

South West Ramblings 4

by Mark Webster

The end of April at last brought some spring warmth and the prospect of some diving weather, although the water temperature stayed stubbornly low at 7c or 8c. The low sea temperatures has slowed up all the usual spring activities but the signs now are that the season is ramping up and there is evidence of activity everywhere on the reef.

I must admit to pangs of jealousy when reading Alex Mustard's recent comparison article on the D600/D800 only due to the test location. Gulen in Norway is a spot I have long hankered to dive particularly during the nudibranch week in March as the shore dive here is famous for its variety of temperate species in the early spring. Despite working in Norway for the past three and a half years I have missed the event each year due to work commitments, so Alex's piece just depressed me even further! So having suffered

this disappointment again I decided that I should have my own nudibranch week when I got home in April. My plans were thwarted during the first few days due to the continuing stormy weather, but finally the seas calmed and I was able to start my search focused on two local dive sites – Pendennis Point in Falmouth Bay and Porthkerris on the Lizard Peninsular.

Whilst Gulen has the reputation of hosting high densities of different nudibranch species, (53 found this year apparently) making them almost easy to find, the reverse is true of my part of the UK. We do indeed have a good variety but generally they are much more sporadic and therefore difficult to find. However, I was in for a pleasant surprise during my first dive at Porthkerris when I found a relative profusion of the little blighters on one patch of reef. I was able to find four different species

during the dive, although other divers looking on the same day told me they had seen none! Our nudibranchs are mostly very small and can be difficult to spot so you need to educate yourself a little on what to look for in terms of habitat, feeding and what the egg mass of each species looks like. For this a copy of a Field Guide to the Nudibranchs of the British Isles by Bernard Picton is essential reading for reference before and after your dives to guide you towards likely habitats.

Finding nudibranchs is slow work and waiting for a good pose or position in your subject can also require long periods of waiting particularly if the nudibranch is feeding. When they are on the move looking for food you can often predict a course and set up a composition with good negative space or perhaps at a point where the nudibranch will climb over something. Species



Facelina annlicornis - Nikon D300, Subal ND20, Nikkor 105mm micro, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100, f22 1/160



Goniodoris nodosa - Nikon D300, Subal ND20, Nikkor 105mm micro, SubSee +10, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100, f29 1/160.

that feed on seaweed and kelp elevated from the seabed may offer opportunities to introduce a little natural light behind the subject, although you need to be cautious with slow shutter speeds as just a little movement in the weed can spoil a good composition. Although we are working with a very narrow depth of field, narrowed even further if you are using a supplementary lens, you might wish to reduce this further to accentuate a feature or soften the background further. Opening up the aperture a couple of stops say from f22 to f16 can have a fairly dramatic effect but also means you must concentrate on your focussing skills even more.

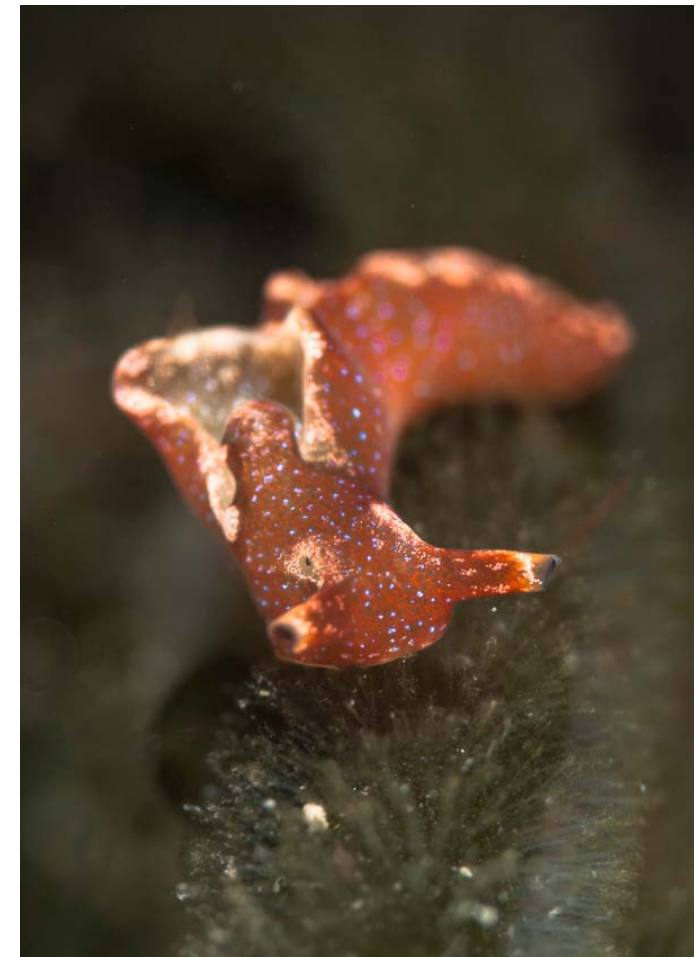
Another important thing to remember is that you will be immobile or moving very little for long



