

Martin Edge interview

by Duncan Whittaker

In a publication like this, Martin Edge is a man who needs no introduction. Most of us will have read his book 'The Underwater Photographer' shortly after picking up our first housing and some will have attended his tuition sessions abroad or in the UK.

After judging UPY, Martin chats to UwP about taking pictures underneath the surface...

Out of everywhere you have travelled, where were your 3 favourite places for underwater photography?

1st would be Sipadan, 2nd Raja Ampat, and 3rd the Red Sea. I first went to Sipadan in the 90s when it was difficult to get to and at its prime; it is my spiritual diving home. It was a totally untouched destination. We could get the boatman to take us around the island and drop us on the schooling jacks and schooling barracuda and the turtles were everywhere. It was just the most awesome place.

Raja Ampat is unbeatable for corals and fans; it's a great place. It's a long way but worth it when you get there.

St John's caves in the southern Red Sea are great for light; some people go chasing sharks and whales and big stuff whereas I go for light. And the wrecks of Gubal in the Red Sea are very conducive towards me teaching underwater wreck photography; there are some superb intact ship wrecks that photograph very well and continue to win competitions to this day and it's great for my

clients because it's a safe environment for me to teach.

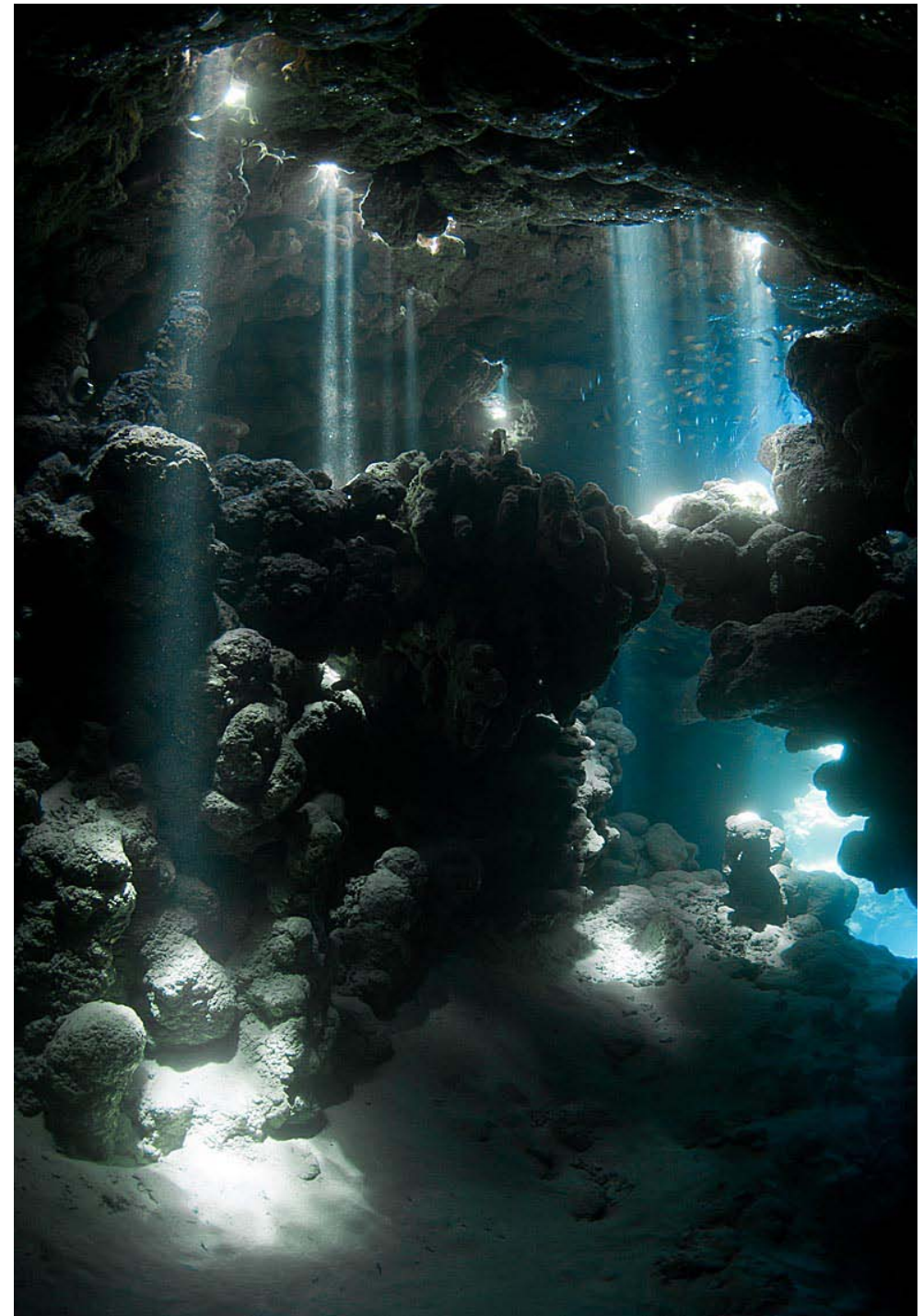
What is your favourite ever piece of photographic equipment?

