



Photo 3. (top center) Giant manta ray in silhouette. Choose a subject that there is no mistaking its identity. Exposure: ISO 200, f/16, 1/100s

Photo 4. (top left) Sandbar shark in Snell's window. Capture Snell's Window and plenty of ambient light to illuminate your subject. Exposure: ISO 200, f/11, 1/100s

Photo 5. (top right) Tiger sharks in shallow clear water. Shoot wide angle very close in shallow clear water for large subjects. Exposure: ISO 100, f/8, 1/160s

All photos were taken with Nikon D500 camera, Tokina 10-17mm lens, Nauticam housing. Photo 1. (far right) Surface lemon shark. The sun's rays are broken up by tiny wavelets and create a reticular network of light. Exposure: ISO 200, f/11, 1/200s; Photo 2. (right) Lemon shark abstract. The additional interplay of shadow enhances the feeling of motion and depth. Exposure: ISO 200, f/8, 1/250s

## Playing with Ambient Light

Text and photos by Gary Rose, MD

Ambient light is always changing. It changes seasonally, daily, hour-by-hour, second-by-second. It is a joy to play with, and it provides unlimited and often unexpected results. Understanding how to utilize ambient light in its multiple and unlimited forms is a terrific tool in the underwater photographer's toolbox.

One of my favorite times of an entire dive is the end. No, I do not mean when I come out of the water. I am referring to those last few minutes of the ascent, and during the safety stop, when the water clears and the light quality ramps up. This is a time, if you are patient, to catch some of the most dramatic underwater photos. Ambient light includes natural light, and you are just never sure what gifts, or tricks, of lighting are coming your way—especially up near the surface, where the surface texture of the sea and the position of the sun can, and will, provide an endless supply of special effects.

Many of my dives are in the waters off the coast of Jupiter, Florida. Lemon sharks are always there, because we have our resident population of lemon sharks as well as the annual seasonal aggregation of lemon sharks. They are fun and playful during the entire dive and act like excited puppy dogs. They almost always follow us up to the surface, and that is where the magic begins. By breaking one of the cardinal rules of photography—"never shoot down"—I have been able to take some of my most dramatic photographs. As demonstrated in Photo 1, the sun's rays are broken up by tiny wavelets, on the surface, and bathe a lemon shark in a reticular network of light. I recommend shooting lots of photos of this, because there is a lot of rapid three-dimensional movement, and you want to nail the light pattern crisply. In Photo 2, I moved in very close to two lemon sharks to achieve this abstract result. The additional interplay of shadow, from above, enhances the feeling of motion and depth.

One of the classic styles of underwater photography with ambient



light is the opposite of shooting down; instead, one shoots straight up to capture a silhouette. I find that the two most important components of shooting a silhouette is to have a large subject so that there are sharp defining borders, and to shoot a subject that is very recognizable. A silhouette of a fish pretty much looks like a silhouette of most fish. Choose a subject such as a sea turtle, whale, sea lion or, as in Photo 3, a giant manta ray at the surface. There is no mistaking its identity. With its wings spread and visible wave patterns above it, you cannot help but feel that it is flying through the sea.

Another "shooting-up" technique

that I enjoy implementing is to shoot up obliquely. This way, I am able to capture plenty of ambient light to illuminate my subject, as well as capture a very dramatic background of Snell's window with very visible puffy clouds in a blue sky. Photo 4 required a lot of test shots, as I planned the photo and experimented with many camera settings to capture each individual component of this photo.

One of the pleasures of diving offshore at West End, Grand Bahama Island, is the clear and shallow water that is a photographer's dream. In Photo 5, the bright sun clearly lit up these two beautiful tiger sharks in the



foreground and provided a feeling of warmth and tranquility. The other two tiger sharks (can you find them?) are far enough away that the light has been filtered to a beautiful shade of blue, and it does not distract the viewer's eye away from the main subject in the foreground.

If you have been solely relying on artificial light (torches or strobes) for your underwater photography, then you will have a bit of a trial-and-error period to learn how to capture ambient light in all of its capricious forms. The best part is that every single dive and photo opportunity will be challenging and unique. Visit: [garyrosephotos.com](http://garyrosephotos.com)

