

South West Ramblings 3

by Mark Webster

This installment of south west ramblings has been delayed by work and a dismal winter and perhaps should include east and far east ramblings in the title as during the cold months most of our diving has been in warmer overseas waters. I do dive at home throughout the winter time when the weather gods permit, and they have not been kind this year, but the winter months are normally reserved for overseas trips as my work in the real world tends to keep me fully committed during the summer. It is always nice to shed the dry suit for the freedom of a wetsuit and packing for the trips, compiling lists and planning how to get past the hand baggage limitations is all part of the fun, some say!

So the first foray was to the northern Red Sea to host a workshop on the MY Juliet which is a very comfortable live aboard that has been operating for some time. Being a mature smaller live aboard she takes a maximum of 14 guests which gives us a comfortable group size of 12 resulting in more time for personal attention and the group also tends to gel quicker. Some of the latest generation live aboard boats take

24-28 guests which to me seems too many even if you are not part of a photo group as you are able to saturate a dive site with your own group let alone those other divers you may encounter from boats at the same site. Although I have been coming to dive in this area of the Red Sea since the 1970's I have never tired of it and always look forward to that first dive of a trip when you drop into the water and are immediately reminded of the vivid blue of the water and how well it contrasts with the mass of colourful

(Top) The MV Marcus (some know as the Chrisoula K) is an easy wreck to penetrate and in the main stairway above the engine room you will normally find dense schools of glassy sweepers and hatchet fish. Nikon D300, Subal ND2, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100 f11 1/60

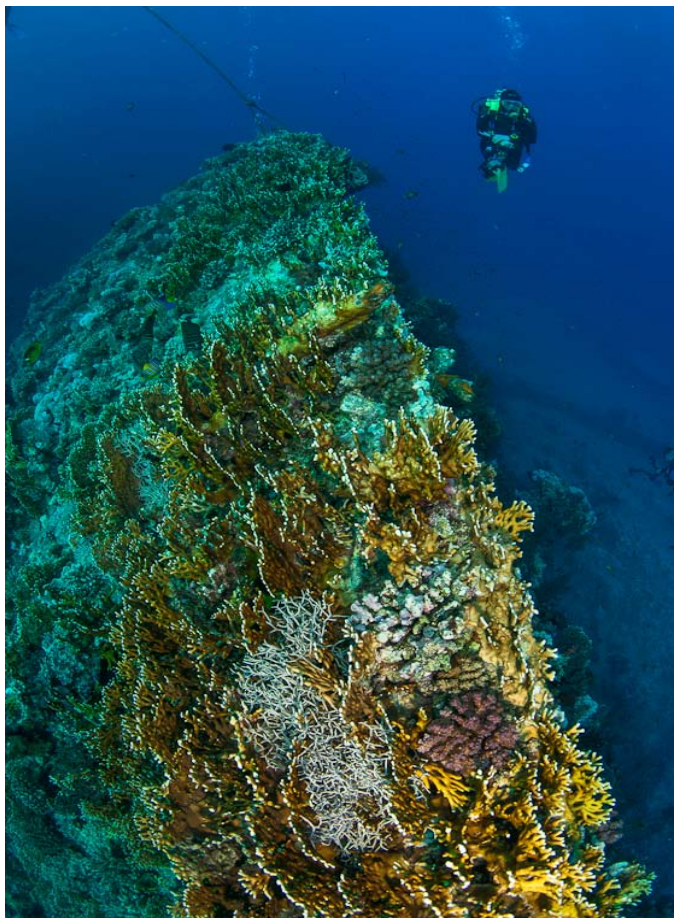
(Right) Early morning dives on a reef wall are a good time to find lion fish that are still out hunting. They are always a willing and attractive subject offering the opportunity to perfect your image or play with different techniques. Nikon D300, Subal ND2, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100 f8 1/30



subjects on and off the reef.

