

Digital Downsizing

by Martin Heyn

While preparing for a dive trip I looked into my “camera closet” and was surprised at all the camera gear I had. Some of it had not been touched in months and other items not used in years. The closet was full of lenses, housing parts, strobes, ports, clamps, arms, etc, all acquired over the years from multiple DSLR systems.

I thought: “wow, how much camera gear do I really need?” Then “what am I REALLY doing with my photos that requires this much stuff?” It was time for a “reality check.”

Truth be told, I have never sold a photo. I have yet to make an amazing wall sized print. I have not entered a major photo contest in years. To my chagrin National Geographic has not approached me about joining their staff!

How about you? What are you really doing with your photos?

Hence my “Digital De-Evolution” began. Maybe “De-Evolution” is a bit misleading. I was only willing to contemplate “downsizing” due to the introduction of the new mirrorless class of cameras and the continuing evolution of those in the point and shoot class.

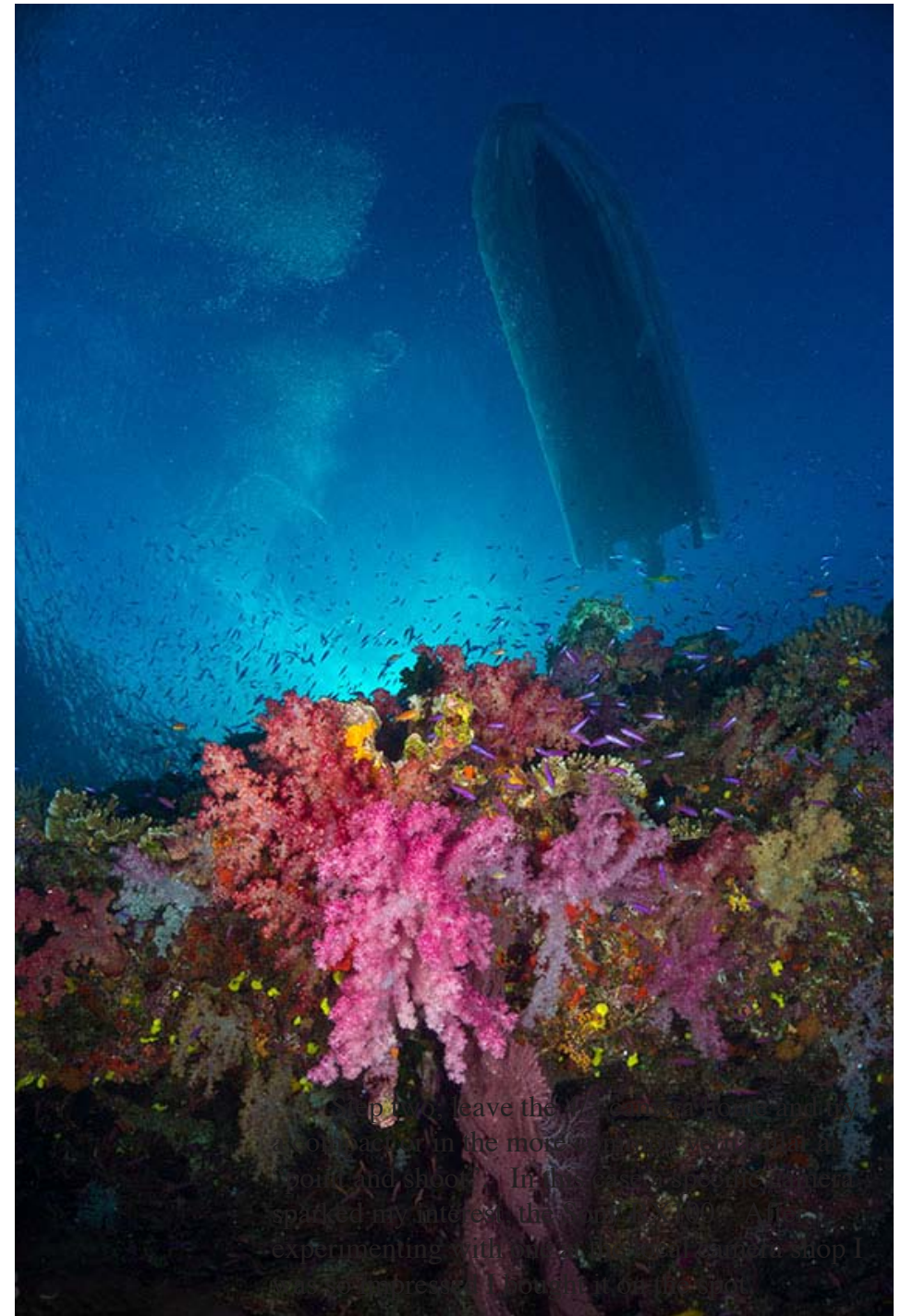
Step one in my “De-Evolution;” leave the Nikon D7000 at home and try one of the 4/3 mirrorless cameras. I

