Silvertip nudibranchs, *Janolus capensis*, photographed in Cape Town, South Africa, with a Scubalamp OSD snoot. Camera gear: Nikon D850 with 60mm macro lens and +12.5 diopter. Settings: ISO100, f/25, 1/250s

Photo Gear Review

Scubalamp OSD Snoot

Text and photos by Kate Jonker

The innovative new Scubalamp OSD Snoot was officially released in late 2021. Underwater photographer Kate Jonker took it through its paces and shares her review of the product as well as her stunning photos taken with it.

When I first started taking photos underwater, I was immediately drawn to macro shots showing beautifully vibrant and detailed subjects with black backgrounds. I wanted to take photos like that!

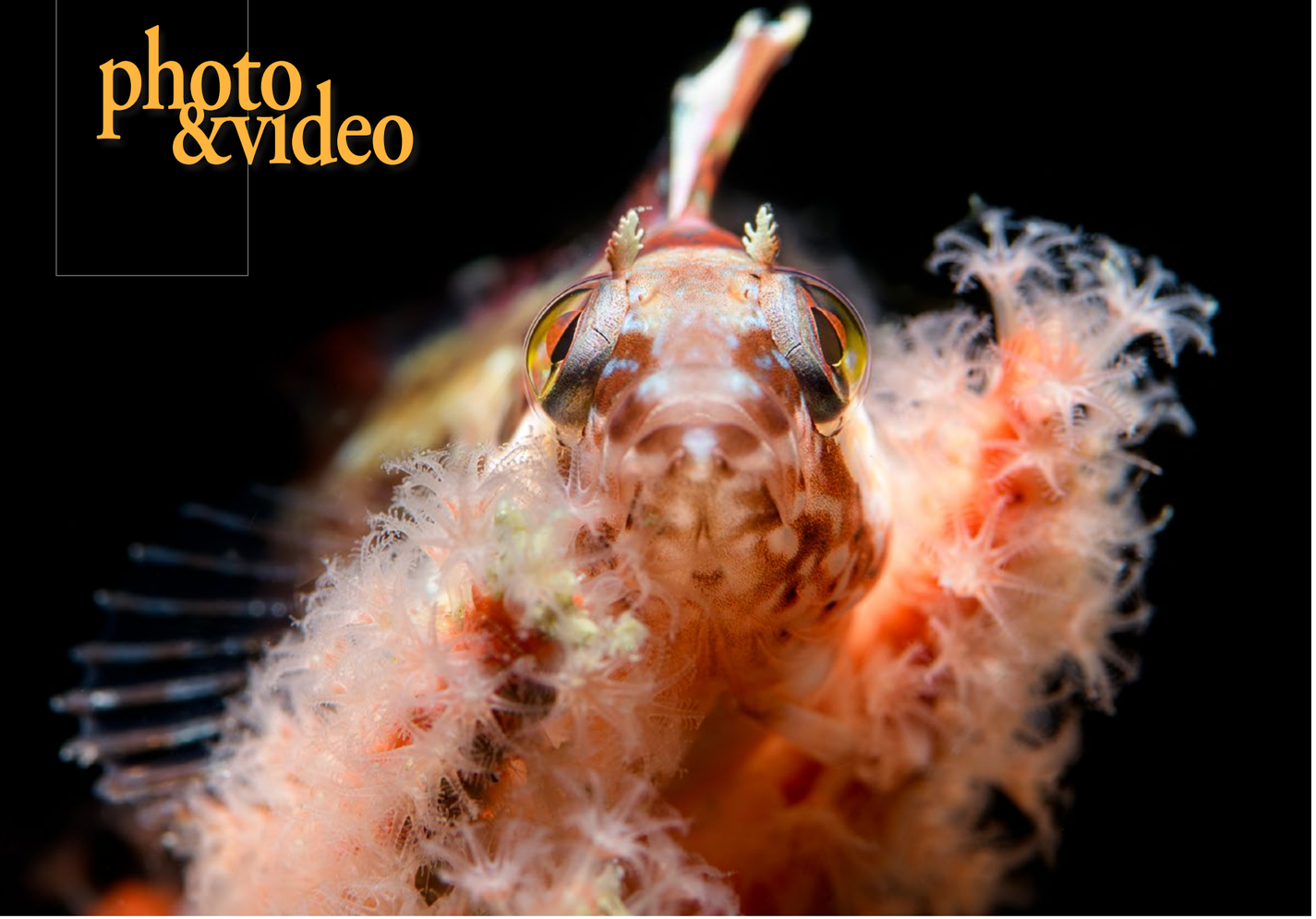
With careful strobe positioning, I was able to achieve black backgrounds, but I discovered that there was more to these images than just strobe positioning. To isolate the subject from its busy surroundings, a snoot was needed.

