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DIVERS

FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

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NATURAL THREATS TO CORAL REEFS 23

WHALESHARK TAGGING

TAGGING JENAN 30

THE LAST WILDERNESS OF THE UAE 36

UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY

LIGHTING, VISIBILITY & BACKSCATTER 40

DIVING A DREAM

MABUL AND SIPADAN ISLANDS

BORNEO DIVERS MABUL RESORT



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REGULARS

- 5** EDA DIRECTOR'S NOTE
- 20** FEATURED CREATURE
Blue Shark
- 75** UPCOMING EVENTS
EDA Event Schedule Updates
- 75** INTERESTING LINKS AND RESOURCES

NEWS

- 6** EDA VISITS RAFFLES INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL'S GRADE 5
- 7** EDA JOINS EPIC:
The Sustainable Living Expo in Dubai Mall
- 8** MALL VISITORS DONATE 400 GHAF TREES
- 9** IN MEMORY OF PATRICK MUSIMU
- 9** SHARK LAGOON DIVE
- 10** EDA SOFTBALL TEAM
- 10** THE DTRP: MAKING A DIFFERENCE
- 11** SHARKWATCH ARABIA
Database Update: Re-Sightings
- 12** ATLANTIS DIVE CENTRE
Zainab Clean Up
- 13** 100% OWSI
With The Atlantis Dive Centre
- 14** MEET JACK
- 14** MONDAY MORNING BLUES
- 14** DIVE THE BIG 5
- 15** INTRODUCING SHEESA BEACH DIVE CENTRE
- 16** CLEAN UP DIVES IN AL AQAH
- 16** MUSANDAM DIVE WEEKEND
22-24 September
- 17** AL BOOM DIVING DHOW TRIP INTO THE MUSANDAM

- 18** DUPLAYS AND AL BOOM TEAM UP
- 18** INDEPENDENT INSTRUCTORS
At Al Boom Diving, Jebel Ali Golf Resort and Spa
- 19** DIVING WITH SHARKS
- 19** 30 DEG AT 30M

CORAL NEWS

- 22** CORAL BLEACHING
- 23** NATURAL THREATS TO CORAL REEFS
- 23** SHALLOW TROPICAL REEFS
In the Indian & Pacific Oceans Boast the Most Coral Species

REEF CHECK

- 24** BRUNEI ANNOUNCES PLAN FOR FIRST MPA
Network & National Monitoring Program
- 24** SWIMMING WITH THE STARS
Training The First Reef Check Eco Diver Team in Haiti
- 25** GRENADINES MPA STAFF TRAINED
In Reef Check Methodology
- 25** AN ASIAN-AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE
On Shark Finning
- 26** NEW ECODIVER TRAINING IN PHILIPPINES
- 27** SUCCESSFUL REEF CHECK ECO EXPEDITION
In Honduras
- 28** REEF CHECK MALAYSIA
Expands Education Program
- 29** REEF CHECK TAIWAN
Continues to Grow

FEATURES

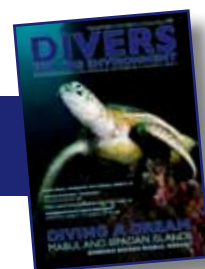
- 30** TAGGING JENAN
- 32** POSEIDON MKVI REBREATHING
Training in South Wales

DIVERS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Please note that EDA's magazine, "Divers for the Environment" includes articles written by individuals whose opinions, whilst valid, may or may not represent that of EDA. It is hoped that the magazine can become a platform for individuals to voice their opinion on marine and diving related issues. You are welcome to submit an article for the next issue of "Divers for the Environment" released in December 2011. Send all articles, feedback or comments to: magazine@emiratesdiving.com

EDA COVER

PHOTO BY SIMONE CAPRODOSSI



Please recycle this magazine after you have read it.

