



Alex Mustard

The underwater world is a notoriously mysterious place, but through innovation and exploration, Alex Mustard dives deep to explore what lies beneath the waves

Alex Mustard was talking to Heather Gregory

At the age of 34-years-old, Alex Mustard has achieved a lot. He is already a doctor in marine biology, an inventor, an author, a diver and, of course, a professional award-winning underwater photographer. One might well ask; how has he managed to do so much, so young?

For a start, there is a big advantage in having an early passion, says Alex. 'As a child I started exploring the underwater world by snorkelling and then began diving as a teenager. I would

'It's a very addictive type of photography; being free to move in three dimensions and having this range of subjects that people aren't familiar with, gives great possibilities for photography'

come back from these adventures and sit down with my family – particularly with my father – to tell them about all the amazing fish I had seen. I soon discovered that the best way to share my experiences was to record subjects with a camera.'

After achieving a PhD in marine biology, Alex worked as a junior marine scientist while simultaneously developing his photographic style and portfolio. 'I'm used to the intellectual challenges, but I found photography more rewarding, as it allowed my work to reach out to a lot more people.'

After facing a number of technical issues caused by taking pictures under water, Alex pioneered various underwater photography techniques, including changing the water colour through the use of strobe filters, the macro wide angle fisheye-teleconverter technique and the use of telephoto lenses underwater. He also invented the Magic Filter, which produces the best colours without having to use strobes.

Alex's breakthrough in photography didn't come easily; indeed, he explains that it was through things like book projects and major competitions that he finally caught people's attention. Specifically, winning multiple BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year awards helped massively. For Alex it was an extremely gratifying experience; 'not only for the prestige and coverage it brings, but because you also get to meet the other winners. The awards also help to open doors and impress a wide range

of people – from school children to the royal family.' One of the BBC victories bagged him an invite to meet the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh to talk about his pictures.

Exploring hidden depths

Although Alex's scientific background aided his photography, he explains how moving his images away from a scientific focus gave his distinct photographic style the opportunity to emerge. 'By treating each marine subject as an individual, not just as a species, I manage to take pictures that convey my subject's character and emotions.' Alex also relishes the challenge of the increasing competition in this field. He adds, 'one of the things that has really helped underwater photography in the last few years is that more and more land photographers are bringing their ideas and vision underwater. This is diversifying the types of images we are seeing as well as pushing us underwater photographers to strive for greater images.'

Another appeal Alex points out, 'is that marine life is generally very accepting of our presence. I can't think of many wildlife encounters where you can routinely get as close as I get to marine life all the time'.

Environmental awareness also plays a part in his imagery. Having recently returned from photographing endangered oceanic white-tip sharks in the Bahamas, he describes how this species has been severely decimated over the past few decades. He added, 'this is something that was interesting to me, both in terms of photographic technique and because the species needs its story to be told.'

Alex's next project takes him to Norway and Canada for a book project exploring frigid waters. Alex concludes, 'I'm excited for the future, for all the great adventures that lie ahead.' We await the results with bated breath.

Alex's kit

- ▷ Nikon D700 SLR
- ▷ Subal ND700 housing
- ▷ Wideangle, fisheye lens
- ▷ Magic Filter
- ▷ Macro lens
- ▷ Zoom lens
- ▷ Underwater strobes

BELOW Nikon D700 in its underwater housing. Buttons, dials and levers provide perfect access to all the camera's functions. Different lenses require different glass ports on the front



Product picture © Peter Rowlands



To most people my subjects are just scaly, slimey, smelly fish, so I try to find angles that boost their natural charisma. This allows the viewer to project a personality onto the subject, as with this leafy seadragon, which I shot in South Australia.

Nikon D80 with 60mm lens, ISO 100, 1/50sec at f/13. Underwater flash x2