

Mike Korostelev

by Duncan Whittaker

Mike Korostelev won International Wide Angle at the 2016 Underwater Photographer of the Year Awards with his astonishing images of the Kamchatka brown bears. Here he speaks to UWP about how such incredible images were produced.

Where exactly were the bear photos taken and do you live here?

I live in Moscow but last year for 3 months I went to Kamchatka. This is the far east of Russia; an 8 hour flight by plane from Moscow to the city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky which is located on the coast of the Pacific Ocean. From here you have to travel 2 hours by helicopter to the Kuril Lake; the place with the highest density of bears in the world! I lived at the cordon of the Kronotsky Nature Reserve on the shores of the Kuril Lake for over a month and this is where I took the photos.

How did you build the cage? Were you on your own during the photo shoot?

My friends in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky helped me to build the cage. I decided to make it before my arrival in Kamchatka so that it was ready in advance. During shooting, my wife helped me. For more than a week, the cage was on the ground and we literally lived in this cage, watching the bears around us. When the cage was in the water, I photographed the bears whilst in the water and my wife waited outside.



Were there any dangers during the shoot? Could the bears have attacked you?

There were no dangerous situations. When the cage was on the ground, the bears often came close and examined us, sniffing and looking but did not show any aggression. When the cage was in the water, the bears did not pay any attention to it; in fact they were fascinated with their fishing.



How did you know that the bears would be there?

There are a lot of bears in the area; they were just everywhere. There is a bridge near the river where I put the cage; often a lot of fish accumulated there. And almost every day, the largest male in the area came to this place for fishing.

How long did the photo shoot take in total?

Under the water I shot the bear for about 6



days. Not all days were successful. On the 7th day, there were almost no fish remaining and the bear could not catch any. Suddenly, in front of our eyes, the large male went after a young bear, killed it and then ate it. The next day he killed another. In the end, he gave up fishing in this place and it was not possible to continue shooting.

What were the main complications of the shoot?

The main difficulty was to take a photograph of a bear from a distance of no more than one meter between the bear and my lens. I needed such a

small distance because in the water I use a wide angle lens. I attached my camera to a long pole which made it possible to take a picture from this required distance.

Another difficulty was that nobody had done anything like this before and therefore we did not know how the bear would react to our actions. After all, I put a huge camera with flashes in front of a very large and dangerous animal. He could have behaved aggressively towards me or become scared and moved away from us. But to our delight, the bear did not pay any attention to me and continued to fish as he usually did.



How did you attach the camera to the pole and how did you operate the shutter button?

The camera was attached using metal wire and the shutter was always pressed; the camera was set to non-stop shooting.

Where did you sleep during the shoot?

We spent the night in tents on the territory of the cordón Reserve surrounded by an electric fence.

Out of everywhere you have ever been, where were your favourite 5 locations for underwater photography? What

was it that impressed you about these locations?

My favorite places where I have been are:

- 1) South Africa (Cape Town)
A lot of different species of sharks. Seals. Penguins.
- 2) Galapagos Islands
Many endemic animals. Marine iguanas, huge whale sharks, thousands of hammerhead sharks, sea lions.
- 3) South Africa (wild coast).
A lot of different species of sharks. And of course the Sardine Run; the best nature action in the world!



4) Maldives Islands

I have found a very interesting place here with many whale sharks and mantas. I visit this place twice per year with anybody who wants to join me.

4) Kamchatka.

Absolutely wild place with great potential for underwater photography. Whales, Orcas, Sea Lions, Sea otters, salmon and many-many other animals in the water.

Which destination was the most disappointing for underwater photography?

I believe that in any situation

you can make an interesting picture. It all depends on the imagination of the photographer. Failure is only stimulated to success in this journey.

I'm usually lucky in events during underwater shooting. Probably most of my unsuccessful underwater trips were on the Sardine Run in South Africa but this is just a reason to go back there again.

If you were to explore one more location for underwater photography, where would you explore?

It is North of Russia. Chukotka, for example. Many white bears and walrus wait for me there in cold

waters I think.

