

Right in the eye!

Experimenting with super-wide angle

by Will Postlethwaite

I had just finished a muck dive with Kungkungan Bay Resort in the Lembeh Strait and when I got back onto the boat all the photographers were asking me why my strobes were so far away from the camera and subject? Was I mad? Did I have no idea? (maybe they were right!) When I explained that I was using a fisheye lens they were still not impressed and were just even more convinced that I was mad and had no idea what I was doing. At least, however, they now understood my strobe positioning.

I have to admit it does seem like madness but that is part of the reason I was trying out the lens in this situation. A number of factors had led up to me using the fisheye on these dives and rather than waffle on around them I thought I would list them below;

1. Ever since I started to shoot digital underwater I have been tempted to experiment and, inspired by Alex Mustard and his talk at Visions 2004, I wanted to break a few rules for myself.

2. I have had to listen to film

photographers talk endlessly about the fact that digital is fine for macro but it cannot handle wide-angle or contrast. For me it is not a debate worth having. I think the complete opposite is true and, if I have learnt anything about the arena of digi underwater, it is that everyone has their own ideas and ways of doing things. All are just as valid as each other.

3. I love the Nikon 10.5mm fisheye. I think it makes great wide angle available to everyone and it is not an expensive lens. I know Peter (Ed.) thinks the same of the INON auxiliary lens. Both focus to almost

Top. Snake eel and shrimps 1/80th f5 manual AF-S closest subject. "It is tempting to bury yourself with the subject!"

Nikon D70 and 10.5mm in an Ikelite housing, 2 Ikelite DS125 strobes with eV controllers. One slaved, ISO 200, White balance auto, Contrast auto, Sharpening auto, Adobe RGB

Right. Octopus in a shell 1/60th f6.3 aperture priority AF-C dynamic area "Touching the dome!"



on top of the port, the Ikelite is very compact, and inspired by Charles Hood's "on the dome" shots I wanted to try something similar myself.

I am a bit bored of macro and especially in Lembeh where the debate is 60mm, 105mm or +4 dioptré? All with the same lens we all take the same shots. David Doublet was in Lembeh last year with an endoscope! Dare to be different.

The basis behind the images I was trying to achieve is three fold. We have all seen the weird and wonderful creatures of the Lembeh Strait captured by the world's best photographers but always macro and if you have not been you cannot really imagine what context or environment they all inhabit. I wanted to rectify that if I could. Most macro struggles to give an idea of size and explaining using your little finger nail is somehow unsatisfactory. I wanted to see if I could give the creatures dimension. Lastly and most importantly I wanted to make the images seem more 3-D, have some depth, and also impact.

There are a number of reasons why having a digital camera makes this type of shot more accessible than with film, the major one being the instant review. When focusing on a subject only centimetres from your dome lighting is critical and here not only are you trying to light your subject but the immediate surrounds and at the same time balance that with the ambient light of the whole scene. Getting areas dark or hot or blown out is a real problem but when you can see your image on the LCD straight away you can deal with that on the spot rather than when you get home! Using the *highlights* and *histogram* screens can help too.

The great depth of field afforded by the camera and also the lens allow you to shoot in such potentially low light situations without much loss of



Two orange frogs 1/80th f6.3 manual AF-S closest subject. "Dark days are difficult"
Nikon D70 and 10.5mm in an Ikelite housing, 2 Ikelite DS125 strobes with eV controllers. One slaved, ISO 200, White balance auto, Contrast auto, Sharpening auto, Adobe RGB



Stargazer 1/100th f6.3 manual AF-C dynamic area. "Tell a story. He's going to be eaten!"
Nikon D70 and 10.5mm in an Ikelite housing, 2 Ikelite DS125 strobes with eV controllers. One slaved, ISO 200, White balance auto, Contrast auto, Sharpening auto, Adobe RGB

sharpness even at wide apertures such as f4. With film I would always avoid shooting at f5.6 or less as I found colours generally looked washed out but I have taken images with the D70 on f2.8 and not been disappointed. So low vis. and black sand were no obstacle although on overcast days the lack of ambient light created some problems with the overall image.

