

Underwater Photography

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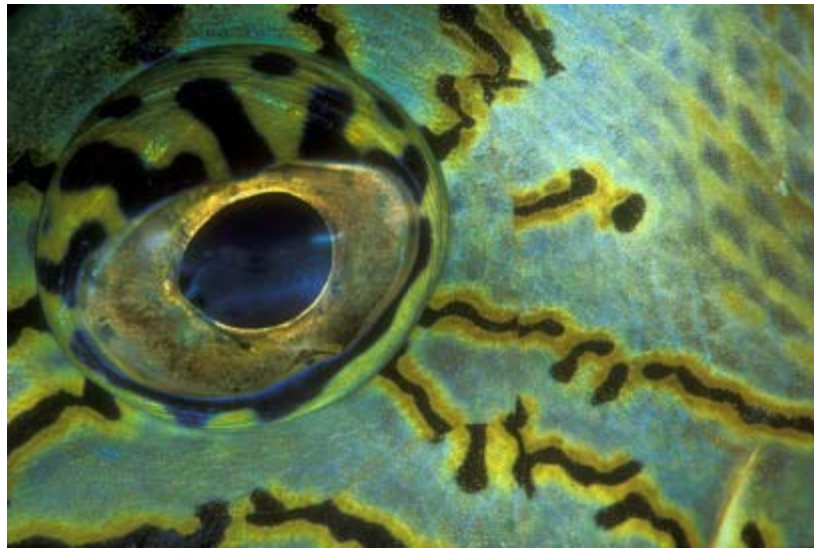


Turks & Caicos

Wides & Macros

by Bernardo Sambra

Not being able to change lenses underwater is at times very frustrating. Few things in life anguish me more than when I come out of the water, with an empty tank, no film in the camera, desperate to get back in and facing the difficult situation of deciding what lens to fit for my next dive. As strange as it may sound, I live in a constant desire for this anguish. I would love it to be a permanent state of mind. In a perfect world each dive site would offer such a variety of species, light and forms that it would constantly place me in the dilemma of deciding what equipment to take down. Even better, wouldn't it be great if the situation forced me to dive with two cameras simultaneously. Unfortunately, few places in the Caribbean have made me



Queen Trigger Fish eye (balistes vetula). Nexus F100 Housing + 105mm + 2 Sea&Sea YS-120 Duo strobes both on TTL. 1/90@ f22. Velvia 50.

feel this way, were I have to plan everything so meticulously that I don't miss out on anything from the huge offering before me. These places are scarce, but one of them must surely be the Turks & Caicos.

The Turks & Caicos archipelago ("Turks" comes from the type of cactuses abundant in these islands and "Caicos" meaning island chain) is situated in the middle of the Caribbean just north of the island of Hispaniola and a mere hour

and a half flight from Miami. The Columbus Passage, a 19 miles wide channel reaching depths of 7,000 feet, runs between both island groups. Providenciales or "Provo" as it's locally known, is the point of arrival and thus houses most of the tourist population. From Provo one can reach the remaining 7 inhabited islands or any other of the solitary beaches and keys distributed in a 190 square miles area. Providenciales, East Caicos, Middle Caicos, West Caicos, North Caicos, South Caicos,



Old boat in French Key. Nexus Master Housing + 16mm. Natural light. 1/125 @ f8. Provia 100



*Horse Eye Jacks
(caranx latus) school.
Nexus Master
Housing + 20mm + 2
strobes Sea&Sea YS-
120 Duo on manual,
full power. 1/90 @
f5.6. Velvia 50.*

*Caribbean reef shark
(carcharhinus perezii)
in movement. Nexus
Master Housing +
20mm + 2 strobes
Sea&Sea YS-120 Duo
on manual, full power.
1/15 @ f5.6. Velvia 50.*



Salt Key and Grand Turk are, from a diving point of view a varied mixture of options which at the end of the day can create problems when deciding where to dive. Making any choice will always leave you wondering if it was the correct one or not. However, most of the diving hot-spots are concentrated on the western part of the archipelago around Providenciales, West Caicos and the tiny French Key.

Although I had read numerous accounts on the wonders of the Turks and Caicos in books, magazines and the web, I remained skeptical on my way there, remembering many trips to the Caribbean which simply did not live up to my expectations of the quest for the anguish I've already told you about. Well, I was happily proven wrong. These islands satisfied my longing and

enabled me to channel it through my camera thanks to the infinite wealth of imagery the place has to offer.

