

Freshwater

by Jack Perks

My name is Jack Perks and I'm fairly new to the underwater photography game with a few dives in Cornwall and the Red sea but my real passion is 'green water' photography otherwise known as freshwater photography.

Freshwater photography is nothing new in the UK with dozens of inland dive sites like Stoney Cove to name one but our hundreds of rivers, streams and brooks are a relatively untapped source for the underwater photographer to get shots and they can really come up with some surprising results.

Firstly you have to assess how your going to actually get the shots, scuba diving is rarely viable as most rivers are not deep enough or too strong flowing to stay down so snorkelling is often a better bet as it allows more flexibility. Then conditions have to be taken into account, similar to diving visibility, temperature and weather must be considered.

Subject matter is almost endless with fish being an obvious choice and other species that would be difficult or impossible to get in large dive

sites and the sea become available to the underwater photographer. Try to have an idea of what your going to photograph with waterfowl the best place would be a country park where the birds are regularly feed and willing to come close and where the water is clear enough to get detail below the water also. Don't use bread to entice the birds closer though as its bad for the birds digestion and clouds the water up so use small amounts of bird seed this is a good option as it sinks prompting the birds to put there heads under the water.

Amphibians are a great choice as frogs and toads will often breed in rivers and are more preoccupied

*(Top) The strobe has just lit the fish here to bring it out
F/4 – ISO 100 – 1/100. Nikon 10.5mm Fisheye Nikon D200 Sea & Sea housing and strobe*

*(Right) Natural light – Due to their size most swans are quite happy to come close to you
F/5 – ISO 250 – 1/2000 Nikon 10.5mm Fisheye, Nikon D200 Sea & Sea housing and strobe*





Fish often look for a structure like this tyre in the background. F/5 – ISO 250 – 1/250. Nikon 10.5mm Fisheye, Nikon D200 Sea & Sea housing and strobe

with mating, then the large camera in there face. Dragonfly larvae and other large water insects can with a little encouragement be photographed with a macro set either in the river or removed into a tub and photographed then released back.

The real tricky customers are the fish of course some like bullheads will sit in the middle of a small stream and stay perfectly still while you take your time to compose the image however more often then not its a lot harder with other species. Fish have a lateral line running down their bodies

that detect movement in the water so if your snorkelling they feel your presence straight away and bearing in mind the water has to be clear to get your shots this means the fish get a huge head start before you even get a glimpse let alone a shot of one!

I've found a couple of ways to get around this. One is using a pole cam though a DSLR will more then likely not fit on a pole so a smaller camera like a GoPro or something similar would have to be used this creates a lot less disturbance in the water and are more likely to get near



Natural light – The frogs are far more interested in breeding then to take notice of me. F6.3 – ISO 250 – 1/160. Nikon 10.5mm Fisheye, Nikon D200 Sea & Sea housing and strobe

the fish. You can even get monitors attached so you can view the footage you are shooting.

A method I have had frequent success with is 'underwater camera traps' which I have two main methods though if possible id recommend using a monitor attached to the camera so you can view the fish underwater and shoot what you see but for a lot of photographers this isn't a option so self improvised techniques are used instead, by setting the camera to time-lapse function this takes pictures

in intervals of however long you set it for and with a prefocus on where the fish are likely to go you have a good choice of getting the shot it can be further encouraged with putting bait in the area. This however can be very haphazard so I've tried a manual version by attaching string to the cameras trigger and two weights on the handles of the housing keeping it stationary and pulling the string from a distance every time a fish comes by this means you control when the shutter goes off, id highly recommend

*Rare white clawed crayfish at Stoney.
F/5 – ISO 640 – 1/40. Nikon 10.5mm
Fisheye, Nikon D200 Sea & Sea
housing and strobe*

though when safe and possible to get in with the fish but these two previous methods are brilliant for very shy fish. Composition is incredibly important when leaving the camera in the river as your going to have a lot of images in that one area. Be ultra sure you have greased the o-ring and make sure the camera is sealed tight as running water will be going over the camera for hours potentially

An advantage to this kind of photography is the use of natural light, of course strobe lighting is a well used factor in underwater photography but particularly when those light rays just cut though the water it can really make a image as normally with the rivers your probably only going to be shooting in no more then four of five feet of water. For this very reason over/under shots are a good choice as well getting the best of both worlds in one shot. Waders are a useful tool as in the winter a freezing river is not something id recommends in a wetsuit! Just taking images as you walk

