

# Duncan Parker on Spinhead, Shrimp, Snorkels, Nature Cinematography.



by Jacques Lipkau Goyard

Chaing Mai province in northern Thailand is known for its handicrafts, woodcarving, weaving, and a variety of animals including elephants, monkeys and bioluminescent shrimp. Once a year during the monsoon season these small freshwater shrimp make their way upstream to spawn. The curious thing is that they make part of the journey by land, out of the water, to avoid the river's strongest rapids.

Duncan Parker, a native of UK's Greater Bristol Area, is a renowned expeditionary nature documentary filmmaker and Director of Photography who has been capturing stunning images of the natural world for over 10 years. He worked on National Geographic's *Hostile Planet*, BBC's *Planet Earth II*, BBC's Natural World, *CATS*, *Siberian Tiger*, *Expedition Burma* and *Wild Japan*. Duncan also leads Bristol Camera Lab, the in-house technology lab for the BBC Natural History Unit. On assignment, Duncan uses an eclectic array of equipment, including Sony VENICE, FX6, FX3, A7S, RED, Cellex thermal imaging cameras for low light, grip equipment and accessories. He has gained the flexibility to shoot in a variety of styles: observational handheld, using an Easyrig, presenter-led pieces, wildlife macro and long lens cinematography.

## **FDTimes: What do you enjoy most in your work?**

Duncan: I have always had a particular passion for working on conservation films that showcase the local people and their understanding of the environment around them. Being a passionate photographer and trained conservationist, I enjoy making films that can make a difference in the world.

## **How did you start?**

When I was a kid, I met wildlife photographer Miles Badgley who lived in the woods near my house in Wales. He opened my eyes to wild animals and the joy of capturing images of them.

After studying Wildlife Conservation Biology, I worked at BBC Bristol and went on to freelance as a camera assistant on a variety of natural history and documentary shoots, before running a small-scale production company and camera innovation space.

After working at production companies, I finally managed to get a

runner job at the BBC Natural History Unit and then moved into camerawork from there. I have a real passion for telling stories about people who are entwined by nature. I am looking to work on more feature films and documentaries about the climate, water shortage and nature connection in the future.

## **Where was your Thailand location?**

The location was mainly in a specially constructed river set where we could hold the shrimp for a short time while we filmed their behavior and details, we also filmed in the wild to be used together with these more detailed shots. These river shrimps were among the most difficult animals I have ever filmed. We spent long nights just waiting for behavior.

We filmed the Lam Duan Rapids of the Lamdom River near Nam Yuen city at night with a safety team keeping us from falling in as the water rushed past us. A few Lightbridge CRLS reflectors and an Aputure 600x light allowed us to film the shrimps' bioluminescence and matching behavior. For some reason, the shrimp don't like direct light, but reflected bounce light seems fine to them for some reason.

## **What special gear did you use?**

Another complication with our shoot was that the action took place underwater. So, not only did we want to add movement to the shots while filming, but we also wanted to film underwater with the Laowa Probe lens. This is often hard to mount, but with the Cartoni Spinhead we had the ability to mount underslung so that it was very close to the water's edge while still allowing full movement.

When using the long probe lens, mounting it correctly is one challenge. The other is being able to mount it and add motion to the shots. Commercial outfits use robotic arms, like the Marc Roberts Motion Control Bolt, which are costly to run and impractical in remote locations like ours. The Spinhead allowed us to do robotic type moves in a lighter weight package.

The Spinhead let us film the tiny shrimp from any angle, in a creative way. The Cartoni Spinhead also works as a top-mounted tripod head that allows us to quickly and easily operate the camera to get the right shot. It is made of lightweight aluminum and has

# Duncan Parker on Cartoni Spinhead



Photos by Sebastian Solberg

a built-in spirit level for accurate alignment. It also has a quick-release plate for easy attachment and removal of the camera.

The Laowa Macro Probe is a special lens that is designed to film underwater, and it gives a smooth and realistic look to the footage. Often, the problem when focusing on very small subject is that moving the camera can result in disturbance if the shot unless is on a slider system. With the use of the Spinhead, we could move the camera in several planes across the filming area following the animals.

The dampening of the fluid head in every axis gave us creativity to smoothly spin around an object or slowly drift across the back of an animal. It was a real game changer when filming very small subjects.

The mounting of the Spinhead was quite straightforward. It was off a scaffold H-frame supported by four Avenger Stands, with a 150mm bowl mount slider underslung so that you could move

the Spinhead left to right, but still utilize the full possibilities of movements underneath.

I also feel that the Spinhead, when used in more classic scenarios like interviews, observation documentary or drama, allows you to be able to react to the subject more often and intuitively.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Cartoni for letting me test and use the Spinhead on our shoot. It is always exciting to be pushing boundaries of what is possible with interesting and helpful equipment. I have enjoyed working with some great production teams, getting me to some very remote and challenging locations. When I am not filming, I spend my time climbing and building filming contraptions or furniture in a workshop in Pensford. I am always up for chatting about film projects, camera innovations and gear—and whenever there's a new product, I'll be glad to test it.



Cartoni H533 Spinhead underslung



H533 Spinhead top-mounted

Spinhead photos courtesy of Cartoni