

BASICS OF BETTER UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY

PHOTOGRAPHING ANIMALS



OPTICAL OCEAN SALES
UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY EQUIPMENT

CAPTURE THE BEAUTY AND WONDERMENT

Mysterious underwater creatures exist.
Capturing these interactions fuels the
imagination and inspires creativity.



WIDE ANGLE AND MACRO

- ▶ Wide angle is best for big animals, groups of fish, animal interaction and the larger animal in its environment.
- ▶ Macro is for details or close-ups and little creatures.



PHOTOGRAPH

ANIMALS UNDERWATER

Four things come into play:

- ▶ **LUCK**
- ▶ **KNOWLEDGE**
- ▶ **PATIENCE**
- ▶ **SKILL**



LUCK & KNOWLEDGE

- ▶ Many times it is sheer **luck** when you find the animals you want to see...
- ▶ But also, to improve your chance of good luck, you need the **knowledge** of where specific animals are likely to be.



HAVING LUCK

FINDING ANIMALS

So, in general the whole “being lucky” thing is out of your control, it is being in the “right place at the right time”, right? Not exactly...





TRY IMPROVING YOUR LUCK

- ▶ **Stay aware of your surroundings.**
- ▶ **Keep your eyes open** – not only looking at the small part of reef you are next to, but look around regularly.
 - Where other divers are
 - Over peaks and valleys
 - In cracks and under ledges
 - Don't forget to look out into the blue

You never know what you might find!

KNOWLEDGE AND BEING PREPARED

Preparing yourself with as much knowledge as possible before jumping in the water can help you to “be in the right place at the right time”.





DO RESEARCH

TO GAIN KNOWLEDGE

Look into the types of animals that you would like to see the most.

- ▶ **What do they feed on**
- ▶ **When are they the most active**
- ▶ **How do they mate**
- ▶ **What is their habitat**
- ▶ **Usual depth they are at**
- ▶ **Best time of year**

There is a lot of information that is readily available, so take advantage of it.

GET HELP

KNOWLEDGEABLE GUIDE

Using a dive guide that is very familiar with the area is also a good idea. Let him or her know what you want to see ahead of time and many times they can make it happen.



PATIENCE & SKILL

- ▶ Many situations or types of creatures where you need quite a bit of **patience** like waiting for shy animals to emerge or big animals to swim by.
- ▶ Once you have those things, you need the photography and diving **skill** to be able get a great shot.



PATIENCE

EASY-GOING ATTITUDE

Patience and an easy-going attitude are extremely important when it comes to photographing underwater creatures.



MORE PATIENCE

CALM & COLLECTED

Not only do you need to have patience with the animals you wish to photograph, you need to have patience with other divers that might be around. Remaining calm and collected will get you the best results in both cases.





EVEN MORE PATIENCE

WAIT & OBSERVE

This is also where your newly acquired animal behavior knowledge comes in. Animals will often repeat behaviors, so spend some time watching.

- ▶ **Does it repeat a pattern?**
- ▶ **Does it open its mouth?**
- ▶ **Is it territorial?**
- ▶ **Does it have a mate?**

If you know the behaviors you'd like to see, or know that there is a shy animal hiding from you, sometimes you have to just hunker down, **wait** and **observe**.

ARE YOU READY TO MOVE IN CLOSER?

Be relaxed. Move in slowly to keep from spooking the animal. Breathe calmly and approach with your camera up and ready.



SHOOT LOTS AND LOTS OF PHOTOS!

Shooting underwater is much more challenging than shooting on land, especially at first. Then add animal behavior and motion – you have lots of challenges.

Taking a large volume of images also allows you to experiment with your lighting, composition and camera settings.



#1 SKILL

DIVING ABILITY

Your first priority for underwater photography is obtaining excellent in-water skills.

- ▶ **Buoyancy** needs to be mastered in order to get nicely composed images. Also, more importantly, if you are not in control of your body, you pose a threat to the environment or yourself.
- ▶ **Technical skills** of your diving need to be completely comfortable and well tuned, so you do not experience a **loss of time**. Underwater photography is exciting, so it's very easy to lose track of time—which can be very hazardous.





#2 SKILL

PHOTOGRAPHY

Practice Above Water: Learn your camera before you get in the water, so that you don't end up fumbling around trying to figure it out and miss that huge manta ray that just swam by! Remember, you can't get the manual out at 80'!

- ▶ **Try all the settings & modes**
- ▶ **Try macro & wide angle**
- ▶ **Learn buttons by feel & placement**
- ▶ **How long does the battery last?**
- ▶ **What type of memory card will work best?**

Then put the camera in the housing and try some more shots, learning what controls are placed where. This all will make you more comfortable underwater and save time.

ANTICIPATE

THE ACTION

Observe where the animals are moving, then try getting ahead of where you think they might come. Get set up and let the animal move into your composition to shoot.



GET CLOSE

THEN GET CLOSER

Whether you are doing macro or wide angle – you need to get closer than you might think – then maybe a little closer.



USE DISCRETION

AND BE POLITE TO FELLOW DIVERS

General etiquette is to take a few shots, then let others take their turn.



After you get your shot, be very careful not to disturb the bottom or animal as you move away. Also be aware that sensitive animals like seahorses can be harmed by repeated strobe firings.

STROBES AND LIGHTING

When using your strobes to shoot wide angle, you need to be careful to avoid backscatter and blowing out the highlights of animals like sharks, barracuda or other silvery fish.

Careful strobe placement and use of strobe power settings will enhance the quality of your images.