Eubranchius farrani verrucosa - Nikon D300, Subal ND20, Nikkor 105mm micro, SubSee +10, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100, f29 1/160

periods so it is essential to wear a good under suit and perhaps additional layers to stay comfortably warm and maintain concentration. I also wear three finger mitts in the winter and spring which really do make a significant difference to hand warmth and do not restrict access to essential controls. Although I have mentioned this before, it is worth saying again that trimming your rig with rigid foam or floats to ensure neutral buoyancy is very important to reduce wrist fatigue and also improve stability at high magnifications with limited depth of field.

A slightly more unusual find this year has



Opisthobranch Elysia viridis - Nikon D300, Subal ND20, Nikkor 105mm micro, SubSee +10, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100, f29 1/160.

been colonies of Opisthobranchs *Elysia viridis* which visually seem to be a cross between a nudibranch and a sea hare in that they still retain a small shell under a mantle. They are extremely small and are found feeding on specific types of sea weed, so require careful searching and then patient photography at high magnification. We have



Flabellina pedata verrucosa - Nikon D300, Subal ND20, Nikkor 105mm micro, SubSee +10, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100, f29 1/160



Diaphorodoris luteocincta - Nikon D300, Subal ND20, Nikkor 105mm micro, SubSee +10, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100, f29 1/160.



Doris sticta verrucosa - Nikon D300, Subal ND20, Nikkor 105mm micro, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100, f22 1/160

been seeing them in a green and deep red colour both with blue spots and although they can be a very frustrating subject due to weed movement and shallow depth of field, it is always satisfying to capture a few sharp images amongst all the soft ones! You will find these little critters particularly on a branching sea weed called *Codium fragile*

which is found in shallow water and inter tidal rock pools. On the same weed you may also find juvenile sea hares which are easy to confuse with the Ophistobranchs until you get your eye tuned in.

So my version of nudibranch week took a little longer due to the vagaries of the weather and did not turn up 53 species, but eventually a respectable 24 if

you count the sea hare and Opistobranch, so not too disappointing and not quite as cold as Norway in March! Within this selection there were some fairly unusual if not rare species here in the south west and at least two that I had not seen before.

At Porthkerris I spotted the uncommon colour variation of *Eubranchus farrani* which is usually



***Janolus cristatus* - Nikon D300, Subal ND20, Nikkor 105mm micro, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100, f22 1/160.**

(but infrequently) seen in white with orange or yellow tips to the cerata, but I was delighted to find one with an almost black body with pure white tips to the cerata. Even with this high contrast colour livery you still have to look hard and methodically to find these critters which feed on various species of hydroids and in one example I found feeding on a sponge. This very small nudibranch, perhaps 10mm in length, will need additional magnification to capture a good image and a dose of patience for a good composition as it moves very slowly.