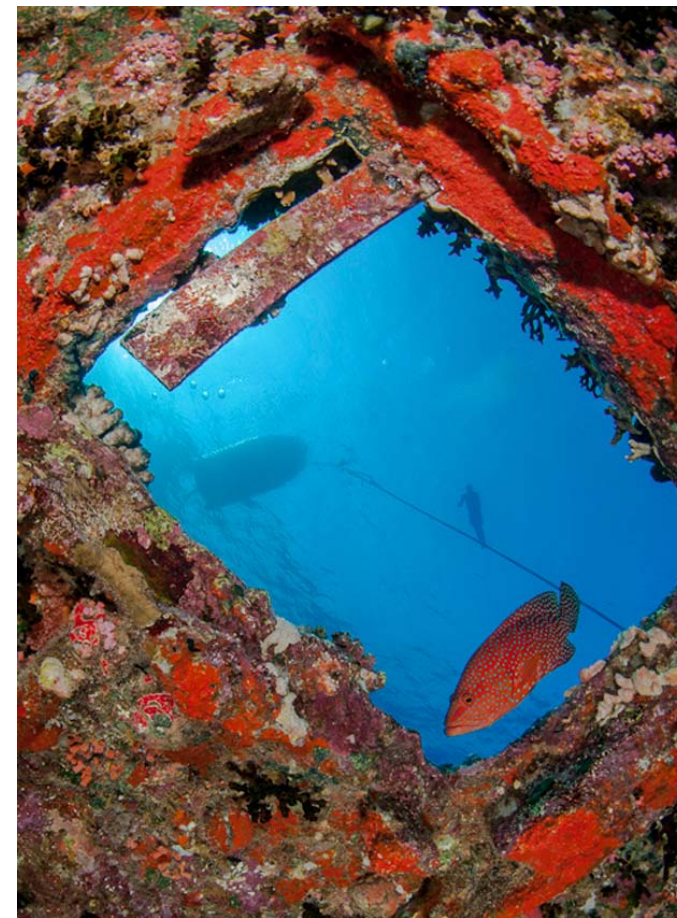
Our group was keen to dive some of the classics and as we were blessed with perfectly calm weather, which held all week, we made the crossing from Ras Mohammed to Abu Nuhas immediately to make the most of the variety of wrecks lined up on its northern face. You may have dived these wrecks many times before but you can always find a new challenge photographically and the mood of the wrecks changes constantly with the light throughout the day. We all tend to focus on wide angle images when wreck diving, but it is well worth putting your macro lens on for a few dives and ignoring the big shot. There are countless critters on these wrecks as well as corals and invertebrates to keep your macro lens fully engaged. Remember to inspect any open pipe end you come across for a few minutes as most are home to a blenny or perhaps a small eel which may not show themselves immediately.

The more recent wrecks offer great picture opportunities but I think that my favourite at Abu Nuhas is the SS Carnatic which still retains the graceful lines of sail and steam in both the bow and the stern. Despite the number of divers who have visited this wreck since it was first rediscovered in the modern scuba age, the structure and marine life have endured remarkably well. Sadly the bulwarks of the stern section have begun to collapse with a large section now lying on the seabed and I suspect this is a result of careless mooring by one of the larger day boats or live aboards. Most boats bring their divers to the wreck in RIB's and moor with a lighter line to the centre section of the wreck which does far less damage. Another feature now destroyed is a very large table coral that had formed on a vertical steel section in the collapsed mid section of the wreck. This was one of the land mark



The SS Carnatic is one of the most visited wrecks in the Red Sea but despite this the corals and marine life are in excellent condition. The graceful shape of this wreck makes it one of my favourites that I am never tired of visiting. Nikon D300, Subal ND2, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100 f11 1/60

features of the wreck in the early days, but now lies broken and dead amongst the debris. But despite these changes the wreck still has great appeal to me and is well worth several dives with different lens combinations.



The SS Carnatic is known for her unusual square shaped port holes which were a marketing feature in her day. They can be used to frame a boat on the surface, diver and marine life if you are lucky. Nikon D300, Subal ND2, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100 f16 1/60

Our guide was keen to take us to Ras Mohammed, where we had some very strong currents, and then to Tiran to dive on the north side of Jackson reef where schooling hammerheads have been seen recently on early morning dives.

As predicted, we did see the sharks which is a real buzz, but poor light and increasing depth meant that it was not a photographic success for me! Knowing this the following day I elected to put a macro lens on the camera and spent a happy hour up in the shallows patiently waiting for a leopard spotted blenny to cooperate – not the same rush as getting close to hammerheads but photographically much more satisfying!

