I call this my Swiss Army Knife. Over the years it has been adapted and modified to suit a variety of roles as well as to help reduce the weight.

Having tried and abandoned the carbon-fibre twist-lock mechanism due to its unreliability, I have settled on the slightly heavier but reliable and solid flip-lock mechanism. The latter only requires a small metal hex key to be carried as well as the larger plastic lightweight hex key usually supplied with the monopod. Easily maintained in tip top condition.

I always use a standard tilt head with the fiddly brass locking mechanism removed (depicted by the arrow on image below). That is easily dismantled and saves a lot of time when called into action.

A small metal bush is fitted on top of the monopod and that is secured with Loctite. I use Loctite 270 there and (only) 243 everywhere else I use Loctite.

Threaded bar fitted with nylock nuts is screwed into the top of the bush and the base of the tilt head.

A narrow and thin piece of steel is drilled and bent as shown as a belt hook. The plastic top of the monopod is cut in line with the monopod grip.

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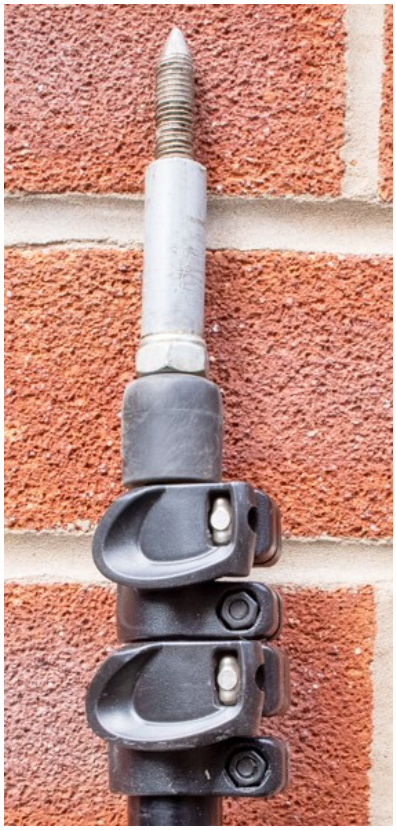
The gap between the cut plastic monopod top and the rounded belt hook 30mm and the belt hook itself hangs down 70mm.

The rubber grip on this type of monopod is also rock solid and reliable. Foam grips tend to slide out of position and break down. My monopod (Manfrotto 290) has to work hard for a living.

I have twin side buckles on the strap for a good reason.

When I use the monopod in the open, I do not want the strap wafting about in the breeze as that can catch the attention of some species. The strap is then disconnected close to the monopod, as shown.

However, with the spike in the ground and the monopod hard against a wire fence, the strap can be invaluable for wrapping around the wire fence and round the monopod to keep it in a rock solid secure position. Handy as a steady camera mount for some video work in the field.



NB: The monopod is supplied with a plastic rotating clip to attached their supplied webbing strap to. I remove that strap and add my own. I also superglue the clip into position to stop it moving from the optimum position and getting in the way.

This other end is no less important. I have a length of snug fitting threaded bar inserted and glued into position using (expanding) polyurethane adhesive. To do that I have a permanent jig in my workshop to be sure the threaded bar remains accurately set while the adhesive is left overnight.

The rubber tip seen is the supplied original drilled. The nylock nut tightens slightly once the adhesive is set. Polyurethane adhesive requires thoroughly wetted surfaces. Cover all nearby vulnerable surfaces with masking tape as the adhesive expands everywhere.

The same applies to the 15mm plastic plumbing pipe seen (50mm). Any make will do and it is bevelled at the end, then secured with polyurethane adhesive.

Note the end of the threaded bar is tapered to a sharp point using a grinder. That end will then dig into a log or firm ground to keep it secure when leaning into a shot.

I carry a short length of straight plastic 15mm plumbing pipe with two straight push-fit connectors attached. One end connects to the spiked-monopod piece of pipe and the other end to a small fishing net fitted also with a short piece of 15mm pipe. These nets are ultra-light and ideal for capturing small specimens in a pond.

Several are carried when dipping, so a fresh net can be used on each different pond.

Nets are then sterilized using the same methods as Anglers, at home, so amphibian diseases and plants are not shared between ponds.

Not shown, I also carry a 230mm length of aluminium bar, threaded at each end and tapered as well at one end. The threaded end fitted with a bush that attaches to the end of the monopod. Once attached that can be driven easily into peat or sand to create an upright stable mount for the camera when shooting video.

I also have a separate standard tilt head that fits on top of the length of aluminium bar. At the tapered end I can add a nut, a 100mm diameter polycarbonate disc and another nut.

That can then be used as a camera mount when laid on the ground, using the mount and camera like a sniper. Especially useful also on soft ground like peat or sand. I call this my pigmy monopod.

Some additional uses (I have more than one monopod in reserve):

- Mounting an independent microphone in the field. Mounted off the camera is always better when capturing audio and the audio is important.

- Supporting a camera off the ground while the lens or tele converter is being changed quickly with minimum risk of debris entering the camera or lens apertures.

- Supporting a camera at the correct height when seated having a break or hunting, so the camera, usually with the longer, heavier lens fitted, is ready for immediate action at the correct height.

  Surprising how often wildlife appears while sat perfectly still. Minimum physical movement necessary to take a shot often crucial in these situations. Some species are very twitchy and vanish on the slightest movement.

- Ditto when stood up, on alert, having seen something or suspect having seen something. Camera and lens immediately ready to shoot and the weight of my default rig (3.3kg) supported throughout what may be an extended period of time.

  You can also lower shutter speed and get enhanced depth of field or more light. Monopod always steadied with one hand with a heavy lens configuration and extended camera strap around the neck for camera safety reasons.

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