

Parting Shot 1

There are a number of animals on any diver's "wish to see" list and usually the bigger they are, the higher on the list. One that would make 99% of all divers' lists would be the whale shark, *Rhincodon typus*. The largest fish in the ocean these behemoths can grow up to twelve meters long and are the true gentle giants of the seas. The opportunity to see one doesn't come often, even if you visit the places where they are regularly found, The Maldives, Thailand and Ningaloo, Western Australia. There is one place however where the chances of seeing one is multiplied many many times, and you would have to be extremely unlucky not to see one. Actually I say one, but in fact there are often fifty or a hundred in one place. That place is Isla Mujeres in Mexico, where every year there is an aggregation of whale sharks around late July through August, as the sharks are feeding on the eggs of the bonito that spawn in the shallow waters around the full moon.

I visited this year with a group from Wetpixel that was split into two groups, with me in the second. The week before I read on the web every day of their successes and how they had groups of up to five hundred sharks on one day, although I don't know who counted them all. Eric Cheng wrote on his blog report that the bonito spawned a day or so before they arrived and so he expected the numbers of sharks to fall off a little as the week went on. "That would be right!" I thought...by the time I get there there'll be one shark and forty boats all crowded around it. I tend to pessimism at the best of times, although I call it realistic expectations.

Arriving in Isla Mujeres, Eric told us there were still whale sharks around, so I started to build up those realistic expectations a little. I needn't have worried. As we approached the spawning grounds I saw the flashes of light as the sun reflected off the fins of the sharks as they swam



Nikon D3 in a Subal Housing. Sigma 15mm 1/160 f9 ISO 500

at the surface. We jumped into the water and it was whale shark soup. There were so many it was impossible to get bored. At the end of the week as I was going through my three thousand odd photos it occurred to me that I was deleting images that only a week before I would have given my arm for.

This shot was one of my favourites of the trip. I really wanted an over under, which was extremely tricky as there was a bit of a swell running, and I wasn't

using strobes to light the "under" part and help to equalise the exposures, so I used the graduated filter in Lightroom to bring back the overexposed "over" section, and then converted to black and white as that really helped to accentuate the beautiful light reflecting off the sharks skin.

Julian Cohen

Parting Shot 2

Think Mick Jagger, Sex change, Maori Warrior or Napoleon Bonaparte, and you will find one really special marine dweller with all these traits, the Maori Wrasse or the Hump head or Napoleon Wrasse. I was fortunate enough to encounter more than one recently in the Red Sea and it was a real special and an emotionally uplifting experience. One that makes the sport of diving an obsessive compulsive disorder of sorts.

Armed with my new underwater camera system we all jumped in to the water with anxious feelings. The dive started mundanely till one of us spotted a really large male Maori. Bluish green and yellow with one of the largest hump I had previously seen, he looked majestic underwater. Nonchalantly and with the confidence of one who has hardly any predators or enemies underwater, just a few inches away, with nary a glance, he moved on to his business of looking for hard shelled species such as mollusks, and crustaceans which is on their regular menu, not to be seen again during our entire dive. They are one of the few species that will feed on the most destructive coral inhabitant, the crown of thorn starfish. After the initial awe and surprise I

managed a few quick shots of this majestic creature, which is one of the largest reef fishes in the world. But this was not the one who would stay with us throughout the dive. It was his consort, the female Maori, with war paint more prominent and exquisite, bright orange eyes, electric iridescent colours and patterns, which we failed to even notice initially, in the shadows of the majestic male, that decided to check us out and stayed with us. Not only on that dive but also another one the next day at a different site.

She was as curious as we were and came up to one inch away from my mask, and with our eyes locked, moved alongside me, then suddenly paced ahead as if in a race, made a sudden u turn and came right back, looking deep in to my eyes. Then as if in slow motion, moved down from my face, passed the length of my body, hardly millimeters away, and swam through my legs, which I had to spread open very nervously, before continuing her escapades and checking out each diver.

Josephine, as I decided to call her, gave me ample opportunity to test my new gear and came every now and then up to two inches away from me. I had a 8mm fisheye lens, which translates into a 16mm wide



underwater, so looking at the pics one can imagine how close these encounters were. The dive ended with an initial silence from all which went into animated discussions of how each one perceived their interaction with this majestic ocean dweller. BUT it was the next day, on the second dive, which was in the same area but on another reef that Josephine decided to come back and stay with us once more in a camaraderie that made my red sea trip more than eclectic. I was in a daze and a high on the ambrosia that the ocean and its inhabitants share with us every once in a while. The entire dive

she stayed, more curious about us than we could ever be. To think that these creatures are on the menu of people, especially the lips, is heart wrenching and downright disgusting. I wish these people could have a small 'Tryst with the Maori', before being served their meals. One can even see these fish in small aquariums of restaurants in Hong Kong swimming forlornly awaiting an end, which I think is far more respectful than the solitary confinement of the small glass walls.

Digant Desai(diggy)

Parting Shot(s) 3

Tropical storm Bonnie shook the boat, dumping cups, plates and lunch all over the floor and making a diet seem attractive. Several camera housings, adorned with dome ports from the minuscule to the ridiculous (Reef Photo and Video's Zen 9" dome) shuffled uneasily across the floor. The excitement of toothy lemon sharks and deceptively graceful tiger sharks sliding in from the limits of visibility had waned as Shearwater circled over the Little Bahama Bank, hunting for elusive Atlantic Spotted Dolphins. Perhaps it was Jim Abernethy's well-earned absence from his flagship, perhaps it was that the dolphins had heard of Wetpixel...

... outside, the hot summer sun roasted the deck, forcing Nikon to shelter with Canon in the freezer box once filled with fish. A sudden shout from above: dolphins! A strange and irregular feat of seamanship followed, the bow swinging from side to side to tempt haughty and maybe contemptuous cetaceans into surfing. After an hour: the next phase. Slowly and cautiously the dolphins were persuaded to move sternwards towards a motley collection of T-shirts, diveskins and wetsuits clutching their retrieved cameras until,

with a flurry of waving, bubbles and splashing the guests vanished into the ocean: to see a pair of cheap fins pumping the water at great speed, but no dolphins. A certain well-known photographer, having mastered the art of cetacean hunting and having finely tuned calves, outpaced the novices and left a trail of shredded sargassum weed in his wake.

The remaining photographers waited for Shearwater to circle around, pick them up, and await round two. The waves battered them as they clung to the dive platform, waiting the chance to splash again...

... dolphins! Swim! Swim hard!! Turn and shoot! Keep shooting!! Ahhh... that's how it's done! Cutting the Mustard?

Tim Priest

**Do you have an interesting
shot with a short story
behind it?
If so e mail us and yours
could be the next
"Parting shot".**

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Nikon D200, Tokina 10-17mm, Anthis/Nexus housing & FP 120-7 dome port: iso 400, shutter priority, 1/400 sec.

