



Nikon D7000, Sigma 50mm, F9 at 1/250, ISO 1000

the following lines.

Whale Shark encounters are never guaranteed but there is one ingredient that makes success much more likely - deep local knowledge. And the captain of the MV Sea Queen, an old hand of Maldivian waters, has lots of that. And he had been told by the fishermen that in a certain area in Thaa Atoll whale sharks were being regularly spotted.

So one evening, just after sunset, our captain connected two large floodlights, almost 1,000 volts combined, directly illuminating the water column, and left them there. Hopefully, the light would attract the plankton, and the plankton would attract a whale shark. Almost immediately, the plankton starts to build up, and in 10 minutes the water turned milkish, full of plankton and small fish. We went for dinner, but not for long... Before 7pm, we heard an excited shout coming from the stern... a fairly large 7-8 meter long whale shark had arrived!. Exactly as Lisa and Dave said would happen, the whale shark went around the illuminated area three times, checking the situation, and disappeared.

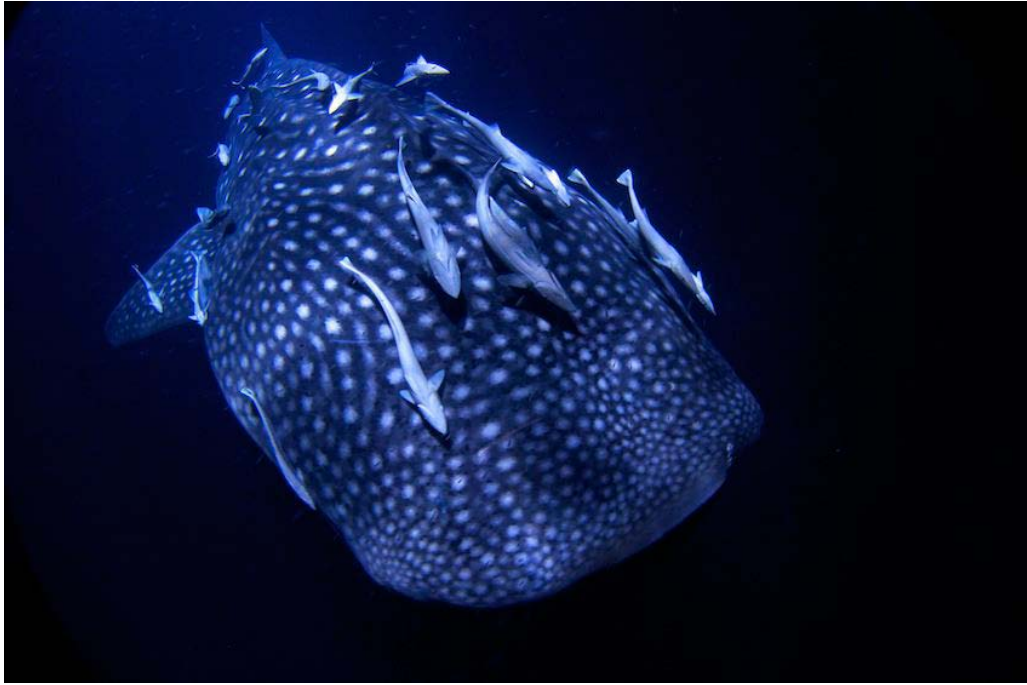


Nikon D7000, Tokina 10-17mm, Ikelite housing, natural light, F7.1 at 1/60. ISO 1000

Approximately one hour later, it came back, and this time it came to feed. It adopted an almost vertical position, and started to gulp water. What a magnificent show! A mouth more than one meter wide, quietly gulping water, less than 50cm from our eyes... After a little while, and following instructions of Lisa and Dave, we started to get ready to quietly enter the water (in pairs, not all of us at once) but something must not have been to the giant's complete taste, because it disappeared, as

suddenly as it had arrived. We waited in vain, for a good half an hour, but to no avail. We looked at each other, with a sweet-and-sour feeling... We had seen Mr. Big, but we have not been able to take any pictures from the water. With a certain feeling of disappointment, we went to sleep.

Fortunately, once again our rest was not going to last long... At 1am Dave is banging on my door, shouting "whale shark, whale shark!". It is a slightly smaller individual, perhaps 6 meter long.



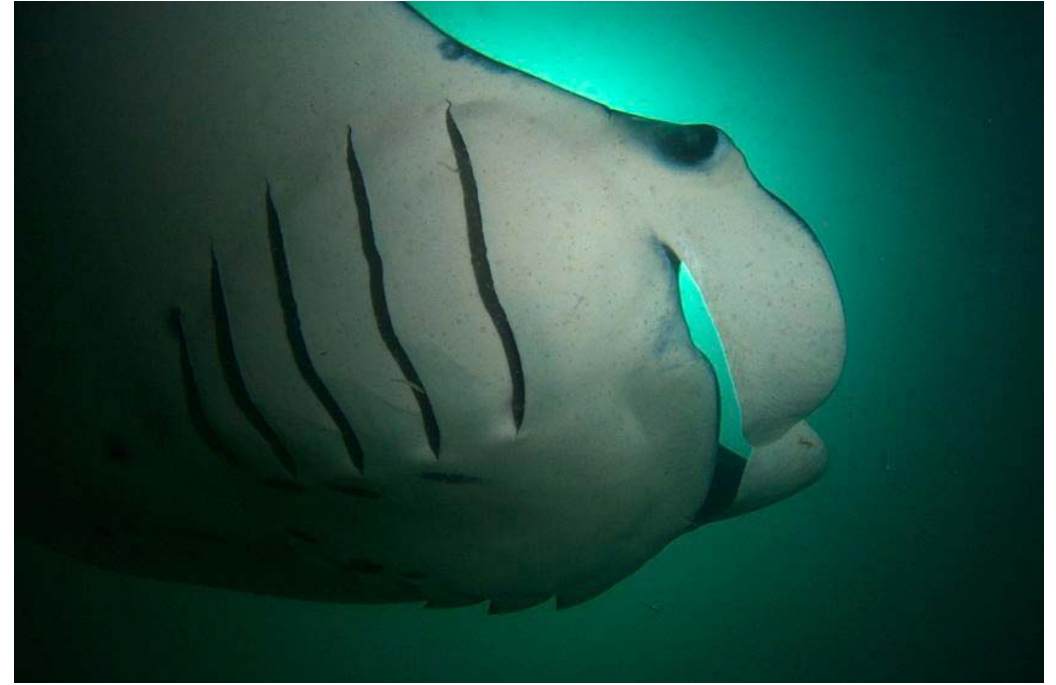
Nikon D7000, Tokina 10-17mm, Ikelite housing, natural light, F3.5 at 1/80. ISO 1000

