

Wide-Angle Macro Photography

Another Perspective...

By Don Silcock

Imitation, as they say, is the sincerest form of flattery.... so let me start off this article by thanking Alex Mustard for sharing his experiences pioneering the technique of using wide-angle lenses to shoot macro type subjects.

I really like trying new techniques to produce images that are "different" and Alex's results with the Nikon 10.5mm fisheye lens coupled with a teleconverter (TC) made me want to experiment and see what I could produce.

The basic concept behind the technique is to use the close focusing capabilities of the 10.5mm fisheye, but adjust its field of view using a TC so that you get a sharp image of the creature and a sense of its overall environment.

This approach differs from the "normal" macro photography, where we tend to isolate the creature from its environment.

The key to the technique is maneuvering the camera really close to the subject so that it fills a substantial part of the overall frame and then being able to light the

subject. Both elements require specific skills and practicing on a fixed subject that thinks it's invisible, such as a frogfish or scorpion fish, is the way to start.

My first attempts at the technique were on a trip to Milne Bay late last year using my spare Subal dome port (the early 6" version) as I had sold the small DP54B dome that Alex recommends a few years earlier, figuring that I would never need it again....

I soon realized that a small dome is really essential for this technique to work because even the curvature of the medium size 6" dome makes it nearly impossible to light the subject without getting light flare from the strobes in the overall image.

Subal DP54B Dome Port

This port was the first dome I ever bought and it will work with any wide-angle lens down to a 20mm. Subal no longer make it, so I had to search EBay for several weeks before eventually tracking one down in the USA.

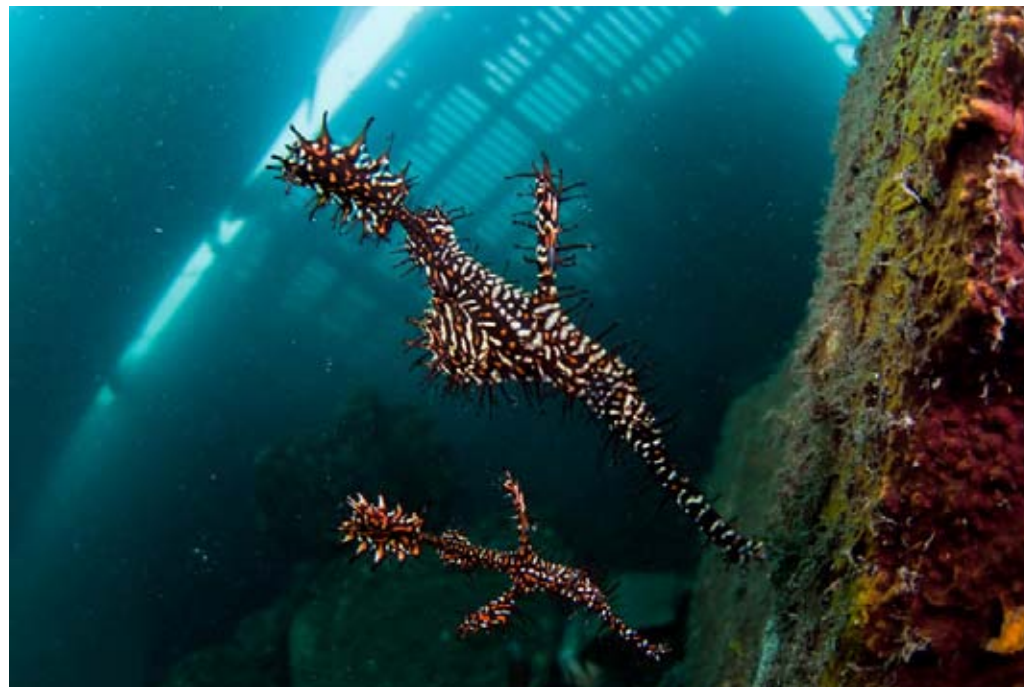


Image wamacro_01 It took me a couple of dives before I was satisfied with the sharpness of the ghost pipefish main subject. Nikon D300 in Subal D200 housing, Subal DP54B dome, Nikon 10.5mm & Kenko 1.5x TC, manual – f5.6 @ 1/50



It's a 4" dome and it's small profile & curvature makes it possible to position twin strobes either side of the lens shade cutouts at 45 degrees left & right so that you can edge light the subject even when it's almost touching the dome.

