

Underwater Photography Master Class by Alex Mustard

List price is \$27.95

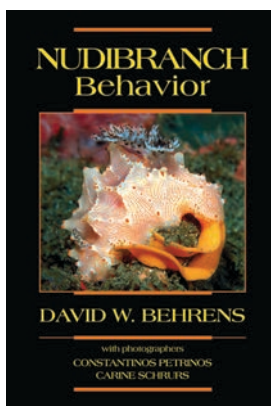
THERE WAS A TIME when great underwater photographers, the likes of Chris Newbert, David Doubilet, Jeffrey Rotmann, Roger Steene and Norbert Wu, published coffee table tomes of their wonderful photographs, but nowadays, few people buy this type of book. When *National Geographic* sheds its full-time photographic staff, it indicates what dire straits the publishing business might be in.

The digital revolution has changed underwater photography, and now everyone wants to take their own pictures and share them on-line. It has become remarkably easy. In the wake of this digital revolution, a plethora of underwater photography gurus has sprung up to reveal the differences between photographing through water rather than air, and the solutions to that.

Some of these gurus are self-styled and not necessarily very good, but marine biologist, underwater photographer Alex Mustard is the modern master of what he does, and willingly reveals to others, by way of escorted photo-safaris, how he does it. Instead of producing just a coffee table book of pictures, he is more didactic in his approach, disguising his superb photos in this book as demonstrations of how to do it, or as inspiration to others to have a go themselves. It's a master class and it's stuffed with information.

Unlike many how-to-do-it books, it's not full of pretentious twaddle and demonstration pictures covered in arrows. He's covered every aspect of the subject and filled its 190 well-designed pages with examples of exceptional underwater

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Nudibranch Behavior by David W. Behrens

List price is \$34.95

WHEN IT COMES TO THAT POPULAR MACRO SUBJECT, the colorful nudibranch, one could be forgiven for thinking they don't do much.

Marine biologist David W. Behrens, a household name among nudibranch enthusiasts, would beg to differ. His book, *Nudibranch Behavior*, divides nudibranch behaviour into locomotion and movement, feeding, reproduction, defences, relationships, colors, camouflage and mimicry, even senses and respiration. There are helpful contributions from photographers Constantinos Petrinis and Carine Schrurs, along with photographs by many others.

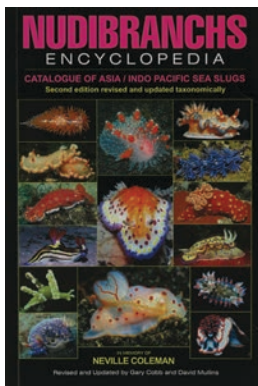
Among these are some interesting examples of dorid nudis testing the patience of various lie-in-wait predators, traversing blindly over the likes of scorpion fish and frogfishes. I bet you never realised colourful sea slugs could be so busy!

Without protective shells, how do they survive in a sea filled with predators? How do they locate food sources or even a mate, for that matter? What do they eat and how do they go about reproduction? This book has the answers.

Nudibranch Behavior follows the familiar format of New World Publication identification books, though its 176 pages leaves it a little slimmer than others. The pictures, nevertheless, are a riot of color; such is the nature of the beast.

If nudibranchs are your thing, this book makes a useful companion to the same publisher's *Nudibranch and Sea Slug Identification – Indo-Pacific*

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Nudibranchs Encyclopedia – Asia/Indo- Pacific

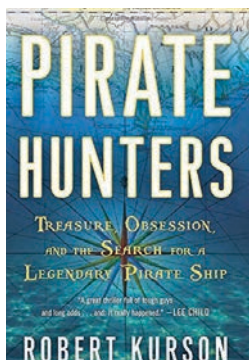
List price is \$39.95

HOW MANY MACRO-LIFE AFICIONADOS know why the mantis shrimp *Lysiosquilla Colemani* or the pigmy seahorse *Hippocampus Colemani*, let alone the nudibranch *Chromodoris Colemani* bear that suffix? Well, in case you didn't know, the late Neville Coleman discovered them along with around 450 other species. Much of what we read in books about the minutia so sought after by those with powerful magnifying glasses and macro cameras can be traced directly back to him.

The second edition of the *Nudibranchs Encyclopedia* has been revised and updated by scientists Gary Cobb and David Mullins, but Coleman is still very much in evidence. With more than 300 pages mostly bearing eight colored identification photographs per page, one could almost be forgiven for assuming that if a particular nudibranch isn't included in the more than 2000 photos, then it doesn't exist, but then, we all know that there will always still be more waiting to be discovered. In fact, it modestly claims only to include around 70 percent of the most commonly observed species of opisthobranchs as divers throughout the Asia/Indo-Pacific region discover more.

Although it is based on Neville Coleman's *1001 Nudibranchs*, every fact and figure has been updated, and an unprecedented number of underwater photographers, both professional and amateur, have contributed to this useful volume.