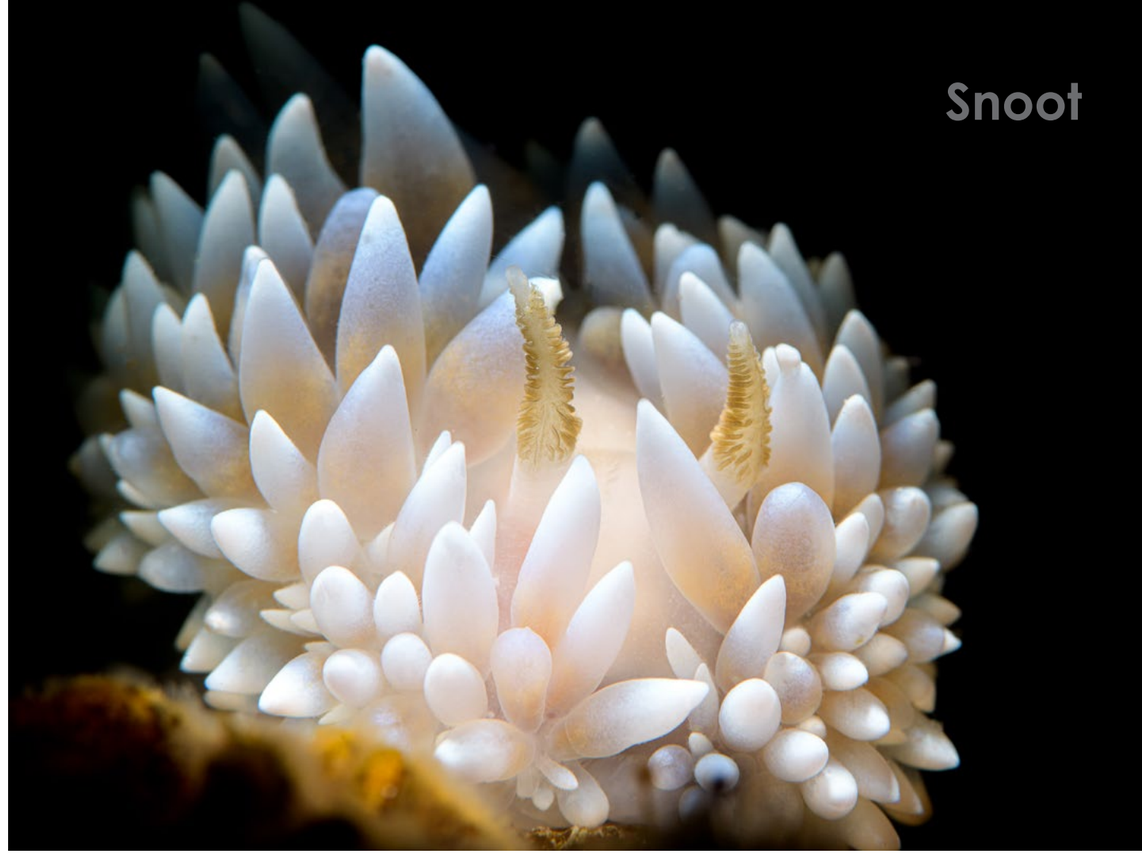
What is a snoot?

I started my research and discovered that a snoot is a device that attaches to the front of your strobe and narrows the beam of light that is emitted when you fire your strobe. If carefully positioned, only your subject is lit by a small pool of light, leaving everything else completely black.

There are several types of snoots—some are cone-shaped with a narrow opening at the end, some use fibre optic threads that channel the light from the strobe into a narrow beam, and others have lenses that condense and narrow the beam of light without losing light quality. I chose the latter for ease of use and quality of light.

Most optical snoots come with a set of masks that slide into a special slot. The masks have holes of varying sizes and the smaller the hole, the narrower the beam, and thus the smaller the pool of light that lands on your subject.





Bluespotted klipfish, *Pavoclinus caeruleopunctatus*, on multi-coloured sea fan (above). Settings: ISO160, f/25, 1/250s; Salmon gasflame nudibranch, *Bonisa nakaza* (top right). Settings: ISO160, f/25, 1/250s. Camera gear for both images: Nikon D850 with 105mm macro lens

Using a snoot

Positioning the snoot is done using the strobe's focus light, which will shine through the hole in the mask and show you where your strobe will light when you press your camera's shutter. It is therefore vital that your strobe has a strong focus light.

Once you can see the focus light in your camera's viewfinder, you need to adjust the position of your strobe until the focus light falls in the centre of your frame where you want your subject to be. You then need to focus your camera and the beam of light on your subject at the same time. I use the back button focus for this. When the focus light falls on your subject and your subject is in focus, take a test shot to check your snoot is in the correct position, and when it is, tighten the clamps of your strobe arms and you are ready to go!