started with the Panasonic DMC-GX1 camera, Panasonic 14-42mm f/3.5-5.6 Lumix G lens, Panasonic 8mm f/3.5 Lumix G Fish Eye lens, Aquatica +10 diopter, 2x Sea & Sea YS-D1 strobes and the Nauticam GX1 housing.

I was apprehensive and thought I would miss my Nikon D7000 and Tokina 10-17mm. I did not! The Lumix 8mm f/3.5 worked just fine. As they say “the best zoom gear are your fins”. Even the Panasonic 14-42mm kit lens preformed better than expected. In fact I was so impressed with the system and the resulting photos that upon our return I sold all of my Nikon DSLR gear!

No more scrabbling over slimy rocks, into surf, clutching 25lbs of camera gear to my chest that cost more than some cars I have owned. No more trying to sneak a +40lbs carry-on past airline check-in desks. Of course one downside is I will burn a few less calories not pushing that DSLR beast into the current.

***Sony RX100, Inon H100 WA Lens
& Dome, Nauticam housing, 2xS
Sea&Sea YS-D1, 1/320, f/4.5, ISO200***





Nikon D800, Nikon 105mm & +5 Fit diopter, Nauticam housing, 2x Sea&Sea YS-D1, 1/125, f/16, ISO 40

(Top right) Panasonic GX1, Panasonic 14-42mm lens, Subsea +10 diopter, Nauticam housing, 2x Sea&Sea YS-D1 1/160, f/20, ISO 320

(Right) Sony RX100, Subsea +10 diopter, Nauticam housing, 2x Sea&Sea YS-D1, 1/160, f/11, ISO125

Over 10 days of shooting in Fiji, on the Nai'a, I was impressed by what this "Point and Shoot" could do. With the addition of the Inon H100 lens and its companion dome I attained wide-angle results on par with my Nikon D7000. While you can shoot decent macro with this camera it is not anywhere close to what can be done

with an interchangeable lens camera and good glass.

It was then time to ask some hard questions. What combination of equipment would give me the results I would be happy with.

First, what am I doing with my photos? Second based on what I am doing with my photos how much



system do I really need to buy?

Now it was time to look at where and how I really share my photos.

First: I post them at underwater photography sites like Wetpixel.com and Scubaboard.com. Typically these images are “downsized” for viewing to 72-150dpi and a max length of 1200 pixels. A three-megapixel camera can provide enough pixels for that.

