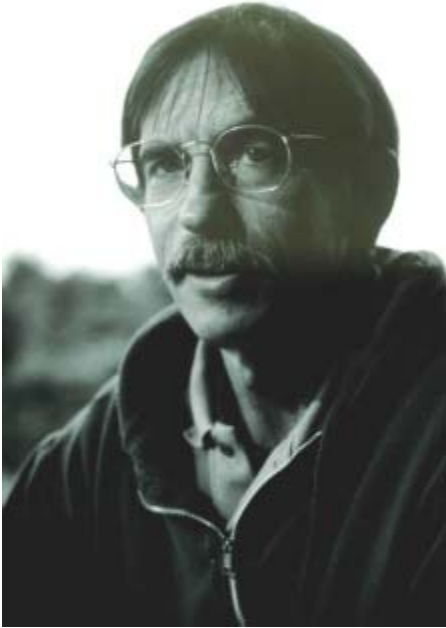


Doug Perrine

A Visual Story Teller

by Simon Brown



Doug who? Mention this name amongst friends and watch the blank looks and vague expressions return your expectant stare. Even divers, some of whom carry a camera underwater (and, in theory, should know better) scratch foreheads and mutter “the name sounds familiar” but fail to make any connection between the name and some of the most eye catching and rewarding images ever taken underwater.

Doug is a rare breed, making a living taking photographs underwater. Whilst most of us who carry a camera into the depths might dream (or



suffer the nightmare) of indulging in a career like this, Doug is out there doing it on a daily basis earning a crust taking images the world over provoking the reaction every photographer craves - “Wow!”. Whilst the image may well be remembered, gracing the living room wall or spread across the pages of many a magazine, the tiny acknowledgement of who took the picture is, almost without exception, nearly always overlooked.

Bronze whalers, or copper sharks, Carcharhinus brachyurus, gulp mouthfuls of sardines, Sardinops sagax, as they charge through a baitball, showering fish scales and blood into the water, S . Africa
Canon EOS D60 digital in UK Germany housing @ ISO 200,
Sigma 14mm f2.8 lens, Canon 550EX strobe in UK Germany housing set to
high-speed mode, aperture priority auto exposure with -1.6 compensation, 1/800 sec.f5.6



Juvenile Florida manatee, Trichechus manatus latirostris, Homosassa Springs, Florida

Nikon F4, 16mm f2.8 lens in Aquatica housing with 8" dome port, no diopters or filters. Underwater portion lit with Ikelite (225) strobe.

Sounds glamorous, exciting and fun - right? On a cold and windy day, when the weather had turned foul, I sat down with Doug to find out if this life was all it appeared to be.

After graduating from the University of Hawaii the idea of being paid to dive lured Doug to the Caribbean. Some dream. After putting in a 12 hour day 6 days a week, Instructors and Divemasters were earning less than what it cost to live in Grand Cayman. The cost of living wasn't the only problem. Teaching people to dive ceased to be a challenge after the second course, and saving tourists from drowning started to wear thin, so something was needed to keep Doug interested in the underwater world.

In an effort to boost a somewhat meagre income Doug added some PADI specialties to his instructor ticket, one of which was underwater photography. Figuring it was a good idea to understand a little of the background before teaching it, Doug acquired a Nikonos III, standard 35mm lens, macro kit and a cheap strobe. Photography had been pursued at high school, so the subject was not entirely new to Doug, but the first three rolls of underwater film came out black. Not an auspicious

start to a career, but the gauntlet had been thrown down.

As the photography improved the macro lens started to reveal an intricate, miniature world that Doug had never seen and somewhat naively thought that no one else had seen either, convinced that the pictures would automatically sell and be featured in the following month's National Geographic. Not quite, but the images caused a shift in Doug's approach to diving, within twelve months retirement from the instructor's scene was complete, with every dive now devoted to taking pictures.

By the early 80's Doug decided to return to university to study fishery science to prepare for a career where he could actually earn a living. The next five years were spent based on a sub-tropical island in the Florida Keys working towards a Masters in Fish biology. Doug spent one summer working for the government departments dealing with fish stocks, quickly becoming disillusioned with the process of churning through data, making recommendations and then finding that political decisions, divorced from the hard facts, set the fishing quotas. Other frustrations followed - one of the maintenance workers at the university flushed fresh water through the salt-water



(Above) Sperm whales, socializing *Physeter macrocephalus* Azores Islands, Portugal (N . Atlantic)

Nikonos RS, 13mm lens, ISO 100 slide film, ambient light (approx 1/125 f5.6)

(Left) Tiger shark, *Galeocerdo cuvier*, riddled with bullet holes by "sport" fisherman ; only the jaws were used, Florida Keys

Kodachrome 64 slide film (Nikon F80 or F90, 35-70mm f 2.8 lens)

plumbing system, destroying Doug's research with one turn of the tap.

