



The Pick Of The Bunch

SCOTTISH DIVER regular Gordon McSkimming

talks us through what's good at the moment in the world of underwater photography books ...

LET'S START this multiple review with two important points. Firstly you will not learn how to take good underwater photographs by reading or viewing the images in any of the following books, underwater photography is a practical skill usually built up progressively. It typically involves persistence and frustration interrupted by the occasional bout of joy when a photograph comes out as planned. Secondly unlike land based photographers you cannot consult handbooks 'in the field' unfortunately you will find that ultimately they will dissolve.

What the books will do is accelerate your progress towards achieving a higher success rate with your underwater photography. The authors have already been quite persistent and by following their usually well founded guidance you can short-cut much of the frustration.

As for taking books 'into the field' there is a serious slant to this comment particularly for beginners. In lieu of a book note down a few prompts, ideas, settings etc on to a plastic slate and take it with you.

Useful underwater photography books fall into two categories those which tell you how to do it and those big glossy books (coffee table books?)

which present a portfolio of frequently stunning images. The former are probably the first port of call and obvious choice for beginners but some of the latter are of equal importance.

1 HOW TO DO IT BOOKS

A DIVERS GUIDE TO THE ART OF UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY

Andrea & Antonella Ferrari
ISBN 978-983-2731-02-3
Published by Nautilus
Amazon: £24.99

HAVING PREVIOUSLY encountered the images captured by this husband and wife team from Italy I did not hesitate to purchase their new book when it appeared on Amazon earlier this year. I would describe the book as a thinking diver's guide to underwater photography. This is not a book full of equipment lists or blow by blow procedures rather it allows a view of the underwater photographer's mindset and uses this to highlight both essentials and pitfalls. It is awash with relevant information to the extent that you may read bits of it a few times over just in case you have missed something important.

There are 8 chapters each with a thought provoking title:

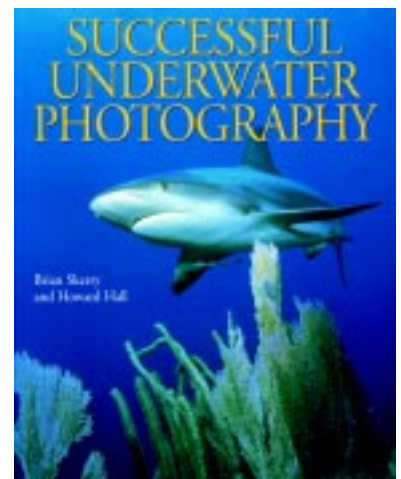
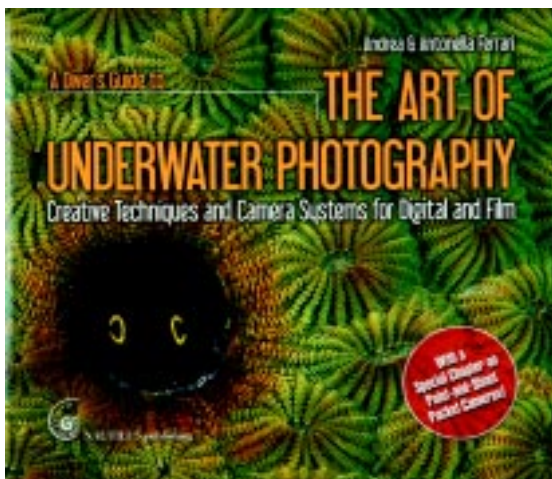
- 1 The Sword and the Hand;
- 2 Zen and the Art of Underwater Photography;
- 3 Framing and Lighting;
- 4 Soaring in the Blue;
- 5 Targets of Opportunity;
- 6 Macro Magic;
- 7 Wide Angle Wonders;
- 8 Topside Training.

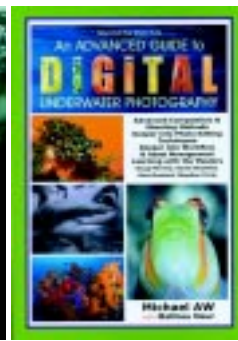
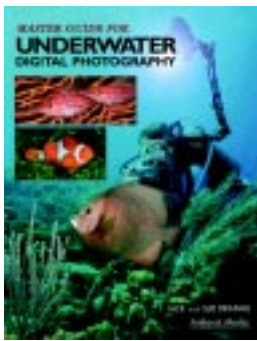
To give a broader reach to their book the Ferraris have included work from 19 guest photographers of varying nationalities. Each image provided by the guests is accompanied by a short description of how and where it was captured.

Two possible shortcomings of the book - firstly there are few images taken from colder, murkier northern waters - a standard issue with all underwater photography books and one which may never be addressed.