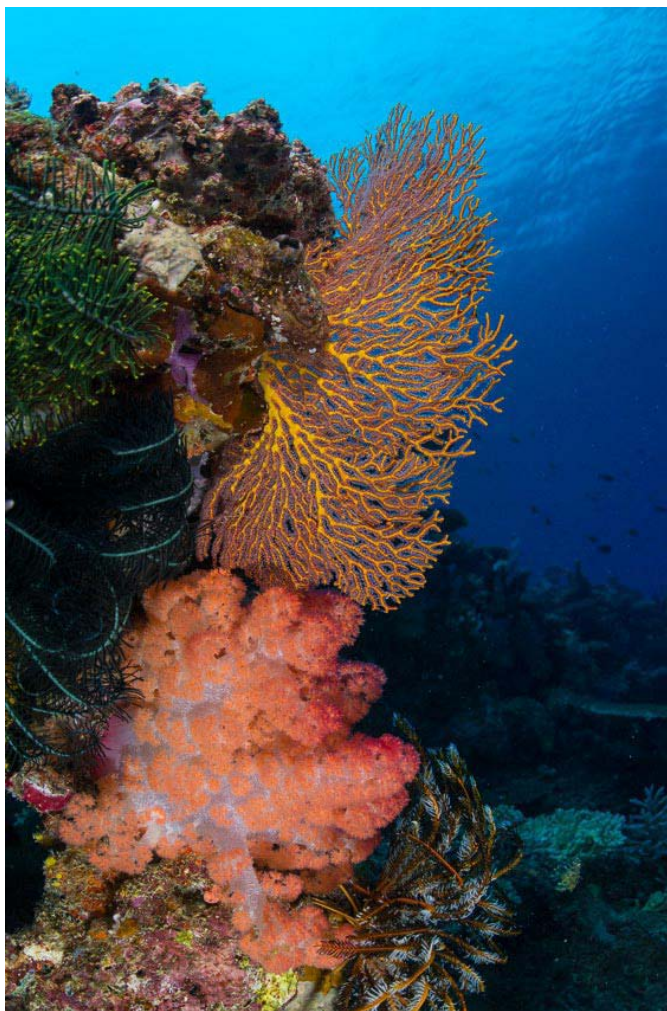
Second: I choose the best of those images and post them to my own website: www.aquabluedreams.com. Which in all honesty is just a way to rationalize the hobby out of control. As to quality needed see #1.

Third: Three to five times a year I put together a HD slideshow of our most recent dive trip. Technically you can use any size file but the max capacity of a Blue Ray disk is 50gigs. Short versions of the video are posted to Vimeo HD with a max file size of 5GB. Be forewarned if we invite you to dinner you will be forced to enjoy your desert while watching our latest excursion.

Fourth: 10-12 of the very best images get printed in 8”x10” up to 24”x36” to be displayed at home.

Therefore, on the most basic level, a deciding factor is megapixels needed to get a high quality 24” x 36” print. 300ppi is considered an “Art Print” of the highest quality. At 150ppi you can get a very good quality print viewed “at arms length” and who gets closer than that to a poster sized print? In addition most of the better online printing companies can “upscale” your file to give you excellent quality poster size print.

Theoretically for online sharing any camera over 3 megapixels will “work.” Given the largest print I do is are about 24”x16” and I have had good



Nikon D800, Sigma 15mm +Nikon 1.4 teleconveter, Aquatica housing, 2x Sea & Sea YS-D1

luck with online printers “up-scaling” my files, any camera with 8 megapixels or more would “work”.