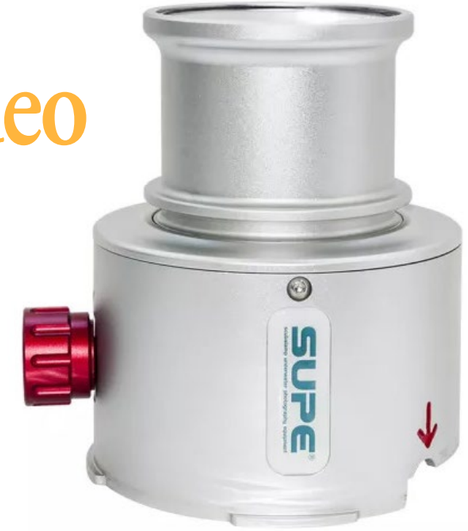
The problem comes in when you find a differently sized subject and need to choose a smaller or larger hole for your mask. This is usually when the strobe gets moved out of position, and you have to start all over again with aligning your strobe. It can be very frustrating and time-consuming.

Camera settings need to be quite specific to ensure a black background. Go for the fastest shutter speed that your camera will sync with your strobe, a high aperture for good depth of field and a low enough ISO to help cut out ambient light—but high enough to give you sufficient lighting of your subject.

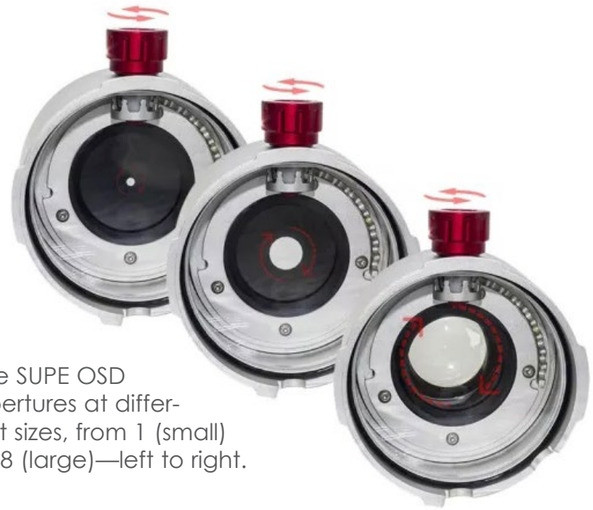
An innovative new snoot on the market

Towards the end of 2021, I was fascinated to hear of an inno-

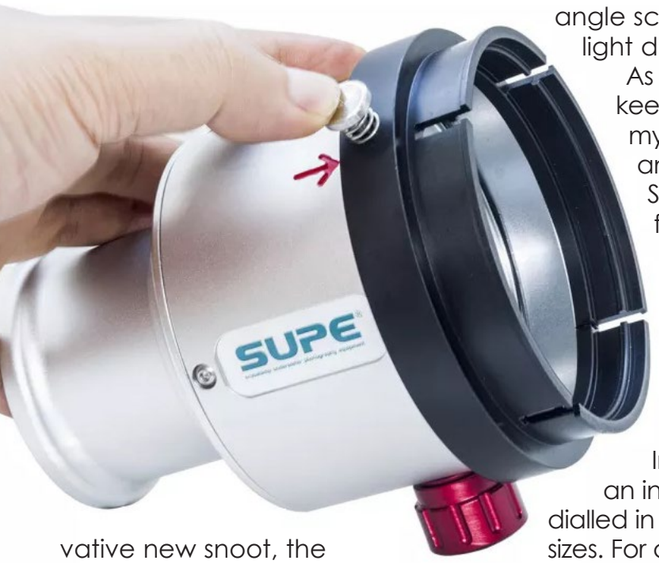
Maroon lined flatworm stretching towards the light of the OSD.
Camera used: Nikon D850 with 105mm macro lens. Settings: ISO160, f/25, 1/250s



Side view of the SUPE OSD (right); Photo of the SUPE OSD showing the plastic collar that attaches to the strobe (below).



The SUPE OSD apertures at different sizes, from 1 (small) to 8 (large)—left to right.



vative new snoot, the Scubalamp (SUPE) OSD that had just been released onto the market. Scubalamp Underwater Photographic Equipment (Scubalamp, or SUPE for short) collaborates with underwater photographers to develop and manufacture high-quality underwater photography lighting products for both photographers and videographers.

I own a set of SUPE D-Max strobes that have a central focus light and a circular flash tube, providing an even spread of light, strong enough for even the most challenging of wide-angle scenes, but soft enough to light delicate macro photos.

