

First image of a thresher shark birth

Shot by Attila Kaszo

Interview by Peter Rowlands

First of all, congratulations on your amazing photograph. It is quite literally extraordinary. Where and when did you take it and was this a trip to specifically photograph thresher sharks?

I went specifically to Malapascua in 2013 to film Thresher sharks. What I didn't know was just how hard it was to get a good shot. Firstly, I had to get up by 4:00am each morning to get my stuff ready, then walk in the dark along a sandy track for about 500m lugging nearly 12K of camera gear just to get to the boat.

Still dark, the boat leaves and we arrive at Monad Shoal about 5:30: dive into 25m of water and wait for sharks by 5:50am. They only seemed to be around for about an hour in numbers then went back to deeper water. This was the daily routine for most of my stay, although I did manage to get out to a few regional dive sites in between.

At what point did you notice that it may have been a pup emerging?

This is the irony of the whole thing, I actually didn't realise I had shot it. We had continuing power failure on the Island, and as a consequence I couldn't charge anything. So I only checked my images a few times just to make sure I had something that resembled a shark. The birthing



*This is the Pelagic Thresher shark (*Alopias pelagicus*) giving birth. Because no artificial lighting can be used on these sharks, a high ISO rating is required. That coupled with early morning and significant cloud cover makes it a fairly dark scene. The shot was also cropped adding even more noise to the image. So what it is as they say, is what it is. Nikon D800, Nauticam housing - 16-35 lens @ f4.5 1/100th, ISO 1600 / No Lighting*



picture was a lot further away than some of the other encounters I had, so really it was just a casual shot of a shark in the distance and I couldn't see anything else. Also there were a lot a jelly fish in the water for a few days making good shots even harder to get, so after one shot I was looking for better angles from sharks that were moving in closer to me.

I only realised what I had after I got back home and started processing the images. But even then it didn't really resonate because I had actually discarded the picture in a trash folder I keep for editing. It was only after I had finished editing that I thought I should have a profile shot, so I went back to the trash folder and found "the" shot but realised it had a blob at the bottom of the shark which in an un-cropped image looked like a jelly fish. Even after I had cropped it I still couldn't accept that it was a pup. You know, these sort of things just don't happen for me or most people, so I tried to explain it away as some freak angle with an incoming fish or whatever. I showed my wife Marg the shot and she said "it looks like it's giving birth, how extraordinary".

Who did you contact in the scientific community and what was their reaction?

I sent it to Dr Simon Oliver, at the university of Liverpool UK, who is the world leading authority on Pelagic Thresher sharks. We received two emails in response, the first, said something like...sorry to disappoint you...but its a common cleaner wrasse going about its business....

I was obviously disappointed but not surprised. Made a cup of tea and talked the whole thing over with Marg who suggested it was still a very unusual

shot and could be marketed. Curiosity got the better of me after about ten minutes, so I opened the second email.

The second email started with HOLY SH.T I just made a huge mistake..... So what had happened was the image had come in to the university server and sent out to Simon as a thumbnail image. From something that small no one could deduct anything much. However, a colleague rang him and said: "have you seen the photo that't just come through on the Thresher...." That's when he saw the full scale shot I had sent and the excitement started.

How long did it take to verify and what was the criteria in the validation process?

I agreed not to publish the image at Simon's request. Their research was in full swing and the shot I had threw a bunch of deductions they had made into question. I don't know what criteria they used or how it was applied, only that overall including peer reviews, it took thirteen months before the prestigious scientific journal "Coral Reefs" published it. I guess anything like this needs thorough investigation and scrutiny, and so it should given the ramifications it eventually has. But I'm glad I held off publishing it because it really helped the project readjust its term of reference and enabled parts of the research to be redirected.

What has been the reaction since the photograph was verified?

The reaction to the image has been extraordinary. BBC published it first, then FOX and CBS followed by Discovery and the Washington

Post which made the effort to at least interview me. Simon allowed a Canadian TV team to put up a clip on YouTube, which last I saw was viewed 52,000 times, and lots more international media had picked it up. The thing that pissed me off though, was my own country of Australia hardly gave it a mention, yet the country of my birth Hungary, gave it a fantastic accolade.

In conclusion, can I just say that I still haven't fully accepted what I shot. It's weird I know.. but that's the reality of it!

Many thanks for your answers, Attila. It has provided a fascinating insight into an amazing image and how the scientific community works.

Attila Kaszo



Peter Rowlands
peter@uwpmag.com

Don't settle for 2nd best



Film - No Filter No
White Balance



Digital - No Filter Manual
White Balance



Magic Filter Manual
White Balance

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.

www.magic-filters.com