CONTENTS

9 IN MEMORY OF PATRICK MUSIMU

Photo by Peter De Mulder



- 35** SUBIOS EXPANDS TO BECOME
'Seychelles Festival of the Sea'
- 36** THE LAST WILDERNESS OF THE UAE
- 39** EMBARKING ON NEW ADVENTURES

UW PHOTOGRAPHY

- 40** LIGHTING, VISIBILITY AND BACKSCATTER

DIVING DESTINATIONS

- 48** DIVING A DREAM
Mabul and Sipadan with Borneo Divers Mabul Resort
- 66** RETURNING TO SIPADAN
And Discovering Macro Paradise
- 70** MARSA ALAM, RED SEA – EGYPT
- 73** THE "NEPTUNE" WRECK

HEALTH

- 74** DIABETES MELLITUS AND SCUBA DIVING

THE DIVING MOVEMENT



IBRAHIM N. AL-ZU'BI
EDA Executive Director

Each time I reach for the keyboard to write my part for 'Divers for the Environment', I'm always overjoyed by the quality and the quantity of articles we regularly receive from our loyal readers, fellow divers and friends; including our vital health issues thanks to Dr. Barbara Karin Vela, the magazine's health section reporter. It's not only our local friends who send in their experiences or advice to other divers but our friends from various other dives from around the world keeping us up to date on other diving and marine environment events going on.

You will notice reading through this issue that diving is now not only a sport and hobby; but is becoming an influential movement within the economy, tourism, environment and social work. There is finally talk in the UAE about the inclusion of disabled people within the public education system; the diving community has gone beyond that – read Tiffany Joiner's interesting article about her living proof that the diving movement is happily becoming a platform for all community stakeholders.

Diving is also becoming a research hub for post graduate students; EDA is not one to shy away from education development so we're proudly supporting a PhD candidate who is studying the herbivore impacts on the structure of benthic communities – EDA's Marine Biologist Rita Bento. Another regular magazine contributor, David Robinson who is currently researching for his PhD thesis on the study of Whale sharks wrote a fascinating article in this issue; 'Tagging Jenan'. You will notice that EDA, Al Ghurair Foods and David joined forces to place a satellite tag on a whale shark in Qatar, ensuring that research go beyond the boundaries.

I hope you will enjoy reading our FAM trip report from Sipadan, Borneo in Malaysia. I

really believe that with time most of our EDA members will be visiting this amazing diving destination. It is also our pleasure to share the story of my good friend Clement Lee – one of Borneo Divers founders through an exclusive interview.

Thanks to our active members, we get to share other amazing diving destinations with you; Philippe Lecomte takes us to Marsa Alam in the Red Sea, and Stephanie Davies takes us to one of Dubai's popular wrecks. Look out for those articles!

As some of you may know, EDA is a Reef Check Training Facility with a resident Reef Check Course Director and with more than 70 certified Reef Check divers. The Global Diving and Reef Check movement uses tools such as, 'Divers for the Environment' to promote and share their work, so I am sure you will enjoy reading our Reef Check News to find out what your fellow divers are up to in other countries.

EDA participated in EPIC Dubai this year – The Sustainable Living Expo in Dubai, and thanks to our dedicated volunteers, EDA managed to have a fantastic participation in this event, and were successful in raising awareness for the diving community. Our members and volunteers always make us proud with their uncompromising support for EDA.

The diving movement is also so proud of its local dive centers and clubs. You will read in the news section of this issue about all of the great work organized by EDA dive centers; all the way from cleanups and photography courses to all the fun events you can have whilst diving. We have noticed that the diving industry is growing rapidly in the UAE and dive centers are now using innovative methods to promote for dive courses and trips.

In my June editorial I said that a photograph always has a story behind it, and in this issue thanks to our good friend Warren Baverstock and EDA's underwater photography competition winner; you will be given useful information and tips on how to capture yours.

Sadly, we sometimes lose some of our friends who truly left their mark in the diving world both locally and globally. The world of freediving mourns the sad death of Patrick Musimu. All those in the diving community who met Patrick knew him as an exceptional and inspirational sportsman. He was the first man to dive beyond the barrier of 200m on a single breath of air and the only human being to do so without any artificial breathing apparatus, he was truly respected for his great professional achievements. May his soul rest in

peace. We are also missing Adel Bu Haliqa, the founder of Freediving UAE, the UAE freediving champion and one of EDA's valued members and friends. Adel has been missing in Greece since May whilst he was there conducting free diving training in preparation for the next free diving competition. We pray that Adel will be found and return home safely to his family.

