

“Miracles” can happen when one least expects it, as in the case of this small 6 to 7cm-long painted frogfish (*Antennarius pictus*), which was captured gaping in a long yawn, on a muck dive in Minahasa, North Sulawesi, Indonesia.



Sequential Shots

The transition from analog to digital cameras has been a boon for photographers, granting them unlimited shots and freedom of movement. These circumstances lend themselves well to the technique of shooting sequential stills. Underwater photographer Claudio Ziraldo shares his insights and tips on taking sequential shots underwater.

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In the first decade of the 20th century, technological advances allowed the printing of photographs in magazines. Fashion photographs appeared for the first time in 1909, in the French magazine *La Mode Pratique*.

Subsequently, attention moved from Europe to the United States, where some renowned photogra-

phers provided a further twist in a way of approaching this type of shooting, which involved abandoning rigid schemes and poses, giving greater freedom to the subjects of their works, which were portrayed in more natural positions.

Currently, fashion photographers take hundreds of shots during a photo shoot, in order to capture the moment when the models are in ideal conditions, positions and facial expressions. With the transition from

analog to digital, even in underwater photography, it has become possible to have a practically unlimited number of shots available. This leaves us ample and total freedom of action.

With that said, let's get to the topic of this article.

Why take sequential shots?

There are several reasons for taking sequential shots. The first and most obvious (a bit like in fashion photography) is to have several images of the

same subject or situation—perhaps by practising a little “bracketing”—and then choose the best shots.

Secondly, in the case of particularly interesting subjects that are often approached with difficulty, we can take close-up shots as long as the subject allows it. In this case, we may get to do a “photo shoot” with lots of shots, and thus obtain the desired effect. In any event, we will at least capture a few acceptable images, even if they are not at an optimal distance.



Hardly ever exceeding 6cm in length, the little flamboyant cuttlefish (*Metasepia pfefferi*) is considered a rare species found in the Indo-Pacific region. Taking a series of shots, as one gradually gets closer and closer to the subject, captures its chromatic and morphological characteristics.

There can, of course, be several other reasons. Three are mentioned below.

1. Yawning

In the past, I have stayed at the Minahasa Lagoon Dive and Tours Club, which is not far from Manado in Indonesia. The Minahasa area is a strategic location in which one can make interesting "muck dives" and take underwater photos of the environment along a splendid wall, which is located just a few minutes by boat from the resort. And, with a 40-minute boat ride, one can also reach Bunaken National Park.

There I was in Minahasa, in the water during a muck dive, when the dive guide drew my

attention to a small 6 to 7cm-long frogfish (*Antennariidae*). It looked like it could be a *Antennarius pictus*, or painted frogfish. So, I got a little closer since I had left my 60mm lens in my car.

"Miracles" do happen when we least expect it, because suddenly, the fish opened its mouth in a very long yawn, which allowed me to take several shots.

In cases like this, it is important to be quick to react, and also to have your strobes' batteries always charged, so that repeated shots can be taken in a very short time. Among other things, if you photograph at short distances, the condenser will not discharge completely, and this is

certainly helpful.

Focus is not a problem, because if you remain still, you are unlikely to lose focus, and the exposure is

always the same. Having said that, we can consider this option to be particularly beneficial when taking advantage of situations that are a little out of the box.

2. Flamboyant cuttlefish

The flamboyant cuttlefish (*Metasepia pfefferi*) is a small animal, seldom exceeding 6cm. Its body is oval in shape, predominantly brown, and its maximum recorded length is 8cm. The body of this cuttlefish has several protuberances, two of which are above the eyes and several are in the ventral area.

If the animal is disturbed, red areas appear on the tentacles, and white or yellow streaks appear on the back, which





The white-eyed moray eel (*Gymnothorax thyrsoideus*) is a fairly common marine animal in the Indo-Pacific region. Taking a series of photos of a moray eel at the footsteps of its den captures the gaping-mouth behaviour that is so characteristic of the species.

are rather variable, irregular and “move” as if they are flashing lights, which is very curious and interesting to observe. It is considered a rather rare critter. Nevertheless, it occupies a rather vast range, including the tropical Indo-Pacific region, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and northern Australia.

I have had the opportunity to shoot sequences of this cephalopod on several occasions. I suggest taking a steadily approaching shoot, in which a series of shots, little by little, highlight the chromatic and morphological characteristics of the flamboyant cuttlefish.

3. Moray eel

The white-eyed moray eel (*Gymnothorax thyrsoideus*) is a fairly common animal and occupies the

same territorial range as the flamboyant cuttlefish. This moray eel generally dislikes light and is a nocturnal hunter. Sometimes, it is fearful and shy. If you try to get too close when taking pictures, it will withdraw into the darkness of its burrow.

In other cases, however, white-eyed moray eels will stay on the doorsteps of their dens, like old wives, to observe the passers-by. The posture that most characterises them is how they often keep their jaws wide open, which to most may appear a bit threatening. However, it is done simply for respiratory purposes.

I will not go into the details of this behaviour here but leave it to biology experts to explain. However, it is precisely this particular behaviour that allows us to take suggestive images, which, quite often, impress

non-experts.

The moray eel in my photos was very cooperative and never moved from its den's front door, until I left after taking more than a dozen shots. She probably felt like a star! □

Claudio Ziraldo is an architect with a great passion for the sea and nature. He serves as president of the Bollate Sub Association, a sports club that promotes diving and the disciplines connected to it. He is a diving and marine biology instructor as well as a successful underwater photographer, who has achieved prestigious international recognitions. In 1987, he won the “Nikon Photo Contest International Grand Prize” for an underwater shot, while in 1991, he obtained the “Prix Mondial du Livre d’Image Sous Marine” at the Antibes Underwater Image World Festival for the realisation of the depths in “Dreams of Light.” In 2004, his book, Il Tempo della Luce, won awards in both Italy and Malaysia.