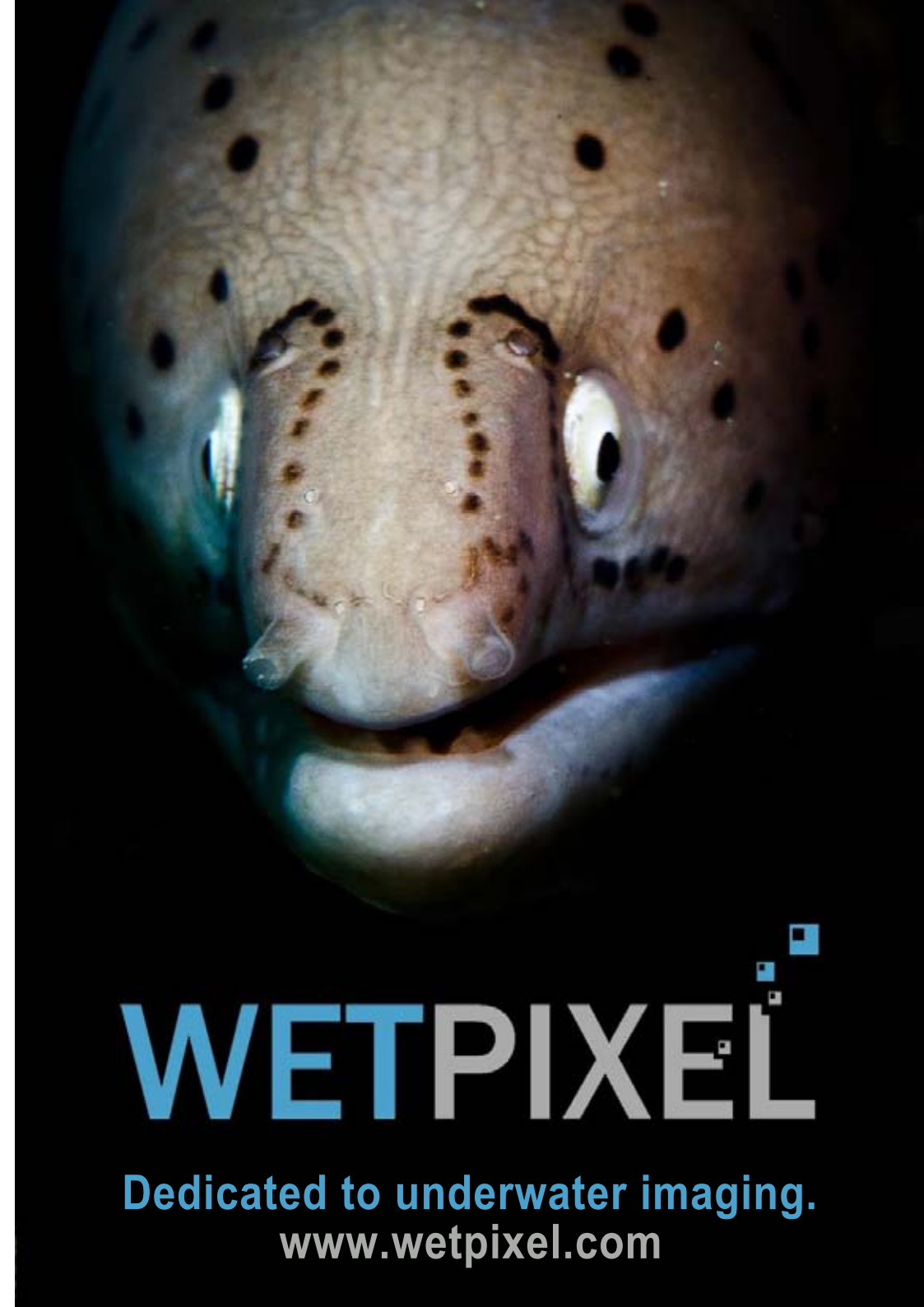


around particularly of the underwater landscape can make a beautiful image.

A word on health & safety try not to go on your own, as rivers can be unpredictable and dangerous having a buddy or shore cover is recommended

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