

YOUR GUIDE TO ADEX 2011 + FREE TICKET TO ADEX 2011

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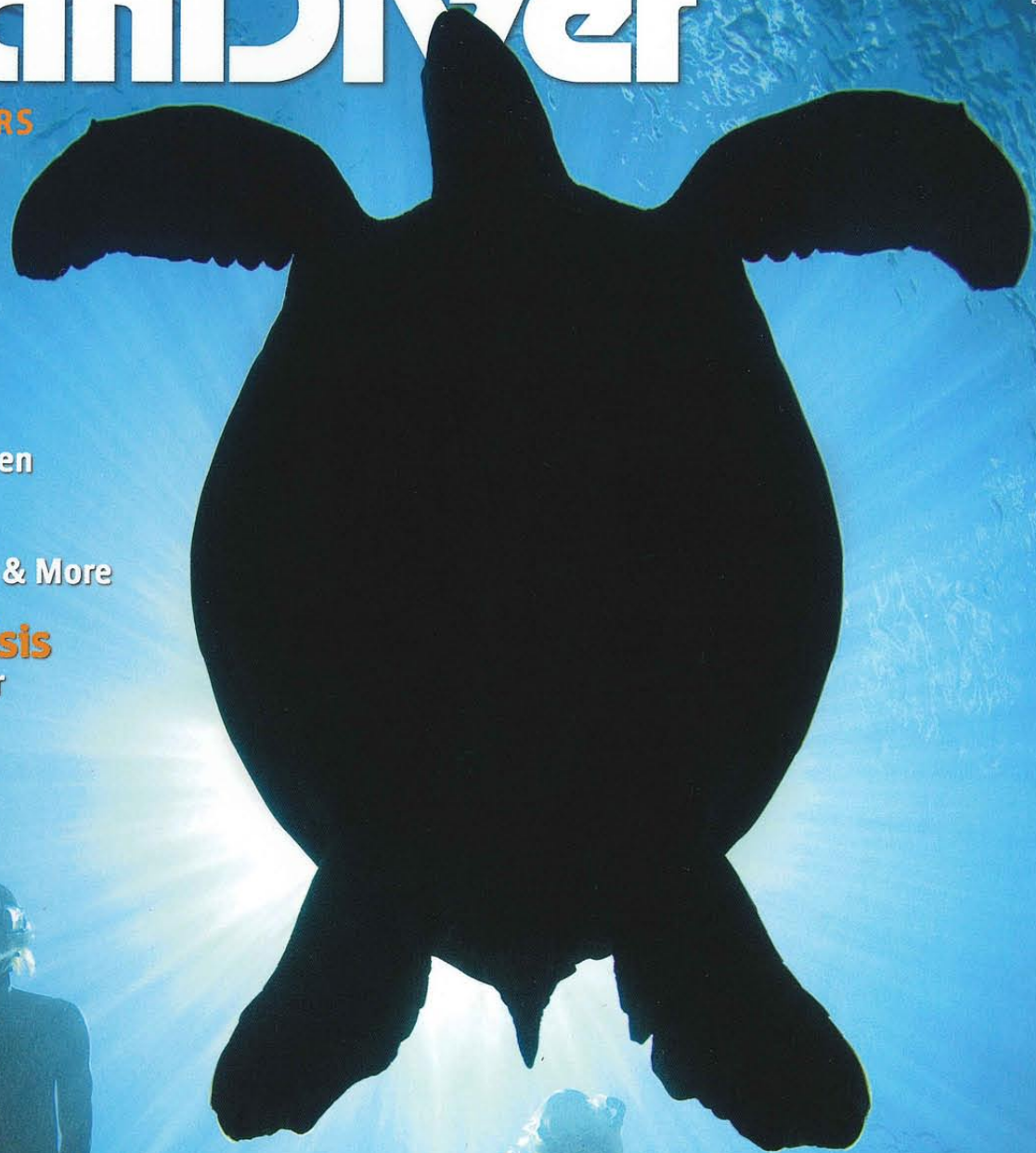
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Terrific Turtles!
The Magnificent Seven

