

## SPEEDY

The rugged cliff at my left, vast endless blue at my right, huge rocks scattered on the ground underneath. Just passed a rocky corner, and deep down there between two stones an unidentifiable body with strange webbed feet, wildly flapping. Head dug deeply into the stirred sand. It looks almost stuck, or as if it wanted to turn over the rock.

My moves freeze, only the light drift carries me on. Suddenly the turmoil clears and a cormorant rockets up towards the surface. He had spotted me and enlarges the distance between us. At my slightest move he'd start running on the water and take off. Now he has me safe in watching distance. I remain completely calm and he continues his dives. Whenever his head points away from me I support the slow drift towards him with a fast kick of my flippers. And I prepare my camera.

It takes some time to convince him that I'm just a piece of harmless flotsam. Flotsam awakens his curiosity, flotsam could be edible, flotsam must be inspected. His dives now slowly come closer and closer. I already look through my viewfinder and watch him speeding up as if he wanted to shoot right through my belly. Obviously his measuring experiences, calculating his own speed versus drift versus floating stuff, are yet limited. He bends backwards in a bow to reach the air somewhere besides the obstacle.

Now his image fills my viewfinder – this is going to be a dream shot - I press the shutter button and the very next moment the camera is almost hit from my hand – he had collided with the flash arm!!! This dream shot surely will be blurred...

A deep breath of surprise. In front of me a flat belly with two lumbering flippers. For a few seconds they hang loose, then energy comes back and hurriedly they paddle out of reach. Then the belly turns round and slowly heads back for inspection – exactly towards my face.

Just inches away an impressive bird's head is lowered into the water. A very strong very long beak, the upper part elegantly bent over the lower part and ending in a sharp tip. A beak perfectly designed to grab squiggling slippery fish, to crash stone hard mussels and strong crab shells. I feel almost hypnotized by two beautiful pitch black half spheres that intensely observe me. My eyes and nose are protected by my mask, my ears are not... Withholding my breath, over and over I beam the telepathic message: *No food, no good!* I still don't want to move, the sight is far too gorgeous!

After thrilling seconds the head goes back up, and with great relief I breathe deeply again. The belly moves left and my long side is being inspected from a safer distance. When I feel his strong pull at my flippers I'm more than comforted he hadn't checked my ears or hair, or even tried my back as a resting place. The culinary verdict proved negative, so he finally loses interest and moves on.



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(With a little help from my friend Lynne Neilly)