A week in the Red Sea passes all too quickly and leaves you pondering all the images that you had planned or hoped for but did not complete for all sorts of reasons. But that of course is what brings us back again and again to a location like the Red Sea as we continue to chase improvement and perfection in our images, so we will be back in 2013.

Our second trip took us still further east to Indonesia and included a trip to a new location for us, the island of Ambon. The diving around Ambon already has a reputation as a hot muck diving destination and currently has only one dive resort catering to the needs of a photographer, so it's a little like stepping back to the early days at Lembeh Strait. Ambon has also been the start or finish destination for a number of live aboards on the Raja Ampat and Banda Sea routes. Maluku Divers is an established operation that relocated to a new expanded resort in 2010, closer to the airport and closer to some of the big name muck sites and the purpose of our visit was to check out the facilities and diving for a planned workshop in 2014.

A short ride from the airport brings you to the intimate Maluku Divers resort which is laid out on level ground a stones throw from the water. There is a house reef dive in front of the resort but the majority of dives are made from one of three boats



One of the most appealing coral fish are the leopard spotted blennies which are often found in fire coral in shallow water. They are a nervous subject but if you are patient their natural curiosity will overcome the fear and you will be rewarded with a portrait shot. Nikon D300, Subal ND2, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO100 f22 1/180.

a short ride north or south from the resort or east across the bay towards Ambon city.

If you need a fix of reef diving and some exercise for your wide angle lens then you can go



This tiny juvenile thread fin lion fish was hiding in the branches of a red gorgonian and seemed very surprised to have been spotted by me. Nikon D300, Subal ND2, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO100 f16 1/180.

on a longer excursion to the mouth of the bay and the reefs beyond. There is also a wreck dive close to the port of Ambon City which is well worth a visit for both wide angle and more macro critters. The



Rhinopias in various hues can be seen in Ambon is quite striking but also surprisingly difficult to spot initially. Nikon D300, Subal ND2, 10-17mm FE zoom, 2xTC, ISO200 f11 1/30.

wreck is the SS Aquila (originally the SS Duke of Sparta) which was sunk at anchor in 1958 by US aircraft during Operation Haik against the communist rebellion in Indonesia. This is a large wreck (137m long, 17m beam), very intact with 50 years of coral growth to decorate it and with an average depth of 30m on the main deck is best dived with nitrox.

Ambon hit the ichthyology headlines a few years ago with the discovery of one of the weirdest looking frogfish ever seen. This was

the Maluku or psychedelic frogfish (*Histiophryne psychedelica*) first seen in Ambon in 2008 and rarely again since then. The species had apparently turned up in an aquarium shipment in 1992 from Bali to the Dallas aquarium, although these examples soon died, but were not initially classified as a new species. So it is possible that the species exists elsewhere in Indonesia but so far has only been seen in the wild in Ambon. We of course did not get lucky enough to see this remarkable frogfish, but



Hairy gobies were a new species to me, but seem to be abundant in Ambon. However they are a frustrating subject that is both very small and constantly on the move. Nikon D300, Subal ND2, 105mm micro, Inon wet lens, Inon Quad flash, ISO100 f29 1/180.

talking with the local guides the consensus is that it is most likely a deepwater species that only comes into shallow water to spawn and nurture the eggs until they hatch.

Another species that is relatively abundant here was also on my want list. *Rhinopias* scorpion fish were seen frequently in the early days in Lembah Strait, but I have not seen any during my last two visits and the local rumour was that they were being targeted by the aquarium trade. They can still be seen reliably at

Maluku and the guides tell me that there is a population of between 12 and 20 spread between the various sites on both sides of the bay. Two of these sites are very close to the resort and we were lucky enough to see four specimens on more than one occasion – two were the paddle flap species (*Rhinopias eschmeyeri*) and two of the weedy variety (*Rhinopias frondosa*), so I was more than happy despite my first attempts being cut short by a small ingress of water into the housing.

