

Diving for photography

Unlike terrestrial photography its underwater counterpart is significantly different and difficult despite the advances offered by digital. The result is that you have to become proficient at something else first i.e. diving before you should even consider taking images.

Learning to dive is easy, comparatively affordable and universally available. Learning to take underwater photographs, on the other hand, is definitely not so easy, almost certainly expensive (and that's just the gear, not the travel) and not everywhere has conditions or wildlife conducive for good images.

Underwater photography tends to be a fairly lone activity. There are very few clubs like there are dive clubs so learning to take and improve underwater images is not as easy.

Fortunately help has always been at hand but I'm not talking about a PADI Certification. I'm talking about dive trips/workshops led by recognised underwater photographers on both liveaboards and land based locations. These trips offer you something no text books, websites or, I will even admit, online publications can offer you - the benefit of experience in the field.

Good underwater images only come when everything is under

control. The right place at the right time and the right space in which to operate. Take the Wetpixel trips, for instance. Timed to coincide with manta behaviour, whaleshark aggregations and similar seasonal happenings.

True these trips cost a bit more than an unlead trip but you will have the benefit of your leader's experience together with the opportunity to dive with and exchange ideas with other like minded people. There can be no more fertile situation in which to make great leaps forward in your underwater imaging.

And to all you photo workshop leaders, my PayPal address is

Post Processing

In the last UwP Editorial I was banging on about how ISO was now an important photographic control along with shutter speed and aperture. Then I read Jens Tröger's excellent article in this issue about Macro in the Pacific Northwest and that reminded me of the other new control which digital offers - post processing.

Now let's rewind to 1996. I was interviewing the great wildlife

photographer Steve Bloom at his then offices on Oxford Street. He ran a traditional photo retouching business, Jones Bloom who would enlarge transparencies up to 10" x 8" and then physically retouch them with dyes and bleaches on pin heads. The process was very labour intensive and therefore expensive so was only done when absolutely necessary. It all sounds slightly Dickensian now!

I was interviewing said Mr Bloom because he had recently taken delivery of a 'Barco' suite which offered new electronic retouching and image manipulation possibilities and he was a pioneer in using it to produce realistic looking wildlife shots such as the totally fabricated Ostrich with its head in a hole (they don't apparently) and the pin sharp cheetah and fleeing impala against an action blurred background.

I'm sure you will have seen hundreds of similar images nowadays but remember this was 1996. It was only 30 years since England had won the Football World Cup not 46 so if my maths is correct that's 16 years ago and in digital speak that's almost a lifetime.

You can now fast forward to

2012 where you have a powerful personal computer on your desktop and a pixel sharp, colour calibrated screen on which you can "post process" your images. There. I got there in the end, didn't I?

This capability is not for everyone. Most are happy to take a few snaps on holiday and leave it at that. Others don't have the eye or computer know how to post process so operate within their limitations. But for those who strive for perfection, post processing is a very important tool whilst for those aiming to sell their images, it is a 'must do' process because if the other photographer who can take equally good images is able to enhance them subtly it will make their shots appeal to the purchasers much more.

Whatever level you are at, never forget how fortunate you are otherwise I'll sit you down in front of a 10" x 8" transparency, give you a supply of sticks, dyes and bleaches and say "Right, mush. Make a Mona Lisa out of that lot." (with apologies and acknowledgements to the great Galton and Simpson).

Peter Rowlands
peter@uwpmag.com