This is a scientific book, but the information is arranged in a sequence that will not confuse the ordinary diver. Since few of the species have common names (so beloved of those who use fish identification guides), the arrangement is broken down into 'families' from Acteonidae to Volvatellidae in the case of slugs and Actinocyclusidae to Zephyrinidae with nudibranchs. Each specimen pictured is accompanied by a description, plus where and by whom it was photographed. There are small sections dealing with natural history, but the *Nudibranchs Encyclopedia* is exactly what it says on the cover – a catalog of as many nudibranchs as a diver could desire – and as such, every enthusiast for underwater macro life will want to have a copy for ready reference. Neville Coleman's legacy lives on in this important book.



A John Chatterton Adventure

***Pirate Hunters: Treasure, Obsession, and the Search for a Legendary Pirate Ship* by Robert Kurson**

\$17.00 (paper) \$28.00 (hard)

THE LAST TIME WE READ about diver John Chatterton, he was the dedicated, perhaps obsessed, wreck diver searching for the secrets of the German submarine U-869, sunk off the coast of New Jersey. Robert Kurson recounted that adventure in his 2005 *New York Times* bestseller, *Shadow Divers*. Chatterton became an instant diving celebrity, soon co-hosting, with fellow diver Richie Kohler, History Channel's *Deep Sea Detectives*. But, Chatterton set off for more adventure, chronicled in Kurson's new book.

In 2008, he and partner John Mattera, who ran Pirate's Cove, a small scuba operation on the south coast of the Dominican Republic, began their search for the *Golden Fleece*, the ship of pirate captain Joseph Bannister, lost in the late 18th century. They weren't alone in their search for that legendary vessel, and Kurson weaves a tension-filled tale as Chatterton and Mattera battle other treasure hunters, thieves, the Dominican government, and their own doubts and disagreements in the race to find the *Fleece*. For years, divers had come breathlessly close to the bones of Bannister's wreck, but to pinpoint the precise location, Chatterton realized they must get into Bannister's pirate mind to understand where he might sail, where he might put up to repair his ship, and how, if located, he might defend himself against the British. It's a rousing story of swashbuckling pirate strategy to attack, steal, escape, and hide; and, centuries later, an equally compelling story of pirate ship hunter and diver strategy, while avoiding and deceiving competitive treasure hunters. Kurson puts you in the middle of the action, as Chatterton and Mattera plot tactics over drinks, pore through century-old diaries, sketch map after map, consult other obsessed characters, dodge competitors, and plunge into tropical waters only 20 feet deep and a stone's throw from shore in their search for the *Golden Fleece*. Kurson has written a thriller, a mystery, a fascinating lesson in pirate history, and a real page-turner. – Ben Davison



One Breath by Adam Skolnick

List price is \$26
(hard cover)

COMPETITIVE FREEDIVING is about how far a diver can go on a single breath. You may be familiar with the names of pioneers Jacques Mayol and Umberto Pelizzari, and Francisco ‘Pipin’ Ferreras, Audrey Mestre, Tanya Streeter, and Herbert Nitsch (the deepest free-diver of them all), but since they set their records, all manner of free-diving schools have started up, and the numbers of participants have grown exponentially. Nicholas Mevoli was the best American free-diver until his unfortunate demise during a competition at Long Island in the Bahamas in 2013.

In his book *One Breath*, journalist Adam Skolnick skillfully weaves the story of Mevoli, an unforgettable young man, from his early life right up to his autopsy, examines what made him tick, points to the competitive element in his nature (“He was exorcising demons from his past and using free-diving to do that”) and even suggests what might be the true medical reason for his unexpected death.

Mevoli belatedly became a devout Catholic, and his priest told him, “When we put our lives on the edge, we are only one step from killing ourselves.”

Lung squeezes were considered more of an inconvenience than acute injury. Such injuries appeared almost routine. “Nosebleeds and blackouts scared exactly no one, and few were fazed by lung squeezes.” Skolnick describes how, during a competition in Greece, Jakob Galbavy of Austria recalled “seeing a slick of blood on the surface.”

The author demonstrates unparalleled access to the sport and its personalities and takes great pains to explain how they achieve the seemingly impossible while often risking all to do it. In the not-so-long-ago old days, free divers added a few meters to each depth achieved over a long period. With new techniques, newcomers quickly reach amazing depths. Skolnick describes how Mevoli pushed his maximum “from 30 to 91 meters in just a few months,” and could soon swim horizontally 156 meters on a single breath.

In the manner of a novel, with *One Breath* Skolnick takes the reader through the life story of this young, talented free-diver and the repercussions of his loss during an AIDA competition. It’s a gripping and powerful tale with a twist that might change free-diving forever. His unexpected fatality, described in detail, gave free-divers and AIDA cause to pause and reconsider some of the medical aspects and safety procedures.

Russian champion free-diver Natalia Molchanova is quoted in *One Breath*. “The biggest problem with free-divers now is, they hurry. They go too deep too fast. That is the problem with Nicholas.” (She, too, went missing during a breath-hold dive in 2015.)