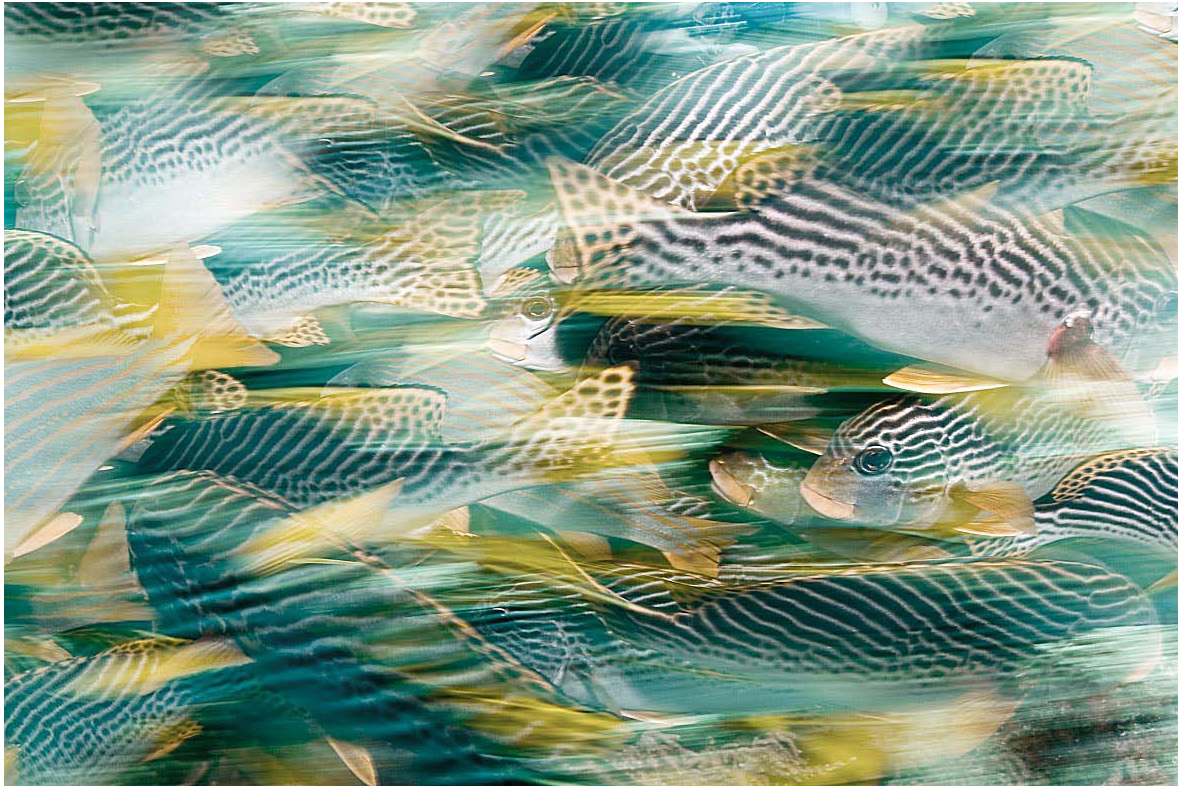
When I first started diving it was all film cameras with Nikonos lenses and one lens in particular was the Nikonos 15mm. I went to my mother and she lent me the money to buy this lens. It was the optimum wide angle lens that you could put on a Nikonos camera; very sharp and at the time very expensive. It was the lens that everybody wanted and to this day it is probably the sharpest lens that I have ever used.

When you tutor people who are completely new to underwater photography and they want to know what they should buy, what do you recommend?

First of all I ask them what budget they have and how much they want to get into underwater photography. Then they come and do a one day course with me using a swimming pool in

Edge's Cave, Red Sea. f 5.6, 1/4 sec, ISO 800, Tokina at 14mm, Subal housing, Nikon D300, Inon 220 strobes.