Nightmare! Luckily the small amount of water was readily absorbed by a strategically placed tampon in the housing and I was able to trace the reason to an obvious cause. Examining the O ring seat of my extension ring with a wet lens to magnify I discovered a tiny string of Delrin swarf across the groove obviously left as the cutting tool was removed during manufacture. I pulled at it with a pair of tweezers and it continued to unravel around half the circumference of the O ring seat. I have used this extension ring for years with no issue, so I must have been lucky until now and something had caused this fine swarf to detach itself during O ring cleaning and replacement. So with disaster averted I returned to the Rhinopias, with a little help from the guides of course, the very next day.

Besides the Rhinopias the Ambon dive sites offer a plethora of muck species to keep any photographer fully engaged from super macro offerings such as the hairy shrimp, numerous species of frog fish, exotic nudibranchs, commensal species and a full range of more normal reef fish if you feel the need. The guides introduced me to a species of coral goby that I had not seen or photographed previously, which they are calling hairy gobies. These tiny little fish live in pairs in



Fire urchins are plentiful in Ambon but only a few will be home to coleman shrimps or in this case the alien looking zebra crab. . Nikon D300, Subal ND2, 105mm micro, Inon wet lens, Inon Quad flash, ISO100 f16 1/180

small branching corals which they share with coral crabs. They look a little like the lemon gobies found in the Red Sea but are much smaller and more nervous. They look very similar to the species *Gobiodon acicularis* but have a fine stubble of hair particularly around the face of the fish which give them the appearance of a little old man, well to me anyway! I managed to capture reasonable images of a black and green variety, but one with an orange face eluded me to total success.

It is only natural to draw a comparison between Ambon and Lembah Strait and they are certainly very similar in topography and species. Lembah is still of course an excellent destination, but has developed at a very fast pace in the last few years and now has numerous resorts and consequently a higher concentration of divers. The great contrast and pleasure in diving in Ambon is that you are the only boat in the area and it really does feel like the early days at Lembah again with an



Snake eels are mostly seen with just their head emerging from the sand, but on several dives we saw them out hunting which offered the opportunity to capture a different perspective. Nikon D300, Subal ND2, 60mm micro, Inon wet lens, Inon Quad flash, ISO100 f29 1/180.

abundance of critters. More resorts are bound to be built in the future so plan a trip soon if you value a feeling of at least partial solitude.

After Ambon it was back to a very wet and windy British winter for Christmas and New Year. 2012 has now been declared the second wettest



year on record in the UK so we are all fervently hoping for something closer to drought conditions in 2013 and some fine calm spring weather to kick off the UK diving season in style.

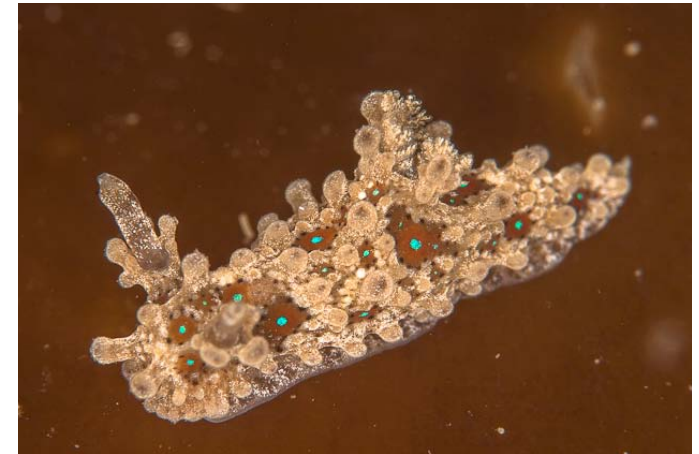
Regular readers may have detected my fondness for the Inon Quad flash which I find so useful for macro photography. This flash is of course now considered obsolete but I had one of the originals which lasted more nearly ten years before expiring. I am now on my second unit (used) which I hope will survive just as well. Inon also supplied a doublet wet lens for the quad which boosts magnification to almost 2:1 and I have used this extensively for smaller subjects. However, if I needed greater magnification up until now it has meant using a teleconverter and perhaps some dry diopters, which works well but of course restricts you to only very small subjects during the dive. I have had a hankering for a much stronger wet diopter and had heard very good reports of the



There is a significant difference in length between the Inon Quad flash wet lens and SubSee +10 wet lens. The +10 will cast a shadow at close focus when used with the quad flash.