Finally, I want to remind you to follow us on twitter http://twitter.com/EDA_UAE and send us your tweets! You can also like us on <http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Emirates-Diving-Association/140646949296859> and share your thoughts and stories!

I hope you had and enjoyed your summer holidays and went diving somewhere on the beautiful planet we live on and we want to wish you all a Ramadan Kareem and a happy Eid Al Fitter and Eid Adha Mubarak.

Ibrahim Al-Zu'bi

EDA VISITS RAFFLES INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL'S GRADE 5 FOR WORLD ENVIRONMENT & WORLD OCEAN DAY

FEATURE **GRADE 5** PHOTOGRAPHY **ALLY LANDES**

In celebration of World Environment Day and World Ocean Day, Rita, Reema and Ally from EDA came to do a presentation to Grade 5 about the importance of coral reefs and the similarities between them and the rainforests of the world. This was entitled **CORAL REEFS: THE RAINFORESTS OF THE OCEAN**.



Today is World Ocean Day and Rita from the Emirates Diving Association gave us a presentation about coral reefs, which are the rainforests of the ocean. We learned many things about coral reefs and rainforests and how they are so similar. She showed us beautiful pictures of animals on land that have similarities with fish (such as the parrot and parrot fish). We learned that rainforests and coral reefs are not only beautiful, but we also need them for food, construction materials, tourism and medicine. Our reefs are getting harmed just like our rainforests are and we need to make sure we do things to protect them. We should plant trees and take care of them and try to buy less wood products. Also, we should pollute less on land and especially in the sea. And when we are near coral, dive carefully so you don't destroy any coral or harm any fish.

there are equivalent species of fish – like eagle and eagle ray."

ROCCO 5B

"Coral reefs are being exploited and people are taking them away for making houses and for tourism."

JAISUNDAR 5B

"I learned that if there are snakes on land, then there are snake fish and if there are frogs, there are frog fish too. I also learned about the coral that small fish live on them."

LARA 5B

"I learned that corals are animals and that the forest and the coral reefs on land and on water are kind of the same because of the animals that live on the land and the same animals live in the water."

LUNA 5B

"I learned that sea snakes also shed their skin but in a different way than normal snakes. I learned that there are these tiny microorganisms in the corals."

JOAKIM 5B

After the presentation, the students created art work based on the images they saw and the thoughts that were shared.



"I learned about how coral reefs were made and how they are being destroyed."

YAO WEN 5B

"I learned that there are many animals which are the same on land and earth; and no matter how different we think they are, they are kind of the same. The forests and coral reefs are kind of the same because reefs are underwater rainforests. I also learned that only 1% of the earth is covered by reefs. Also that humans fish more near reefs because there are more fish there."

AIYANA 5B

"I learned that corals are animals when I always thought they were plants and rocks. I learned there are lots of species of animals and that



EDA JOINS EPIC:

THE SUSTAINABLE LIVING EXPO IN DUBAI MALL



EPIC is produced by SUSTAINABLE MEDIA GROUP LLC (SMG), a joint venture of GLOBE Events, a subsidiary of the GLOBE Foundation, the leading organizer of global events promoting THE BUSINESS of the ENVIRONMENT since 1991, and S.S. Lootah International, the global business and investment arm of S.S. Lootah Group. Both partners share very strong synergies through a common vision of promoting the business of environment and a shared belief that a sustainable future rests on sincere collaborative efforts.

ECO-WISE. PROGRESSIVE. INTELLIGENT. CONSUMER.

EPIC, The Sustainable Living EXPO, is a unique consumer lifestyle showcase, designed for forward thinking companies. EPIC is about doing what you can, when you can...all you need is a little education and inspiration, and EPIC has lots of both! The three-day celebration of earth-friendly living surrounded visitors with truly inspirational people, innovative ideas, and environmentally-responsible products.

WHAT WENT ON AT EPIC?