Slow motion blur, Loloata PNG. f8, 1/2sec, ISO 200, Subal housing, Nikon D300, Nikon 12-24mm, Inon 220 strobes.

Bournemouth. Some are very enthusiastic and want the best that money can buy and then there are other people who are on a budget.

Can you describe some of your most effective and rewarding lessons that you have delivered?

I have taught people from scratch who have not known one end of a camera from another and I had one guy who was deaf; they were rewarding. I also think back to people who saved up for the equipment they needed and then went on to be very good underwater photographers; some went on to be at the top of

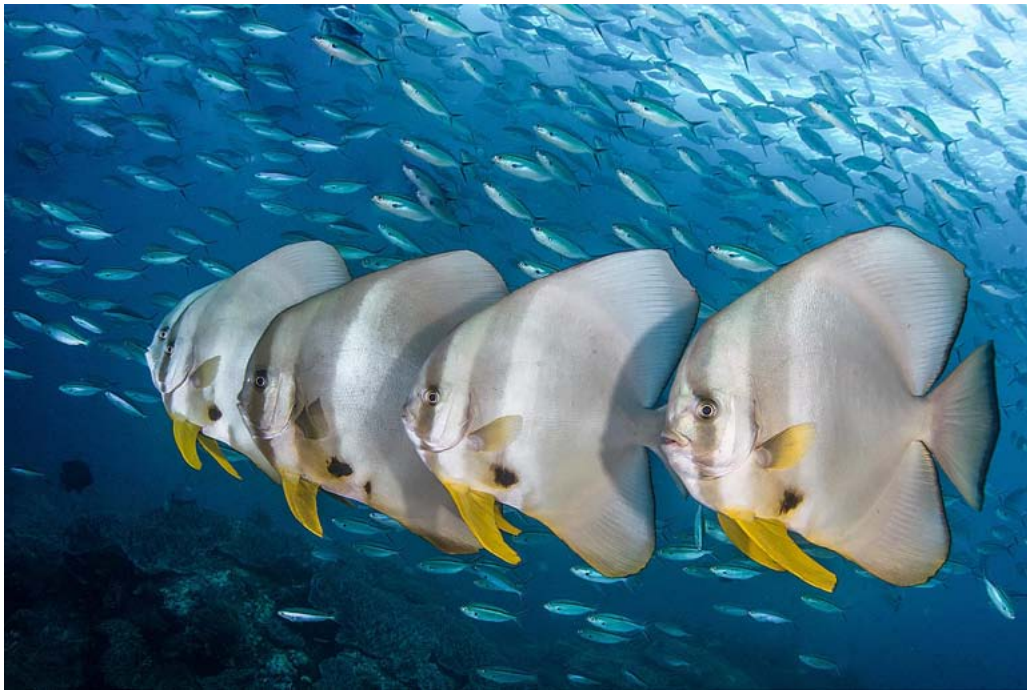
Feeding frenzy, Grand Cayman Pier. f14, 1/200th sec, ISO 100, Nikon D7000, Tokina 10mm end. Nauticam housing, Inon 220s.

the things they do and I taught them, so this is something that has been very special to me. Do you take pictures underwater?

Yes.

Well you'll have to come down to Bournemouth for the day. I would say that I can improve your photography by 5 years in one day. That's what I do with the people who come and I offer them their money back if I don't succeed. I must have taught close to 1000 people now over the last 25 years and I've never had to forego any payment!





Bat fish, Raja Ampat. f13, 1/125th sec, ISO 500, 17mm end of Tokina, Nikon D7200, Nauticam housing, Inon 220 strobes.

What is the best advice you have ever been given with regards to underwater photography?

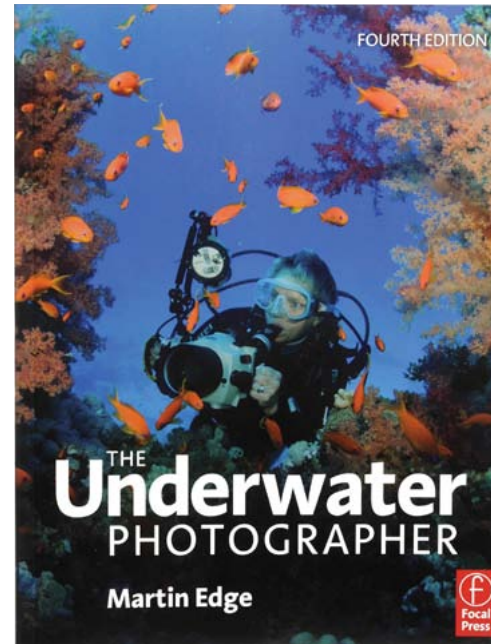
I had a couple of mentors in my early days. One of them is Peter Rowlands whose magazine you are writing for. He has always been a big influence with me and if I ever needed any advice then I would go to him and I sometimes still do to this day. And someone who died fairly recently is Peter Scoones; he's a legend and I used to seek his advice very often. One night at a BSoUP meeting, one of the main speakers didn't turn up so we had a question and answer session with Peter Scoones instead. That night, he had won

the monthly competition with a picture of light and I was fascinated with it.

