

Shooting Ocean Drifters

by Ryo Minemizu

Jellyfish, small shellfish and larval fish start their lives drifting in the ocean. Generally they are referred to as plankton which is swept away or drifts with the tide as they have limited swimming ability.

It is really interesting to see and photograph these subjects as some are transparent and some are very particular in shape – a far cry from their adult appearance. We can see them during the day from just under surface up to 10m depth and some of them can be observed during night by using their light-harvesting characteristic with a torch. They vary in size from a few millimeters to tens of centimeters so different techniques are needed to capture these subjects while drifting.

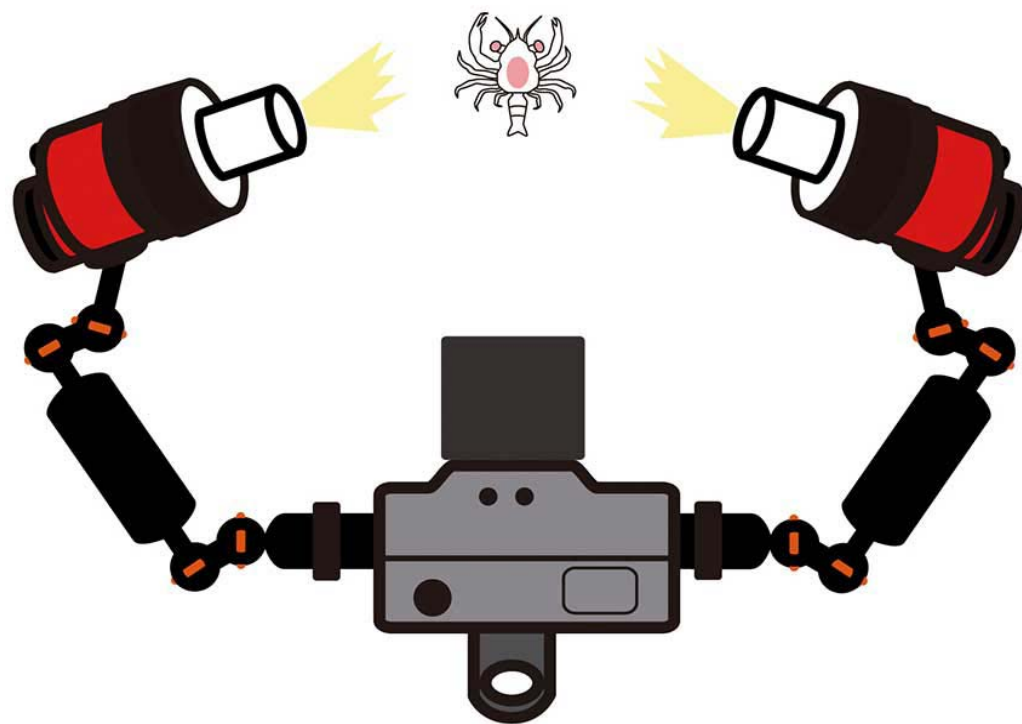
The first thing we have to consider is the balance of an underwater housing. When shooting these ocean drifters neutral buoyancy is a must. It would be ideal if we can comfortably hold a housing with one hand without feeling wrist strain. I manage this with my INON X-2 for EOS60D combined with Multi Ball Arms with Stick Arm Float S and Mega Float Arms to lighten total underweight of the housing. The

configuration of buoyancy devices can be adjusted to get neutral balance.

The next decision is what lens to use. As with any subject, there is variety of shooting styles including wide and macro. We can use a wide lens at close focusing distance shooting ocean drifters with seascape behind or a macro lens to capture the micro world in detail. I normally use Canon EF50mm F2.5 compact macro lens and EF8-15mm F4L Fisheye USM for shooting ocean drifters. When using the EF50mm F2.5 compact macro lens with EOS60D which is a crop camera, focal length is approx. 75mm and reproduction ratio is 3:4. Minimum focus distance is 23cm which is best suited shooting distance to shoot most ocean drifters.

Lighting technique without backscatter

The last technique but not the least important is lighting. When shooting transparent marine life on a black background, small particles around the subject are also illuminated. Normally strobes are positioned on either side of the camera but this would create backscatter. In such situations, dark field imaging





technique (more specifically incident-light dark field imaging) for photo microscopy is useful. Attach a snoot on an INON strobe to narrow down the beam coverage and extend it with a strobe arm to light just to the right of the subject. This lighting technique can reduce backscatter.

Focusing

Needless to say, using narrow strobe light makes it extremely difficult to focus on moving subjects so it is better to use manual focus to pre-focus the lens to a certain distance. Put your finger in front of

a lens to take sample shot and make sure that the finger is lit up by a strobe as well. Next, make a composition for actual subject and move camera back and forth to get satisfactory focus and then press the shutter release. This pre-focus technique is unique to the combination of EOS 60D and Canon EF50mm F2.5 compact macro lens which provides larger DoF comparing to a life size macro lens.

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After working as a local dive instructor based in Osezaki, Shizuoka, Japan, he started new carrier as a photographer in 1997. He published a pictorial book of marine crustacean Marine Crustacean in 2000 and Coral Reef Shrimps of Indo-West Pacific in 2013 both from Bun-ichi Co.,Ltd. His current interest is shooting marine plankton including jelly-fishes not only in Japan but in the U.S. and Southeast Asia.



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