EPIC DUBAI featured a number of community activities designed to entertain visitors while inspiring positive change in their lifestyle. From knowledge that enables more conscious consumerism for a better future, to facts that drive individual accountability. EPIC empowers everyone to make a difference.

WHO VISITED EPIC?

Today's consumers look for new companies to believe in, that offer products and services that leave a softer footprint on the earth. EPIC reaches out not only to an environmentally aware audiences, but also to an emerging and vast group of consumers looking for information and knowledge to help them make better, more informed purchasing choices.

EDA participated in the sustainable expo which took place in Dubai Mall on the 22nd – 24th June. Thank you to the EPIC team who provided us with a stand and gave us their full support throughout the exhibition.

It was great to participate in an exhibition where you can find environmental companies and services who support conservation and come together all under one roof. Dubai Mall was an excellent location for such an exhibition as it attracts such large and diverse crowds of visitors and there was something of interest for everyone.

Thank you to all our members, old and new who dropped by to say hello and a MASSIVE thank you goes out to our dedicated and keen volunteers who dedicated their precious time to help us out at our stand! The call back for volunteers was outstanding. We really appreciated your presence and your enthusiasm!

MALL VISITORS DONATE 400 GHAF TREES

FEATURE **GOMBOOK**



26TH JUNE 2011 | Mall visitors donate 400 Ghaf trees and commit to save the local environment.

400 Ghaf trees have been donated to Goumbook for the 'Give a Ghaf – Tree Planting Program' by the visitors who took part in EPIC: THE SUSTAINABLE LIVING EXPO in Dubai Mall.

Today the Ghaf is being over-lopped and over-grazed to destruction. Ghaf groves are succumbing to urbanization and rapid infrastructure development. An accelerating decline in Ghaf trees and woodlands would imply a loss in cultural and biological heritage, and Goumbook wants to lead its conservation by giving the opportunity to plant the wild Ghaf and preserve its aesthetical, cultural and ecological significance.

"We were incredibly excited to promote Goumbook during our EPIC expo," said Laura Stagl, International Liaison from Sustainable Media Group, the joint venture between the Globe Foundation and S.S. Lootah International (the global business and investment arm of S.S. Lootah Group), which produced the sustainable living exposition at The Dubai Mall, 22-24 June.

"Not only are we excited about the 400 trees which will be planted through the Give-A-Ghaf program, but we are also delighted to be registering these trees with the United Nations Environment Program's Billion Tree Campaign, an initiative which aims to plant at least one billion trees worldwide each year and strongly encourages the planting of indigenous trees

appropriate to local environments," added Ms. Stagl.

Goumbook and its local partners, Ecoventure and the UAE Environment and Protected Areas Authority, have launched the "Give a Ghaf" program back in January to encourage people to plant Ghaf trees and help protect one of the world's most valuable symbols of the living desert. The aim is to raise public awareness about the multiple values of the Ghaf, raise the tree's profile and reach out to the public to plant Ghaf trees.

Goumbook has a dedicated section on the website set up to provide comprehensive information about the Ghaf and to enable the site visitors to plant trees online: seeds are planted for them and taken care of for a period of 5 years providing water and organic fertilizers. Later, when the trees are strong enough, they will be given back to the local community and donated to parks, municipalities, schools or urban areas where natural shade and greenery are needed.

Tatiana Antonelli Abella, co founder and Managing Director of Goumbook, was in Dubai Mall to encourage people to donate and to raise awareness on the Ghaf. She was helped by a total of 35 volunteers from the Volunteer in Dubai Association.

"It is important to meet with the local community to share information on the importance of the environment and to define our role as individuals in the field of environmental protection and conservation of natural resources", she said.



"The 'Give a Ghaf' initiative enables people to participate in positive action and reinforces the Society's role in changing behaviours when dealing with the environment, stimulating joint work for a better future," she added.



IN MEMORY OF PATRICK MUSIMU

The world of freediving mourns the death of Patrick Musimu. People who met him respected his great human and professional qualities. Patrick was an exceptional and inspirational sportsman. He was the first man to dive beyond the barrier of 200m on a single breath of air and the only human being to do this without any artificial breathing artifact.

