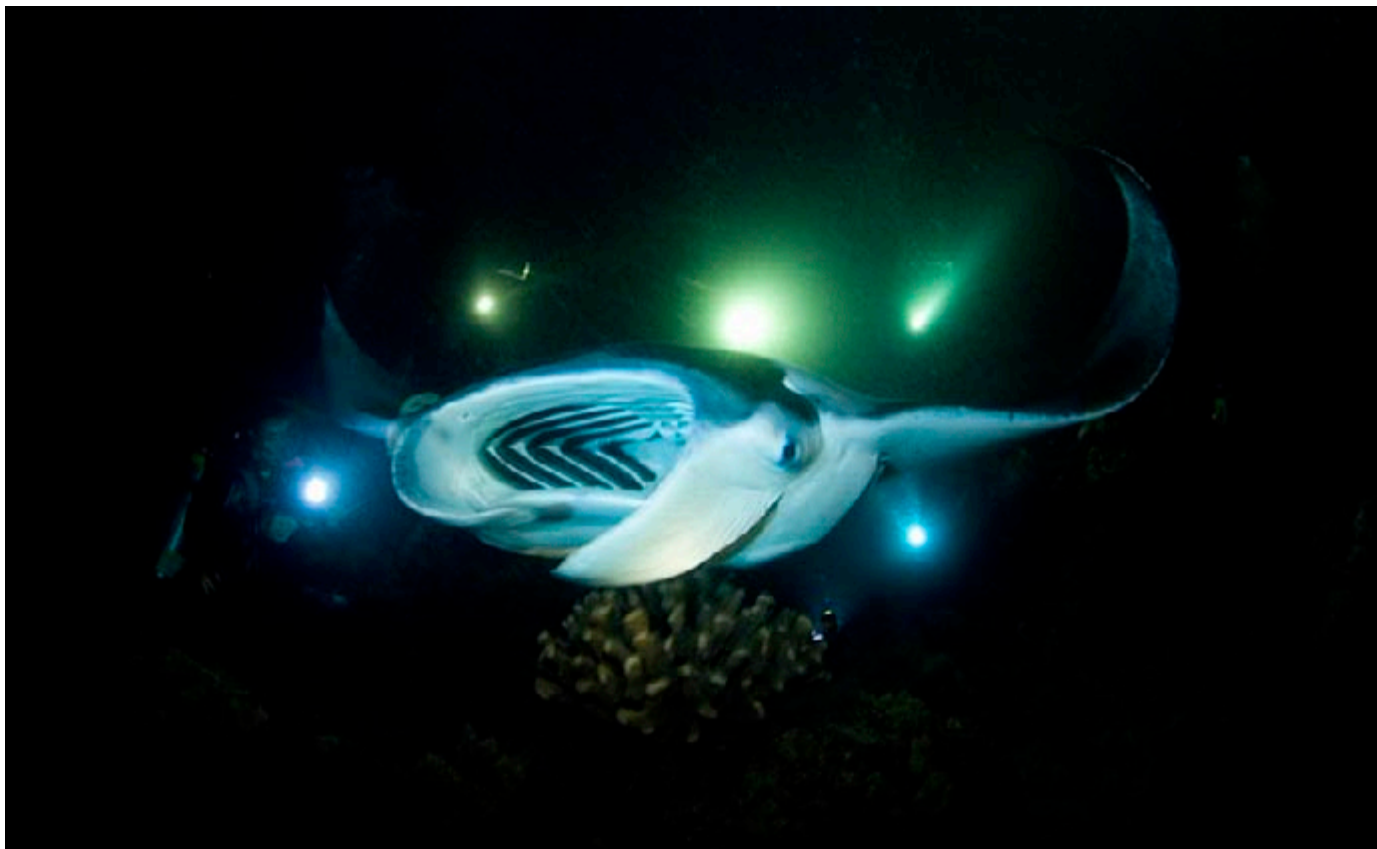


Behind the shot

By Martin Edge

The manta ray night dives off the Kona coast, Hawaii were first made famous by National Geographic underwater photographer David Doubilet back in 1994. He employed the use of HMI lights (Hydrargyrum Medium Arc-length Iodide) a continuous light source that illuminates underwater at a day light temperature of 5600A° Kelvin, similar to the temperature of a traditional underwater flashgun. My attempts were quite modest in comparison. We shot the Manta over two nights, spending a total of two hours with them. I used the same photo equipment on both occasions but varying the technique on the second and most successful attempt. I used a Nikon D200 with a Nikon 10.5mm fisheye lens inside a Subal housing and fisheye port. My flashguns were two Inon Z220 on short ultra-lite arms placed out to the side of the housing. I ensured that both flash guns were behind the two side shades of my fisheye port. This was to minimise the effect of particles which were in abundance by virtue of the plankton attracted by the fixed lights and our own dive torches.

Fisheye photography at night in poor visibility and planktonic water is about as hard as underwater photography can get. I had put a fair amount of thought and consideration into how best to shoot the manta, yet I was unable to conjure up any good ideas to make my attempts different in some way. My first attempt at the Manta dive site resulted in images of manta with mouths agape a few feet in front of the lens. Whilst they were sharp and well



Nikon D200 with a Nikon 10.5mm fisheye lens inside a Subal housing and fisheye port. My flashguns were two Inon Z220 on short ultra-lite arms placed out to the side of the housing.

This particular shot was taken on F5.6 at 1/8th second at 400 ISO.

exposed, they failed to capture the atmosphere of the experience and were no different than the numerous 'manta dive' postcards on sale throughout Kona. I pondered this for some time. I wanted to record the manta at a distance, interacting with each other and the audience, but with traditional flashguns this was impossible. Because of weather concerns we had consoled ourselves to just the one Manta dive, however on the last night of our

charter the weather picked up and we had a second opportunity adjacent to the Sheraton Hotel of Keauhou Bay. Ten of us entered the water at dusk and waited for the mantas to appear from the deep.

As normal I had tested both flashguns before entering the water and once I'd settled on the bottom I repeated this procedure. My heart skipped a beat! The left side flashgun failed although the ready light was glowing. I used the test button



