



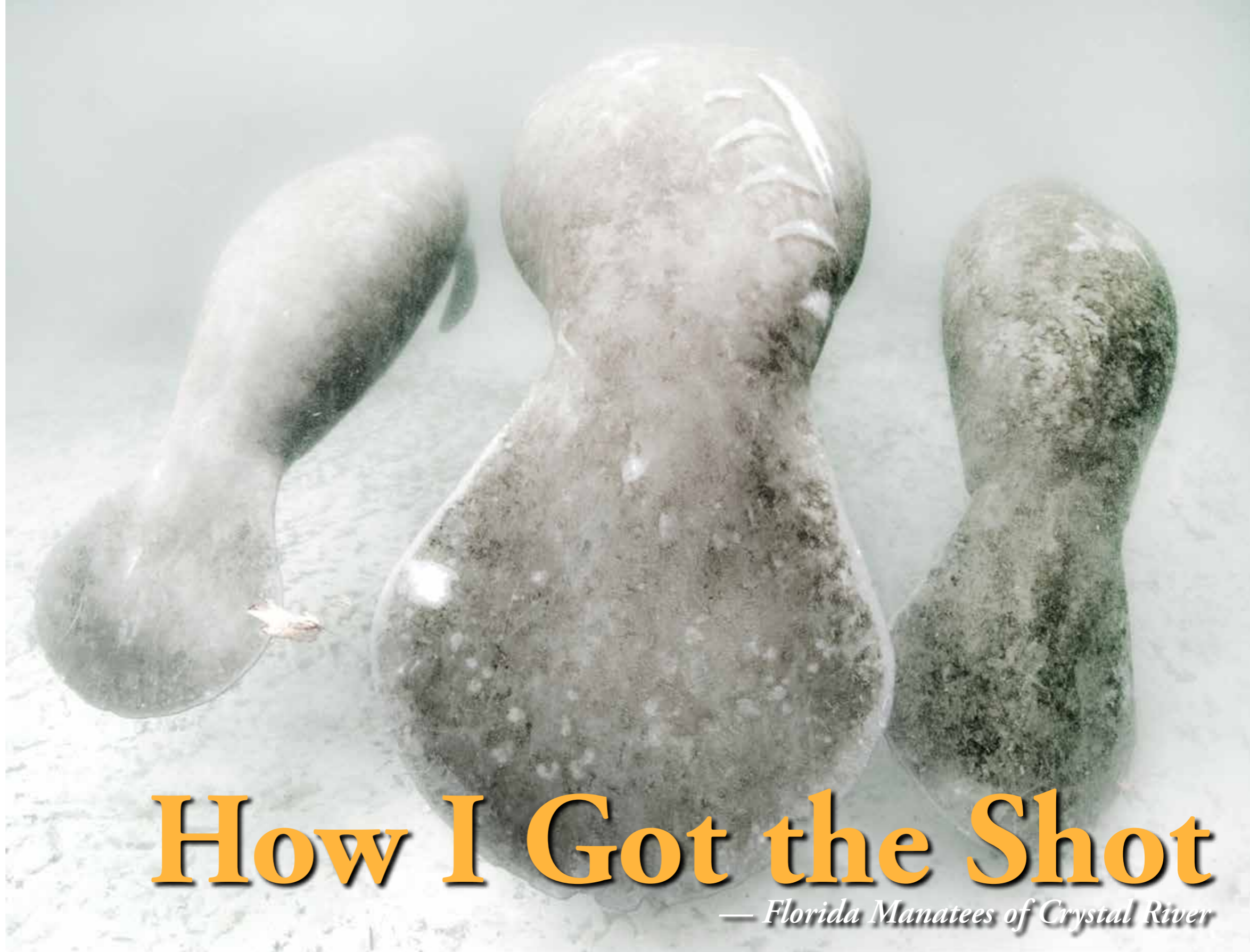
photo &
video

Text and photos by Amanda Cotton

Florida manatees are an endangered species found in the rivers, springs and ocean around the state of Florida in the United States. By far, one of the best places to encounter these gentle giants is at Three Sisters Springs in Crystal River, a state park filled with crystal clear blue water, perfect for capturing imagery of this sometimes curious and playful species.



Florida manatee in this issue's cover shot by Amanda Cotton



How I Got the Shot

— *Florida Manatees of Crystal River*

Under special permit, underwater photographers are allowed to enter the water with camera in hand to photograph manatees within the state park. Strict regulations are in

place to protect the manatees from harassment and abuse as they move into the spring head area to rest and to keep their young warm, as temperatures fall in the winter months.

Many times, manatees will approach swimmers and photographers alike, as this species can be quite playful. With a friendly and outgoing manatee, the photography

opportunities are endless.

In this particular image (left), a young manatee moved in close to my camera several times, curious over its reflection in my large dome





photo & video



THIS PAGE:
Underwater
scenes with the
Florida manatees
of Crystal River

*published
underwater
photogra-
pher based
in Florida.
Her work has
been featured
in science
and diving*

photographer interested in pho-
tographing the Florida mana-
tees in and around Three Sisters
Springs to contact the Florida
Fish and Wildlife Conservation
Commission in Crystal River for
more information on how to
safely and respectfully interact
with this species. ■

*Professional Nikon Photographer
Amanda Cotton is a widely*

*magazines as well as National
Geographic, BBC, Discovery
Channel, The Weather Channel,
Smithsonian Magazine, Times
Publishing, CNN, Natural History
Magazine and Earthweek. A
member of The Explorers Club
and the Ocean Artists Society,
Cotton was recently inducted
into the Women Divers Hall of
Fame. For more information:
Acottonphoto.com.*

port. The sun breaking through the trees
directly behind us added a nice dra-
matic backdrop for the scene.

Darkening the exposure on the ambi-
ent light helped make the sun rays
stand out against the dark sand and
roots in the background. The area
inside the spring head of Three Sisters
Springs is great for photography, with
so many different lighting scenarios
available to underwater photographers
due to the tall trees and light-to-dark
changes in sand color.

It never ceases to amaze me how
incredible it feels to have a wild animal
initiate contact and the interaction.
Many times, manatees will attempt
physical contact with swimmers.

According to the rules of the park, if
a manatee initiates the physical con-
tact, swimmers are allowed to touch
the manatee in return. This has been

somewhat controversial over the years
because of confusion in determining
who initiated the contact and encoun-
ter.

At Three Sisters Springs magical
encounters happen often. We, as
underwater photographers and swim-
mers in the area, need to stay vigilant
in respecting the animals and the sur-
rounding environment of this special
place so that generations to come can
continue to enjoy it.

Recent changes to the park and
its regulations in regards to swimming
with manatees have restricted some
access to them. These updated rules
have been put into place to further
protect manatees in the area from
harassment. Many of the rules directly
impact underwater photographers,
both professionals and amateurs. It is
recommended for any underwater



SEACAM
silver



cinema of dreams



www.seacam.com

