

in focus

Winter 2006/7

no. 86



The British Society of
Underwater Photographers





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in focus - Winter 2006/2007

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<p>Cover shot: from the winning annual 'open portfolio' by Steve Jones</p>

www.bsoup.org

Editorial

ANDY CLARK thank you from the bottom of my notepad. You have done a stirling and often thankless task (I know, I've been membership secretary...) bringing transcripts of the meetings to the wider audience for five, long years. You deserve a rest and then some.

Members, fully intending to be wishing you all festive seasons greetings I am barely scraping by with happy new year. However, I do hope it is a very happy year full of adventure, fun and discovery.

In the packed year planned we have old favourites, some welcome new speakers and some serious plotting going on behind the scenes to fill the gaps with yet more entertaining and informative guests to bring light to the darkness that is the downstairs, back room of the Holland Club.

In this issue of the magazine we have another thoughtful piece from our own Alex Mustard on developing your own style. Then, part 2 of Jeremy Cuff's really useful series on building your own website and, after zooming round the globe to 'the other down under' Jane Burnett concludes her excellent adventures in New Zealand.

This is all followed by some pretty meaty, monthly meeting reports on some impressive and interesting speakers. Finally, the proud and deserving winners of our competitions (including the increasingly popular 'world in our hands' theme keeping the spotlight on the fragility and vulnerability of our precious marine environment).

Oh, and there are a few pictures in here too, enjoy.

Now for my usual plea (this STILL includes you, Pat Morrissey...!), I know you are all slipping away on trips all the time, so why aren't we hearing about them?!? You've done the snapping, now get writing and share your adventures with us.

Wishing you all the very best,



BSoUP speakers 2007 (where there are gaps assume TBA)

February 21

Photo techniques: RPS - the road to fellowship *with Len Deeley*
'focus on': Close-up
Main event: Shooting the military *with Simon Brown*

March 21

Photo techniques: Digital Asset Management 2 *with JP Trenque*
Annual event: Theme portfolio
Main event: Innovative, creative, effective? *with Alex Mustard*

April 18

Photo techniques: Getting more from your compact *with Maria Munn*
'focus on': Abstracts

May 16

Photo techniques: Planning for a 'splash-in' *with Charles Erb*
'focus on': People
Main event: Turbid water (tropical & temperate) *with Mark Webster*

June 20

'focus on': Creative

July 18

Photo techniques: 'Splash-in' review *with Brian Pitkin*
'focus on': Temperate waters

August 15

Photo techniques: Portfolio composition
'focus on': International 'focus on'
Main event: Portfolio workshop

September 19

Photo techniques: **Heather Hammond**
'focus on': The world in our hands
Main event: **Alan James**

October 17

Annual event: Best of British portfolio

November 21

Annual event: AGM
Annual event: Beginner's portfolio
Annual event: 'focus on' final
Main event: UK (green water) photo techniques *with Peter Rowlands*

December 19

Annual event: Open portfolio
Annual event: Christmas party

A sense of style by Alex Mustard

www.amustard.com

Way back in the summer of 1856, observant promenaders on Dorset's south coast would have witnessed the most dramatic advance in underwater photography ever made. William Thompson lowered a camera into the sea and captured the first underwater photograph ever taken (albeit without actually going underwater himself). Since then, the last five or so years have seen the greatest advances in underwater photography equipment than any other time.

It would be foolish, of course, not to expect inexorable progress in technology, but the usual constant trickle has been replaced by a raging torrent in recent years. There have never been such a wide variety of housings available for our cameras and the average camera is so much more capable of pleasing results than ever before. And the R&D hasn't stopped there: each month there are new strobes, accessory lenses and filters that are changing the possibilities of what we can photograph underwater.

In short, there has never been a better time to get into underwater photography. It has never been easier to get pleasing images on your very first dive with a camera, and many photographers now produce shots on their first trips that would have won competitions 10-15 years ago. Of course, this rate of progress is not entirely good news for the diver who has been keen on photography for a number of years, a category many of us BSoUP members fall into! With such a high standard of underwater images these days it is important that we keep pushing on to make sure our images stand out from the chasing pack.

A popular solution for many photographers is to differentiate their work by developing a distinctive photographic style. Having a distinguishing specialisation is a good way of developing excellence in one area and an ideal way of getting our name known with editors and publishers. And, developing a style is only as restrictive as we want it to be. Of course, you do not always have to stick to your speciality!

A photographic style can be defined by many factors: some photographers are well known for shooting in certain regions or even at certain resorts, others are specialists in particular creatures like sharks, while still others are known for their macro skills. There are experts at diver shots or fish behaviour images, and people known for the distinctive look of their images irrespective of subject matter. Some favour moody, atmospheric lighting, while others go for evenly lit subjects and punchy colours. A few photographers are known for certain techniques, such as movement blur, split level photos or super-macro. There are countless areas to target for the development of our own style by weaving together several of these specialities. But the aim remains the same - to develop a portfolio of images that really stands out from the crowd.

In these digital days, there is a new, important factor to consider in defining the look of our images. Our choice of camera and, probably more so, the choices we make about white balance, saturation and contrast settings, either in camera or in RAW conversion can have a large impact on our images. For those who enjoy post processing, the way we solve problems in Photoshop can give our images a different look. For example, most people get rid of spots of backscatter by using the clone tool or the healing brush to spot them away. But one photographer I know likes to blur open water to hide backscatter. These blurry blue and green backgrounds certainly help make his images look distinctive.

Of course style is no good without substance. As well as chasing shots that stand out, it is important to develop a diverse and balanced portfolio of images. If we spend all our time seeking new and different shots we may well end up wearing the Emperor's new clothes! That said, developing a style and some specialisations is a great way to get your images noticed. If your pictures look just like those in the dive magazines - that is great - but the dive magazines are unlikely to want to publish them as they already have contributors who can provide these types of shots. But if your images are different (and ideally better and different) from those you see then you will soon have customers queuing up for your work.

Building a photography website by Jeremy Cuff

Part 2 - 'site under construction'

www.ja-universe.com

In part 1 published in the last issue (no. 85) we looked at the internet as a whole, the reasons why a photographer might want a website and considered some general points. If you have decided a website is for you, the next step is to create one:

We have all seen the “Site Under Construction” message on the internet and in some ways, creating a website is rather like undertaking a building project.