As an avid "snooter," I was very keen to try the SUPE OSD for myself and ordered one with an adaptor for my SUPE D-Max Strobe as well as an adaptor for the Sea&Sea YS-D2 strobe.

About the SUPE OSD

The SUPE OSD (optical shaping device) differs from other snoots due to its innovative way of changing the size of the beam of light. Instead of using masks, it has an in-built aperture that can be dialled in to eight different aperture sizes. For a narrow beam of light, a small aperture can be selected and for a wider beam, a larger aperture can be selected by merely turning a knob on the side of the OSD.

The SUPE OSD is very sturdy and made from aluminium. It uses glass lenses to enhance the strength of the focus light and quality of light emitted from the strobe. It measures 117mm x 114mm x 99mm and weighs 522g.

SUPE says that the OSD is compatible with its D-Max and D-Max Pro strobes, Seacam 150D, Ikelite 161 and 160, Retra and Sea&Sea YSD2 and YSD3.

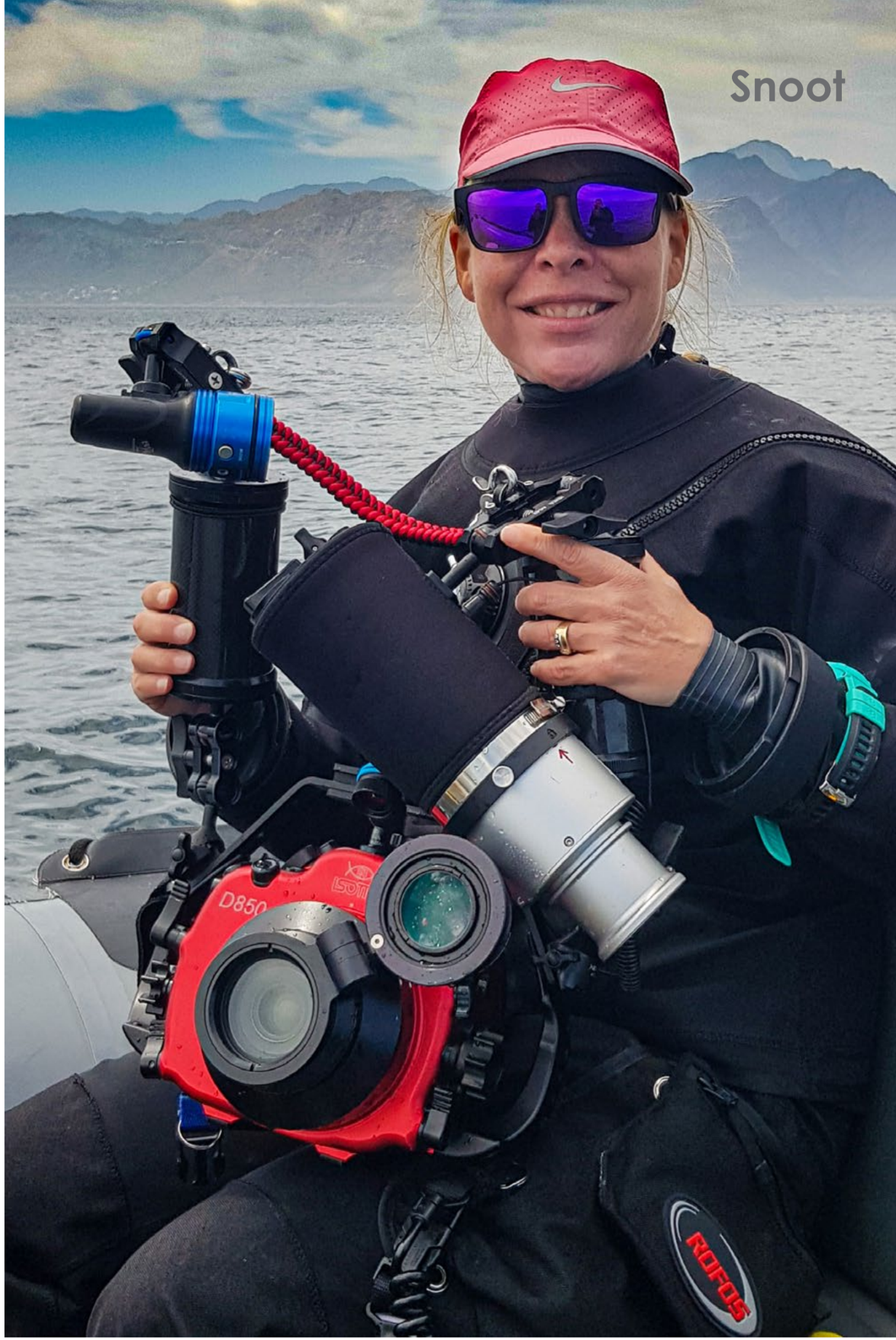
To attach the OSD to a strobe, SUPE has designed special adaptors for each strobe type. Each adaptor consists of a plastic collar that clips onto the front of the strobe, which is then tightened by a metal clamp that fits over it. The OSD fits onto a bayonet mount on the plastic collar and locks in place with a spring-loaded button. It is easy to remove the OSD on a dive, should you wish to take a photo without a snoot effect.