One Breath is a fascinating, well-written if bleak commentary on a high-risk sport.

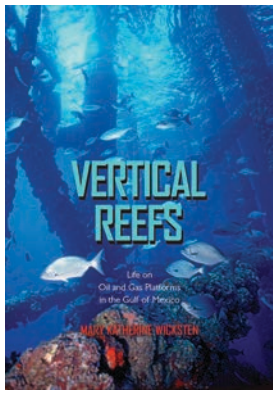
Underwater Photography Master Class (Continued from page 1)

photography that any diver with a camera would wish to emulate. In fact, they could represent the modern day acme of any underwater photographer’s achievements.

The copy is written in a friendly and easily understandable way, making it a good stand-alone read. For example, the chapter on Close-focus wide-angle starts, “A mantra for successful underwater photography is “Get close. Get CLOSER!” This is such essential advice that some photographers even have it written on the backs of their housings.” At the start of

a chapter entitled ‘Big ideas for small subjects,’ he writes, “Some photographers look down their noses at macro photography, mistakenly believing it lacks the creative art of wide-angle.”

If you are already satisfied with the pictures you are producing under water, buy this book and let your envy work wonders for you. If you have never taken a picture underwater, buy this book and get persuaded you can do it, too. In the age of digital photography, it’s easy. With the *Underwater Photography Master Class*, the secrets are out!



Vertical Reefs: Life on Oil and Gas Platforms in the Gulf of Mexico

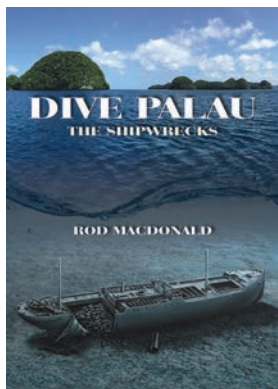
List price is \$29.95

THIS IS A SERIOUS AND IMPORTANT BOOK, written by Dr. Mary Wicksten, a biologist at Texas A&M University and long-time *Undercurrent* subscriber. She has dived on the endless oil rigs that dot the Gulf of Mexico and describes the extraordinary range of marine life that congregates there. In the Gulf, where the seabed tends to be a muddy desert, these manmade vertical reefs stand as an oasis that attracts not only algae and corals, not only sedentary and benthic species, but also passing pelagic life. And that's what attracts divers and liveboards from Houston to the Flower Gardens, a remarkable American diving destination.

The author explains the difference between natural reefs and banks compared to these platforms, how life arrives at the rigs, and biological invasions. She describes the resident animals and larger visitors, as well as discussing what may eventually happen to old platforms.

It's an excellent primer – about 100 pages – for any diver interested in the ecology of reef communities that thrive around offshore gas or oil production platforms, and their value in providing hard substrate for marine organisms, where there would otherwise be none, thereby aiding both fishing and diving opportunities. Not long ago, Greenpeace was campaigning for the removal of obsolete and defunct structures such as this, but time and increasing knowledge has changed attitudes. The Gulf of Mexico obviously benefits from these structures, and Dr. Mary Katherine Wicksten's book goes a long way to promoting their value.

My only criticism is that with the on-line world awash with amazing photographs, the pictures may satisfy scientists rather than astound the reader. Nonetheless, for a diver serious about understanding the value of oil rigs to the underwater community, this is the go-to book.



Dive Palau – The Shipwrecks by Rod MacDonald

List price is \$44.95 (hard cover)

EVERY DIVER HAS HEARD OF THE WRECKS OF TRUK LAGOON, but you may not recall that when the Japanese WWII command was told that an American reconnaissance plane had been spotted overhead, they ordered all the warships to evacuate Truk and escape, which they did.

They mostly went to what was considered a safer anchorage in the lagoon at Palau, but they didn't escape Operation Desecrate One six weeks later, when many of them were destroyed. That was 1944, and in 2004, I had the unusual experience of diving with Tomimatsu Ishikawa, who had been an engineer on the fleet oiler *Iro* when it went down. I dived with him on the wreck of his old ship, which gave me a special interest in Rod MacDonald's new book, dedicated to diving the war wrecks of Palau.

The author has followed a format similar to that of Dan E. Bailey's seminal work, *World War II Wrecks of Truk Lagoon*, although this 295-page hardcover book is significantly smaller. There's the history, the contemporary black & white photographs, both of the ships themselves and from aerial reconnaissance, the more recent surface photographs of wartime remnants of installations and detailed maps.

In a second section, each vessel is covered in individual chapters, detailing how and where they were built, how they went down and what it's like to dive them now. There are sketches of the wrecks as they lie at the bottom of the lagoon today. It's a pity the underwater photographs aren't better. The visibility in the lagoon at Palau can be very poor at times, and I can only guess the author was unlucky when he was there. He should have asked me. I've got a huge library of good photos! Apart from that, it's a very useful reference for anyone interested in the subject.

– John Bantin

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