It starts with you, the photographer, clutching the original, raw idea. Then, the designer enters the fray as the architect to help you shape and mould it. The domain name and hosting is the plot of land where the site will sit. Finally, along come the visitors themselves and their first impression is critical. They decide if your site is a Sydney Opera House or a Soviet style tower block. What they think in the first few seconds will probably determine whether they stay on the site or move elsewhere.

To get started, you must register a domain name and associated email accounts which form the site’s address. This is now fairly cheap, a far cry from the dotcom hysteria of a few years back when catchy domain names changed hands for megabucks. Many companies offering domain registration also offer hosting packages which you will also need. But, make sure you do it through a reputable company - take advice from your designer or refer to computer magazines.

That done, you can start creating the site itself. There are many issues to consider as touched on in part 1. It is important to get your inspiration and ideas together. Look at other websites - and not necessarily photo sites. Ideas are all over the web. Replicate the essence of what you like on other sites and make it work in your own.

You will also need to consider functionality. For example, do you need a search facility? Functionality needs programming and therefore takes more time and expense, so it's up to you to consider the pros and cons. A well sorted and categorised website may not need a search facility and don't forget, it will only be as good as the programming - if you can't do it well, best not bother.

My personal taste for web design is that back button usage should be unnecessary in order to navigate the site i.e. menus should be clear and easy to move between, and that flash animation is kept to a minimum. But, it is ultimately up to the individual so you need to decide what's best for you.

Specifically relevant to photo sites is whether the images appear in pop-ups or are embedded into the site. These days, I would suggest embedding the images since many internet security programs are designed to block pop-ups. This decision will inherently affect the design and layout of the site, so it's important to decide before commencing the design work.

Details and refinements are important too. However subtle, people respond to the thought and effort that has gone into a site. For example, a today's date which can be driven by a bit of programming gives the site a present tense feel about it. It gives the impression the site is updated every day, even if it isn't.

Try to ensure your work is difficult to steal. I risk it with some stories which are easy to cut and paste but that's the chance you take if want to publish samples of your work. Images are easier to protect, as they can be of a sufficiently low resolution as to render them useless for commercial print. Caveats such as copyright information are also small but important 'must haves' for any site.

It's also important to consider where the site is going and how you want it to grow. An ability to expand and grow the site without a major redesign is a real advantage, and a cost saver, too!

To build the site itself, you need to enlist help unless you're already a graphic designer. Like choosing a good builder for your house extension, choosing a good designer tasked with building your website is essential. You might also need a programmer for functionality - most web designers can recommend contacts if they can't program themselves.

But what is a good designer? It's all too easy to find out the hard way. There are many designers out there so it's important to find one you can both work with and relate to. The 'common sense factor' is useful when selecting. First, ask yourself "can I work with this person?" If not, find someone else. Is the designer busy? If yes it's usually a good sign. Personal recommendation can count for a lot, so ask around. Also, ask to see a portfolio of their work which should help determine whether they are capable of producing what you want and whether their style suits you. Finally, enquire about costs so you're clear about the charging basis. If you're still unsure, ask more questions.

Be wary of designers who 'know what you want' before they have listened to you. It's easy to get involved with someone who sees your website as a means to flex his creative muscles. If that's his agenda, he may well sacrifice practicality. The internet is about instant access. Don't prevent a visitor to your website reaching the area they are interested in. Web patience is well known to be limited.

On the flipside, a mistake I often see is a client unwilling to listen to the designer's suggestions. A good designer's views should be respected and contribute to the finished result. After all, that's why you've employed him. Rarely can bad designers produce good work but I have often seen good designers produce rubbish, purely because that's what the client has insisted on. It has to be a healthy push and pull relationship, in effect a creative partnership.

One sure way of not getting what you want is to have a vague brief. It may sound obvious but it happens so often. The way websites are built means that major afterthoughts and u-turns are a designer's nightmare.

Achieve a direction you're happy with early on. If you're unhappy with initial interpretations, produce more ideas before adding in all the content. It's essential to get a design style that you're happy with. If it isn't working, consider changing designers or persevere until you hit the sweet spot. But beware, you might still get billed unless you made it clear you won't pay unless you actually use the designs.

So to summarise - provide a good, clear and well described brief. It also helps if you provide some background on the site's purpose together with a brief history of its content, so the designer can understand and engage with the material they'll be working with. That way, you're more likely to end up with the website you imagined. You will also minimise wide interpretational differences that are inherent in transferring your minds-eye to another individual.

It's a good idea to ask your designer to put the "Site Under Construction" on a test address so you can see the work as it progresses. You can also ask family and friends for their feedback at this stage. Perhaps ask them to choose something specific and see how easy it is to find. Second opinions are invaluable as it's easy to get too emotionally attached to the project.

Once your website is complete, don't put it live immediately, check it first. You literally have to test every page and link. That way you can find any mistakes before someone else does and make the necessary amendments. With that done, you can finally put it live on the internet.

Oh, and give yourself a deadline. The project can expand into infinity, especially if the site is big.

Part 3 in the next issue will consider managing the site content and updates. Jeremy Cuff is an underwater photographer and photojournalist based in Warminster, Wiltshire. Recent work includes images from the Kona Coast of Hawaii and the Florida Keys.

A whirlwind tour of the other ‘down-under’ part 3

by Jane Burnett

In the last chapter of Jane’s New Zealand adventure, we join her as she finishes her diving in spectacular Fiordland and heads north to conclude her travels in the land of the long white cloud:

Lance, our skipper, insisted we were rather limited in our interests. We wanted to dive too much (only morning, noon and night - that’s normal isn’t it?). He was determined to broaden our horizons so periodically tipped us off ‘Breaksea Girl’ into the ‘car’ (dinghy) and whisked us off to walk on deserted beaches or experience the marvels of the rainforest. One of Fiordland’s key conservation campaigners, Lance was keen that we should leave knowing something of the area’s wider environmental issues.