The OSD also comes with a groove on its neck, which makes attaching a lanyard possible. It is sealed with O-rings, and SUPE says that it is waterproof and "future proof," meaning that if you change strobes, you will just need to purchase a new adaptor.

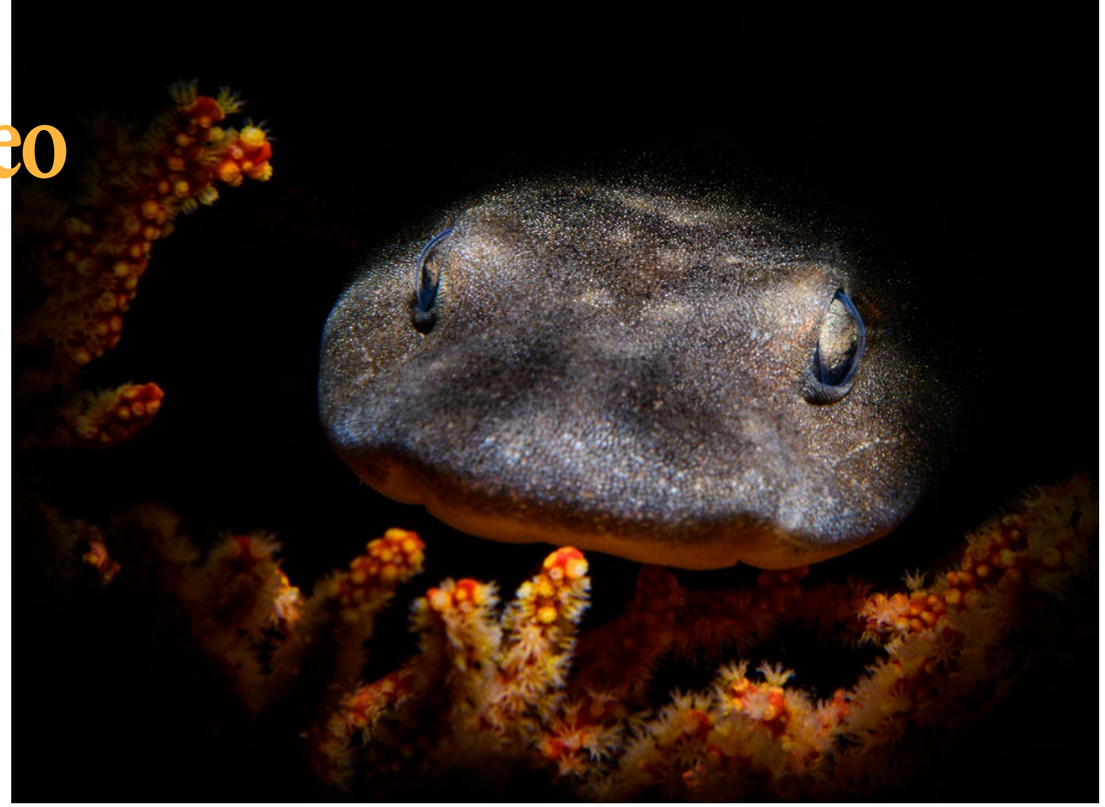
First impressions

When I received my OSD, the first thing that struck me was how much shorter it was, compared to the other snoots I own. This makes it more compact to use, which is a bonus—especially when using larger strobes such as the D-Max, Seacam and Ikelite strobes.

Once I attached the OSD to the front of my D-Max strobe, it seemed quite heavy and bulky in comparison to my usual Inon Z240 strobe and snoot setup. I was quite worried about how heavy it was going to be underwater.