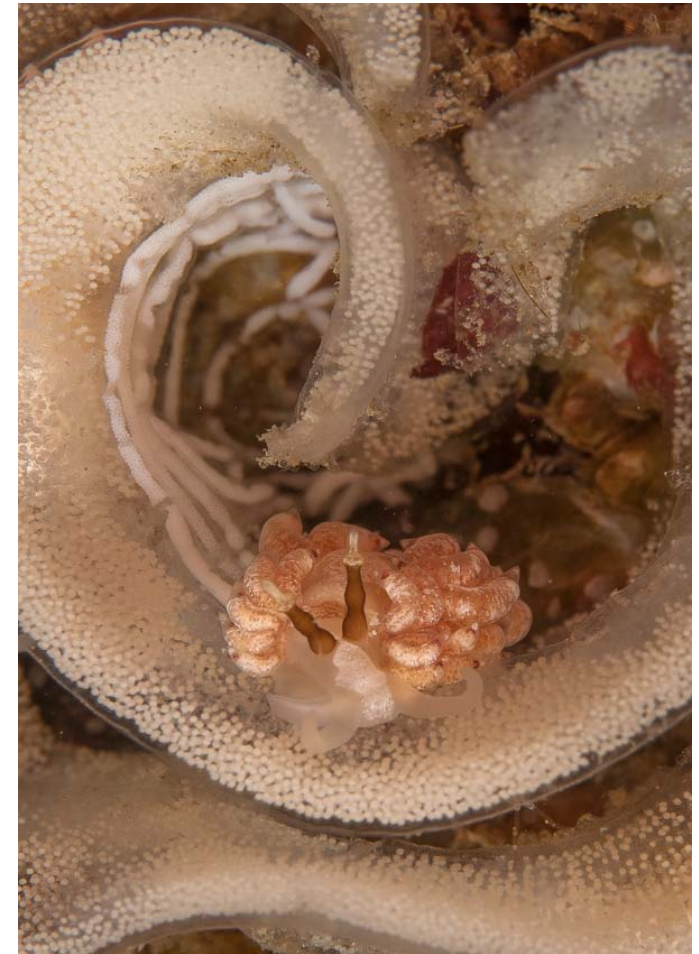
Close to Pendennis Point I encountered three more very uncommon species within a couple of metres of each other. The first was *Doris sticta* a bright yellow nudibranch with grey to purple



***Flabellina lineata* - Nikon D300, Subal ND20, Nikkor 105mm micro, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100, f22 1/160**

makings which is very difficult to find as it mimics the sponges it feeds on. I was lucky to spot one between feeding sites although you still have to look carefully to convince yourself that this is a nudibranch! As a slightly larger species this can be captured with a 105mm macro lens close to 1:1 magnification.

The second species was the spectacular looking *Facelina annlicornis* which again I was lucky enough to spot emerging from a tangle of hydroids and then follow across a patch of weed. It seems that this species also feed on other species of nudibranchs and there was a significant number of *Flabellina pedata* on the same patch of reef and this guy was heading in their direction. Once seen



***Flavorinus branchialis* - Nikon D300, Subal ND20, Nikkor 105mm micro, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100, f20 1/160**

it is so brightly decorated you might wonder how it hides at all as it is covered in iridescent white spots and has an almost alien look. This example was perhaps 30mm in length and was moving pretty quickly across the reef presumably following a trail left by the other species he was chasing.



Acanthodoris pilosa - Nikon D300, Subal ND20, Nikkor 105mm micro, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100, f18 1/160

During my final nudibranch hunt dive the numbers seemed to have reduced significantly in only a few days and I was expecting my luck to have expired. But nature had one more treat with another tiny species which according to Mr Picton's book is scarce and not often seen. What looks like a tiny white blob to the naked eye develops into a very cute looking nudibranch called *Trapania pallida* which was difficult to capture with a +10 lens in a swell, but I persevered and got a few sharp images to complete my collection for 2013 so

far!