In 2002, after 4 world records set under the regulations of AIDA and IAFD, Patrick Musimu decided to step out of the freediving federations. His quest for the unknown lead him to the 'No Limit' category. According to him, this category should not be considered nor used as a sport.

In 2003, Patrick had a dream. The idea was to test and demonstrate human potential far from any commercial and political games.

In 2004, when Patrick announced a dive at 200 meters – a depth where his body would be submitted to 21kg/cm^2 – the authorities of the Red Sea Government believed in his tremendous project and gave the green light to the most ambitious diving project: The Ultimate Dive.

His approach challenged many commonly held beliefs about 'No Limit' diving. To counter the pressure, Patrick decided to develop and to master The Air Cavity Flooding technique. A method which consists of flooding his middle ears and sinuses with sea water during descent. Unlike any divers around the world, Patrick Musimu did not use any air!

Despite several requests from the board of free diving federation Patrick Musimu refused to have his dive ratified. Patrick explained: "What sense is there in warranting these dives at the ends of the world in title? What is left to "judge" while, lost at these depths Man discovers something greater than himself?"

Controversy and barriers became daily routine but Patrick remained focused and trained to survive the unknown.

In June 2005, within 3 weeks and only 10 dives, Patrick marked history by diving consecutively to 100, 136, 151, 170, 185 metres, and on the 26th of June, he finally reached the mythical mark of 200 metres.

On the 30th of June, his body exhausted, forced him to stop after a dive at 209,6 metres, shattering the deepest human performance registered by almost 40 meters.

Never in diving history, has such a gap between performances been achieved.

Photo by Eric Petit



SHARK LAGOON DIVE

The Atlantis Dive Centre is now offering dives in the Shark Tank at the Atlantis Hotel.

For many, it is a once in a life time experience to dive in crystal clear water, surrounded by sharks and rays and wave at the guests watching you from the windows below.

The Atlantis Dive Centre is offering the dives for certified divers and for those who also wish to take part in our Discover Scuba Diving program. The Dive Centre also offers the dive (an additional dive to their course) for students who are doing their:

- National Geographic course
- National Geographic Almanac
- PADI Photography Specialty
- PADI Videography Specialty
- PADI Fish ID Specialty

Please call the Atlantis Dive Centre on **04 426 3000** for more information.



EDA SOFTBALL TEAM

FEATURE **HOLLIE BURROUGHS, DIVEMASTER
TRAINEE WITH AL BOOM DIVING**

A group of enthusiastic divers have teamed up to get involved in a new sport – softball! Sponsored by EDA, the EDA Team plays every Wednesday evening in the Duplays recreational softball league held at the field next to the Metropolitan Hotel.

Divers in the team include Ibrahim Al'Zubi, EDA's Executive Director, Francis Uy, PADI Course Director and Dive Supervisor at the Dubai Aquarium & Underwater Zoo; Samantha Joffe, Marketing Manager at Al Boom Diving, Geoff Braden, Independent PADI AI with Al Boom Diving, myself and a number of other divers that have discovered a love of softball.

"This is a great sporting and social get-together to do every week," commented Ibrahim. "It has given us a great reason to chat about the weekend diving after the game".

"We have also managed to get a lot of people interested in diving just through our presence on the field" said Sam Joffe.

"I was thrilled with the idea of playing my favorite sport, with my dive friends," said Geoff Braden. "The team is going from strength to strength and we have a good team in place now".

EDA has kindly sponsored team softball shirts, which further increases the visibility of diving out in the public eye.

The team has also furthered the crossover between softball and diving among its players. A special congratulations to Team EDA's newest divers, third basewoman, Laura Gibson, and outfielder, Xuan Jin. Instructed by Lee McDee, Independent PADI Instructor with Al Boom Diving and Team EDA shortstop, both Laura and Xuan received their PADI Open Water certifications in July.