In Doubtful Sound we met a team from the NZ Dept. of Conservation (DoC) who were implementing a stoat eradication programme on one of the islands. The stoats were introduced to deal with the rabbit problem. But rabbits are big, fast and on their guard. Far easier, the stoat thought, to munch your way through the nice, plump flightless birds who are oblivious to predators. The effect has been devastating. In a land that was renowned for its bird life it is somewhat eerie to stand in the rainforest and hear ... silence. DoC has a tough challenge but the Kiwis are rather less coy about eradicating introduced alien wildlife than we are. So perhaps there is hope yet.

We left the calm waters of Preservation Inlet to journey north to Dusky Sound. Along the way, we were joined by the ubiquitous muttonbirds (sooty shearwaters) as well as various species of albatross that skimmed across the waves around us. Dusky Sound brought us dolphins, fur seals, crested penguins and the attack of the girdled wrasse. The wrasse are small but they drew blood on more than one occasion where divers had patches of exposed skin. We spent an afternoon snorkelling or diving with the fur seals and then, on the way to Acheron Passage, we were joined by a pod of 20 bottle-nosed dolphins riding our bow wave.

As we slipped below the water at our dive site just south of the wonderfully named 'Wet Jacket Arm' we had the somewhat bizarre and incongruous experience of seeing an enormous cruise ship, several storeys high, rounding the corner and bearing down on us. We sank quickly into the abyss to escape ...

Our final Fiordland adventures were in Doubtful Sound with two dives on a small marine reserve that has the charming name of 'The Gut'. Lance, a diver himself, gave us very explicit directions and chucked us in. As we descended through the most visible freshwater layer yet, our vision became distorted - I thought I'd forgotten to put my contact lenses in. After a few metres, we entered the seawater and normality returned. We arrived in a rocky area. Sliced by deep crevices, this was crayfish country.

Intending to go deep for an afternoon dive there was no time to stop. Heading down the desert road, we met the Kays coming back. They swept in from across the canyon and their enthusiastic grins suggested that we were in for a treat. So clear was the water, we could already see the reef on the other side. Crossing the gully, we could make out huge orange sea pens scattered across the sea floor at about 40m. The reef, swept by currents pushed through the narrow channel, was spectacular. Covered in yellow zooanthids, black crinoids and red coral it was a marvellous sight but, at 30m, we could only stay for a few brief minutes.

Next day rain was coming down in sheets. Sitting in my bunk packing my camera ready to travel suddenly Tracy, the cook, shouted down "you'll want to see this". I grabbed my Nikon and climbed up on deck. We were heading out of Crooked Arm where we'd spent the night. On either side the mountains towered above us. Last night, as we'd sailed in, the scenery had been fantastic but no more remarkable than at any other time. Now it was transformed. The water cascaded off the mountaintops in torrents. In some areas, the volume of water was so great we could hardly make out the forest beneath. I don't think I've ever seen so much water, which is perhaps an interesting thing for a Scot to say! No wonder they call it rainforest.

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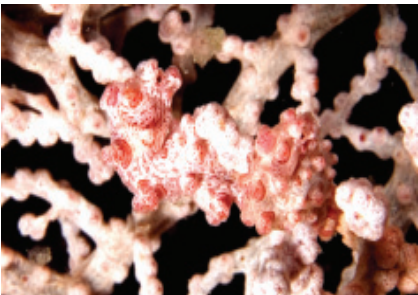
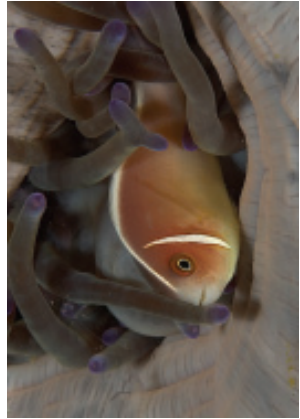
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Beginner's portfolio 2006



winner Kam Arya on page 42

Regretfully we had to leave the fiords, but not without visiting the most northerly tip of the South Island for our final day of diving. As we left Picton Harbour the sky was blue and the sea calm. We kitted up and sank into almost zero visibility. Yuk! We weren't used to this (at least not in NZ). Being folk who feel cheated if we don't get at least an hour underwater, we persevered. Eventually, we surfaced ... on another planet. Surely some mistake? We surfaced into a maelstrom! The waves were huge and the boat had vanished. Fortunately, it was just sheltering and the skipper made a couple of passes before he worked out the best way to approach us. Then Lucy proved she had been paying attention on her rescue skills course and deftly threw us a line that we caught first time. Once relieved of my camera (get your priorities right), getting on board was actually easier than it looked and we were soon relaxing over lunch, albeit in the rain, in a nearby cove under a memorial to some guy called Cook.

Disappointed with our morning dive we nearly called it a day, but gritting our teeth we set off once more for Long Island and were glad we did. The weather had settled and, in a sheltered bay, we went paua (abalone) hunting. We'd all seen the shells but never the beastie inside. Long Island is also a land reserve and, bobbing about on the surface waiting to be picked up, we were enchanted to hear a bellbird singing its heart out in the forest.

So that was New Zealand. A marvellous trip, over too soon. Even the demise of our plane on the way home resulting in an extra six hours in LA airport did nothing to diminish our enthusiasm. We'll be back!

Our trip was brilliantly organised by MCS/BSoUP member Vicki Billings in conjunction with First Light Travel (www.firstlighttravel.com). Fiordland Ecology Holidays is at www.fiordland.gen.nz In the Poor Knights we dived with Glenn Edney (www.oceanblue.co.nz) and at the Aldermen Islands with Dive Tairua (www.divetairua.co.nz). A great source of information is the book 'Fiordland Underwater - New Zealand's Hidden Wilderness' by Paddy Ryan and Chris Paulin. Also Glenn Edney's book 'Poor Knights Wonderland'.

Monthly meeting reports

International shoot-outs with Pete Ladell

August 16 by Alison Mayor

Pete began his talk by thanking BSoUP and its members for giving him the opportunity to represent them at international photo shoot-out competitions over the last six years via a contribution to the cost of attending. Pete has been a photographer for over 20 years and has entered a number of these events both at home and abroad. He went on to describe the nature of the competitions, identifying the differences to our own UK/ BSoUP 'splash-in' events.

