

Micro Four Thirds Macro Lenses

By Andrew McLachlan

When it comes to macro lens options, perhaps no group of underwater shooters is more spoilt for choice than those shooting Micro Four Thirds.

When picking a macro lens for the Micro Four Thirds system for underwater photography, the Olympus M.Zuiko ED 30mm f/3.5 Macro, Olympus M.Zuiko ED 60mm f/2.8 Macro, and OM System M.Zuiko ED 90mm f/3.5 IS PRO Macro are all phenomenal choices that complement each other well.

Each lens offers distinct advantages and considerations over the others. After using each of these optics over the course of the last year, I will outline what I consider to be a breakdown of the benefits and pros and cons of each lens.

Olympus M.Zuiko ED 30mm f/3.5 Macro

The physical footprint of the M.Zuiko ED 30mm f/3.5 Macro is extremely small, and it is the least expensive of our trio of lenses. It has a full-frame equivalent of a 60mm macro lens, which makes it ideal for larger macro subjects or those you are able to get extremely close to. It has a closest focusing distance—that is, measured from the subject to the camera sensor—of 3.74in (9.5cm). That's a minimum working distance of just 0.55in (1.4cm). This makes the lens perfect for capturing subjects like coral details and mid-sized reef fish such as spotted scorpionfish.



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The M.Zuiko 30mm Macro provides a wider field of view to help more easily put subjects like this goldentail moray into context by showing a bit of its environment. Goldentail Moray Eel, West End, Grand Cayman AOI UH-OM1 Housing, AOI FLP-04 Lens Port, 2 X AOI Q1-RC Strobes M. Zuiko 30mm Macro Lens. ISO 200 f11 @ 1/250 sec.

Olympus M.Zuiko ED 30mm f/3.5 Macro



At the same time, the lens' small size and light weight make it easy to handle underwater with minimal drag while snorkeling or diving. Thanks to the wider focal length, the depth of field is relatively large compared to that of longer focal length lenses. Being able to photograph a slightly wider scene can be beneficial when you want context in your macro images.

Short focal lengths are less affected by water's magnifying effects, helping maintain a natural field of view. A drawback to this lens can be evident when photographing small, shy marine life that may require too close of an approach for the intended photographs, as you may spook skittish subjects or risk damaging delicate underwater environments. Getting in very close with the 30mm macro lens for tiny subjects can also make lighting the subject tricky, especially in tight quarters.

The 30mm macro lens is an excellent choice for beginners or photographers who want an affordable, compact lens for coral details and marine life of roughly 1–2 feet in length. The very short working distance of the 30mm lens is also beneficial in water containing more particulate matter than desired, as one can get very close to improve image clarity.



The 30mm is perfect for subjects that don't move, as you can get incredibly close, eliminating as much water as possible between the lens and the subject, helping boost sharpness, details, and colors

Olympus M.Zuiko ED 60mm f/2.8 Macro

Next up is my macro workhorse—the M.Zuiko ED 60mm f/2.8 Macro. The 60mm has a full-frame equivalent of 120mm. This particular lens offers a very nice balance between portability and reach. With a closest focusing distance of 7.4in (19cm), the 60mm offers a longer focal length that allows for the photographing of small subjects from further away—a minimum working distance of about 3.1in (8cm)—making it easier to photograph elusive or shy subjects. It is also easier to light images photographed with a longer focal length, as you have more space to position strobes exactly how you want them.

The M.Zuiko 60mm is known for its excellent sharpness and image quality—it is arguably the sharpest M.Zuiko lens in the entire lineup—crucial for capturing fine details like the textures and patterns of marine life. Despite its relatively long focal length, it is still compact, lightweight, and handles easily underwater. The 60mm is a good all-around macro lens for both macro and general underwater work and is capable of 1:1 true macro reproduction for high-detail shots.

For higher magnification images, combining with a wet lens diopter is a breeze. Its longer focal length provides good working distance, much better suited for shy or skittish subjects than the 30mm. The number of images I've used the 60mm for far exceeds either the 30mm or the 90mm.

The 60mm is a true 1:1 macro lens and photographing the reef's smallest denizens, like a sharknose goby for example, with razor sharp details is no issue.



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The 60mm is a fantastic all-around macro lens and is fantastic for fish portraits of larger reef fish, like this four-eyed butterflyfish.

*Foureye Butterflyfish, George Town, Grand Cayman
AOI UH-OM1 Housing, AOI FLP-02 Lens Port, 2 X AOI Q1-RC Strobes ISO 200 f8 @ 1/250 sec.*

M.Zuiko ED 60mm f/2.8 Macro





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A stunning chain moray, photographed against a black background using the Olympus M.Zuiko 60mm Macro lens—a perfect choice for tight fish portraits.
AOI UH-OM1 Housing, AOI FLP-02 Lens Port, 2 X AOI Q1-RC Strobes



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OM System M.Zuiko ED 90mm f/3.5 IS PRO Macro

The OM System M.Zuiko ED 90mm f/3.5 IS PRO may be quite a mouthful, but this macro lens—the first 2:1 macro lens in the Micro Four Thirds system—is also the most unique. Not only does it go beyond 1:1 reproduction, all the way to 2:1 magnification, but it is also a whopping 180mm full-frame equivalent.