Team EDA would like to thank the Emirates Diving Association for its sponsorship and invite all EDA divers to help cheer us on next season. Games are held every Wednesday evening from September 14th to November 15th between 7pm and 11pm at the softball fields next to the Metropolitan Hotel on Sheikh Zayed Road. Food and beverages are available on site, so grab your hotdog and come to watch the fun!



THE DTRP: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

FEATURE **DUBAI TURTLE REHABILITATION PROJECT**
PHOTOGRAPHY **WARREN BAVERSTOCK**

On June 16th the Dubai Turtle Rehabilitation Project (DTRP) organised a release for 101 critically endangered hawksbill turtles back into the wild in celebration of World Sea Turtle Day. All the turtles released were rescued from the beaches of Dubai in the colder winter months. 101 children, including competition winners, pupils from a local school and hotel guests, released the turtles from the beach of Madinat Jumeirah back into the Arabian Gulf.

The event, which attracted a large crowd with children's activities and a taste of Jumeirah hospitality, was designed to raise awareness of the importance of the turtle rehabilitation project, issues facing turtles, their risk of extinction and conservation of the marine environment.

The release follows a previous event in April where 100 hawksbills were returned to their natural habitat after being rehabilitated by the project. This brings the total number of released turtles this year to 250 with further releases scheduled for October once the sea

water temperatures start to cool.

The DTRP is based at the Burj Al Arab and Madinat Jumeirah and run in collaboration with Dubai's Wildlife Protection Office, with essential veterinary support provided by the Dubai Falcon Clinic and the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory. The project has been running in its current form since 2004 and has so far released over 500 rescued sea turtles back into Dubai's waters. This year alone, over 350 sick or injured sea turtles have been treated by the DTRP after washing up on the regions beaches.

The public turtle enclosure located at Madinat Jumeirah can be visited at any time, with scheduled educational and feeding sessions on Wednesdays at 11am and Fridays at 1pm. If you find a sick or injured turtle then please call the DTRP team on +971 4 301 7198. For more information visit www.jumeirah.com/turtles or visit us on facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/turtle.rehabilitation>.



SHARKWATCH ARABIA DATABASE UPDATE: **RE-SIGHTINGS!**

FEATURE **DAVID P. ROBINSON, JONATHAN ALI KHAN & WARREN BAVERSTOCK**

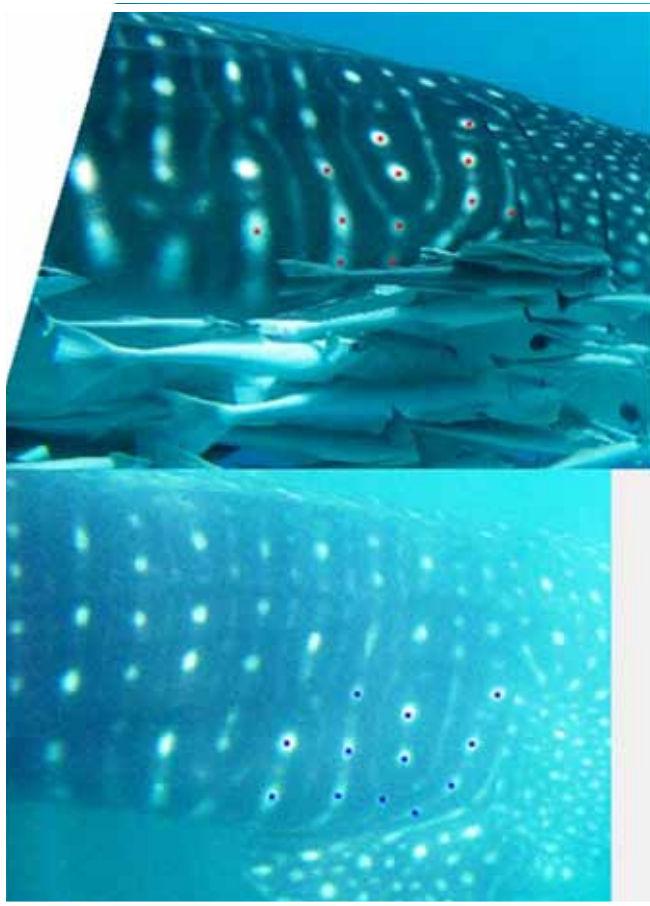
The encounters have certainly increased since our last update and so have the number of images sent into us, which means there are indeed more sharks around! We have managed to add many more sharks to the Sharkwatch database thanks to the continued support of our local divers and dive centres.