The international competitions are much more commercial in their approach. Often accompanied by stringent rules, there are some big cash and goods prizes but the organisers usually wish to use the resulting images royalty free. Often the large diving federations like PADI and CMAS sponsor competitions along with diving equipment manufacturers and retailers.

Every two years, CMAS hold the 'World Underwater Photography Championships' in locations all over the world. All five continents are represented with over 27 entering, the next one being in Autumn 2007. The competition is very controlled in order to create a level playing field for all competitors. However, some entrants enjoy the advantages of much greater support from their sponsors who will go to great lengths and expense to win. The competition is fiercely contested. Some teams are afforded the luxury of being able to spend weeks at the venue and so benefit from exploring the potential dive sites and familiarising themselves with the waters and marine life, others can only hope to make the most of the two or three days of the competition.

Almost every photographer has a regular model to accompany them. The models are familiar with how and where to position themselves in order to get an image the judges will like and also with what dive kit to wear in order to look good underwater. For each dive, the images selected for judging are cut and mounted in front of the jury.

British portfolio



2006



winner Arthur Kingdon
on page 41



There are five main categories judged in the competition:

- macro
- wide-angle
- wide-angle with diver
- fish
- theme (recent competitions include sea grass and nudibranch)

The jury comprises up to nine internationally renowned photographers. In general, the winning images have a different style to those taken by UK photographers, especially those involving diving models. Pete explained that in the judging they look for clean/ slick lines and composition is very important. UK photographers do not normally dive or work with a dedicated model, but one who works regularly with the photographer can help create the sort of image the judges are looking for.

The events are very well organised locally and are run very much with the involvement of the local population, councils and businesses, making the event a real pageant or festival for the townspeople and their families. The media are also heavily involved. CMAS HQ organisation is very bureaucratic partly as a result of their bid to secure Olympic accreditation.

So far, all the competitions have been limited to film but it is now understood that they will be open to digital photographers in the coming year. It is not yet known how the rules for digital competitions will work, and whether competitors will be able to manipulate images before they are judged.

Pete then showed a short film, produced during the competition held in Estartit, Costa Brava. The diving was centred in the Medas Islands but unfortunately there was not much in the way of marine life on that particular trip, though the Medas Islands are normally known for their prolific Mediterranean life.

International competitions are a great way to meet some of the best underwater photographers in the world and make new friends and Pete wanted to thank BSoUP again for giving him the opportunity to take part.

How to dive with sharks without getting your butt bitten www.gparsonsp photography.co.uk

August 16 - talk and text by Gavin Parsons

Of the 230 species of shark, some are so docile you'd be hard pushed to call them bothersome, while others scare the living wotsits out of you as soon as they arrive. So, to help your shark photography here is a brief description of the expected behaviour of some of the more commonly encountered sharks. You will notice the absence of the great white here, that's because divers in a cage are hardly in the animal's true environment; are safe from attack; and if you see one outside a cage my advice is to exit the water very, very quickly.

Dogfish are small, UK and Mediterranean sharks that few divers take much notice of. Yet, they are extremely pretty and elegant members of the catshark family. They live all around the coast and are generally rather docile and approachable while the diver is calm with minimal movement. However, their tolerance is not a sign of apathy. Grab one and you will discover dogfish are agile enough to bite their own tail, or the hand holding it. You have been warned.

White tip reef sharks are a kind of tropical version of the dogfish - with a little more fire power. They patrol tropical reefs around the globe and are quite docile, even skittish of divers. During the day they are often found on reef ledges resting as, like the dogfish, they have the ability to pump water across their gills - a trait not many sharks possess. They often swim off, but remain still and breath slowly and the shark will probably return to the exact spot it left. With a calm and quiet manner it is possible to watch the animal rest for as long as you like.

However, white tip reef sharks come into their own at night and there are several locations where it's possible to watch them feeding. One of the best known for European divers is Maya Thilla in the Maldives. Here, boat loads of divers queue up to witness the spectacle of feeding white tip reef sharks, but if you have influence, get your dive master to arrive a little later than everyone else.

The earlier dives (some at dusk) can be too early for the sharks to arrive and there are so many divers with torches emitting more power than the sun it can be brighter at night than during the day.

Grey reef sharks are the quintessential shark - torpedo-shaped, sharp teeth and can, at times, be a little menacing. Thankfully they are not particularly a threat, unless you really get on their nerves. Do that and they let you know by arching their backs, lowering their pectoral fins and swinging from side to side in an exaggerated way. If you are stupid enough to keep annoying them, you only have yourself to blame for being bitten - which is what will happen unless you back off. Generally though, grey reefs mill around reef edges looking menacing, but veer away from bubble blowing divers.

Far more aggressive, though they don't look it, are angelsharks. Yes, these retiring sharks that devote so much time to just laying on the bottom have a temper to match John Prescott with an egg on his head. I discovered this the hard way when I inadvertently photographed one that had just, unbeknown to me, been bothered by a group of divers and my flash made it 'snap'. It turned towards me and rushed at full speed. Now, sharks generally try and attack from behind. So this fellow tried to get around behind me. So I span around to keep it in sight. It span more, I followed. It was like an aquatic swan lake for the mentally insane. I got about three or four revolutions into our bizarre dance before, feeling a little dizzy, I gave up, put my head down, my camera up and awaited my punishment. Luckily it missed all my fleshier parts and grabbed the padded shoulder of my BCD. It shook me hard and not wanting to rile it any more I acted like a rag doll. After a few seconds it spat me out and swam off in huff leaving me laughing my head off and the other divers in my group worrying I'd been hurt!

Oceanic white tip sharks are ocean wanderers encountered near deep-water reefs. There is no need to seek them out particularly as they come looking for you. As opportunist hunters they investigate pretty much anything from floating mangoes to people and anything in between. Yet they can be elusive. I spent many dive trips searching

Bad Breath Frightening the Fish?



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With ever increasing competition, it's getting harder to take images that really stand out from the pack. Which means you really must exploit every edge you can. And not just with camera gear. Diving equipment makes a difference to.