Wide side

One of the main goals of this trip was to capture on film the well known sharks of French Key. This small island lies 40 kilometers south of Providenciales and it made me realize why the Turk & Caicos should be seriously considered as an alternative Caribbean underwater photography destination. Underwater visibility can reach an incredible 200 feet and the diversity of diving options is excellent. Places like Double-D, Rock & Roll or G Spot can satisfy the most demanding

underwater photographer. Right from the first dip in these warm waters, I found myself surrounded by large Caribbean reef sharks reaching more than 7 feet in length and was able to shoot them with my entire collection of lenses at different times of the day. Spotted eagle rays, huge schools of jacks, bottle nose dolphins, scalloped hammerheads and



Turks & Caicos gin-clear water sometimes reach amazing 200 feet of visibility. Nexus Master Housing + 20mm + 2 strobes Sea&Sea YS-120 Duo on manual, half power. 1/60 @ f8. Velvia 50.

less frequently tiger sharks all enact this vast underwater spectacle and help remind us that leaving the wide angle lens on shore is nothing less than a mortal sin.

Many are the wonders of the Turks & Caicos



Yellow line arrow crab (stenorhynchus seticornis) . Nexus F100 Housing + 105mm + 2 Sea&Sea YS-120 Duo strobes on TTL. 1/60@ f22. Velvia 50.

but their main attraction and surely their hallmark must be the huge humpback whales (Megaptera novaeangliae) which abound in these waters during the months of January and February. During this time of the year, these wonderful creatures have just completed their 40.000 miles migration from the



Trumpet Fish (alostomus maculates). Nexus F100 Housing + 105mm + 1 strobe Sea&Sea YS-120 Duo + 1 strobe Sea&Sea YS60N both on TTL. 1/60@ f22. Velvia 50.

gelid waters of Greenland to Silver Banks, near Grand Turk. Many people from different parts of the world come for the chance to dive and photograph these spectacular cetaceans in their natural habitat.

Macro point of view

At this point it could sound ludicrous to leave the wide angle lens behind, but believe me, it is at times a wise decision. The waters around these islands also harbor large quantities of corals and invertebrate species. The reefs which surround West Caicos and French Key contain colorful varieties of sponges, sea fans, giant elephant ear sponges, impressive stands of pillar and elkhorn coral, dramatic gorgonian fans, barrel sponges, diverse reef fishes and a range of exotically shaped invertebrates.

Spotted Drum Juvenile (equetus punctatus) a magnificent subject to test the uw photographers' patience. This fish moves very fast in front of the lens making auto focus goes crazy. Using pre set manual focus is a good decision. Nexus F100 Housing + 105 mm + + 1 strobe Sea&Sea YS-120 Duo + 1 strobe Sea&Sea YS60N both on TTL. 1/200@ f22. Velvia 50.



The need for a lens with extreme macro capabilities becomes paramount if we wish to capture the incredible forms and chromatic expressions which seek refuge in the reef. Miniscule decorator crabs, tiny red night shrimps, long-horn nudibranchs and the spectacular juvenile spotted drum fish will all make sure we quickly finish our film stocks. Underwater night life in these waters deserves special attention and it is perhaps during these hours that most of the macro photographic activity should be performed. A careful inspection of a mere 160 square feet of reef will easily make us empty our oxygen tanks and run out of film in our cameras.

If we are interested in maximizing our time in the water in select sites when photographing an archipelago, then the best option is a live-aboard. About 20 dive operators are to be found on the Turks & Caicos

mostly around Provo including an excellent live-aboard vessel: The Aggressor, perfectly fitted out for the underwater photographer.

Turks & Caicos is still relatively unspoilt. Large hotels and tourist hordes invading beaches and reefs are non-existent. The islands have experienced a relatively late inclusion on the international diving circuit so we can find parts of the shore which are relatively intact to this day. Let us hope that the authorities realize the value of developing careful management plans as regards tourism and take effective conservation



*The brand new Turks and Caicos Aggressor II vessel.
Photo courtesy of Aggressor Fleet, Ltd.*

measures for the reefs.

As a farewell note, I just have to remind the reader that the magnificent diversity to be found in the seas of the Turk & Caicos alone, will not guide us to that desired sense of anguish. To get there, we literally need the assistance of an excellent dive operator who will conduct us to the special sites, those which house the treasures of marine life and the wonders of the underwater landscape.

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