

"Under the Blue" 2007 results



'California' - Rick Coleman, USA

Prizes: One week live aboard trip to Eastern Indonesia with Archipelago Fleet + Ikelite flashlight

Popular underwater imagery websites DivePhotoGuide.com & Wetpixel.com teamed up with SCUBA Show to develop an annual international competition for amateurs and hobbyists worldwide.

The 1st annual UNDER THE BLUE competition was a tremendous success. Entries flooded in from around the globe, and were on display during SCUAB Show in Long

Beach, California, June 2nd and 3rd, and are now posted online at the official competition website www.UnderwaterCompetition.com.

Photographers competed in four still image categories, including a category for images that focus on California's unique and beautiful underwater environment, and one video category. Winners shared more than \$20,000 in prizes, including



***1st Place - Man in the Sea
Noam Kortler, Israel***

Prizes: One Week of Shark Diving in Fiji with Bega Adventure Divers + \$100 gift certificate from Ultralight Control Systems

premium dive travel, and underwater photo & video equipment! Travel prizes include trips to some of the top photo destinations in the world including Fiji, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, South Africa and Australia.



***Best of Show Winner
Yeang Chng, USA***

Prizes: One week diving in Papua New Guinea with Walindi Resort + \$500 Amphibico gift certificate

As with all UnderwaterCompetition.com events, 15% of entry proceeds will be donated to marine conservation efforts.

www.UnderwaterCompetition.com

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Temperate Temptations

by Mark Webster

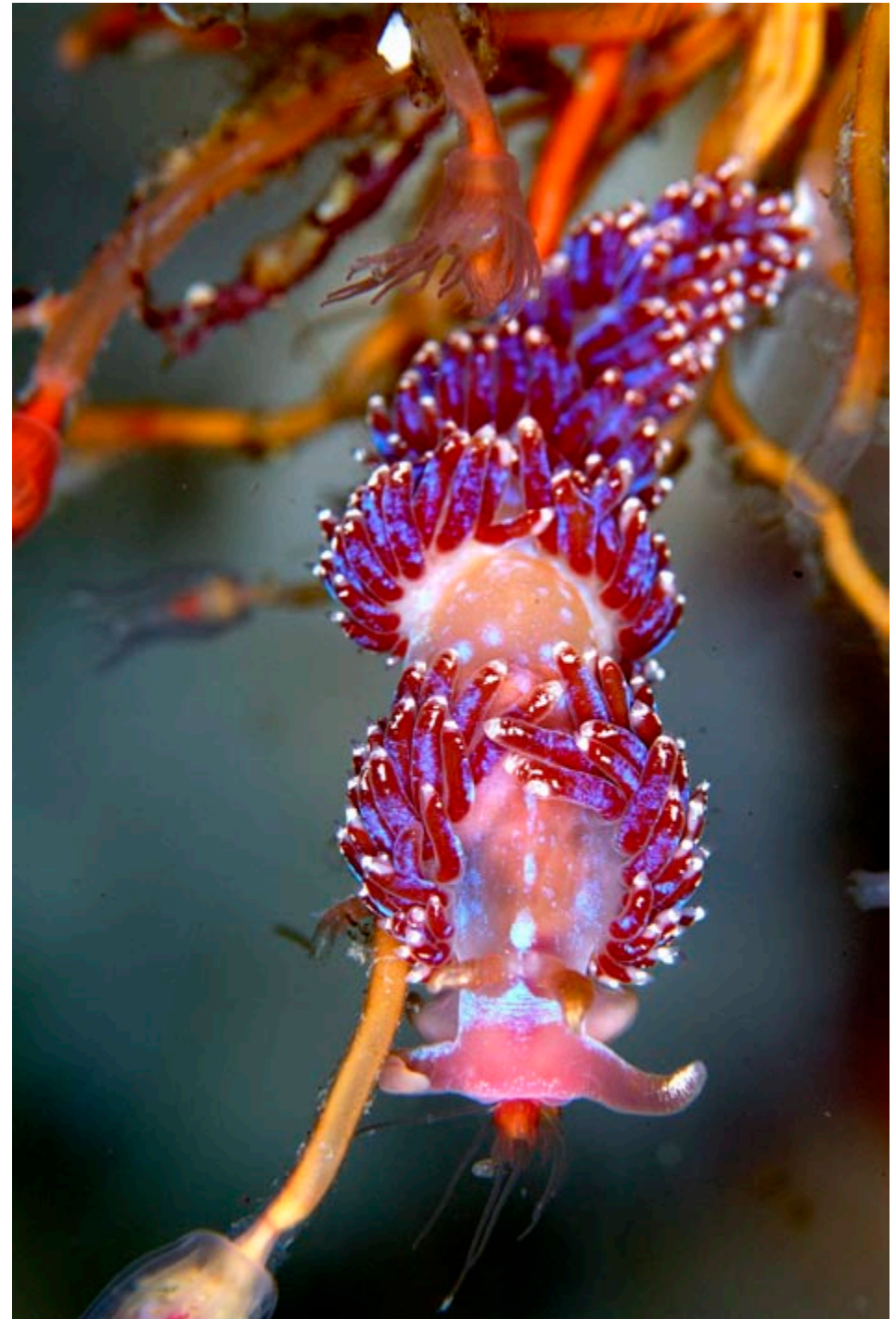
Regular readers of UWP will know that I occasionally sing the praises of diving in the cooler waters of the UK. Many of us live closer to temperate waters than we do to tropical and the cost of travel means that if you eschew your home grown opportunities then you may only dive once or twice a year in warm waters with your camera, dependant on your personal budget of course. The added benefit of diving at home is that you have the opportunity of testing equipment and techniques which will improve your success rate when you take that expensive trip.