Not only have we managed to log the IDs of some more sharks but we have also found two matches from the previous year. The matches not only show that these particular sharks have indeed visited the region on two consecutive years but also that one shark moved between Muscat and the Musandam. The first match was from a shark that Steve Wood encountered on 29.04.11 by Angus Carlisle, which was encountered the year before at Martini Rock on 09.05.10. The second match was between a shark reported by Edward Crowley from Octopus Rock on 14.05.11, which was previously encountered at Fahal Island, Muscat on 29.07.10 by Nasser Al-Khanjari. These re-sights plus the addition of new sharks to the database will help us to build up an idea of the movements of the sharks throughout the region.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the following individuals for their support and for sending in sightings to Sharkwatch Arabia: Steve Wood, Nicola Bush, Roustem Khamitov, April Hendreschke, Graham Potts, Anna Seaman and Denise Losi.

If you encounter a whale shark in this region, please visit www.sharkwatcharabia.com and report your sighting.

The image shows the match of right side spot patterns for the shark that both Edward Crowley and Nasser Al-Khanjari encountered.



ATLANTIS DIVE CENTRE – ZAINAB CLEAN UP



The next clean up is on Saturday, the 24th September. It is going to be a great fun day. We will be running two clean ups on the day including one for our junior divers.

Also from 3pm – 5pm, complimentary Discover Scuba Diving sessions for anyone who has never tried diving.

Please contact the dive centre to book your places as there are limited spaces available.

Call: +971 4 426 3000



Early in June a huge fishing net managed to engulf itself around the Zainab. Like a giant net curtain it covered the wreck from the wheelhouse to the propeller and from top to bottom.

Something needed to be done, otherwise the Zainab was going to become like the Dara, a wreck permanently covered in fishing nets.

So the SOS went out and we got a great response from everyone. So a big thanks to Captain Ali, Paul, Mark, Shaun, Chantel, Lucy, Enrique, Gavin, Leo and William, who all volunteered their time and did an amazing job. Working in support of Project Aware we have been able to send the data from the clean up to them.

On the morning of Saturday 23rd, the guys all met up at the Atlantis Dive Centre. After the EANX tanks were analyzed and the kit was loaded, we headed out for what was to become a wonderful day, both rewarding and also what a laugh we all had.

After the dive brief, mission not so impossible was accepted and we all descended down. To be honest on looking at the net I thought no way will we get it all done in two dives. But the guys were straight in and 35 minutes later... wow you could see the wheelhouse and the nets were on their way to the surface.

After many laughs, lunch and Gavin's wife's chocolate brownies, we headed down to finish the job off. Working behind the wheelhouse to the propeller.

As we headed up for our safety stop, it was a joy to be able to look down on the wreck and see it back in its magnificent state.

So again a huge thanks to everyone who volunteered. If you would like to see a clean up in action, please go to www.projectaware.org/diver/jason-socket or **YOU TUBE, Atlantis Dive Centre.**



100% OWSI WITH THE ATLANTIS DIVE CENTRE



A HUGE CONGRATULATIONS TO: Reg, Stuart, Carl, Gavin, Ernesto and Jack who in July became PADI OWSI and EFR Instructors.

The whole IDC was a lot of fun from start to finish, so thank you for doing your IDC with us. The guys chose the part time course due to work commitments, so back in May, Paul and I started putting them through their paces.

Another congratulations of course must go to Paul Cunningham who since joining the Atlantis Dive Centre a year ago has successfully trained all candidates not only to ALL pass the IE, but also more importantly to go onto becoming very great instructors. His passion and enthusiasm for diving and teaching is second to none.

The IE was held in Muscat and Jack decided not to do the Muscat IE, but to go 10 days later to do it in Egypt. Think there was meeting a girl over there that swung his vote!

