

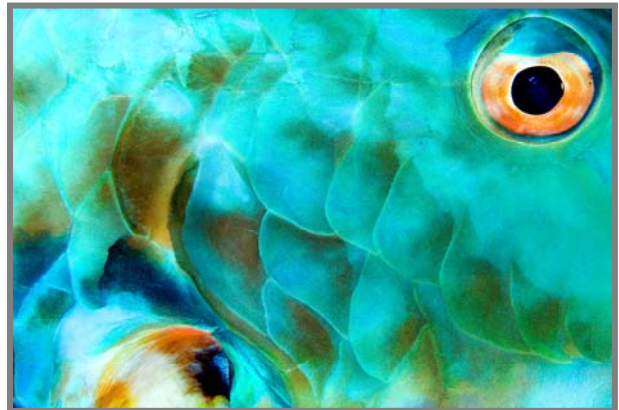
I Love the Night Life...

Taking Advantage of Great Photo Opportunities While Night Diving

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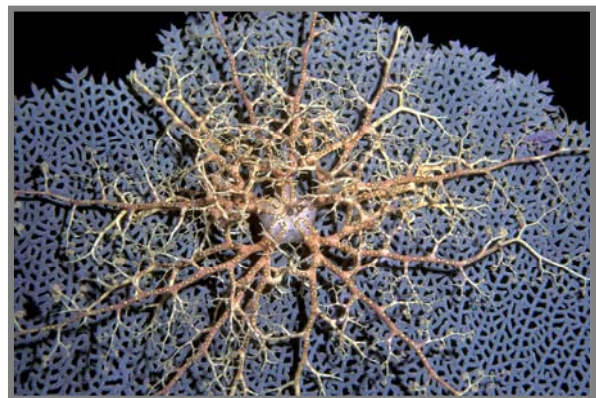
New York City is known as the “city that never sleeps” and on South Beach the party doesn’t start until after midnight. If you have ever been to either of these two great places you are keenly aware that the type of people you see on street at mid-day are not the same type of people you see at midnight. The same can be said for coral reefs, if you only dive during the day you are only seeing half of the reef.

Once the sun goes down life on the reef begins to change; the brightly colored daytime fish look for crevices to hide for the night. Hard corals that used the sun for photosynthesis now have to open and extend their polyps to try and capture a meal floating by. Under the cover of darkness octopus feel safe to come out and roam the reef, basket stars extend their beautifully intricate arms and small crabs come out to forage for an easy meal. At night it’s a different reef with an abundance of unique photo opportunities.



Night diving will give you the opportunity to photograph fish that during the day refuse to hold still. At night many of these fish can be found sleeping under ledges or in the case of parrotfish, a mucous cocoon. This is an excellent occasion to take your time, get close and bracket your shots. You also have the chance to create some very unique abstract images by capturing the colorful details in the fins of a parrotfish or scales of a hogfish.

Typically, for this type of shooting I like to use a 60mm or 105mm macro lens on my digital SLR. At night there are very few occasions where I would try to shoot with a wide-angle lens. The absence of any ambient light will mean your images will have a black background that is easily ruined when you strobes illuminate the suspended particles in the water column. Backscatter on a black background is very distracting and at night very hard to minimize even in the clearest of water. That is why I recommend that you put away the wide-angle and use your favorite macro or fish lens.

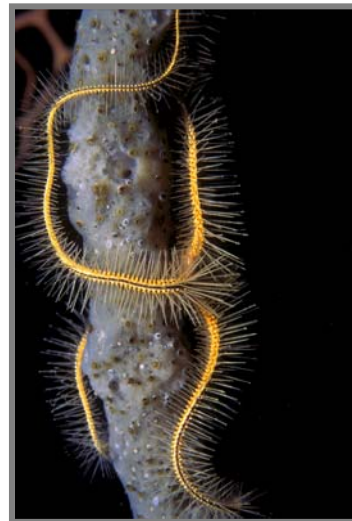


Of course with night diving light is an essential ingredient. Not only do you have to light your images but you will need light to find your way and also for safety. As a photographer you have to find a lighting solution that fits with your equipment and how you dive. Photographers that use a point and shoot camera in a small housing with a small strobe and are able to shoot with

one hand can simply use their freehand to hold their light. Another effective solution is to use a light that can be attached to your mask, in this way you are assured the light is always pointed in the same direction you are looking in.

If your camera rig is large and requires that you use both hands to shoot or require that you look through a viewfinder you will need to find a different lighting solution. Some camera housings allow the photographer the capability to mount a small light on the housing. This is method especially effective at ensuring that there is light on the subject which in turn will help your focusing. If your housing is capable to have a light mounted on it, there are several strobe arm vendors that have connectors that make it easy to attach a small light to the strobe arm.

One photographer I know fashioned a neoprene sock that fit over the body of the strobe. This “strobe” sock had a pocket that could hold a small light that could be used to help light the subject and ensure that the strobe was pointed correctly. Other solutions that I have seen that are effective include using duct tape, rubber bands or plastic ties to strap a small light to a strobe. Unfortunately these low-tech solutions don’t always work and sometimes have tendency to fall apart underwater.



There are some strobes on the market that have built in modeling lights. I have seen many photographers use their strobes’ modeling light was their primary dive light. It is a simple solution however you have to consider how the increase in battery consumption will affect the number of flashes your strobe is capable of. In any case regardless of how you approach use a dive light you should always have a backup. Having a backup will save your shoot in the event that your primary light fails and of course makes good safety sense.

It is important to remember that many of the creatures you find at night are out because it is dark. Shining you bright light directly at them even for a short period of time could cause them to begin to retreat or close. On night dives I like to remind my buddy that I appreciate his help finding and lighting all the cool critters on reef but if he is not careful he is going to scare them all away. I only need a small amount of light to see and focus my camera, so I try to always only use the outer edges of my dive light’s beam rather than the center.

Night diving is a lot of fun and you have a chance to see a part of the reef that seldom seen. Just be aware that at night your visibility is reduced and there are still creatures on the reef that could hurt you unintentionally. Take your time as you move along the reef and remember to look around before you settle on the bottom to take a picture. Soon you will see why night diving is a favorite of many photographers.