Basically if you want to have a go at this technique, you will need to get one of these ports if you use Subal, or an equivalent for your specific housing.

Lenses, Teleconvertors & Extension Rings

Alex Mustard used the 10.5mm Nikon, a Kenko 1.5x TC and a 20mm extension ring in his first successful attempts with the technique and then Mark Webster recently documented his success with the 10-17mm Tokina, 2x TC, home made zoom ring & 35mm extension ring.

The TC changes the lenses field of view; depending on which one you use, while the extension ring positions the lens so that there is no vignetting or cut-off

My initial efforts with the DP54B were also done with the 10.5mm Nikon, a Kenko 1.5x TC and a 20mm extension ring, but I really struggled to get sharp focus on the subject. This was more to do with me adjusting to the technique I think, than anything to do with the actual set-up, and while

I really liked the way I could include significant areas of the environment – in this case Tufi Dive Resort's jetty – it took me a couple of dives before I was satisfied with the sharpness of the ghost pipefish main subject – Image wamacro_01

I also tried the same set-up on larger subjects, provided in ample supply by the local Tufi kids who use the nearby public jetty as their swimming pool – Image wamacro_02

I decided to see how the Sigma 17-70 lens would work with the 1.5x Kenko TC, and found it was much easier to "drive" than the 10.5mm Nikon. I used a 38mm extension ring (20mm + 18mm), which gave me a zoom range of 17mm to around 45mm, before the lens hit the inside of the dome, and allowed me to do macro wide-angle at the 17mm end and more or less traditional macro at the 45mm end.

At the 17mm end I could get very close to the subject and get it really sharp, while including enough of the critter's environment to provide a nice sense of location.

At the 45mm, the Sigma allowed to fill the frame with medium size creatures such as an octopus.



Image wamacro_02 I tried the set-up on larger subjects, provided in ample supply by the local Tufi kids who use the nearby public jetty as their swimming pool. Nikon D300 in modified Subal D200 housing, Subal DP54B dome, Nikon 10.5mm & Kenko 1.5x TC, manual – f11 @ 1/160



Images wamacro_07 & wamacro_08



The variable power settings on my twin Inon 240's, plus the very special "Don Silcock diffusers" (hand crafted from milk containers...) to soften the light slightly, but without reducing it too much like the Inon ones tend to do, all worked a treat – even when the main subject is extremely close to the port.



(Left) At the 17mm end I could get very close to the subject and get it really sharp, while including enough of the critter's environment to provide a nice sense of location. Nikon D300 in modified Subal D200 housing, Subal DP54B dome, Sigma 17-70mm & Kenko 1.5x TC, manual – f10 @ 1/50
(Right) At the 45mm, the Sigma allowed to fill the frame with medium size creatures such as an octopus. Nikon D300 in modified Subal D200 housing, Subal DP54B dome, Sigma 17-70mm & Kenko 1.5x TC, manual – f13 @ 1/125



Viewfinder

Alex mentioned in his original article that small housings are better suited to this technique, as they allow you to get lower. My results in a converted D200 Subal housing, using a Nikon D300, supported that conclusion but I also found my Inon 45 degree finder a major benefit as it allowed me get really low and look up, so that I could include more of the environment.

My Subal housing was modified

by Backscatter in California to accept the Inon 45 degree finder and (once I got used to it...) has had a major positive impact on my results overall.

Conclusion

Wide-angle macro photography underwater probably is not for everyone, as it's more difficult to do and depends on finding the right subject matter, but if you are looking for a different look & feel to certain images then it's a great way to achieve

that.

For a relatively minimal additional investment in a teleconverter, extension ring and small dome port you can use your existing lenses in a completely different way to obtain results from a new perspective.

What I found really interesting was to dive Tufi jetty, which I have done literally dozens of times but mainly using the Nikon 70-180mm zoom (my personal favorite "traditional" macro lens), with these

new set-ups. I found that I was looking at subjects, I knew would be there & how to find them, but in a completely different way which I believe has to be a good thing.

Don Silcock

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