During the break, I sneaked up on him and he explained to me about the time of day, the depth, and how the ripples on the water affect the light. He had a good old chin wag and I just listened and probably the next weekend I went down to Swanage Pier and tried it out.

This is something which I still use today. I met both of them through BSoUP and it was BSoUP that made me the teacher that I am today because I got to pester all of the best photographers for tips and techniques.

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Have you got any plans for a new edition of The Underwater Photographer?

Not at this moment in time but it doesn't mean that there won't be a 5th edition in the future. The only thing that has really changed in the last 4-5 years is equipment; the techniques haven't changed. With it being the 4th edition, I've had 4 goes at getting the content and explanations right so another edition at this time would probably be too similar to the 4th edition.

What trips do you have planned in the future?

I'm going out to Lembeh with a group in September and that is a macro workshop. I work exclusively for Scuba Travel and have done for over 6 years now and they are a very efficient



Yawning blenny, Dumaguete. f16, 1/320th sec, ISO 200, Nikon D7000, Nikon 105mm macro, Nauticam housing, Inon 220 strobes.

company who fulfil my needs to the letter.

Which current underwater photographers do you admire?

I think the best underwater photographer in the world at this moment in time is Alex Mustard. His forward thinking, technical knowledge, desire, and obsession to experiment with things are inspirational. The images that he produces are phenomenal.

There are the Asian photographers who specialise in ultra super duper close



Jellyfish, Cornwall, circa 1987. f22, 1/250th sec, Fujichrome 100, Nikonos 3 camera, Nikonos 15 mm wide angle lens (as discussed in interview), Oceanic 2000 strobe.

up. There's a very well known guy called Yoshi Hirata; his work is just phenomenal and I met him 20 years ago because he worked on the island of Mabul when we used to visit Sipadan. I've got a lot of respect for the work that he and some of the other Asian photographers have been doing for some time.

When you judge the UPY and Ocean Art competitions, what is it exactly that you are looking for?

I am looking for the "Wow!" factor; something that comes up and I'm just blown away. To be honest, we are getting quite a lot of that "Wow!" factor these days. Some of the stuff that I see in the competitions that I judge are just "Wow!" They are just amazing.

It's also intimidating as well to be honest and I have to ask myself, "Could I produce that quality of image?" I am fastidious towards over processing of images and I'm also a stickler towards people who insist on keeping the same aspect ratio for a crop.

There has to be an element of post processing; we often find in the competitions that people just go too far and we refer to this as "over processed." It is important to bring out the colours a little bit, bring up the contrast slightly, increase the saturation, and

crop that image to the best dimensions that please you.

Can you discuss one of your images that is particularly significant to you?

The picture of the jellyfish was a picture that changed everything for me. It was taken in 1987 and my wife Sylvia and I were in a dive club called Hamworthy Sub Aqua and we went down to the Lizard Peninsula and I was very into my photography but still had a lot to learn.

We went out diving and there were lots of jellyfish. When we got back to Porthoustock there was a jelly fish in a rock pool. On the second dive, everybody got in the inflatable to go out but I decided to stay and photograph this jelly fish in the rock pool. The kind of reaction was, "There's loads of jelly fish in the sea! Come out with us and have a dive." I went in the rock pool and took that picture. If it was in today's era then it would have gone viral because I won a lot of competitions with it. Nobody has really bettered it since; they have tried but they have never done it. The jelly fish picture made me realise that there's a difference between going diving and taking pictures.

Duncan Whittaker

Martin Edge offers 1:1 tuition with programmes tailored to meet an individual's needs and budget. He adopts a modular approach enabling photographers to select areas of specific interest and for those who want to combine teaching with practice he offers an accompanied underwater photography session in a swimming pool. Many find it helpful to determine the areas of focus after the introductory photo clinic. A typical full day programme consists of the introductory photo clinic/critique, agreed topics/teach-ins and a swimming pool session with review and basic Photoshop skills if necessary.



www.edgeunderwaterphotography.com/pages/tuition.asp

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