A common misconception is that temperate waters have less colour and variety than tropical destinations. We do of course lack the reef building corals, but there are temperate locations worldwide that will challenge tropical reefs for colour and variety and there are many closely related species. The purpose of this piece of prose is to advocate the attractions of nudibranch species and sea hares in the UK and perhaps offer a few pointers for finding and photographing them successfully.

Nudibranchs

We have a number of appealing and colourful species of nudibranchs in the shallow coastal waters of the UK but the major difference between them and their tropical cousins is that of size. The cold water species tend to be much smaller and consequently are more of a challenge to find. Understanding when and where the nudibranchs are likely to appear will help you in your quest, but the key to finding them is moving slowly and examining the habitat very carefully – using a torch will help and some may even find that a strong magnifying glass can assist – you can buy large plastic ones in varying strengths from an optician. Nudibranchs are at there most abundant in spring and very early summer, but the exact season

Coryphella lineata feeding on oaten pipe hydroids. Nikon D100, L&M Titan housing, 105mm micro Nikkor, Inon Quad flash, ISO 200, f16 @30th





Polycera quadrilineata. Nikon D100, L&M Titan housing, 105mm micro Nikkor, Inon Quad flash, ISO 200, f16 @125th

Flabellina pedata. Nikon F90X, Subal housing, 105mm micro Nikkor, Inon Quad flash, Velvia 50, f16 @125th

will depend largely on how cold the winter has been – if the winter has been mild then you can often find species beginning to appear as early as February.

I find that the best hunting grounds are the shallow coastal reefs particularly in amongst the seaweeds and kelps. There are particular species (e.g. *Coryphella lineata* and *Tritonia nilsodhneri*) which like to feed specifically on hydroids or on

gorgonian fan corals which thrive more on the offshore reefs which are exposed to strong currents.

The first species to appear in late winter are normally the sea lemons (*Acanthodoris pilosa*) which are one of the larger species and can look just like small sponges, so can be quite difficult to spot on the reef. One of the first things to look for is the rosettes of eggs this species deposits in a variety of colours on



Coryphella verrucosa feeding on bryozoan sea mat. Nikon D100, L&M Titan housing, 105mm micro Nikkor, Inon Quad flash, ISO 200, f16 @15th





Janolus cristatus. Nikon F90X, Subal housing, 105mm micro Nikkor, Inon Quad flash, Velvia 50, f16 @125th

the reef, often under overhangs. Having found one or more of these egg masses, start looking hard in the immediate area and you will more than likely find your quarry. If you are lucky you may find mating pairs or one actually laying eggs which will make an attractive behavioural shot. I have found that some of these are light sensitive and will retract their rhinophores and gills when a focus light is on them – use the light to pre focus, lock your lens and then wait patiently until the appendages emerge. In my locality we have beds

of maerl, which is a type of calcified seaweed which forms into small coral like structures and often has a strong purple tint. This habitat also seems to attract the sea lemons during their season and can be a much easier environment to find them in.

Other early species include Polycera quadrilineata and Limacia clavigera both of which are very small (10-15mm) and coloured white with bright yellow markings in mixture of stripes and spots. These are very attractive subjects and are found mostly on various seaweeds and the



Limacia clavigera. Nikon D100, L&M Titan housing, 105mm micro Nikkor, Inon wet lens, Inon Quad flash, ISO 200, f16 @125th

kelp feeding on algae. Searching amongst the weed on the seabed will generally reveal some of these but they are occasionally found on overhanging sections of reef wall as well. In the late spring and early summer Polycera quadrilineata is often found in large numbers on kelp fronds grazing on the sea mats (bryozoans), copulating and laying their egg spirals – sometimes it seems

there is a positive orgy occurring!