But this time it is going to stay for several hours, feeding in turns from the plankton column in one light to the plankton column in the other. It just opens its massive mouth and gulps water, packed with plankton, swimming from one light to the other, again and again.

It is absolutely mesmerizing, to see such a massive living body slowly swimming in the water in front of you...

The divemasters want to give the whale shark enough time to feel completely relaxed so it is only after

what seems an eternity that I am told I can go as well. By now it is 1.30am... I put on the wetsuit, hood, mask, and fins and get into the water, quietly floating from ropes from the Sea Queen. I immediately recognize one photographic obstacle to overcome: as no strobes are allowed, the only available light comes from the floodlights, and it is very contrasted: very intense in the centre of the beam, and quickly fading into absolute darkness less than 2 meters away. Pure cathedral light... So I decide to meter on the illuminated skin of the



We also saw Giant Mantas on at least three occasions. Nikon D7000, Tokina 10-17mm, Ikelite housing and strobes, F4.5 at 1/80. ISO 1000.

shark's head, overexpose two thirds of a stop in order to allow the sensor to register a bit more information from the outer area of the beam, and pray that the highlights in his head will not ruin the pictures.. I know this will be a bit of trial and error... so I apply myself to the task and in less than one hour I take more than 400 shots. I can get so close to the whale shark that I could put my head in its mouth. In fact, at one point, it whacks me softly with its tail. I am in heaven!!

I am so happy that at some point I wish him a long and happy life...

And when I come up to the boat and go to bed, it is almost 3am. The following morning, after a rather sleepy first dive, I am told the shark stayed all night long, feeding on the lights, until the captain started the engine at 6am. Apparently the larger shark also returned, later, but had to stay under the boat, as the younger one would not allow him to take a position in the floodlights area.

A few days later, now in Huvadhoo Atoll, we repeat the experience. And we strike gold again – but this time with some external



Nikon D7000, Tokina 10-17mm, Ikelite housing, natural light, F4 at 1/60. ISO 1000

help. The first whale shark of the night arrives at 10pm or so, but it does not stay. As we are surrounded by several large fishing vessels with much more powerful lights which are likely to create larger plankton accumulations, we start to fear that we have been “outlighted” and will have no resident whale shark tonight. This increasingly seems the case, until from one of the large vessels nearby they signal us that they have one whale shark in their lights.

It is now past midnight and everybody has gone downstairs except the two headmasters and myself so we take the small dinghy and there we go... and when we arrive, after a couple of minutes dinghy ride, we see a massive 8-9 meter shark happily munching (or rather, filtering) away. The fishing crew is incredibly nice and they even stop their fishing work for half an hour so that I can jump... And there I am, once again completely on my own, in pitch black waters, with Mr. Big. In fact, not with one, but with two of them, as there are two different big guys, taking turns, rising from the deep, feeding, and going down again.

The floodlights of the fishing vessel are twice as powerful, almost

2,000 volts... which gives me even more problems with the exposure. Again, trial and error, and again, almost 400 shots. Sadly, I never have both sharks in the frame at the same time. But the experience is once again out of this world. One of the two sharks gets really close to me and in one occasion, it “corners” me between his massive open mouth, and the hull of the ship, so I have to stay there, shooting this huge cave of a mouth, at least 20cm distance... For the second time in less than a week (or the fourth, if we include the wallpaper of sharks in Viligili kandu, and the giant mantas feeding at night in Vaavu) I am in heaven...

Arturo de Frias



Don't settle for 2nd best



Film - No Filter
No White Balance



Digital - No Filter
Manual WB



Magic Filter
Manual WB

Digital cameras have opened up new possibilities to underwater photographers. For available light photography manual white balance is an invaluable tool for restoring colours. But when you use it without a filter you are not making the most of the technique. You're doing all the hard work without reaping the full rewards.

These three photos are all taken of the same wreck in the Red Sea. The left hand image was taken on slide film, which rendered the scene completely blue. The middle image is taken with a digital SLR without a filter; using manual white balance. The white balance has brought out some of the colour of the wreck, but it has also sucked all the blue out of the water behind the wreck, making it almost grey. The right hand image is taken with the same digital camera and lens, but this time using an original Magic Filter. The filter attenuates blue light meaning that the colours of the wreck are brought out and it stands out from the background water, which is recorded as an accurate blue.

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