ReefNet SubSee units but it was not until quite recently that I had the opportunity to handle one of the latest +10 models and see the results. I was impressed and planned to buy one, but first I had to have a method of mounting it on the front of the quad flash which has a non standard thread to mount the Inon wet lens. I tested my technical drawing skills and sent off a request to Ken Sullivan (an excellent engineer BTW) who produced a perfect stepping ring for me and once the lens arrived I was in business, or so I thought.....

What I had not taken into account was the additional length of the +10 lens compared to the Inon lens, which is about half the length. The +10 works fine on the Inon quad flash until you approach the maximum magnification of the +10, which of course is quite close to the subject. At this short distance the +10 lens begins to cast a shadow



Aegires punctilucens nudibranch is an unusual species that I have seen only a couple of times and is perhaps 8mm in length. An additional wet lens for 2:1 reproduction is essential to capture these critters in detail. Nikon D300, Subal ND2, 105mm micro, SubSee +10, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100 f29 1/180.

over the subject as the flash tubes are close to the lens. Not a problem with the Inon version at this range, but we live and learn. So it was back to Ken for another adaptor to fit my tapered 105mm macro port (also from Ken) so that I can use the +10 with conventional twin strobe lighting.

Having the +10 strength is a big step up in magnification and requires a little practice and familiarization to get the best out of it. You will generally only use this when the lens is set at or close to full magnification although the lens will still focus through a reasonable range with the wet lens fitted. Aiming at a much smaller subject is the next challenge and then dealing with a much reduced depth of field. I find it is best to lock the lens at its closest focus point using the MSC switch or AF lock and then gradually rock focus until the subject is sharp. Holding the camera housing steady



Colpodaspis pusilla is a tiny mollusc (5-8mm) sometimes mistaken for a nudibranch, but still retains its shell under a mantle. An additional wet lens for 2:1 reproduction is essential to capture these critters in detail. Nikon D300, Subal ND2, 105mm micro, SubSee +10, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100 f29 1/180.

is also important and it helps to have the housing trimmed almost neutral buoyancy so that your wrists don't give up after a while! The +10 lens is quite heavy compared to others so you will need to add a little more buoyancy to your rig.

There are several wet lenses to choose from on the market, some cheaper than others and some can be stacked to increase magnification. You

make your choice and pay the money, but I can recommend the SubSee from a user's viewpoint.

Hopefully 2013 will produce a dry and calm summer with plenty of marine life action and a bigger quota of basking sharks than in 2012!

Mark Webster
www.photec.co.uk



Underwater Photography Workshops with Mark Webster
 Red Sea 13-20 October 2013
 Maluku Divers, Ambon Indonesia 22 February to 1 March 2014
www.photec.co.uk www.oonasdivers.com



Underwater Photography Workshop with Mark Webster
 Maluku Divers, Ambon
 22 February to 1 March 2014

Details: www.photec.co.uk
www.muckdivingindonesia.com

Guidelines for contributors

The response to UwP has been nothing short of fantastic. We are looking for interesting, well illustrated articles about underwater photography. We are looking for work from existing names but would also like to discover some of the new talent out there and that could be you! UwP is the perfect publication for you to increase your profile in the underwater photography community.

The type of articles we're looking for fall into five main categories:

Uw photo techniques - Balanced light, composition, etc

Locations - Photo friendly dive sites, countries or liveaboards

Subjects - Anything from whale sharks to nudibranchs in full detail

Equipment reviews - Detailed appraisals of the latest equipment

Personalities - Interviews/features about leading underwater photographers

**If you have an idea for an article,
contact me first before putting pen to paper.
E mail peter@uwpmag.com**

How to submit articles

To keep UwP simple and financially viable, we can only accept submissions by e mail and they need to be done in the following way:

1. The text should be saved as a TEXT file and attached to the e mail

2. Images must be attached to the e mail and they need to be 144dpi

Size - Maximum length 15cm i.e. horizontal pictures would be 15 cm wide and verticals would be 15cm.

File type - Save your image as a JPG file and set the compression to "Medium" quality. This should result in images no larger than about 120k which can be transmitted quickly. If we want larger sizes we will contact you.

3. Captions - **Each and every image MUST have full photographic details** including camera, housing, lens, lighting, film, aperture, shutter speed and exposure mode. These must also be copied and pasted into the body of the e mail.