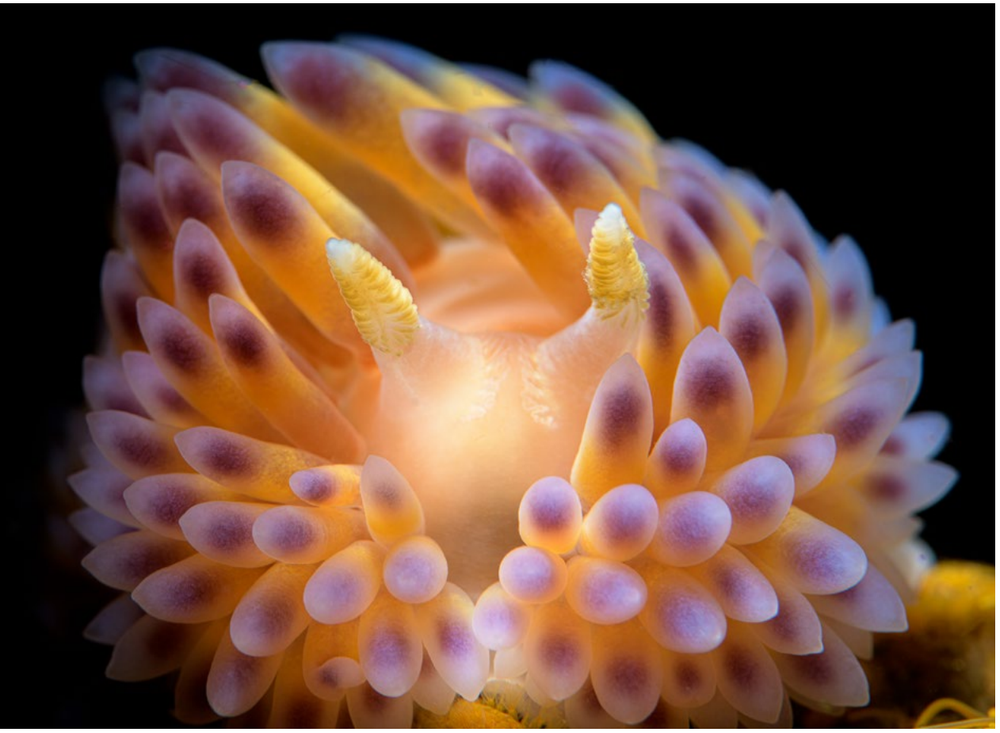


The author and her camera rig with SUPE D-Max strobe fitted with a SUPE OSD

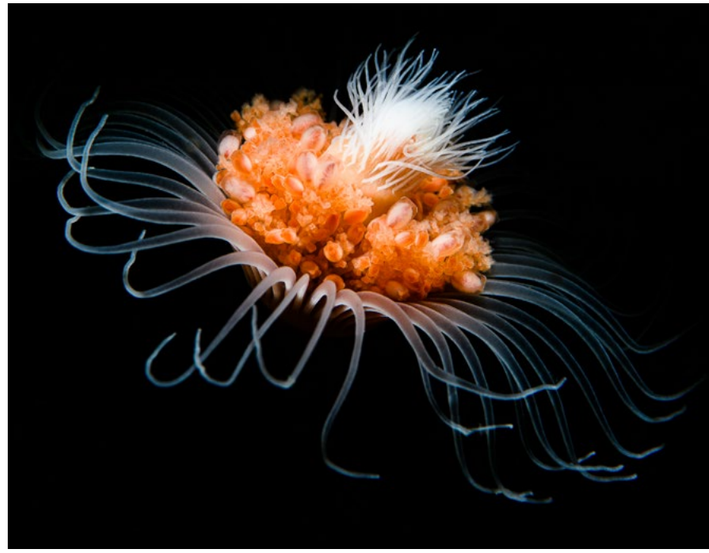


Sleeping dark shyshark, *Haploblepharus pictus* (right). Camera used: Nikon D850 with 60mm macro lens. Settings: ISO320, f/25, 1/250s; Egg ribbon with a tiny, 2mm-long amphipod perched in its centre (far right). Smallest aperture of the OSD was used. Camera used: Nikon D850 with 105mm macro lens and +12.5 diopter. Settings: ISO160, f/22, 1/250s

Snoot



Blue gasflame nudibranch, *Bonisa nakaza*. Camera used: Nikon D850 with 105mm macro lens and +5 diopter. Settings: ISO160, 1/250, f/32



Tubular hydroid, photographed with OSD pointing diagonally at it (right). Gear: Nikon D850 with 105mm macro lens. Settings: ISO160, f/22, 1/250s

Field testing the SUPE OSD

I initially used my 105mm macro lens with my Nikon D850 camera and attached the strobe and snoot to a float arm with 750g lift underwater. I attached my torch to the right-hand float arm. I used the torch to search the reef for critters and pointed it to the right so that its light did not seep into my snooted images.

