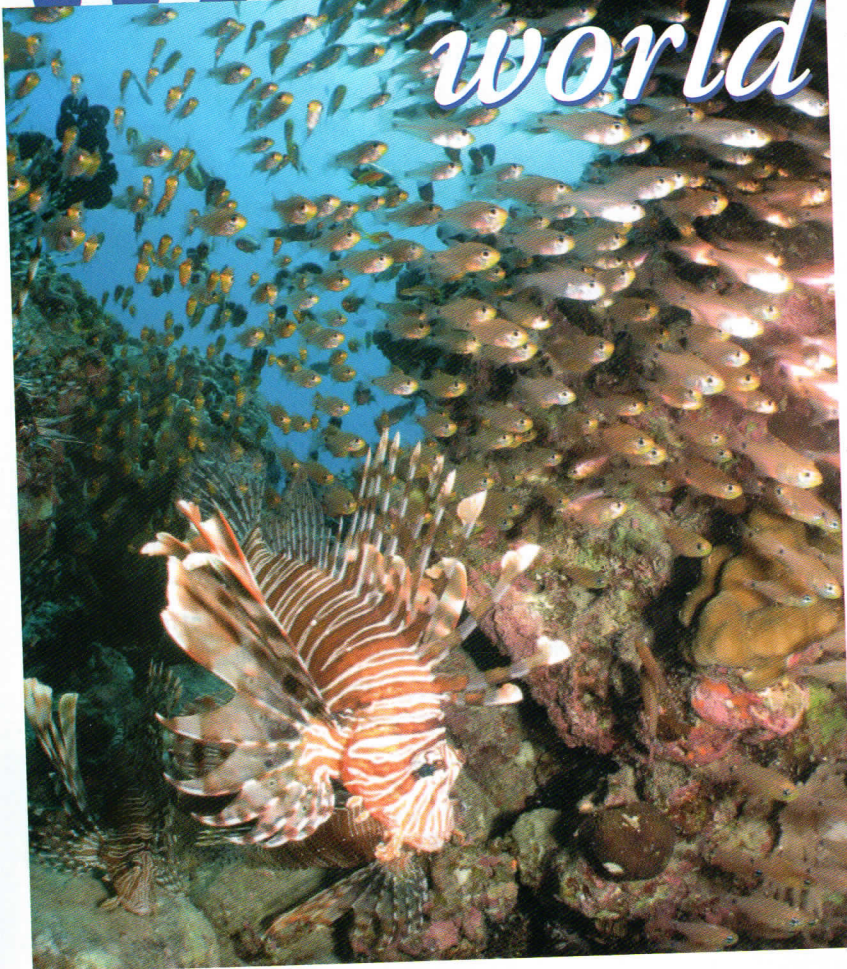


# WATER world



Bromley-born Maria Munn is an award-winning underwater photographer. **SHANNON DENNY** finds out more about marine wildlife on camera



Maria Munn

**IT REALLY STARTED WHEN** I was in hospital for six months. I had a serious accident back in 1994. I had 15 fractures to my back and my leg and my arm.

**I SAW THIS PROGRAMME ON TELEVISION** called *The Aquanauts*. They were a group of American scientists following whale sharks in Honduras in the Caribbean, and they were satellite-tagging them. I had MRSA at the time and the doctors weren't sure if I was going to make it. I saw this programme and

I just thought, 'If I get out of here that's something that I really want to do.' That's how it really started.

**I WANTED TO SET UP A PROJECT** to help people understand more about sharks and whales and dolphins. I funded myself; I sold my home at the time to go around the world and photograph sharks in their habitats. It's a funny one because I never really thought of the ocean or thought of the sea till that point, and then I lost my mum and dad. I just needed to get underwater to get away from everything and just concentrate on something.

**I WASN'T A DIVER;** it took me four years to get over my fear of being underwater before I learnt how to dive. When I was following sharks back in 2000, I was just snorkelling, following them with my Sony Cybershot. Everyone was laughing at me! All the Americans were like, 'You need to learn how to dive. If you've got a camera like that you can't do good pictures, you need one of these!'

**IN 2004 I STARTED DESIGNING COURSES** – which were the first of their kind in England – to help divers with small little digital compact cameras learn how to take good pictures underwater. I really didn't think that the courses would work. I launched them at Excel at the London Dive Show. I was really overwhelmed by how many people really liked them and really wanted the courses.

**ONCE YOU GET OVER THAT FEAR** of being underwater it's just a different world really, it's so relaxing, serene and really special.

**THE BOOK I'M WRITING** is called *Underwater Photography for Beginners*. It's the first of its kind in the world, concentrating on showing divers how they can take good pictures with small, inexpensive cameras. That's due out at the end of October.

**THERE ARE SO MANY PEOPLE** that want to get into underwater photography who have small little point-and-shoot cameras. There's still a belief that they don't take good pictures and that you need to spend on the expensive equipment. ●

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