Many shy animals are spooked by the buffeting from your exhalations. With conventional regulators, the exhaust valve is in front of your mouth and the powerful vibrations from your exhaust bubbles can put your subject to flight.

The Aqua Lung Mistral twin hose regulator disperses air bubbles behind you. It's much gentler on your subject and they'll appreciate you for it, letting you get closer. So you can shoot subjects you couldn't approach before.

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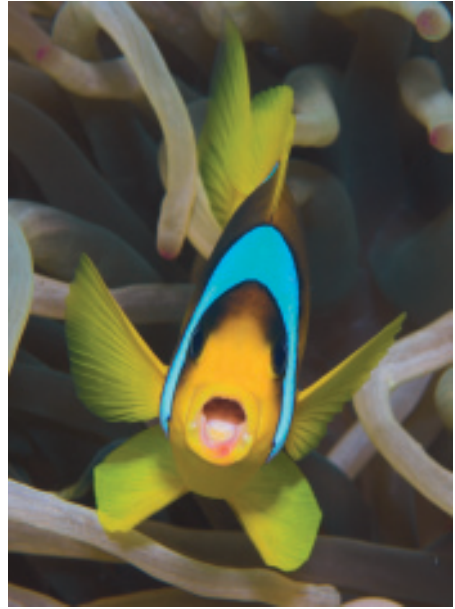
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Annual open



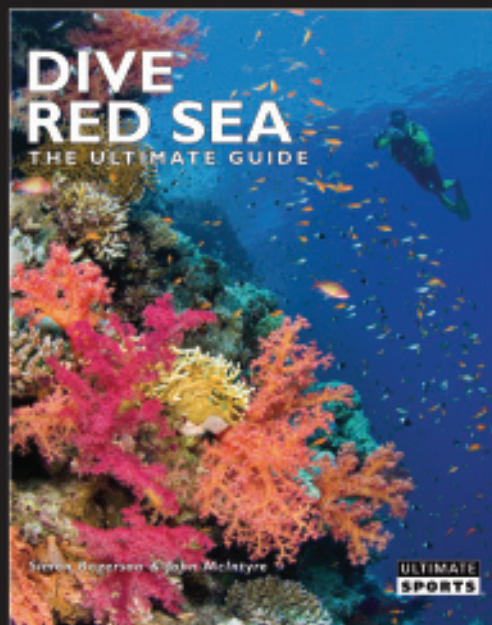
portfolio 2006



winner Steve Jones
on page 42



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 - Marine life identification section •
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for these pretty yet evil-looking sharks and failed to get close. Yet, when it all comes together, oceanics provide some of the most adrenaline-fuelled diving and snorkelling to be had. One way to attract them is to simply tie a small buoy off the back of the boat and wait for one to pop up - of course a snorkeller in the water also works well, they just get a bit wrinkled after a while.

When in inquisitive mood an oceanic will approach closer than most divers are comfortable with. A standard approach is to circle the person from a distance and to close in slowly. Once it's convinced you are about as useful in the water as a fish riding a bicycle up a mountain the shark will often swim directly at you. Not in a rush, just gently, yet deliberately directly at you. As a strategy to scare the living be-Jesus out of me it works very well. But stay calm and keep eye contact and you should have an exciting experience. If two show up though it is perhaps wise to leave the water.

Back to basics - September 20

talk and text by Martha Tressler

Our multi-tasking Chair Martha Tressler remained standing after introducing the meeting to present 'back to basics':

Modern film cameras made it easy. TTL (through the lens) flash and automatic settings resulted in largely perfect technical results with little effort. Digital has made us think again. TTL is gone for most of us, but the ability to see results on the spot makes it easier to experiment.

Whatever we are shooting, film or digital, what more could/ should we be doing with the camera to get different and interesting results? What are the basics? Well, for the purposes of this piece - aperture, shutter speed and lens focal length. What do they do? They control the light entering the camera, change the depth of field, affect the distance the flash will reach, and can freeze action or allow blur.

Aperture. A small aperture (e.g. F22) will give a greater depth of field, allow less natural light into the camera and give a shorter

flash distance. A large aperture (e.g. F5.6) will give a shorter depth of field, let more natural light into the camera and give a longer flash distance. Note that the relatively small lenses on digital compact cameras provide much more depth of field than on SLRs.

Shutter speed. A fast shutter speed (e.g. 1/250th) will stop the action, but let in less natural light. A slow shutter speed (e.g. 1/60th) gives more movement, allows blur and lets in more natural light. Remember, if you turn the flash on you are limited by your camera's maximum flash synchronisation speed - probably somewhere between 1/90th and 1/250th (except you lucky D70 users who get 1/500th). Check the manual!

Lens focal length. A wide-angle (short focal length) lens of 20mm or wider provides a large depth of field. A macro (long focal length) lens of 50mm or longer gives a narrow depth of field.

So how do these three (sometimes conflicting) things work together and what can we do with them?

Both shutter speed and aperture affect the amount of natural light entering the camera, so different combinations can provide a correct natural light exposure but give other different results. If F11 at 1/60th at 15 metres gives your desired exposure (e.g. the right blue background water), then F5.6 at 1/250th should do the same. But, the latter will freeze the action of fast moving fish better while the former gives greater depth of field. With a wide-angle lens you get a good depth of field anyway, so a faster shutter speed may be the driving factor. Unless you actually want some blur, of course.

A small aperture can darken or blur the background if you want the subject to stand out. If there is very little natural light, a small aperture will limit the distance the flash will reach - just make sure it gets to the subject but doesn't light the background. With a macro lens, a small aperture should also blur the background if it isn't too close to the subject, but use a fairly flat subject area or you could blur part of that also. Remember that wide-angle lenses naturally give a large depth of field so this doesn't work with them, or with digital compacts.

Consider what you want - a naturally lit background, slightly out of focus to highlight the subject? Use a large aperture and balance with a shutter speed to give a good natural light exposure. A totally black background? Use a small aperture to limit flash distance plus a fast enough shutter speed to minimise natural light, and light the subject entirely with flash. Or, everything in the frame to be in focus and have reasonable natural light? Use as small an aperture as you can get away with that allows a useable shutter speed (probably no slower than 1/30th) which will provide a good natural light exposure. Or, use a wide-angle lens and you can have a larger aperture, faster shutter speed and hopefully still have enough light to expose the entire frame.