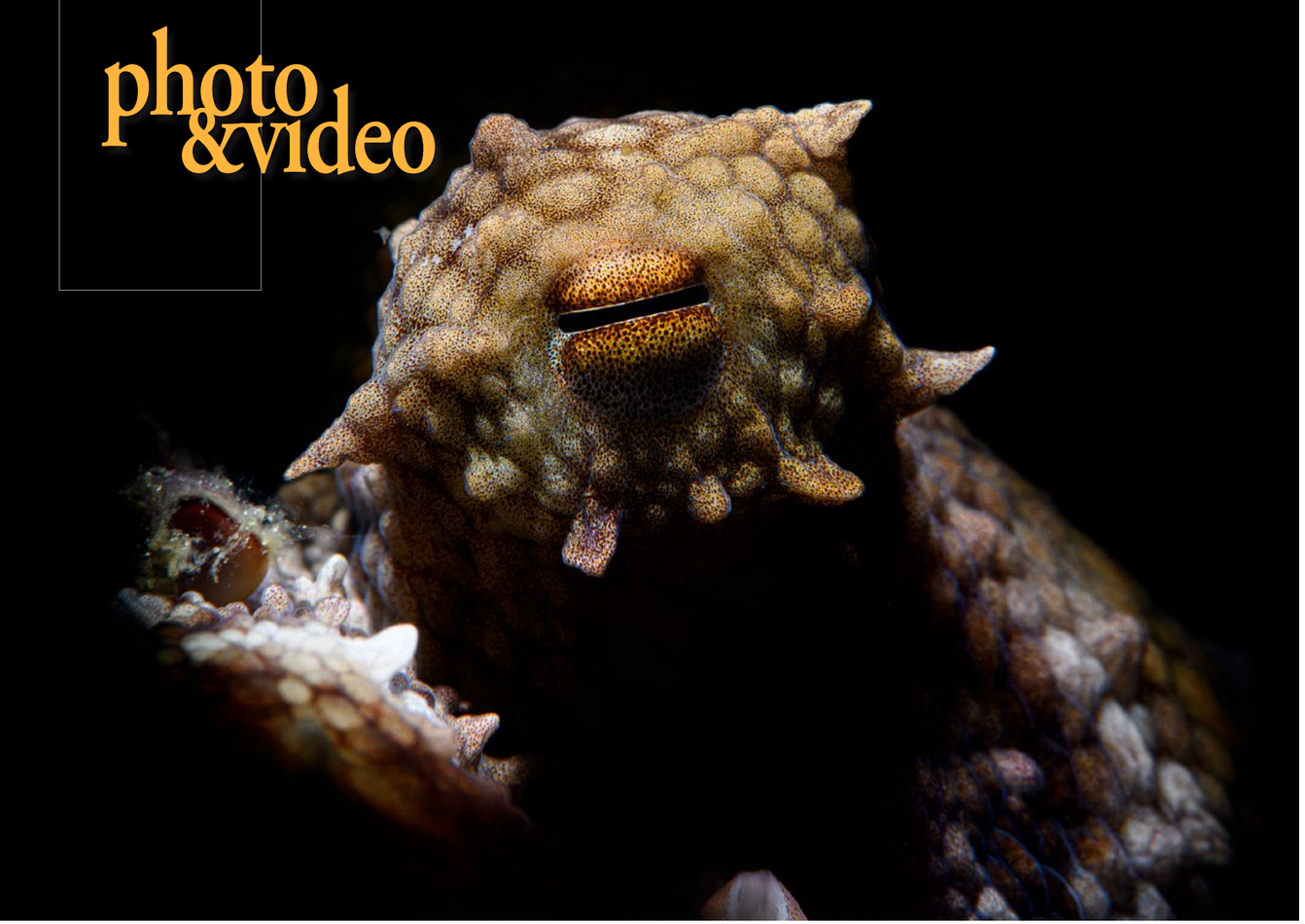
As soon as I entered the water, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the strobe and snoot combination was unnoticeable and did not pull the camera forward or put undue strain on my wrists.