Sheratan Hotel, Hawaii

– it fired! “No problem there then”. “It must be a knackered flash lead”. All the bending and pulling made no difference. The flash failed continuously again and again! How was I going to light these creatures with only one good flashgun and at night with an ultra wide lens? Ten more minutes of fiddling! The water had turned black and on cue the first manta appeared followed by several more. “How could I make them different with only one flash gun”?



The Manta's had been with us for about fifteen minutes with me shooting the same old stuff when suddenly I had a flash of inspiration! I decided to use the illumination from the torch- lights of the dive crew, the non-photographers and the deck lights from our live-aboard, which were clearly visible through the under-surface above us. I used my one flashgun as fill light on the manta. I selected 400 ISO and opened my shutter speed to 1/8th 15th and 30th of a second and used panning techniques (fingers crossed that this would work).. I used wide apertures of F2.8 and F4. I proceeded to shoot the spectacle at a distance and by constantly reviewing my LCD, bracketing apertures, shutter speeds and flash power I began to get the alternative images I had hoped for. This particular shot was taken on F5.6 at 1/8th second at 400 ISO.

If my flash had not failed I doubt very much that I would have done anything different from the previous

opportunity earlier in the week. Instead, the faulty flash lead had forced me to think ‘out of the box’ and as a result I spontaneously, without thought upped my ISO, dropped both shutter speed and aperture and commenced panning techniques. This was that innovative idea I had pondered over for days.

Remember. Experience is what you get when you do not get what you want!



Martin Edge

www.edgeunderwaterphotography.co.uk

Photography Holidays & Courses *with Martin Edge*

Martin & Sylvia will share with you all their photo tips and techniques. Their passion is to help others improve and develop their own abilities with a camera. Underwater workshops will ensure that you are provided with the best possible conditions to improve your photography

One to One tuition Days in Bournemouth

Excorted holiday to Kasai Village, Cebu, 8th March 08
11 nights 10 days diving only £1845

Red Sea - Wrecks & Reefs
on the liveaboard *Typhoon*
26th July 2008
only £1095

See our websites for more information

Tony Backhurst Scuba Travel
0800 0728221
www.scuba.co.uk

EDGE
Underwater Photography
www.edgeunderwaterphotography.co.uk