Digital compacts have fewer options than SLRs, but many give some control over aperture and shutter speed. Find out what yours can do, and remember to check out the programme options. For example, a sports/ action mode is intended to stop fast action on land, and should work equally well under water. Also, don't forget that digital cameras give us one more option regarding light - if with your aperture and shutter speed combination you still need more light, remember you can change the ISO setting.

In summary, try automatic and have a go at some of these options. See what you can do that is a bit different, and maybe you will improve your photography.

The power of RAW with Paul Kay

www.marinewildlife.co.uk

September 20 by Andy Clark

RAW describes a group of image file formats and does not as such contain the finished image ready for viewing. What RAWs do hold is unprocessed data, read directly from the camera's image sensor, waiting to be transformed into the desired image via a RAW converter software package. This data, yet to be finalised, provides incredible opportunity and creative flexibility and could change your photography and the way you use your 'light room'.

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This was Paul Kay's basic message about RAW, and as a professional photographer with 25 years experience in all photographic mediums, such announcement is worthy of note. Favouring a Canon 1DS (11 megapixels) in a SEACAM housing and Subtronics strobes, Paul is always looking for 'something slightly different' in his photography and urges us all to take more time to 'experiment'. Living in North Wales, Paul is ideally located to pursue his expertise in diving and photographing subjects in temperate waters, mainly Britain and Ireland but also Spain and New Zealand. And more than just a photographer, Paul's passion for the underwater world and its inhabitants is almost tangible, and verging on the scientific. I guess you would describe him as an underwater naturalist for his observations on marine species, their rise and fall and notes on alien creatures are as interesting to the real science and monitoring bodies as they are to him.

So what is it about RAW? If you consider the film vs. RAW debate, the first thing to note is that you cannot apply the principles of RAW to film photography. Secondly, experiments on film prove problems with low contrast and thirdly, cost. RAW is, as Paul suggests, 'a revelation' and 'has to be accepted'. It offers a very inexpensive way to really experiment, it copes with all lighting conditions and offers that invaluable creative flexibility.

Additional benefits include:

- quality: RAW images are more detailed and contain more accurate colours; RAW is described as a loss-less format and as such all detail is preserved; RAWs are recorded in higher bit depth, 12 or 14, which results in brighter highlights, darker shadow detail and smoother tones
- flexibility: RAW data is hardly touched by the camera's processors before being saved, so adjustments to white balance, contrast, sharpness and even exposure, can (usually) be corrected post-capture
- control: with a decent RAW converter package the control available with your images is incredible; contrast adjustments, curves and noise smoothing can all be made with a little know-how
- easy enhancements: enhancements to RAWs via a RAW converter are easier than enhancements to JPEGs through Photoshop!

You might also like to consider the drawbacks:

- file size: RAW saved file sizes are often three or four times larger than JPEG
- write times: due to the file size, they may take a while to be written to your memory card; if shooting fast subjects and your camera's buffer is being utilised, you may have to wait a few moments between shots
- compatibility: make sure your RAW converter package is compatible with your computer and your camera
- processing time: RAW images generally need to be saved to either TIFF or JPEG before any adjustments/enhancements can be made; this could slow your overall processing time if you have many images.

It does seem that RAW will be featuring a good deal in future digital photography. If you're not already a convert perhaps Paul's presentation may sway you that way. Certainly, having been privileged enough to see some of the images Paul showed at September's meeting, RAW seems to be a pretty exciting tool! If you need more encouragement, Paul recommends the book 'Adobe RAW', by Bruce Fraser.

Photo libraries with Matthew Ford

www.oceans-image.com

October 18 by Gill McDonald

Being involved with a stock library has many plus points, and the first is that it forces you to catalogue and organise your work providing a necessary sense of order. It can also make you view your work from different angles and bring an unexpected sense of sharing and communication with your fellow contributors.

The other really important factor is protection, both from freeloaders and unlawful use of copyrighted images. For example, recently a publisher wanted a shark picture for a double page spread. He found the one he wanted on Oceans-Image, contacted Matthew expressing his interest and asked the price. When Matthew told him he spluttered "outrageous" and offered £35. As Matthew picked himself up off the floor the publisher growled that he could trawl the web and get one for £25. "Go ahead then", Matthew replied.

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Jane Morgan's winner of the annual 'focus on' final competition. This image also won the prestigious Plongeur d'Or (1st place) in the black and white prints category at the Festival Mondial de l'image Sous Marine, Antibes, 2006.

Matthew's strongest advice was "never sell cheap". If you have good pictures take pride in them and sell them for a deserving and decent value. Otherwise, it is bad for the industry and bad for you.

You do need to be very tough with editing, you must be harshly critical of your own pictures. Also, get someone else to help or do the editing for you. They will be objective and unemotionally involved. You need someone who will be honest though!

You must apply keywords rather than relying on the stock library. The more keywords, the more chance the image will be returned when someone does a search e.g. shark, great white, teeth, eye, aggressive etc. The person searching may well know nothing at all about the underwater world, probably an assistant given a tight timeframe and told to find it now.

Make your image files minimum 50mb and use as raw an image as you can in either .jpg or .tiff format. Include captions describing when, where and how. Don't sharpen or manipulate the images at all, the designer will want to sharpen and apply their own adjustments to match the style of the publication. Oceans-Image will not accept digitally manipulated images unless clearly stated what the adjustments were, although some other larger agencies are not as concerned. Matthew believes strong manipulation is a travesty. Digital photography is just the same as film photography in the sense that you capture the instant, the feeling in the picture.

So, what makes a great picture? A great picture has a moment, a personality, a twinkle in the eye. Along with good composition, colour and light it represents a special split second of time. Anything you can find that makes a picture different from the crowd will attract the attention of a library and a publisher. Bear in mind that pictures are used in many different ways - billboards, ads, on TV, posters in an exhibition, childrens' books etc. Be aware of these possibilities when capturing and presenting an image. Think of the target. People will choose a picture because it is usable. For example, if you want a magazine cover go for portrait and leave appropriate room for titles, headings, bleed, logo etc. Think of your viewfinder as a printed page. This is very difficult to do but is very valuable.