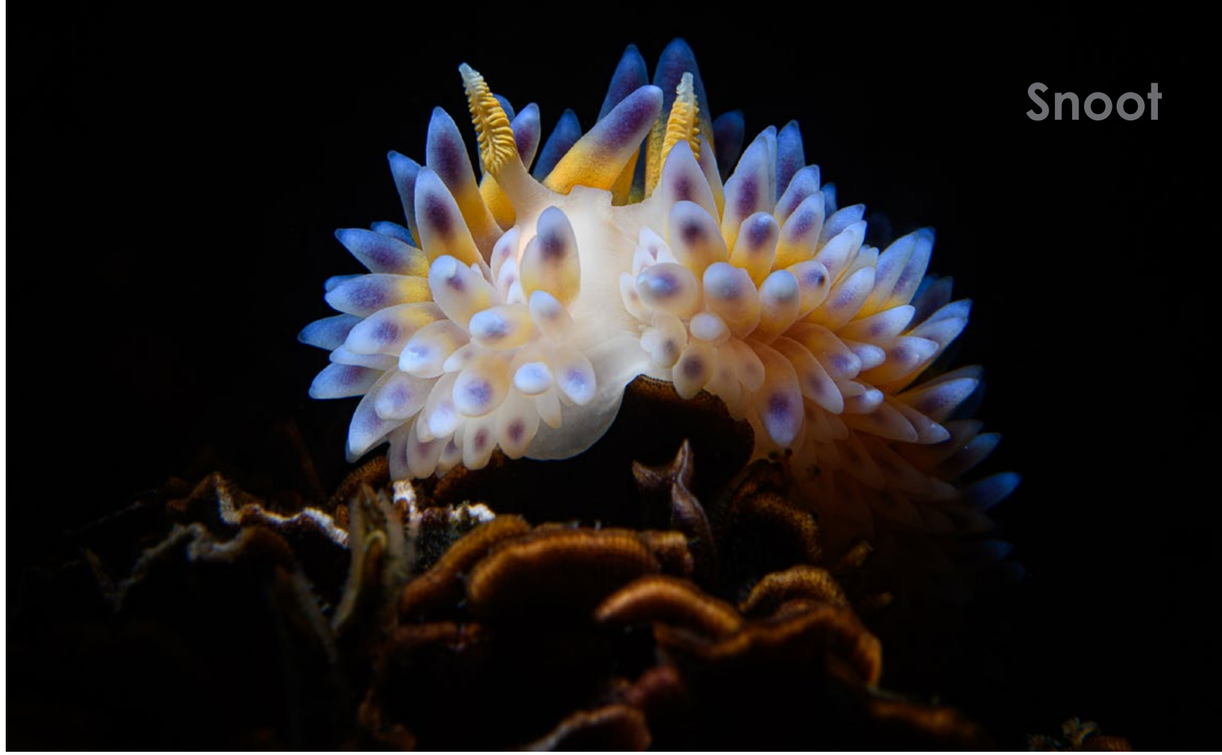
I found it easy to see the strong focus light of the D-Max strobe underwater and because of the sturdy strobe and OSD combination, it was easy to move into place. Some snoots have a habit of dislodging from the strobe when you move them, but the OSD stayed firmly locked in place.

When I pressed the trigger, I was delighted to discover that the beam of the focus light was spot on, and my subject was lit exactly as I wanted. The light quality was brilliant and produced great colours and details.

It was an absolute dream not to have to move or remove the mask to change the size of the beam of light—all I needed to do was dial in the aperture size I wanted. I did have to change the position closer to my camera for super macro, but apart from that, I did not need to move the strobe at all.

The different aperture sizes were adequate for the 10cm gasflame nudibranchs, which we have in Cape Town, South Africa, right down to 0.5cm ghost nudibranchs. One thing I did notice was that when using a smaller aperture on the OSD to photograph smaller subjects, I had to push up my strobe power a notch.





Snoot

Gasflame nudibranch (above). Camera used: Nikon D850 with 60mm macro lens. Settings: ISO100, f/22, 1/250s; Small common octopus, photographed using widest aperture to light as much as possible (left). Camera used: Nikon D850 with 105mm macro lens. Settings: ISO160, 1/250, f/25

Tiny, 0.5cm-long ghost nudibranch, photographed with OSD on a small aperture, pointing directly downwards. Camera used: Nikon D850 with 105mm macro lens and +5 diopter. Settings: ISO160, f/32, 1/250s

The following day, I decided to attach the OSD to my Sea&Sea YSD2 strobe to find out how it performed. Apart from the setup being much smaller than my D-Max strobe, the other difference between the two strobes was the location of the focus light. The Sea&Sea focus light is located at the 12 o'clock position on the face of the strobe, whereas the D-Max has a centrally located focus light. I found that when used with the Sea&Sea strobe, the focus light did not give a true indication of exactly where the strobe light would fall, and I needed to compensate for this by adjusting the strobe position accordingly.

Conclusion

The OSD is designed to be used with a selection of different strobes, although I found the OSD far easier to use with the D-Max strobe than with the Sea&Sea YS-D2. I found it much harder to get the beam of light to fall in the right place with the YS-D2 strobe, and it took quite a bit of trial and error to get the strobe light to fall in the right spot.

I have been using the Scubalamp OSD with my SUPE D-Max strobe for the past four months, with both my 105mm and 60mm lenses and am incredibly happy with the photos I have been able to produce. Would I recommend the SUPE OSD? Absolutely—if you have a strobe with a centre-mounted focus light. I am pleased with how mine works with my D-Max strobe and can imagine anyone with a strobe that has a central focus light will have equally successful and enjoyable dives with the SUPE OSD as I do. ■

Kate Jonker is an underwater photographer, dive writer, underwater photography instructor, dive guide and dive boat skipper based in South Africa who leads dive trips across the globe. For more information regarding diving and underwater photography in Cape Town, divers are welcome to find her at: ***katejonker.com****.*