beat the basking shark. The second biggest fish in the sea (after the whale shark) is completely harmless to the intrepid photographer and it fact is now a protected species in the UK and throughout Europe. Recent years off the Cornish coast have seen significant numbers of sharks sited, running into the hundreds, and also some not previously seen behaviour, notably breaching in a similar fashion to great whites, only in this case it is not associated with feeding.

Basking sharks are thought to be migratory, following the rich plankton blooms in temperate waters on which they feed. During the late winter the waters of the south west reach their lowest temperature which often results in the best visibility, but not a lot of fish activity due to the low food levels. As spring approaches the surface water temperature begins to warm slowly until the first period of extended sunshine, maybe only three or four days, which is the catalyst for an explosive growth of zooplankton. This generally occurs in early May and as soon as I hear complaints about the soupy visibility in the local dive shop I know that the first sharks will not be far behind. The first sightings are generally from the local cove boat fishermen who often see them whilst hauling their pots.

You need to develop a good technique for getting close to the sharks and it helps to have done some training with your snorkel and wet suit – the chase can be hard work! Most encounters are brief. After you have spotted your target shark from the boat the best technique is to slip into the water ahead of it and watch the dorsal and tail fins swim towards you on the surface. You can then snorkel on an intercepting course until the shark bursts from the murk into your viewfinder. When feeding they will ignore you and veer off a metre or two away and at this point you will need to put on a burst of speed to stay alongside briefly for a few head and tail shots. The plankton will often break up into patches and you can observe individual sharks cruising around the edges as they consume there own personal banquet. This behaviour presents perhaps the best opportunity to position yourself on the edge and wait for the shark to swim by you time and again.

The best photographs will be taken using natural light only – forget

your flash as it will only produce monumental backscatter and be too unwieldy to move quickly on the surface. A wide angle lens is essential but a fish eye is generally too wide unless it is a film lens on a crop sensor. So for a crop sensor a 12-24mm zoom is ideal and for a full frame chip try either a 20mm or 17-35mm zoom.

Depending on sunlight choose ISO 100 or 200, set your shutter speed to 125th and meter the water below the surface and then perhaps open half a stop on the aperture – the sharks are grey and sometimes quite dark. Auto focus will often hunt on all the particles in the water, so fix your focus at a range that will fill the lens with shark, perhaps 1-1.5m, wait until the shark is sharp as it sweeps towards you and then shoot you four or five frames whilst beginning the swim to keep up!

June to September - Jelly Fish

The jelly fish season tends to follow the basking sharks but can sometimes overlap if the plankton bloom persists into the summer months. Although several species of jelly fish are reliably seen each year there is often an explosion of a certain species every couple of years. More often this is the large Rhysostoma (sometimes locally known as the moon jelly) which can reach half a metre or more in diameter, but occasionally it will be the Compass jelly fish (Chrysaora hysoscella) or the Lion's Mane (Cyanea capillata). The Lion's Mane can have very long tendrils which can give you an unpleasant sting whilst the other two species are pretty much benign.

All three species are most often encountered in shallow water drifting with the tide but when numbers are high they will often be swept into sheltered bays to plague the swimmers but make easier photographic targets. Juvenile fish (horse mackerel??) often join these jelly fish from their planktonic stage to seek protection from predators by hiding in the canopy or amongst the tendrils of the jelly fish, where they seem not to be bothered by the stinging cells. A zoom wide angle lens is best for these plus a touch of flash to light them up against the sun on the surface.

(Left) Compass jellyfish are another species that appear with the plankton blooms. The tentacles can give an unpleasant sting, so be cautious if working close under the jelly fish. Nikon D100, L&M Titan housing, 18-35mm zoom, Subtronic Mini flash guns, ISO 100 f11 1/80.

(Right) Cuttlefish begin to appear around April when they come into the shallows to mate and lay eggs. Eel grass beds are a good place to search and their amorous activities often distract them from your approach. Nikon F90X, Subal housing, 60mm micro, Sea & Sea YS50 and YS30, Fujichrome Velvia 50ASA, f8 1/60

April to November - Cuttle Fish

You can normally see cuttle fish any time between April and November although activity is different over these months. Early in the year they begin to appear in shallow water after the winter storms to mate and lay their eggs. The average size of an adult cuttle fish seen in our waters in 20-25cm long, but during the spring breeding season we often encounter much larger example of up to 60cm in length. Their preferred breeding ground is amongst the eel grass which can be found in several locations in the far south west. They are often very easy to approach whilst courting and laying their eggs, often at the base of the eel grass stalks or on kelp stypes.

But then these larger animals disappear and for the remainder of

Cuttlefish have amazing camouflage and colour change skills. They can either mimic their surroundings or as in this case display a bold pattern. Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 12-24mm zoom, Subtronic Mini flash guns, ISO 100 f8 1/60

Grey Atlantic trigger fish will generally pick a small reef area and remain close to it for several weeks late in the season. This seems to be associated with cleaning stations (by goldsinney wrasse) and the opportunity to school with bass and pollack. Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 12-24mm zoom, Subtronic Mini flash guns, ISO 100 f8 1/60

the spring and summer we are back to the 'average' size but often in large numbers. They congregate in shallow sheltered bays and seem to prefer light gravel or heavy sand seabeds where there are thick growths of standing seaweeds (bootlace, Japweed etc.) to hide amongst.