What do people want? They want great ideas, the more varied and imaginative the better. For example, split shots half in and half out of the water, the eyes of a child, children in the water, wrecks with a diver for perspective. Macro shots are also sought after but the composition must be excellent. Also people shots are always popular.

In summary, you are aiming for great composition and light, capturing the moment, being creative, leaving space for words and never, ever sell yourself or your pictures short.

Animal hazards with Linda Pitkin

www.lindapitkin.net

October 18 by Alison Mayor

As a scientist and author of four books on the underwater world, Linda is a well regarded subject matter expert on marine life. After recently providing advice to the London Diving Chamber medic course on the dangers of various marine animals and treatment that could be given, Linda thought that as BSoUP members also face various hazards in their drive to get the best images, they may benefit from some useful advice on what dangers may be lurking beneath the waves.

In her very entertaining and informative talk, Linda was keen to observe that there are usually only minor dangers from marine life. The main hazards facing divers and underwater photographers are from other human intervention. Provided we take care to respect the environment and interact with marine life properly there is little risk of harm. Using some of her wonderful images, Linda was able to show the audience some of the beautiful but dangerous marine life that members may encounter in both the UK and more exotic locations around the world.

The most common injuries or illness from contact with marine life are from stinging cells, cuts, spines, venom or from eating poisonous animals. Linda explained how each species can harm divers using their particular mechanism of self-defence or attack.

Stinging animals, such as the lion's mane jellyfish, can cause very unpleasant rashes as a result of stinging cells on their long, trailing tentacles. The purple stinger, though rare in the UK, is more common in the northern tropics with a very painful sting. If stung, a good tip is to rinse with vinegar. The most dangerous one is the 20cm box jellyfish whose sting can often be fatal. Siphonophores such as the portuguese man o'war also cause injury with stinging tentacles. Hydroids like 'fire coral' found in the Red Sea and tropics are a relative of jellyfish and can cause very unpleasant nettle-like injuries from venom in tiny hairs.

In Indonesia, the hydroids are more fern-like and their sting is much worse than that of fire coral. Other stinging animals like anemones may sting sensitive skin and divers in the tropics should beware of hell's fire anemones whose sting is particularly painful.

Cuts and abrasions can easily occur underwater from careless contact with sharp items e.g. elkhorn coral, lobsters, clams etc. but also from fish like surgeonfish and needlefish in the shallows. Healing can often be slow due to bacteria in the water. A number of divers have lost fingers from a lobster or crab which is determined to put up a fight rather than end up in a cooking pot. It is also claimed that divers have been injured by being caught in giant clams but this is a little hard to believe given that they close relatively slowly. Surgeonfish and unicorn fish have very sharp cutting plates at the base of their tails. Their bright colouration is a good warning sign to watch for. Needlefish tend to hunt at night though you would be unlucky to be speared by one.

Linda explained that creatures with spines may sometimes also inject venom, they are a common cause of injury for divers and can be very dangerous. The fireworm has white, fluffy tufts along the length of its body which act like little needles. If you are unlucky enough to get stung by one, Linda's tip was to use sticky tape to try to remove them. Textile cone shell molluscs, at only 5-6cm long, are very dangerous and have a harpoon type radula which can inject highly poisonous venom into their prey. The results of an unfortunate encounter can be fatal. Poisonous urchins found in the Red Sea have sacks of venom which can give very serious stings.

The colourful patterns of the fire urchin (found in Indonesia) are a reminder that it also has the potential to inject venom from its spines. Injuries from other dangerous urchins such as the crown of thorns may take many weeks or even months to heal.

By reminding everyone of Steve Irwin's recent fatal encounter with a sting ray, Linda pointed out the danger of rays which may be partly buried beneath sand and in shallow water. If feeling threatened, these animals can use the spine at the base of their tail to lash out at their attacker. Scorpionfish are also well camouflaged with venom hidden in their dorsal fins. The spiny devil fish also injects painful venom and the advice for the patient is to immerse the wound in extremely hot water to neutralise the venom. Another dangerous but very beautiful fish is the lion fish, often encountered on a night dive it has venom stored in its numerous long spines. Closer to home, weaver fish are a hazard to swimmers in British waters as they live in sand at many beaches. Striped catfish and even dogfish also have venomous spines. Other toxic creatures include the fire sponge (Caribbean) and some sea cucumbers. Linda warned everyone that the beautiful blue-ringed octopus, at only two inches long has a highly venomous and fatal bite.

Eating fish when abroad can also result in poisoning and care should be taken to ensure fish is very fresh and has been prepared correctly as sometimes fish can store poison within their body.

Linda then warned of the dangers of being bitten, which often results from animals who are provoked or feel threatened. Moray eels can bite when they have been fed by divers as 'entertainment'. Congers may bite if you accidentally place your hand in their hole but are generally placid and shy away into the shadows. Grunts and barracuda have, on rare occasions, bitten people in the Caribbean but one of the most aggressive fish is the titan trigger fish. This highly territorial fish has a formidable beak and mouthful of teeth covered with bacteria and strong enough to bite through coral so are capable of delivering a very nasty bite. Linda also warned that large mammals such as grey seals and sea lions can be really playful but have the potential to deliver a bite similar to a large dog.

Sharks are obviously what spring to mind as the greatest danger and they have a fearsome reputation. Bottom dwelling sharks such as the wobbegong rarely pose a threat. Grey reef sharks have occasionally bitten observers when feeding. Moving up the danger scale the scalloped hammerhead, blue shark, ferocious looking mako and oceanic white tip sharks can be a danger if you are fortunate to ever meet one. The great white, though very rare these days, has pride of place but bull sharks and tiger sharks can be much more aggressive.

Linda concluded her talk with a reminder that general safe diving practices, good buoyancy control and above all an awareness of your surroundings can go a long way to reducing the risk of injury when underwater. Photographers should be wary of handling or harassing marine life and should avoid touching the reef. Wearing protective clothing, even a dive skin will save uncomfortable rashes and burns, and another good tip is to learn about hazards and dangers from local guides. Their knowledge of dangerous marine life is very useful and they usually have some good tips on what to look out for.