Shooting in raw format allows you a great deal of leeway post shot, which I found extremely useful for these shots. Adjustments to white balance, fine tuning exposure and sharpening all are invaluable raw tools. I feel shooting in jpeg is like trying to walk with only one leg when you have two but, again, there are many views on this.

Since switching to digital I have not found the loss of TTL at all distressing. In fact with fine adjusting strobes and instant feedback I have found that the manual control allows perfect exposure of situations, like a white frogfish on black sand, where TTL would struggle. Indeed the talk of inability to deal with contrast I almost find the opposite being true! Even sunbursts are not a problem if your camera has an electronic shutter like the D70 and all compacts. Just crank up the shutter speed and all is well. The D70 syncs to 1/500th but playing with the hotshoe contacts, or by using an Ikelite eV controller as I do, the limit is only the flash duration.

So it is all easy! Well if someone can invent a sensor that will tell you if you have backscatter than it will be. I shot all these images in only 5-10 metres visibility. Unless you have managed to shoot a snowstorm seeing any scatter on the tiny LCD is impossible, even if you use the magnifier. This where your laptop back in the room becomes handy. If you do not take one then the dive centre might have one or just play with your strobe positioning



White frogfish 1/80th f8 manual AF-S closest subject. "Contrast is no problem"
Nikon D70 and 10.5mm in an Ikelite housing, 2 Ikelite DS125 strobes with eV controllers. One slaved, ISO 200, White balance auto, Contrast auto, Sharpening auto, Adobe RGB



Emperor shrimp. 1/80th f8 manual AF-S closest subject. "Composition is always tricky"
Nikon D70 and 10.5mm in an Ikelite housing, 2 Ikelite DS125 strobes with eV controllers. One slaved, ISO 200, White balance auto, Contrast auto, Sharpening auto, Adobe RGB



Frog in a sponge 1/60th f8 Aperture priority AF-S dynamic area. "Put subjects in context". Nikon D70 and 10.5mm in an Ikelite housing, 2 Ikelite DS125 strobes with eV controllers. One slaved, ISO 200, White balance auto, Contrast auto, Sharpening auto, Adobe RGB

with the water column in mind. Which is what you are going to be doing anyway.

Next find your subjects. The main priority is sessile, so when you get 3cm from their poor face they do not run away. These are generally the same subjects in Lembah that the macro guys are on so that is why it is such a good place for this technique. Colour is useful for contrast especially in the black sand. Also the image will be more appealing all round! We as photographers like muck but it is

persuading everyone else that is the thing.

And now shoot. The advent of huge capacity memory cards of up to 4GB with super fast write times leave you with no excuse. As long as your strobes are freshly charged there is no reason not to try a shot or experiment. Gone are the days of 36 precious images to be rationed for the best situation.

Will Postlethwaite
w.postlethwaite@btinternet.com

Bunaken & Lembah North Sulawesi



Dive Operator/Retailer.
 Host of Asian Diver Magazine's Photo Shoot-Out
 (July/August 2005).
 UK-owned dive operator in North Sulawesi.

Specialist in underwater photography. Three resident European photo pros offering photo seminars, rentals, courses & sales.

Bunaken National Park, winner of British Airways' Global First Prize for responsible tourism, offers world-class wall diving.
 The Lembah Strait is arguably the most diverse and rich muck-diving destination on the planet.

Two-centre stays available to dive and photograph both unique environments. Quality resort accommodation available in both locations - Tasik Ria Resort in Manado, for diving Bunaken and Kungkungan Bay Resort in Lembah.

Guaranteed small dive groups with knowledgeable local Divemasters who understand the needs of photographers. E6 processing, digital downloads, camera room on jetty with 220/110v charging.

North Sulawesi's only PADI 5 Star Gold Palm IDC Resort.

www.eco-divers.com

info@eco-divers.com