

Corona Critters

by Dr Alex Tattersall

I am acutely aware of how lucky I am to live on the South Coast at this moment in time and with overseas trips being put on hold, I've been able to look to my own backyard to find sanctity and sanity, a brief escape from the madness of the world.

In spite of my good fortune to live so close to some choice UK shore diving, it is still a very different diving experience from that of a luxury liveaboard, and it takes some careful planning and a lot more physical effort and dedication. Without local guide/spotters, you are on your own to find interesting subjects and photogenic situations, and at first sight, this seems impossible in the dark brown silt and sand. However, patience, sensitivity to the environment, and cumulative experience do bring their rewards.

I live in Bournemouth, some 45 minutes from my most visited dive site this year, Swanage Pier. A group of photo friends and I started diving



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(Top) Shanny under Swanage Pier, Nikon D850, 105mm, 2x Retra Pro Flash, F7.1, 1/60, ISO 40

(Right) Common Prawn at Kimmeridge Bay, Nikon D850, Nauticam housing, 60mm, CMC-1, 2x Retra Flash Pro, F20, 1/160, ISO 640

(Far right) Flatfish, Swanage Pier, August, Nikon D850, 24-70mm, Nauticam WACP-1, 2x Retra Flash Pro, F13, 1/160, ISO 200



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Snakelocks anemone reflections under Swanage Pier, Nikon D850, Nauticam housing, 28-70mm, WACP1, 2x Retra Pro strobes, F13, 1/160, ISO 160.

as lockdown was lifted and have continued throughout the season and are still diving now when conditions allow. The beauty of this has been the opportunity to watch the site's flora, fauna and even topographical features change in response to weather conditions and seasonal variation. We've watched nudibranch species arrive, proliferate, lay eggs and then disappear. We've witnessed sea hares arrive in their masses, mate in huge groups and then vanish overnight. We've seen wrasse nesting, blennies laying and guarding eggs, anemone shrimp grow from teeny-tiny to almost filling their host snake locks anemone, jellyfish come and go in waves, and (shh) even the magical spiny seahorse pairing, brooding and giving birth in front of our eyes. As the nights draw in and the water cools (and for however long the South West continues to elude more serious lockdown), we are looking forward to more winter and night diving to briefly follow the lives of colder water and more nocturnally active species (although motivating ourselves in colder, damper conditions will be a challenge!).

Knowing that overseas diving is largely on hold (plus the marked slowdown in my day to day workload) has allowed me the time to take a new perspective on local UK diving. I have been able to approach each dive with



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Stalked jellyfish on bootlace weed, Kimmeridge Bay, UK, Nikon D850, Nauticam housing, 105mm VR, 2x Retra Pro flash, F14, 1/80, ISO250

a much greater level of mindfulness coming from a drop in urgency to make each dive as productive as possible. Returning day after day to the same few sites, revisiting the same critters, having more numerous windows into the lives of the animals

has all afforded me with a much deeper level of intimacy with the local seas, for which I hope I will be ever grateful. 2020's post lockdown sites for me were Swanage Pier, Kimmeridge Bay, the Weymouth/Portland region and I managed to

sneak out for a three day break to Lundy Island.

I am also in the fortunate position of having access to new and exciting underwater photo products (what would an article from me be without a few commercial plugs?).



Snakelocks anemone under Swanage Pier, Nikon D850, Nauticam housing, 28-70mm, WACP1, 2x Retra Pro strobes, F11, 1/250, ISO 400.

Candy stripe worm on rusty metal pipe, Swanage Pier, Nikon D850, Nauticam housing, 105mm VR, SMC-1, 2x Retra Flash Pro, F18, 1/200, ISO 160

Visiting the same sites, I could return with different lens and lighting combinations with ideas as to how to tackle the same subjects from very different photographic perspectives. Much of the shore diving on these sites, as you can see from the photos in this article, lends itself mainly to close up and macro/supermacro photography with windows of excellent visibility (and tangible excitement) when I was able to unleash the Nauticam Wide Angle Conversion Port on the critters. We have also recently received the Nauticam EMWL-1 (Extended Macro to Wide Lens) which is a long probe lens attached to the front of the flat macro port offering wide-angle perspectives of macro subjects. I had the pleasure of test driving the new Retra Pro flashes (with its ability to sync to shutter speeds far higher than the usual 1/250 as you can see in the jellyfish and sunburst shot) and the Backscatter miniflash (the easiest and most versatile snoot light option we have used), to understand first-hand how both are opening up new and exciting possibilities for

underwater photography.

My final thought having revisited the image selection for this article is that I'd have never expected to have been able to repeat dive these same sites and to find such diversity and beauty in our local marine flora and fauna. If there is any upside for me to the current difficult situation, it could be that I would never have made the time to discover this had international dive travel still been an easy option.

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