Throughout the years, what have been your favourite pieces of equipment for underwater photography?

I have one camera; a Canon 5D Mark II which I started to shoot underwater in 2013 and I have one Ikelite housing for it. Under the water I used to have only one lens; the Canon 17-40. However, I recently added a Canon 8-15 to my arsenal.

I'm not one of those photographers who pray to their cameras and lenses, cleaning every speck of dust and hair off them. I do not keep track of any new cameras and lenses. The camera, for me, is just a technical means of shooting; it is not a divine artifact. So I always have everything in the sand, scratches on the lens, and often dust on the sensor. I always lose lens caps in the first week after purchase.

Which other underwater photographers do you admire?

Paul Nicklen is the best. I have never met him but his works showed me that impossible projects do not exist. If you want to shoot something then you will do it.

What 3 pieces of advice would you give

to new underwater photographers?

Always include your imagination. Always go your own way and not the way of hundreds of other photographers. Do not shoot everything under water but seek your own style and direction.

What projects do you have planned for the future?

I plan to return to Kamchatka this summer and continue underwater photography of bears. Also I want to dive with orcas in Kamchatka this year. There are a lot of orcas in this region.

Which species would you love to photograph underwater but never have done?

Steller's sea cow. But I need a time machine for this project; unfortunately they were completely destroyed in the 18th century.

Thank you for your time and fascinating information.

Duncan Whittaker

Small ads



SOLD! – Ikelite housing for a Canon 5D MKII

Ikelite housing for a Canon 5D MKII, Ikelite 8" dome port (no scratches) for a Canon fish eye lens, Ikelite ports Canon 17-40mm and a macro 100mm IS lens. I am based in Scarborough, U.K. £1100 ovnoroaminrobin@hotmail.com

Your advert could be here instead for just £5.00



For sale – extrem'vision(up to 100 m!!) and video camera sony vx 2000

I'm selling a fantastic underwater housing extrem'vision(up to 100 m!!) and video camera sony vx 2000 in really good condition!!!coming with a pelican case!!!!The underwater housing is coming with :- 2 lenses (1 macro and 1 wide angle) - 1 red filter. - 2 set of o'rings - Sillicon for the o'rings. - Digital screen.The sony camera vx 2000 is coming with : - A set of batteries (2 large,i medium,1 small) - 5 new dv tapes. - 2 cleaning tapes.Extrem'vision is a French Brand known worldwide.it's strong,reliable and easyto repair if any problems....REALLY GOOD CONDITION!!!2000 euros!!!!!!fabien mouret

Email: maddox666@gmail.com [Ref:c147]



SOLD! – Subtronic Nova analog version no ttl converter

Subtronic Nova analog version no ttl converter

The strobe is 3 years old in good condition

All sockets in S6

800-€

Rudolf Sellböck

Ref C146

Your advert could be here instead for just £5.00



For sale – Aquatica housing 5D, 8 inch dome, dome shade and canon 5D body

Aquatica housing 5D, 8 inch dome, dome shade and canon 5D body including 2 spare batteries and spare charger for sale £1600 + p&p.Housing:Aquatica 5D housing - good to 90m, 8" optical acrylic dome port – some minor scratches but not visible in photos, 8" dome shade / guard, for wide angle lenses, Spare O ringCameraCanon 5D, 3 Batteries, 2 Chargers, StrapAll for £1600+ p&p, will accept paypal, or cashPlease feel free to ask any questionThe equipment has not been used for a while but I have just upgraded to a canon 5D mark II package so have this for sale.I am based in London and if you wish to come round and have a look/examine the equipment prior to parting with your money we can arrange that.

Email: martin.abela@hotmail.co.uk [Ref:c145]

Sell your stuff You'll be amazed at just how quickly your unwanted underwater photography kit could be converted into hard cash with a UwP small ad. You can have your own UwP small ad for just £5.00 and it can have one photo as well as up to 100 words.

Check out small ads
here

Buy your small ad
here