

My Shot

by David Fleetham

I regularly inspect antler coral for the inhabitants that call these branching structures home. These corals, with their complex lattice of intertwined branches, form an underwater city full of life. Nestled among the crevices, I often discover a variety of residents: tiny crabs clinging to the stems, shrimp tucked into protective alcoves, and small fish darting in and out with surprising agility. One particular family of small gray fish has always intrigued me. They are quick to vanish into the coral maze, their cryptic behavior and muted coloring making them frustratingly elusive. Capturing them on camera, or even just seeing them clearly, is always a challenge.

The difficulty lies in illuminating such a habitat. Light struggles to penetrate the narrow passages of the convoluted polyp maze. To peer inside requires careful maneuvering of strobes and focus lights, a juggling act that often feels like trying to shine a torch into the keyhole of a locked door. But persistence has its rewards.

These mysterious residents are spotted crouchers, *Caracanthus maculatus*. Small and inconspicuous, they are masters of camouflage. Their mottled bodies blend seamlessly with the coral branches, rendering them nearly invisible to both predators and curious divers. Belonging to the family Caracanthidae, crouchers are specialists: they have evolved to live exclusively among stony corals such as antler coral. Their flattened bodies allow them to wedge securely between branches, and their behaviors are adapted to life within this fortress-like environment.

The presence of the spotted croucher is a vivid reminder of how coral biodiversity depends on the health of the reef itself. Without living coral to provide protection and resources, species like the croucher would struggle to survive. Each inspection of these habitats reaffirms the importance of preserving coral ecosystems—because within every branching coral lies a hidden world of remarkable creatures, each perfectly adapted to its coral refuge.



Shot with a Canon EOS R5 mirrorless in an Ikelite dry-lock housing with a Canon RF 100mm macro lens, 1/125 sec, F20, ISO 200, with two Ikelite 230 strobes set on TTL.

Do you have a favourite shot or an image/s which made a dive special?

E mail yours with some text to peter@uwpmag.com

and yours could be the next My Shot/s

(It's very easy. Images can be any size bigger than 20cm (horizontal or vertical) @ 150dpi saved as jpeg format and about 500 - 750 words would be fine.)

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