Photography Made Easy

Well maybe a little easier ...

Jack Morrison and Gordon McSkimming, the Butch Cassidy and Sundance Kid of the Scottish underwater photography world, kick off a new series of tips with a comparison between a compact camera and a heavy duty Digital SLR ...

FOR A LONG time now I have been intending to start a photography column; indeed a few years ago I did, and after the first article I abandoned the idea. At the time I, like most people, was using film and I very quickly realised that digital was about to revolutionise photography.

The impact of digital on underwater photography was enormous as manufacturers of digital compact cameras were quick to see the potential for added value by producing cheap plastic housings for their cameras. Although relatively cheap they were, if you looked after them, pretty good and as long as you were happy not to take them deeper than 30m they provided a easy way to record what you saw on dives.

However I think it would be fair to say while some people got the hang of using them others found the whole experience difficult and disappointing. That's why we think the time is right to see if we can help you get the most out of your camera whatever make or model it is.

Who are we? I'm Jack Morrison, editor of **SCOTTISH DIVER** since 1998. Four years before I became editor I met Gordon MacSkimming and after discovering a common interest in underwater photography we became regular dive buddies. We have experience of both film and digital and since the advent of digital have both had formal training in Photoshop.

Hopefully this makes us a useful resource to the increasing number of divers who are carrying a camera. We would like this to work on a Q&A basis, you ask the questions we provide the answers and if we don't know the answer we're sure to know someone who does.

Of course capturing a digital image is just the start, with film there was very little you could do after the event but now given the right software there is scope for considerable improvement of the original image. However one of the most important lessons you can learn is not to over manipulate your picture, but wait I'm getting ahead of myself I'm answering a question that hasn't been asked yet. Let's wait till you start asking before we start answering.

How do you ask a question? Well we've set up an email address at photoqa@scotsac.com which will go to both Gordon and I, or you could drop a postcard to HQ where Hazel and Sharon will forward it to me. Better still approach us in person if you see us at a dive site.

I should at this point let you know the sort of equipment we use, I have a digital compact with two external flashguns and Gordon has a Digital SLR and a selection of external flashguns to cover a diversity of circumstances.

In this issue we have decided to show two examples that demonstrate how little difference there can be between a DSLR and a compact The task we set ourselves was to produce an image that would work as the front cover of a magazine. To be credible we chose to shoot the same subject, a conger in Loch Fyne, on the same dive.

Camera	**Nikon D2X, Subal Housing**
Lens	**60mm Macro**
Flash	**Inon Quad, Full Power**
Aperture	**F 13**
Shutter Speed	**1/250**
ISO Sensitivity	**100**
White Balance	**Flash**
Pixel Dimensions	**2848 x 4288**
Original Format	**RAW**

THE INTENDED use as a magazine front cover immediately dictates a strong image in the portrait format with space for the editor to insert a title plus additional text. By using a 60 mm macro lens I was able to get a large amount of subject into the frame while minimising the amount of water between lens and subject, crucial given the poor visibility on the day.

Even lighting was achieved using the Quad flash which consists of four flash tubes mounted in a circle around the edge of the housing port. This flash system intended for macro work is very good at directing the light into rock fissures without over exposing the surrounding rock surface.

A number of shots were taken each time waiting for the conger to open its mouth. The manual flash exposure value was determined by first doing a couple of test shots on a nearby piece of rock.

Post processing was carried out using Nikon Capture for the RAW conversion and then a minimal level of capture sharpening and a 20% cooling filter applied in Photoshop. The image was saved as a TIFF file and converted to a highest quality JPEG to be passed to the magazine.

Finally a problem that we have in Scottish waters is the abundance of small calcareous tube worms. They have intense white tubes and I cannot think of anything else in the natural world that reflects light more efficiently. In our images they appear as 'burnt out highlights', in layman's terms 'muckle great white blobs'. In this image they appear on the rock above the conger and I judged that they were not intense enough to worry about. They can be removed or their intensity diminished during processing.

Gordon McSkimming

Camera	**Fuji finepix F810**
Lens	**Fujinon at 7.2mm**
Flash	**2xSea&Sea YS90DX**
Aperture	**F 8**
Shutter Speed	**1/200 sec**
ISO Sensitivity	**100**
White Balance	**Auto**
Pixel Dimensions	**2139x2848**
Original Format	**RAW**

ONE OF THE advantages of a compact camera is just that, it's compact, so you can push it closer to the subject because you are composing the picture on the LCD screen and not through the viewfinder. On this occasion getting physically closer allowed me to use the lens at a wider setting about the equivalent of a 28mm lens on a DSLR. Of course when you are this close, about 30cm, you need to switch on the close-up facility. This is a usually a button with an icon that looks like a tulip or flower and it lets the camera focus down to around 7cm.

The two flashguns are pulled in close to the camera and pointed straight forward like headlights they have 12 power settings and you turn down the power the closer you get to the subject. Just like Gordon test exposures were taken on nearby rocks to get it right that way you can then concentrate on composition.

Again lots of exposures were made in an attempt to get one with the mouth open. Using this wider approach gives a view that shows more of the conger's habitat but makes it smaller in the frame.

My post production was done first in Adobe Bridge which allows me to browse the files and get rid of the rubbish before moving on to improving them. I then open them in Adobe Camera Raw where I first check if the image is sharp then tweak the exposure. Finally in ACR I save it as a TIFF file. In Photoshop I'll adjust the levels and take out any blemishes etc using either the healing brush tool or the stamp tool. Lastly I'll sharpen the image and convert it to a JPEG and send it to the magazine.

Gordon has pointed out the problem caused by white worm tubes and that in his picture he has decided they are not intrusive and don't detract from the image. Just to show the difference I have removed them from my picture, although normally I too would leave them in.

Jack Morrison