Among other very colourful species are the Flabellina sp. and Coryphella sp. There are several similar looking species which are also very abundant in late spring and many of these are often found feeding on the stinging cells of oaten pipe hydroids which thrive in shallow waters on the offshore reefs where tidal currents are much stronger. These species are able to digest the nematocysts in the stinging hydroids and store them in their cerata which deters potential predators. These nudibranchs can be a bit of a challenge to photograph as the hydroids are often moving around significantly in the current and swell. If you cannot find a sheltered section of reef then try positioning yourself up current to block the water movement in front of the subject – this is only possible when the current is not too strong!

In the UK we also have a species of gorgonian fan coral, which is much smaller than the tropical cousins but is host to a particular nudibranch (Tritonia nilsodhneri) which mimics the polyps of the coral that it feeds on. They can be quite a challenge to find, but are often given away by their egg trails which are also laid on the coral. These guys are very small and often the fans are in deeper water, but it is satisfying to find and photograph them.



***Coryphella verrucosa* and spawn. Nikon D100, L&M Titan housing, 105mm micro Nikkor, Inon Quad flash, ISO 200, f16 @125th**

There are also other species that are less common and require a little more diligence and a portion of luck to find. These include the spectacular Lomanotus and Aegires punctilucens. Although most of our species are quite small there is one larger species that is often encountered in muddy or sandy environments particularly in river estuaries. This is Pleurobranchus membranaceus which can be up to 12cm in length but is often well camouflaged and difficult to spot. As with other species early spring is best when you will most likely find the large egg swirls first and the nudibranch close at hand.

If you are shooting with a DSLR then the best lens for the small species of nudibranch will be in the 90-105mm range with 1:1 magnification. For me, a shorter focal length of 50-60mm brings you too close to the subject at maximum magnification,

making it very difficult to light with flash. I often use a wet lens with a 105mm Micro Nikkor, either an Inon or Nexus, to boost the magnification – you can also achieve this increased magnification with a diopter or tele-converter inside the port, but this then commits you to small subjects for the dive. A good light helps with focusing and it often helps to lock your lens in manual or use AF lock once you have reached your desired magnification – then simply rock back and forth until the subject is sharp and release the shutter. Having your rig close to neutrally buoyant helps this process as often you need to hold the system with one hand. There are various ways of achieving this, my method is a string of small net floats on bungy cord that I put around the port (see picture).

If you are using a compact camera you may need to add a macro wet lens, dependant on the zoom range and close focus ability of your lens. Some compacts do offer a super macro setting, but this is normally at a very short distance to the subject, which makes it difficult to light – and in fact some compacts will not fire the flash in super macro. Once again, it is best to use manual focus options or AF lock once you have the range and desired magnification for your subject.

Sea Hares

Closely related to nudibranchs are the sea hares, the major difference between the two is that sea hares (Aplysia sp) have retained a very small shell on their backs as a part of their mollusk ancestry. You often wonder how creatures earn their common name, but with a bit of imagination I think they do look a bit like a hare or a rabbit when viewed head on, but judge for yourself. Once again



***Aplysia punctata*. Nikon D100, L&M Titan housing, 105mm micro Nikkor, Inon Quad flash, ISO 200, f16 @125th**

this is an early spring species which can be quite difficult to find as the colours blend very well with their habitat. However, every two or three years we seem to have a brief population explosion normally after a mild winter. During these seasons there are positively hundreds if not thousands of sea hares on our local dive sites with mass mating activities which would raise eyebrows if we indulged in



Pleurobranchus membranaceus spawn. Nikon F90X, Subal housing, 60mm micro Nikkor, two Sea & Sea YS30, Velvia 50, f16 @125th

Pleurobranchus membranaceus. Nikon F90X, Subal housing, 60mm micro Nikkor, two Sea & Sea YS30, Velvia 50, f16 @125th

similar activities in public! The colouration and patterns on these sea hares varies dramatically from plain browns and greens, through bright purples to those decorated with yellow or white spots and stripes. Many of them can be quite large (4-8cm) and so are well suited to a 60mm macro lens.

Sea hares are most often found feeding on seaweed and kelps, but during the mating season they will

also be found all over the seabed and on the reef. The egg mass is left on the seaweeds in tight coils and trails in colours varying from white to pink.

