

All in a Day's Work

PETE ATKINSON

UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHER, WRITER AND MARINE ZOOLOGIST

PROFILE

Pete studied Marine Zoology at Bangor University in Wales and worked briefly in the Zoology Department at Bangor. He then spent some time at Sherkin Island Marine Station taking pictures of underwater life around the island. After that he bought the 1935 classic yacht *Eila*, which was his home for 17 years. On *Eila* he sailed 45,000 miles through the Pacific Ocean shooting photos as he moved. He now lives in Queensland, Australia.



What advice would you give to anyone wanting to be a wildlife photographer?

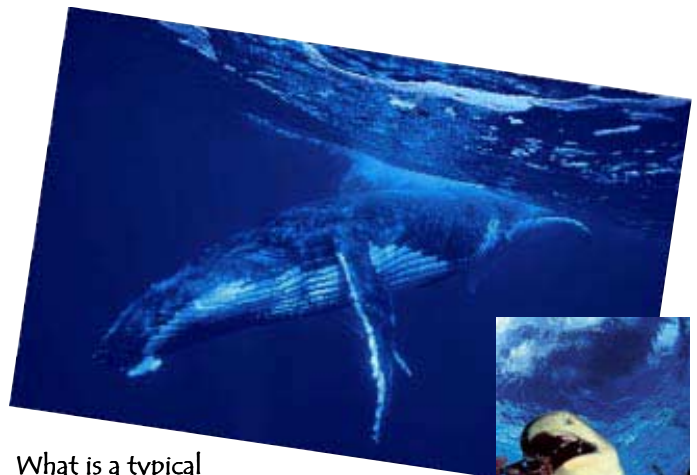
I think to be a wildlife photographer today, you need another job, which gives you money and some free time. Study art rather than photography. Do what you love, with passion. Shoot digital and make the computer programme PhotoShop your friend. Look at the photography of Jan Tove, one of the few artists in this field.

What is your favourite creature?

Sharks, and whales too. Sharks are just so beautiful to watch and exciting to photograph.

What was the most exciting creature you have had to photograph?

Two and a half metre bull sharks in Fiji being hand-fed about a metre from the camera.



A Day in the Life of Pete Atkinson

When did you decide you wanted to be a Wild life photographer?

From about the age of four I was fascinated by fish and the ocean. I wanted to be a trawler man as a kid, and then I wanted to be Jacques Cousteau. This obsession made me want to study Marine Zoology in Bangor, in Wales. I built my first underwater camera housing for an instamatic camera when I was 17. I made my second while I was learning to dive at Bangor and then started taking photos. It was on the strength of these photos that I was invited to Sherkin Island Marine Station. And it was Matt Murphy, more than anyone that convinced me that a living could be made from underwater photography.

What is the best thing about your job?

The best thing is the freedom to do what I want, when I want.

What's the worst thing about your job?

All my film gear having so little value when I switched to digital and the frustrations of using film all my life - digital would have made life so much easier.

What is a typical working day for you?

I have to be at the boat at 8am with about 65kg of gear. From where I live it takes about 1hr 40 minutes to get to the Great Barrier Reef. The other people go off for their dive and I usually do my own thing, often in shallow water, just snorkelling shooting pictures over/under pictures. I'll go in the water three times before we head back. Before, when I lived on my yacht in the Pacific, it was easier. At Beveridge Reef, I'd set up three cameras and take them all in the water with a box of fish, which I would jam in the coral. The grey reef sharks would come up the smell-corridor so you could shoot three rolls on a single dive. We rarely had any trouble with the sharks at all.