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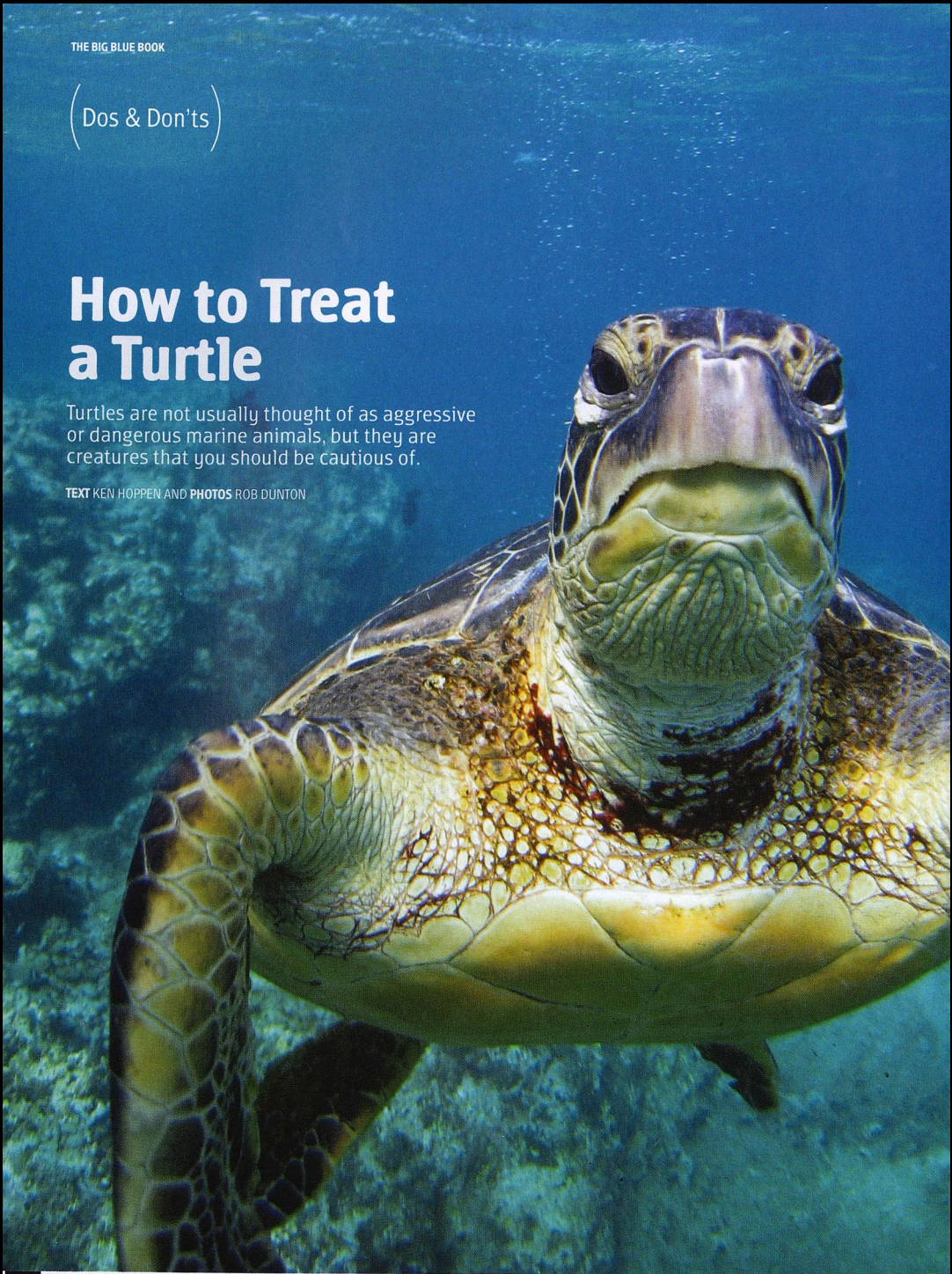
THE BIG BLUE BOOK

(Dos & Don'ts)

How to Treat a Turtle

Turtles are not usually thought of as aggressive or dangerous marine animals, but they are creatures that you should be cautious of.

TEXT KEN HOPPEN AND PHOTOS ROB DUNTON



THE vast majority of turtles I have encountered have been docile and mildly curious of my presence, but there will always be one that does not appreciate your company. Some of the large loggerhead turtles that reside on the Australian coastline, in particular, are known to be a little short tempered with too-curious divers, and as such have earned nicknames such as Agro and Wild Thing. Agro in particular lived up to his name as he came head-on at me in the then-murky water and tried to snap at my camera and strobes. It was more than a little disconcerting to have a metre-and-a-half-long reptile upset at your being in his vicinity!

PAY A LITTLE RESPECT

Turtles officially have no teeth, but their “gums” are solid and have a sharp edge with which they can really do some damage. So how do you approach a turtle so that it won't get upset, agitated, or swim away?

Firstly, do not swim head-on to the turtle at breakneck speed. Swim parallel to a moving turtle and slowly decrease the gap between you. If the turtle is stationary, look at it from the corner of your eye and slowly edge sideways toward the animal. Remember to always leave an escape route for it if it chooses not to stay. No wild animal likes to be cornered. If there are several of you, don't completely surround it, stay on one side so that it has space to move away. The turtle should be able to decide whether he wants to stay or leave.

Never try to pat the turtle; it is a wild animal and is not likely to appreciate the gesture. If you are able to get close, be happy with that. In the past it was considered macho to ride on a turtle, being towed along as it tried to escape the diver's grasp. This is now highly frowned upon behaviour. A turtle would quickly tire from the exertion and may not be able to recover, with drowning the possible end result. Common sense should also tell you not to bother a turtle that is heading to the surface to breathe, it will not appreciate an approach as it strives to

satisfy its need for air.

In short, take your time when approaching a turtle, use some common sense and enjoy the experience of seeing a truly remarkable animal in its natural environment, so that it can enjoy watching you, too!

GET THAT SHOT

Photography of these beautiful creatures is both rewarding and

challenging. My favourite lens for turtles is a 12-24mm lens, F2.8 all the way. This gives you a little bit of choice in your lens length. My preferences for the strobes are the DS125s - light, compact and powerful.

If the turtle is not very appreciative of your company, the 24mm means you do not have to get quite as close to fill the frame and can still get an acceptable image, but for those rare times when you get an animal that is happy to interact calmly and curiously, the 12mm selection is invaluable. Occasionally a 30mm lens or a 60mm macro for close-ups of the face, or perhaps the barnacles growing on the carapace is a good idea, too!

When you have made your lens selection, approach the turtle carefully as explained before. Try to be a little below the animal particularly if it is swimming, and if possible have the sun behind you! This will blue the background water, but often is not a choice that you will be able to make yourself. Take your shots at a slightly upward angle, and try to fill the frame. Eye contact is invaluable, so hopefully the turtle is looking at you!

Use a faster shutter speed and balance the exposure so that you don't darken the background too much. Remember, people do not like to see hundreds of “bum shots”, so get in front and to the side of your subject. Most importantly, when selecting your shots to show your family, friends and workmates, only show them the best half dozen or so shots from an encounter. Leave them wanting more! **ad**