For the fellow "nudi-nerds" amongst us here is a listing of the species I found, in no particular order:

Doto fragilis; *Diaphorodoris luteocincta*; *Polycera faeroensis*; *Limacia clavigera*; *Jorunna tomentosa*; *Janolus cristatus*; *Coryphella verrucosa*; *Eubranthus farrani*; *Favorinus brianus*; *Flavorinus branchialis*; *Tritonia nilsodhneri*; *Goniodoris nodosa*; *Polycera quadrilineata*; *Archidoris pseudoargus*; *Cadlina laevis*; *Elysia viridis*; *Acanthodoris pilosa*; *Eubranthus* sp;

Aplysia punctata; *Flabellina pedata*; *Facelina annulicornis*; *Doris sticta*; *Trapania pallida*; *Flabellina lineata*

So as I finish this latest selection of musings the weather has at last warmed a little and the sun is shining, but this also means our local dive sites have been engulfed by an immensely thick plankton bloom of jelly like phytoplankton reducing light levels and visibility to 1m or less! Before the plankton I was pursuing my nudibranchs in good visibility, however being focussed on a particular theme will inevitably mean that you will miss out on other opportunities. Whenever you are armed with a macro lens you can

almost guarantee a wide angle event to make you want to weep. Recently my local dive site has been host to both a friendly seal and also a visit from a couple of dolphins keen to check out the divers and of course you have no hope when you have the 105mm macro lens on your camera. When will Nikon or Tokina produce the 10-200mm fish eye macro zoom, surely the ultimate lens for underwater photographers to cover all eventualities?!

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

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

Digital Photo Books for the iPad

By Ron Lucas

I started taking photos in the film era, initially with Sea & Sea amphibious cameras and then with a Nikon SLR in an Ikelite housing. The maximum shots per dive were 37. I had to wait until slide film was developed to see results and then order prints for either a photo album or photo frame. I still remember the agony of having a roll of film ruined by the photo lab on a live-aboard.

Then along came digital photography. I could bracket my shots with impunity and take as many photos per dive day as memory cards would allow. I would process my images on the computer and home printer to put in photo albums and occasionally on the wall!

Next came digital photo sites like Kodak and Shutterfly.com and I could print my images much more cheaply online than at home. These sites soon offered online software to produce photo books. In 2006 I discovered Blurb.com in the USA who now have international online stores including the UK.

Blurb.com allowed customers to print all types of books digitally

ranging from novels to photo books and everything in between e.g. cookbooks. Their book creation software meant that customers could make books offline using templates and easily modify or make their own custom templates. It no longer mattered if they had slow or intermittent internet connections. Other sites required customers to upload photos to make books online using restrictive templates. Initially the dedicated digital photo sites did offer better and more expensive photo paper, but the gap has narrowed considerably. Blurb.com now offer a great choice of paper and book covers.

To illustrate I used Blurb.com to produce a photo book on a 2006 trip to Galapagos and incorporated a couple of photos by the Aggressor Photo Pro. The books were purchased at cost by fellow divers from that trip and by Aggressor Fleet to put on their two Galapagos boats. I then produced a photo book of local reef species which I showed to the Bermuda Zoological Society and we agreed to proceed with producing and publishing a conventional photo book



which went on sale locally in 2008. "Bermuda Reef Portraits" has been very successful.

Then along came the iPad and the digital world was revolutionised again! Much the same way we can download colour magazines to our pads, it became possible to convert print photo books to download to iBooks through Blurb.com. I suspect some other photo sites have or will shortly offer this service. It will also spread to other Operating Systems.

Blurb.com also offers a service to

convert a book at low cost to a PDF if you purchase a print book so you can view on your computer. I have not yet tried this as I am happy with viewing books on my iPad.

Lorraine, my wife, and I have produced eleven downloadable digital photo books so far. Initially when the service was offered one had to purchase a print book and then it was converted for \$1.99. Now we no longer have to purchase a print book but the fee has gone up to \$9.99. Once converted, the customer can set a