

JPEG or RAW????

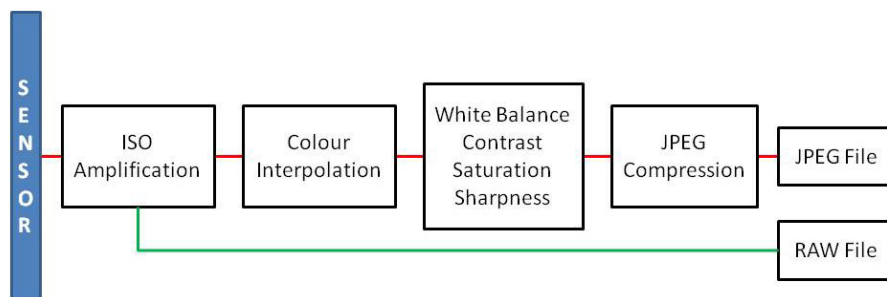
Digital cameras may allow images to be saved in a number of different file formats. The general format that all cameras offer to save images is the Joint Photography Experts Group standard (JPEG) which is the most common file format for storing image data. High end cameras including dSLR's also allow images to be saved as RAW files.

JPEG

When a camera saves an image in JPEG format it compresses the file and applies some image processing. A JPEG file is what is called a lossy format. This means it discards data contained within the file in order to provide a reduced file size. Further, each time a jpeg file is edited on a computer and saved it loses more image data and quality reduces.

RAW

As it sounds, a RAW file is exactly that. It is a file that contains unprocessed image data. There is no processing of the image and no compression. Because of this, RAW files are significantly larger than JPEG files. The advantage is that the image can be processed in the computer without loss of image quality. The exposure and the ISO cannot be changed but almost all other parameters of the image can be adjusted. Professional photographers shoot in RAW.



After processing in RAW an image file can either be saved in JPEG format where it is compressed and reduced in quality or it can be saved in a number of different uncompressed formats, some of which are suitable for printing like Tagged Image File Format (TIFF). Being uncompressed, TIFF files and other similar formats are quite large.

I have heard several underwater photographers say "I don't believe in image processing, I try to get it right in the camera". Firstly, every digital image has already had some degree of processing done to it by your camera, more so if you are saving to JPEG files. And if you are saving as JPEG the photographer has limited control over the parameters surrounding that



processing. But the latter part of the above statement is correct. Always try to capture the image as good as possible in the camera. Processing in Photoshop etc. makes very good images great, but it will not do the same for bad images.

So the bottom line is if your camera offers it, shoot in RAW. If you want, also save a small JPEG of the image for quick reference. And learn to use image processing software. There are many packages available and it is only a few basic functions that are required to quickly turn your favourite photographs into show pieces.