

Kingsclere Photo Club

Interview with Sheilah Openshaw Feb / Mar 2012

As a photographer, in the early days, and for that matter the later days in some cases, it is a constant technical challenge to capture acceptable and maybe, if lucky, a few really good images. If there is not enough to think about, Sheilah adds the additional degree of difficulty by shooting underwater.

In her early twenties Sheilah's early interest in photography waned as life in general got in the way. A number of years later Sheilah's father gave her a small, very compact, film camera which rekindled her interest in photography. This camera suddenly expired one day due to condensation after being left in a dry bag on a boat. The bag was so effective it not only protected it from the sea but also didn't allow condensation to escape! This in turn proved to be a blessing in disguise; the following Christmas Sheilah was given a Sony P7, a whopping 3.7 megapixel, camera with underwater housing. When finally Sheilah took the camera underwater it ignited an instant love affair.

Sheilah had reached a point where just pointing and shooting was not enough to produce images. With the help of a friend they successfully encouraged Gareth to run a six week photography course, which led to Sheilah joining Kingsclere Photo Club. This greater understanding of photography has been reflected in the images Sheilah has subsequently captured. From this point in time photography added another dimension to her passion for diving. There now are days when Sheilah just dives to take photographs.

Over the years Sheilah has dived in Australia, South Africa, Thailand and the Galapagos Islands. However, even after 18 years of diving she is at her happiest diving off the Dorset coast. Here Sheilah, along with her husband, love to explore new areas off the Dorset coast using an ocean bed map to locate potential locations.

Wildlife is another major passion for Sheilah. As the choice of Mark Cawardine as favourite photographer demonstrates. The trips to South Africa and Galapagos Islands consisted of half dive and half wildlife. This is reflected in the wealth of images that adorn the walls of Sheilah's home. When asked to name her favourite image in each sphere of her photography Sheilah chooses a wonderful image of two male lions, brothers, drinking. Their buttocks were touching and their reflection showed clearly in the water. The favourite diving image was of a glorious British Fan coral.

Today Sheilah's kit consists of a Canon 450D EOS and an Olympus 7070Bridge camera along with housing and a strobe each side. Out of the water this is quite a weight but underwater there is neutral buoyancy.

Photography will be a major feature in Sheilah's life during 2012. In late spring there is a trip to the Scilly Isles. During this summer there is a project in her mind to photograph the five species coral that flourish off the Dorset coast. Hopefully all of us will see the results at this year's exhibition.