- ▶ Point your strobes outward and use the edge of their beam to avoid backscatter.
- ▶ Turn off your strobes if your subject is further away.
- ▶ Choose a shutter speed that will give you a good "blue" or "green" water.
- ▶ Adjust your aperture and ISO for good exposure.
- ▶ Adjust strobe power to light the animal without blowing out the highlights.



SEE OUR HANDBOOK:
"STROBE POSITIONING"
FOR MORE TIPS.

ANGLES

FOR SHOOTING

Shoot "upwards" for a brighter background, letting the ambient light work for you.

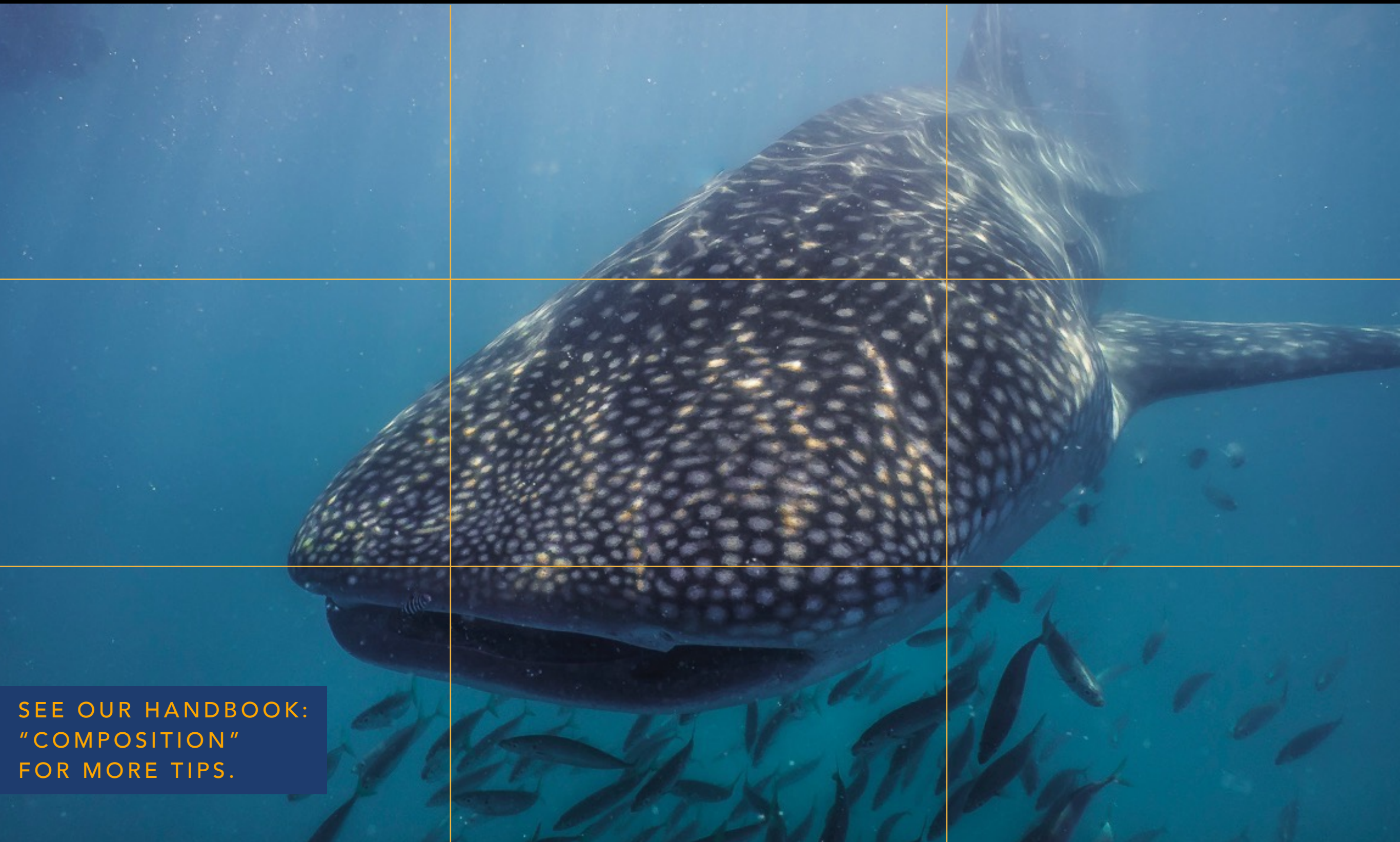
Every once in a while – don't be afraid to shoot "blind" if necessary by bringing the camera to the ground and just pressing the shutter without looking through the viewfinder, sometimes that is the only way to get close shots of certain animals.



COMPOSITION

USE THE RULE OF THIRDS

Offset the placement of the animal in your photo. Focus on the eye, then recompose by moving it to one of the outside points.



SEE OUR HANDBOOK:
"COMPOSITION"
FOR MORE TIPS.

GOT DOWN THE BASICS?

NOW EXPERIMENT

- ▶ Small depth of field to get a blurred background
- ▶ Panning the camera to show motion
- ▶ Different or unusual compositions or angles of view
- ▶ Extreme close-up of the eye, or a pattern on its body
- ▶ Creative lighting



PRACTICE DOES MAKE PERFECT!

In underwater photography - like anything else,
it comes down to practice, practice, practice.

Shoot lots of photos, be creative... and have fun!





Part of the “Basics of UW Photography” Series

OPTICAL OCEAN SALES, LLC

UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY PRODUCTS

More chapters and other free information at:
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1800 Westlake Ave. N, Seattle, WA 98109
800-359-1295 / 206-284-1142
orders@OpticalOceanSales.com

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