Competition results by Andy Clark

August 16 - 2nd annual international 'focus on'

Our second annual International 'focus on' competition attracted 48 entries from Australia, Bermuda, Canada, the Cayman Islands, Egypt, France, Germany, Monaco, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Singapore, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Switzerland, Turks and Caicos and the UK.

The winner, Martin Tomczyk, took his lovely half-in half-out shot of a frog waving at the camera in a small lake just outside his hometown in Gader Valley, Slovakia. 70 members voted for:

- 1st - Martin Tomčík - Slovak Rep - 48 pts
- 2nd - Ralph Mortimore - UK - 39 pts
- 3rd - Alex Mustard - UK - 36 pts
- 4th= - Len Deeley - UK - 30 pts
- 4th= - Peter Mooney - Australia - 30 pts
- 6th - Andrzej Czyzyk - Poland - 22 pts

September 20 - The world in our hands 'focus on'

The popularity of the annual September 'world in our hands' theme is growing and this year we had a pleasing 13 entries. A sad picture was painted of the increasingly desperate state of our oceans and the (seemingly) total disregard for the welfare of their inhabitants. We saw powerful images of pollution and equally poignant images depicting mans' plundering of our marine life. The final results were:

- 1st - Arun Madiseti - 43 pts - vulnerable leatherback turtle hatchling
- 2nd - Jane Morgan - 38 pts - freshly hooked fish
- 3rd - Anthony Holley - 33 pts - captured crab in crab pot

October 18 - Best of British portfolio

Congratulations to Arthur Kingdon, the clear winner of the 2006 Best of British portfolio competition out of a total of 23 portfolios submitted. Arthur received the BSoUP Best of British Trophy and a cheque for £100 donated by Sport Diver Magazine. Check out Arthur's winning portfolio on pages 18/19

- 1st - Arthur Kingdon- 92 pts
- 2nd - JP Trenque - 32 pts
- 3rd - Len Deeley - 30 pts
- 4th - Charles Erb - 25 pts

November 15 - 'focus on' final

A fantastic year for Jane Morgan who won this year's 'focus on' final for the BSoUP 'focus on' trophy with her image of a seal pup taken in the Farne Islands, UK with a D70 in a Sea & Sea housing. A black and white version of the same image won the *Plongeur d'Or* (1st place) in the Black & White Prints category at the Festival Mondial de l'Image Sous Marine in Antibes. As this was the final of the year, Jane's image was judged by the audience to be the best of about 100 images. See Jane's beautiful shot on page 35

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 st - Jane Morgan | 4 th - Tony Baskeyfield |
| 2 nd - Steve Jones | 5 th - Pedro Vieyra |
| 3 rd - Steve Jones | 6 th - Gavin Parsons |

November 15 - Beginner's portfolio

Very well done to Kam Arya for winning the 2006 beginner's portfolio competition. Kam proudly received the Diver Trophy and a cheque for £100 kindly donated by Diver magazine. See Kam's successful portfolio on page 15. The full results were:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 st - Kam Arya - 48 pts | 4 th - John Wallis - 35 pts |
| 2 nd - Rich Smith - 40 pts | 5 th - Neil Rosewarn - 34 pts |
| 3 rd - Mike Davidge - 37 pts | 6 th - Tamsin Eyles - 19 pts |

December 20 - Open portfolio

As another successful year of underwater photography drew to an end, the festive BSoUP audience was treated to an extravaganza of visual panache. 21 entries of varying virtuoso adorned the silver screen and between them, entrants took the audience beneath the waves of many of the world's oceans and seas, reminding us all of our reasons for diving (in case we were ever to forget!), and offering a little extra inspiration for planned endeavours for 2007.

Steve Jones ended a successful year with the BSoUP Trophy and a cheque for £100 from Dive magazine. The full results were:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 st - Steve Jones - 41 pts | 4 th - Alex Mustard - 35 pts |
| 2 nd - Sam Bean - 40 pts | 5 th - Shannon Conway - 34 pts |
| 3 rd - Alex Tattersall - 37 pts | 6 th - Tony Baskeyfield - 28 pts |

Editor's plea

I hope you enjoy the detailed write-ups of the monthly London meetings and competitions. I believe these are really useful for both attendees and distant/ unavailable members to keep in touch with what is going on and also hopefully pick up a few tips.

BUT - you know what's coming... someone has to sit in the meeting, take notes and write these up. If anyone can help in even the smallest way (e.g. take notes on a competition) I would be very grateful. That's how I started, who knows, the editor's job could soon beckon...

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Forward planning

Sharm el Sheikh, Red Sea: 16 - 23 June 2007

Photo-workshop aboard the MY Hyatt with Diving World. This is particularly aimed at the time when fish spawning takes place and will cover photography, Photoshop and audio visual presentation techniques.

Len Deeley www.imagine-photography.co.uk

Red Sea: 21 - 30 September 2007

Jane Morgan & JP Trenque are running a photography workshop on board MV Kawarty II. The itinerary will cover the Brothers, Daedalus and Elphinstone. For more information, speak to Jane & JP or visit www.hiddendepthsdivetours.com

South Africa and Mozambique: 14 - 28 October 2007

14-day 'shark, whale shark & manta ray expedition' with optional extensions for great white shark cage diving and/or big-5 game safari - Kruger National Park. There are excellent facilities for non-divers and the group so far consists of both. The trip will particularly cater for underwater photographers.

Len Deeley www.imagine-photography.co.uk

Peter Ladell

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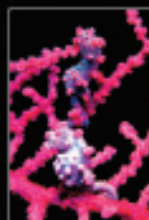
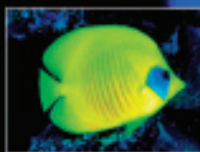
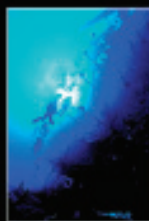
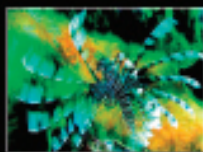
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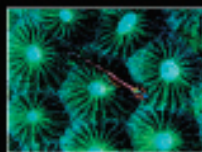
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