In September and October we start to see the juveniles appearing ranging in size from 2cm to 10cm in length but possessing all the camouflage, pattern and texture skills that the adults have even down to miniature jets of ink as they scoot off into the seaweeds. If you dive a site regularly over the season the resident cuttle fish will accept you and become bolder with each dive to the point where they will all but ignore you and continue to feed on the small fish that are also attracted by your presence.

September to November - Atlantic Trigger Fish

If, like me, your most memorable encounters with tropical trigger fish involve some nifty defensive swimming and repeated chewing of your fins by angry titan trigger fish, you might be less than delighted with the prospect of meeting a related species in temperate waters. In recent years we have been seeing increasing numbers of the Atlantic or grey trigger fish (Balistes carolinensis) which begins to appear in late summer, but fortunately has not developed a taste for fins yet.

These trigger fish are mostly shell fish diners and they will be often be observed eating mussels from both reef and wreckage or picking winkles delicately from kelp fronds before spitting out the remains of the shell. Juveniles have not been reported so far and it seems unlikely that they spawn in our waters as this apparently commonly occurs in temperatures of 21ºC or more. However, the temperatures off the Cornish coast rose to 19-21ºC for two or three months this summer so it may only be

Red mullet are closely related to the Mediterranean and sub tropical goat fish and begin to appear in early summer as the water temperature increases. Nikon D100, L&M Titan housing, 18-35mm zoom, Subtronic Mini flash guns, ISO 100 f11 1/80.

a matter of time.

These trigger fish are obviously very happy with their temporary environment, although I have wondered on occasion if they may be suffering from a bit of an identity crisis. On many occasions they are seen in groups of five or six swimming amongst schools of bass or grey mullet and keeping up very well despite a very different swimming style. Whether this behaviour is for protection or amusement is difficult to tell, but with the exception of anglers I cannot imagine what would predate on the trigger fish in our waters.

Another late summer visitor are two members of the red mullet family, closely related to the goat fish seen in sub tropical and tropical locations. There are slight differences between Mullus surmuletus and Mullus barbatus, but the latter is somewhat rarer and only seen in south west waters. These fish are generally seen in ones and twos sifting the sandy seabed for small crustaceans, but occasionally you may see schools of up to twenty fish together, particularly juveniles.

All too soon the season comes to an end with the arrival of another winter. This for me is not a signal for me to hang up the dry suit for a few months. Although the winter can be stormy we often get periods of high pressure which bring calm seas and sunny days and an opportunity to investigate what is happening at local dive sites. In the chill of winter the visibility can reach as much as 30m and in these conditions a dive on the offshore reefs can be spectacular. Even if you are photographing familiar subjects it is an opportunity to play with new equipment, improve compositions, hone basic skills and perhaps experiment with new and unusual techniques.

Mark Webster
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E mail peter@uwpmag.com

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Parting Shot

Persevere, avoid the crowds… and cheat!

I've always wanted to shoot a good image of a jellyfish, having failed with British jellies when I started out in 1990 using a Sea & Sea Motormarine II, bought from a dubious back-alley shop near Hammersmith in west London (I think it was called Ocean Optics, and run by a couple of suspicious characters who seemed to build their own cameras in the back room).

Martin Edge has a wonderful jelly in his book, "The Underwater Photographer". I always wondered how he shot it in a tide pool, with a sunburst in the frame.

Being older, richer and less tolerant of cold water I set off a couple of months ago for Palau, an independent state in the western Pacific, that nevertheless feels like a small corner of the USA. One attraction was the famous Jellyfish Lake, now apparently recovered from the catastrophic death of its jellyfish several years ago.

The Rock Islands of Palau are fossil coral reefs supported by a slowly sinking volcano. Water percolates through the limestone to fill salty lakes that have no direct connection to the sea. The rain forest gives way to mangroves, surrounding still waters that support a few fish, and millions of Mastigias jellies. The jellies float around the lakes where they live, following the sun. they have lost most of their sting, and live by the photosynthetic algae that stain their bodies brown. A severe El Ninjo caused them to expel their symbiotic algae and most died, like bleached coral.

There are a few barriers to meeting the jellies. Buy a permit, then a speedboat ride at hair-raising velocities through the narrow twisting channels between the Rock Islands. Clamber over a sharp limestone ridge, with camera and fins. Apparently the vegetation to either side is poisonous, but the snakes aren't. You are not allowed an aqualung.

A small jetty is crowded with tourists, all wearing life-jackets, and most don't seem to know how to swim. They have to be negotiated, as the jellies are about 200 yards away, across the lake. It's unseasonably windy, and the choppy water is hazy. I have two strobes and a 12-24mm zoom, but I can't get a decent shot with the surface in it. After 45 minutes (the official ration of time for visitors to the lake) I give up.

Next week my companions want to sunbathe, but I give the lake another chance. It's calm now, and the visitors are inexplicably concentrated 100 yards away from the jellyfish. I dive down several times, and shoot upwards against the light. I'm using a 10.5mm fisheye lens, and the jellies look very small.

Then I have a sudden inspiration. I float at the surface, and hold my camera with its dome port just underneath a jelly, with my strobes pulled back behind the camera. I guess where the jellyfish will appear, and shoot several frames.

Everything falls into place.

Tim Priest

Do you have a nice shot with a short story behind it?
If so e mail me and yours could be the next "Parting shot".
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