This extra long focal length means you can photograph subjects from much further away, which is fantastic if photographing skittish subjects such as a fairy basslet or trying to isolate specific parts of a subject like the details of a rock-boring urchin.

The M.Zuiko 90mm will give you that astonishing 2x magnification at its closest focusing distance of 8.66in (22cm), which is about 2.5in (6.5cm) from the front element. At 1x magnification, this increases to 3.7in (9.5cm)—a touch more working distance than the 60mm offers.

The 90mm's uniquely long focal length means isolating subjects or photographing skittish critters is much easier, as you can be significantly further away and thus run less of a risk of spooking whatever it is you're photographing.

Unsurprisingly, the 90mm is the largest, heaviest and most expensive of the options discussed here. It also provides the greatest challenge to get used to as the field of view—about 14°—is so narrow.

While it will likely never supplant the 60mm as my go-to lens, for those situations where the 90mm excels, it truly excels.

Isolating subjects from the background or photographing the smallest or most skittish critters is far easier with this lens than either of the other

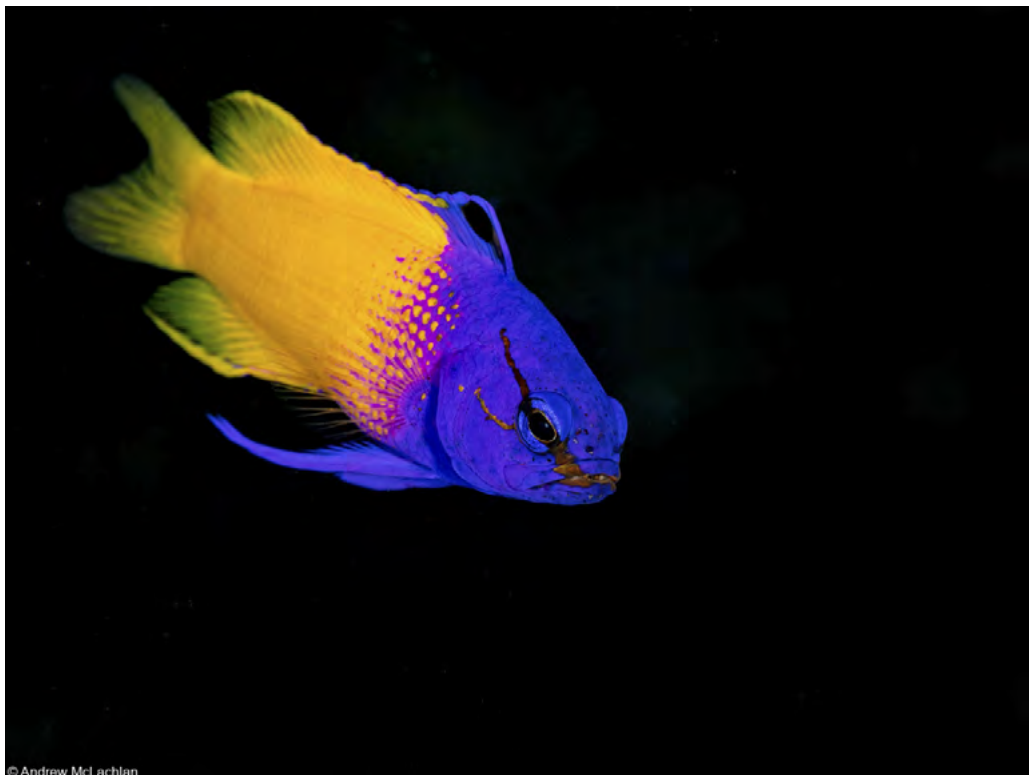


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*Most macro lenses max out their magnification at 1:1. The 90mm goes all the way to 2:1, meaning even the smallest details of a rock-boring urchin are easily captured—without the need for a diopter
AOI UH-OM1 Housing, AOI FLP-09 Lens Port, 2 X AOI Q1-RC Strobes, ISO 400, f16 @ 1/250 sec.*

M.Zuiko ED 90mm f/3.5 IS PRO





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The 90mm's uniquely long focal length means isolating subjects or photographing skittish critters is much easier, as you can be significantly further away and thus run less of a risk of spooking whatever it is you're photographing

options.

The sharpness is fantastic and there's also stabilization built in, which when combined with the in-body stabilization found in cameras like the OM System OM-1 and OM System OM-1 Mark II, is truly impressive.

Final Thoughts

If you are a Micro Four Thirds underwater photographer looking

for macro lens options, consider the subject matter you most typically encounter during your diving or snorkeling and choose accordingly.

I honestly feel a good starting point would be to add both the 30mm and 60mm options to your kit, as combined they are much less expensive than the 90mm option and will likely be more useful to you over the course of time. However, if you are a true macro junkie looking to



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A small sailfin blenny peaks out of its burrow and eyes the 60mm macro lens while it is used to capture a cute portrait

photograph the tiniest of marine life then the 90mm may be the lens you're looking for.

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