As described above, many nudibranchs and sea hares can be found grazing on seaweed and kelp on the reef top which gives you the opportunity to introduce a little natural light behind the subject even at high magnification. As you will be using a small aperture to maximize the



Aplysia punctata mating. Nikon D100, L&M Titan housing, 105mm micro Nikkor, Inon Quad flash, ISO 200, f16 @125th



*Subal ND20 housing,
Inon Quad flash, Inon
wet lens, focus/spotting
light and fishing
floats for increasing
buoyancy.*

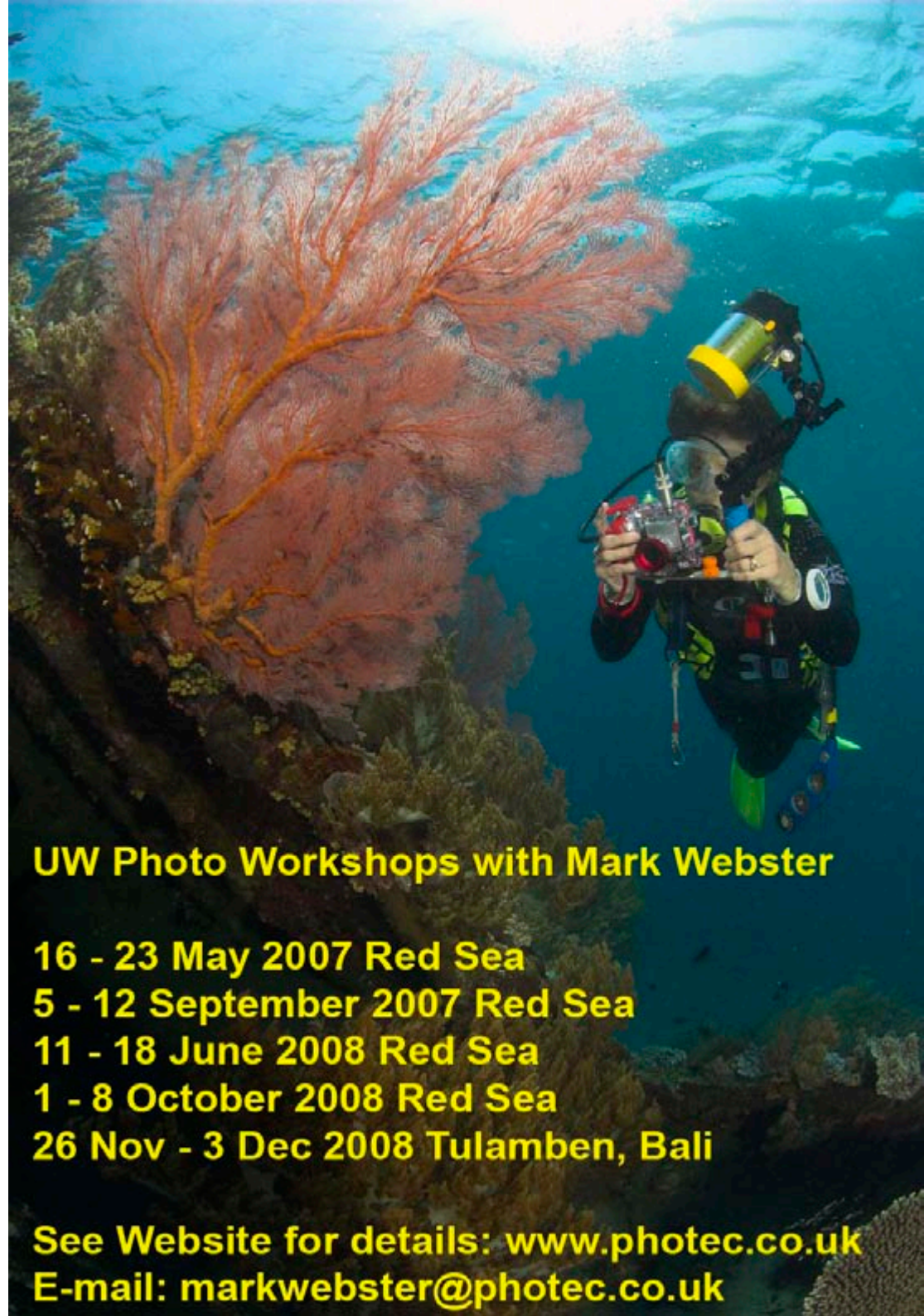


depth of field you need to take a low view towards the surface and slow the shutter speed down significantly to record the natural light. I regularly shoot at 1/15th or 1/8th of a second to achieve this – you may also want to play with the ISO setting as well if conditions are particularly gloomy. Keep shooting and varying the shutter speed and aperture until you are happy with the colour of the background. You can also open the aperture to narrow the depth of field further, but this means that your focusing must be very accurate and it can be difficult to hold a heavy housing steady.

As we all know, practice makes perfect particularly in the art of underwater photography. Many

photographers are wary of cold water, but the wide range of dry suits and thermal under suits available today means that you can stay warm and comfortable and increase the ‘return’ on your investment in expensive camera equipment. Perfecting techniques in temperate waters will give variety to your portfolio and enable you to recognise image opportunities and compositions in warmer waters thus making your expensive trips more productive. Come on in – the water is lovely, really!

Mark Webster
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