

Parting Shot

Australasian snapper *Pagrus auratus* (or *Chrysophrys auratus*) is perhaps the most popular fish among the fishermen and spearfishermen in New Zealand. It is a commercially important species, both for the commercial and recreational industries. The result is in the coastal areas it is more-or-less fished out. Also the fish are very shy and keep the distance from divers. One of the few places where even big snappers can be met and photographed underwater is the Goat Island marine reserve in Leigh, a bit more than an hour of driving from Auckland. Even though the fish are plentiful there, they either move too much, or keep the distance, or try to touch (read taste) the port of the camera. None of these situations help making pictures.

There are exceptions, however. In winter a couple of years ago I went for my usual shore dive in the reserve. Focused on taking pictures of small critters I entered the water. I spent about a quarter of an hour searching for anemones and nudibranchs, ignoring the fish swimming around. At some point I realized one fish was different. A big snapper was not moving much, it was just watching me. I turned my face up toward it. It started slowly swimming away. I

ignored it and turned my face back to the seabed. The snapper returned. I looked at it, it started to leave slowly again. After a couple of rounds of this behaviour I thought perhaps it wanted me to follow it. I gave up photographing macro subjects and followed the snapper through the kelp.

From time to time I stopped to photograph a small fish. The snapper stopped and waited. But never for long. If it “thought” it was waiting too long, it simply chased the fish away. After a while we got to open sandy bottom with no kelp around.

The snapper turned its face to me and waited using its pectoral fins to stay on one place. It was in perfect distance for my 60mm lens. I slowly pointed my camera to it and took a picture. Surprisingly, the fish did not move. I checked the histograms, adjusted the setting and took a picture again. The snapper was still there. I took another picture. And another. Then I tried a picture of its head from a side. Then another one. Landscape. Portrait. The fish was holding. I felt sorry for its eyes, they got exposed to so much light from my strobes.

When we both had enough the



Nikon D300 in a Sea&Sea housing with 60mm lens and 2 x Ikelite Substrobe Ai. Camera settings: manual mode, F/11.0, 1/125 s, ISO 200.

snapper turned around ... and stayed on the place. So I took a picture of its tail as well. After that I started to swim back to the shore. Now the fish was following me. It stayed with me the whole way to the beach and left only when I removed my fins and stood on the bottom.

I visited the reserve many times since that day, saw plenty of snapper, but has never had such a good photo session with one fish again.

Daniel Poloha
www.poloha.co.nz

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If so e mail it with up to 500 words of text and yours could
be the next Parting Shot.**
peter@uwpmag.com