The second is an occasional aberration in the translation from Italian which may bother some. Personally I feel that the underlying message is strong enough to reduce the translation issues to an appropriate level of insignificance.

I would strongly recommend this publication to underwater photographers of any experience level.





BIG GLOSSY BOOKS

THE RATIONALE behind consulting a book of stunning underwater images apart from simple pleasure is to understand how the photographer achieved his or her result. When viewing an image that appeals to them photographers with moderate experience should be able to work out approximately how the image was lit, what sort of lens was used, even a rough estimate of shutter speed and aperture settings may be possible. This knowledge allows replication of the original photographer's style and technique to be applied when a suitable opportunity presents itself.

BEYOND THE ESSENTIALS AN ADVANCED GUIDE TO DIGITAL UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY
Michael Aw with Mathieu Meur
ISBN 1-87638108-6
Published by Michael Aw
Aquapress: £12.99

THIS IS THE follow up to *An Essential Guide to Digital Underwater Photography* by the same authors. It is very much a reference book aimed at taking the digital photography newcomer away from the 'point and press' world and into an environment which includes such topics as colour space, bit depth and DAM (digital asset management).

When I first picked up this book I thought that it did not give adequate coverage of some important areas but I have since revised my opinion. Essentially the book seeds the ground for those wishing to learn more about digital underwater photography and is good value for money.

Rather than chapters the book is divided into five modules as follows:
Module 1 Advanced Digital Essentials
Module 2 Advanced Techniques
Module 3 Learning with the Masters
Module 4 Workflow & Asset Management
Module 5 Return on Investment

A broad spectrum of good advice is supplied throughout with module 3 providing input from four additional photographers. Where appropriate, photographs are supplemented by captions giving technical details of equipment and methods used. An interesting and useful checklist of 'how to do' features is included at the beginning of the book.

I do have misgivings about Module 5, which covers image sales, competitions and ultimately a plug for other books by the author. I do not think that this section was essential to the success of this publication. A properly compiled index would have been more useful.

For those ready to move their photography forward from simply taking snapshots this book is bang up to date and provides sound advice at the right price.

Before I move on you might also consider the following three books.

MASTER GUIDE FOR UNDERWATER DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY
Jack & Sue Drafa
ISBN 1-58428-166-9
Published by Amherst Media
Amazon: £16.49
Aquapress: £24.99

A good publication for those starting off with housed compact cameras.

SUCCESSFUL UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY
Brian Skerry & Howard Hall
ISBN 0-8174-5927-8
Published by Amphoto Books
Amazon: £11.44
Aquapress: £18.95

This is the third edition of arguably the best 'how to' underwater photography book to be published. Unfortunately it just pre-dated the ascendance of digital but it is still worth every penny of the Amazon price tag.

ADOBE PHOTOSHOP FOR UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHERS
Jack & Sue Drafa
ISBN 1-58428-189-8
Published by Amherst Media
Amazon: £18.74
Aquapress: £29.99

As the title suggests this book provides guidance in the use of Adobe's famous application with an underwater photography bias. If you are already up to speed with Photoshop see the book before deciding to purchase. If you are a relative newcomer to the world of Photoshop then this book will be very useful however you should be aware that you could purchase any one of a number of much larger and very comprehensive Photoshop 'bibles' for the same price.

WILD SEAS SECRET SHORES OF AFRICA
Thomas P. Peschak
ISBN 978 1 77007 590 0
Published by Struik
Amazon: £11.89

This publication is most certainly not a coffee table book; informative text is supported by images showing a refreshing diversity of subject, style and technique. As the title indicates all of the images come from the coastline of Africa. There are six main chapters: Secret Shores; Cold Seas; Warm Seas; Seabirds; Blue Wilderness and Close Encounters.

The book is set off by the front cover image of a shark, mouth agape and turning towards the photographer. This image is astounding and has a dramatic impact. Beyond the covers there are many more images of large marine animals, a few close ups and crucially some of the onshore life including people are also on display. As a marine biologist the author has been able to provide words which integrate well with his images and which are laced with factual information.

Of particular value to underwater photographers are the last few pages where a series of thumbnails repeating every image in the book are provided. This time the author supplies very useful information detailing the capture of each image.

Finally it is worth noting that a photograph by the author gained top place in the Nature in Black and White category of last year's BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition.

This book is a good read and the photography is way above average to the extent that it would provide food for thought and inspiration to any underwater photographer.

Err on the side of caution if you intend to buy a 'coffee table' book as a means of improving your underwater photography, there are some fairly average and not always cheap publications out there. Books by David Doubilet, Roger Steene and Christopher Newbert are certainly worth considering.

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Wet Bell (top-up) - 17th November
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