

# MEMBER TO MEMBER

Tips, advice and updates from your fellow divers



## Unlearning Image Fixation

### The upside to leaving your camera topside

BY JIM DRIGGERS

**O**n the last dive of a recent trip to Cozumel I did something I rarely do. I left my camera on the boat. Why rarely? I'm an amateur underwater photographer trying to become the next David Doubilet. Toward that goal, I shot thousands of images over my last seven or eight dive trips. Underwater, my eyes would whirl to find some interesting thing, and I would play with strobe settings, camera controls and positioning to get the "money shot" that would kick off my professional life. In time, though, I realized something. While I was gaining photographic ability, I was losing my joy of diving.

During that last dive I realized I had left something besides my camera on the boat: my fixation on creating images. Before, I felt like a hunter searching for a target; now I felt freedom and peace. Without the distraction of photography, I slowly approached a large school of blue tangs. The spectacle of 150 loosely packed tangs moving in unison through clear water, eight feet above rolling, white sand aprons dividing low-slung coral ridges was incredible. Not threatened by a camera's eye or the hunting behavior I unconsciously assumed when clutching my housing, the tangs allowed me to close within inches of them. Their iridescent blue scales and shockingly bright yellow caudal spines were sublime.

A fellow diver gestured to a coral hollow in which a splendid toadfish awaited unwary prey. It felt good to simply enjoy the sight and show it to another diver in our group. Later, the divemaster pointed to a distant pair of sea turtles leisurely paddling away into the current. I watched their relaxed strokes advance them against the water's stiff flow. Smiling around my mouthpiece, I thought, "Ahhh."

Earlier in the trip I had used my camera's video mode to record a large spotted eagle ray investigating me. I'm accustomed to having my camera in manual mode, and during the excitement of that once-in-a-lifetime encounter, I was confounded by the camera's video mode. The ray completed a full loop around me at no more than 10 feet away. After it swam into the distance, I reviewed my video segment and discovered I'd turned the recording off rather than on when the creature approached. I had only saved a second or two of its graceful flight to digital memory. Luckily, because I'd taken my eyes away from the camera and watched the ray's swooping orbit directly, I have the breathtaking experience saved in my mind.

Realizing my good fortune, I considered how often I focused on creating images of my subjects rather than seeing my subjects. While that compromise may be an occupational hazard for professional underwater photographers, for me it led to forgetting why I learned to dive in the first place. I still use a camera on most of my dives and work to improve my skill. But on two or three dives per trip, I'll leave the camera topside and focus on experiencing the dive rather than documenting it. **AD**

## SHARE YOUR STORY

Do you have tips, advice, travel strategies, dive techniques, lessons learned or other words of wisdom to share with your fellow divers? *Alert Diver* wants your story! Email it to [M2M@dan.org](mailto:M2M@dan.org), or mail it to "Member to Member," c/o *Alert Diver*, 6 W. Colony Place, Durham, NC 27705.