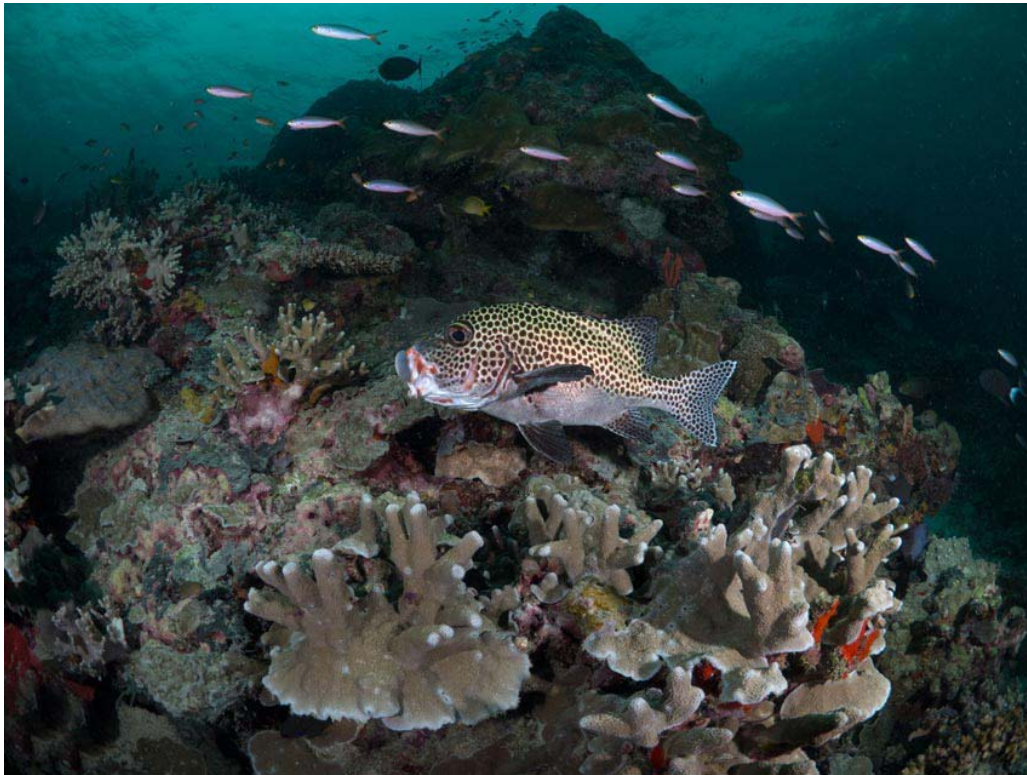
Most all of us have some form of budget. An additional significant consideration was cost vs. final results given what I am really doing with my photos. The following is a fairly accurate break



Sony RX100, Inon H100 WA Lens and port, 2x Sea & Sea YS-D1, 1/160, f/4/0, ISO 200

down of what general systems cost.

All systems include the cost of the camera body, lenses, aluminum housing with tray or handles, 2 strobes, 6 clamps, 4 strobe arms, 2 sync cords, associated zoom gears, wide angle dome, macro port or wet lens equivalent. For the DSLRs



Panasonic GX1, Lumix 8mm Fish Eye lens, Nauticam housing, 2x Sea&Sea YS-D1, 1/100, f/7.1, ISO 800

and Mirroless cameras 3 lenses are assumed, wide angle, macro and a generalist. For the compact the equivalent in wet lenses were included.

Full Frame DSLR System	\$14,810
Crop Sensor DSLR System	\$10,040
4/3 or Mirroless System	\$6725
Compact Camera System	\$4873

Note: For each class the most* or least expensive housing were used. For the full frame class think Nikon

D800 or Canon 5D Mark III.

The following photos were taken with a variety of cameras; full frame DSLR, cropped sensor DSLR, 4/3 mirroless, and compact cameras.

Can you see a \$10,000 difference? Cameras and settings can be found at the end of the article.

Clearly this is not meant to be a technical "how to pick your camera" article as sensor size, lenses, auto focus systems, etc have not been

touched upon. For me it was an exercise in reality. In being realistic about what I am doing with my photos and how much money I can rationalize given how I am sharing my pixels.

What did I discover? It is unlikely I will ever own a DSLR again. But years of shooting DSLRs with excellent macro lenses has set the bar at such a high point that, at this time, most compact cameras even with diopters don't meet my expectations. I will buy mirroless 4/3 system. Drum roll please; it will be the Olympus OMD-EM5!

But then again maybe I'll hold out till the new Zeiss lenses come out

for a Sony NEX system, or wait and see if someone announces a housing for the new Fuji or...

Martin Heyn

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