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Preparation is crucial, as it's hard to know just when and where a lively humpback whale will breach.

Southern humpback whale

Every year, thousands of humpback whales swim from freezing Antarctic waters towards northern Australia. The males go to mate and the pregnant females give birth to their young in the warmer waters. This amazing spectacle has given pleasure to countless people over the years and has developed into a huge whale-watching industry. On Australia's east coast, numerous vessels head out to sea to give people an opportunity to watch these majestic mammals 'up close and personal'. It is a journey I often take during the cooler months in the hope of capturing on camera some of the incredible behaviour that the humpback whales can display.

Wildlife photography really is a game of patience, especially if you are hoping to capture certain behaviours. You need to be in the right spot at the right time and that's exactly what happened when I took this photo. The first hour and a half on the boat was very quiet, with few whale sightings. Then word came of a whale breaching a few kilometres out. We headed in the general direction and sure enough, this individual was breaching continually and playfully. I set my camera settings (f5.6, aperture priority, hand-held, using an 80–200mm f2.8 zoom lens) and waited for the right moment to press my shutter. The problem was that the seas were so

dark and choppy, I couldn't tell where the whale was going to breach. There were plenty of missed shots – often, by the time the whale had breached and I composed my shot, all that was left was a massive splash! On this occasion, after the first breach, the whale repeated the breach, so I was ready. I used a continuous shutter setting in order to capture a sequence of breaching shots and also set my exposure compensation dial to minus one. This stopped over-exposure due to sunlight bouncing off the splashing water. To capture the water frozen in motion mid-air, my shutter speed was set at 1/2500th of a second.

My biggest sense of satisfaction comes from the actual experience of seeing so many of Australia's diverse and amazing at close range. Capturing great photos of wildlife behaviour is a simply a bonus.

Happy photography!

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