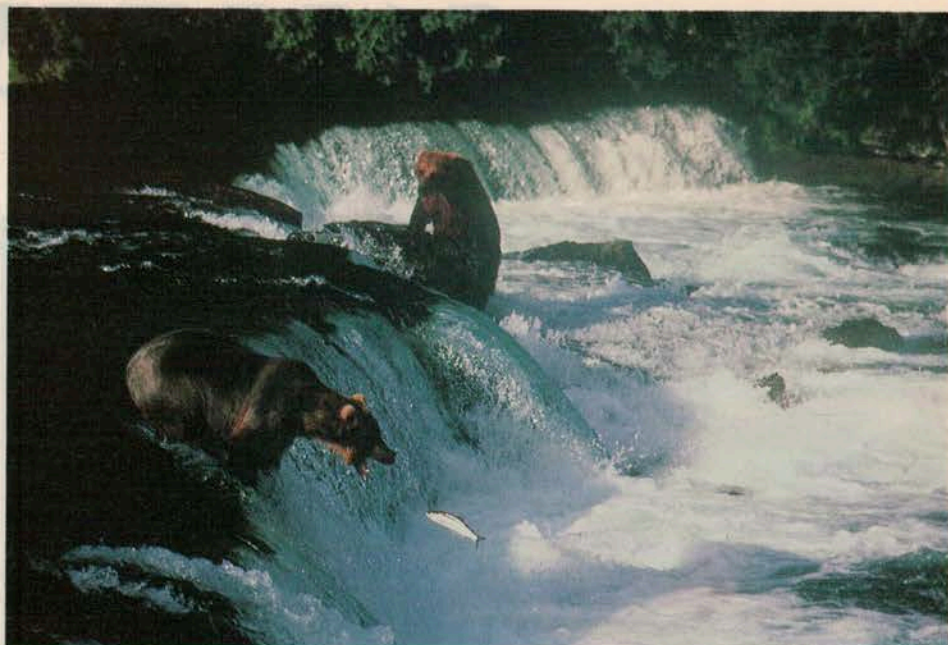


GALLERY



Homeward



Left: the male Atlantic salmon here was a lucky find in New Brunswick, Canada — Roggo had already packed up to go home after a week of abysmal weather

Above: the Alaskan grizzlies are not to be trifled with — Roggo spied this one, catching a sockeye salmon mid-leap, from a safe distance

Pacific and Atlantic salmon are majestic and mysterious creatures, with a fascinating ocean-going life cycle that begins and ends in the same place — the natural freshwater pool. To get back here from the salty sea to spawn, the fish are sometimes compelled to travel thousands of miles, struggling upstream, leaping huge waterfalls and navigating the rapids *en route*. Hence these are highly rewarding, but challenging, subjects for a professional to specialise in.

'I've been taking photographs of migrating salmon since 1983, though I don't know exactly how it all started. I had enjoyed fishing for a long time and also took photographs of wild animals,' explains Michael Roggo, who previously worked as curator at the Natural History Museum in Fribourg, Switzerland. 'I can remember the first time I was fascinated by them, though — I saw hundreds of them swarming in a small creek in Alaska...

Michael Roggo has been pursuing Pacific salmon in the wilds, to gain this intriguing picture of their lives underwater. Liz Walker reports

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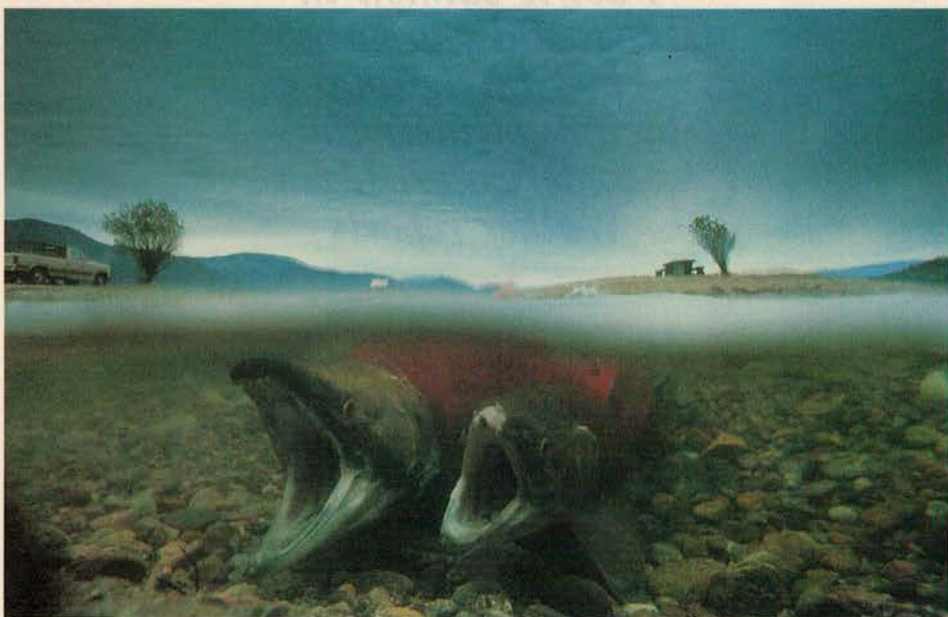
GALLERY



Above: Roggo released the shutter here just as two frisky sockeye salmon swam into focusing range at their spawning site in British Columbia

Right: this shoal of pink humpback salmon was photographed in British Columbia, Canada, from below with a Canon T70 inside a watertight Hugi housing

Below: inquisitive sockeye salmon take a bite at Roggo's T70 inside its housing — he's alright though, safe on the river bank with a remote control handset...



Next year I went back and tried to photograph them with a Nikonos underwater camera, but it was too dangerous — the water was too cold and there were bears around. Now I've developed a system whereby I put a Canon T70 (inside a Hugi housing) in the water and work by remote control, so that I don't disturb the fish and can get in very close for a more unusual angle.

I have tried this in European waters,



but it's near impossible as the streams are often polluted and dark, and it's harder to find salmon, too,' the photographer complains. 'In Scotland the rivers were brown, and they haven't had salmon in Switzerland for the past hundred years! That's why I was so impressed when I first saw those salmon in Alaska.'

Working with five species of Pacific salmon and their Atlantic cousins, Roggo spends much of the year off the shores of Alaska and British Columbia, but enjoys

best the more photogenic, backwater episodes of the epic salmon journey.

He likes to take advantage of the late summer sunlight, but in Alaska he waits until October, when the light is both soft and golden. 'There's quite a lot of difference between light levels above and below the water,' says Roggo, 'but at noon the sunlight is at a good angle and later in the evening you can use flash but I prefer not to, as it startles the fish. I have tried using autofocus but it doesn't work well so

I tend to use wideangle lenses of 20mm and 24mm, focusing on a distance between one and two feet away, then waiting for the fish to swim within the focusing range.

'I have to travel to each location by floating plane,' he says, 'and then I use a canoe, alone, to get close to the salmon and wait for good lighting. You have to be very careful of the grizzly bears though, and remember not to keep food in your tent. I've never had any problems yet though!'