This was not the career Doug had envisaged, but a friend told him what a great living he was earning with underwater photography, taking and selling images. Doug somewhat naively believed him, and three years later Doug turned in his first profit for a year of trading - \$25.

In the world of freelance photography the most persistent person who starts owing the least normally wins. With a cheap one-room apartment under one of Miami's freeways, no family to support and a rusty Honda for transport Doug owed nothing and was in an ideal situation to start. When the fridge was empty and the rent due next week, Doug would stop taking underwater pictures and

*Long-beaked common dolphin,
Delphinus capensis, leaping in the
bow wake of tanker off Wild Coast of
Transkei, S . Africa*
*Fujichrome Provia 100 F slide film,
Canon EOS 1N, 70-200mm f2.8 IS
lens (1/800 sec. f5.6) ambient light*

get temporary work, earn a few bucks and keep a roof over his head. The articles and images Doug took and managed to sell helped to pay off cameras and film, but the real strength was the bank of images being amassed. After a few years Doug could start to pick and choose the 'regular' employment, but it was five years of persistence and this yo-yo lifestyle pitching between paid jobs here and there and freelance photography before the latter supported Doug completely.

This glamorous lifestyle is not without risk. The trick with underwater photography is to get close to the subject, and this includes big predators. It was whilst trying to photograph a Caribbean Reef Shark that Doug picked up his 'shark bite' scar. Not quite a 'Rodney Fox', or even a 'Tony White' (when measuring the size of the bite mark) but this particular shark had been agitated by some nearby spear fishermen and took a dislike to having its photo taken. The shark decided to get too close for comfort, and the only line of defence



was the Nikonos, which was sacrificed as the shark lunged forward. One small bite mark on the hand, and a very scarred camera with a broken viewfinder were the only casualties. The hand healed, and the camera ended up being repaired and offered as a prize in an underwater photography contest. Incidentally, if

you have the bitten Nikonos Doug would love to hear from you.

You might be fooled into thinking that Doug's work revolved around larger animals; Humpbacks, Dugong, sharks and the like. Indeed, a quick glance through a children's book about sharks (brought home from school by my daughter) credited

around 25% of the images used within to 'Doug Perrine/Seapics' which reinforces that view. This was a misconception quickly corrected. For example; Doug was the first person to document and record the feeding habits of a tiny creature - The Vampire Snail. This rather aptly named beast feeds at night by forcing the snail

Atlantic sailfish, Istiophorus albicans
(c-r) La Guaira Bank, Venezuela
(Caribbean)
Nikonos V, 15mm lens, Ikelite (150)
strobe, ISO 100 slide film

equivalent of a hypodermic needle through the mucus cocoon formed by sleeping fish and sucking out bodily fluids. These days Doug admits that the eyes of a dive guide are needed to help him pick out macro subjects, or to put it another way larger creatures are easier to spot!

I met Doug at the Sardine Run in South Africa. For three years Doug had been coming to photograph the sardines and the predator/prey story that is played out as dolphin and shark gorge themselves in a bait ball, but never quite got the images he felt the subject deserved. A week before I arrived Doug had seen and photographed a bait ball, but this year Doug chose to shoot on digital instead of film. When shooting a bait ball the action is hectic, and more often than not all 36 images on a roll of film are used up in five minutes or less. Doug chooses to dive with just one camera (rather than the 'Doubilet' technique of carrying many) so once the film is used he would fin back to the boat, de-kit and dry off, unload the used film and reload, find the baitball, get back into the water and start shooting again. This process would take around 45 minutes, but shooting digital has changed the process completely. How about shooting images until your air or adrenalin runs out? In one 45-minute dive Doug shot continuously, storing 250 individual images in the camera's memory. Having been bumped by numerous sharks and dolphin Doug ran out of air and adrenalin so returned to the boat. With no need to change film Doug swapped tanks and when back into the water to take another 150 images of the action. Try doing that using a traditional film camera!

So, after twenty years in the business is Doug ready to



retire and stop taking pictures? While the rest of us sat down to enjoy breakfast before the boats launched Doug would have been up and out at sea and taking pictures. Success in photography - topside or below - demands a high level of commitment and having witnessed Doug at work I think it is fair to say the urge to tell a creature's story on film (or digital) is still very much present in Doug. Doug freely admits (but few would agree with) that he "Has yet to master underwater photography" and is still trying to pick up that gauntlet first thrown down twenty years ago.

Simon Brown

info@simonbrownimages.com
www.simonbrownimages.com

**Doug Perrine's images are
available for commercial
purposes through
www.SeaPics.com**

Bali International Diving Professionals



- * Dive Safaris
- * Packages
- * Liveaboards

Real Photography

the only 5 star centre in
Bali offering IANTD
technical diving:

Western and Asian Directors

- * Mola Mola to macro
- * Special rates for readers
- * Nitrox/Trimix/Heliox

Tel: +62(0)361 270759

email:

info@bidp-balidiving.com

website:

bidp-balidiving.com

Mola Mola © Robert Delfs