On the day before the IE, all the guys met at the dive centre nice and early at 08:00hrs. A final check that everyone had everything and we headed off for the drive to Oman.

By 14:00hrs we were checked into the Al Falaj Hotel and were heading off to the Oman Dive Centre for lunch. The plan to arrive early was so the guys could spend the day relaxing

before the next big 2 days. In the early evening, most of the other candidates arrived so we all met up for dinner and an early night. There were 16 candidates in total, mostly from Oman, which is great for the regions diving.

On the first day of the IE, the guys were up early for breakfast and ready to go. Dave was the PADI Examiner; his first role was the



orientation, letting the guys know the program for the next two days. He is also very good at getting the candidates to relax.

First off was the pool sessions and splitting the group into 3 groups. The pool was warm but everyone sailed through with no worries.

Then the part everyone seems to dread, the exams! After about 2 hours, guys started to trickle out with massive smiles on their faces. Jodie and I sat outside waiting for them all to come out. Never having been a father, I have an understanding of what it must be like waiting outside the delivery room!

Day one was complete but the pressure was not off with one more day to go.

Day 2 started with presentations and can you believe Reg did his whole presentation in 3 minutes!

As the Atlantis group was the first group to make their presentations, we had a few hours spare before the OW. So we headed off to the Muscat Souk for a bit of sight seeing and yes you can see what we bought!



Midday we met at Euro Divers and they were excellent hosts. With the briefings done, they all headed out by boat to the OW site. Three hours later, they returned with some nervous faces, they are all so close. One last thing to do...the debrief and they could be PADI Instructors.

An hour or so later, Dave had heard the debriefs of all 16 candidates and then the moment of truth.

Well done to all 16 candidates, 16 new PADI Open Water Scuba Instructors. So nice when all the candidates pass and as Dave said, 'it is rare to have all pass'. So a big congratulations to everyone!

MEET JACK



Hello my name is Jack, I have come over from England to become a scuba diving instructor. I was working in the UK in the 'Railway Inn' in Birmingham, my shift was about to start and surprisingly it was sunny. But this was not my dream!

I came out to Dubai on holiday mid April, and had an insight into life in the diving industry. I am young, living at home, so what have I got to lose? I did some research on the internet about Career Development opportunities in Dubai and after several emails with Jason

from the Atlantis Dive Centre, my ticket was booked and my new life was about to begin.

When I landed, Jason greeted me at the airport and took me to where I would be staying, at the Atlantis Staff Manager Accommodation (AMSA). I found myself that same day walking into the dive centre, I got all the materials I needed for all my courses as well as a schedule for what I will need to do to complete my dive master course and Instructor Development Course. No messing around.

The dive centre put the DM video on for me but within 20 minutes I was fast asleep! I think I need to sleep before I start the course!

I had a great time working with Jodie Bush and Kerry Wheldon throughout my Divemasters and got a great insight into life as a diver and my diving ability increased immensely. From starting my course with only 40 dives, before I knew it, I was a DM with just over 60 dives.

After my DM the next course for me was Assistant Instructor (AI). This was the hardest course, a big step up, but I was keen to rise to the challenge. The course teaches you how to present to people with "knowledge development presentations." Generally this course can be done over a weekend with 1 or 2 nights to work on. For me however, this took about one full week to accomplish, I did not mind however, being that I felt that I learned more and got more confident, the extra time really helped.

Now onto the final leg of my journey, the OWSI section. This fine tunes the candidate and took 8 weekends to complete. Throughout the OWSI you learn how to teach the other PADI courses and at the Atlantis Dive Centre we finished the course off with a Mock IE, now that really helped.

Then the great day came. I had met the course requirements, I felt confident, Jason and the Course Director Paul thought I was ready to take a real IE so I went for it. I didn't go to the Muscat IE, but instead chose to go over to Egypt in Hurghada. I booked into the hotel where the IE was being held and booked my flights and off I went for 5 days of nervous fun and yes looking back on it now it was fun, a lot of fun.

I am very excited to tell you I past and got the official hand shake from the examiner saying congratulations you have passed! Welcome to PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors). I am still here in Dubai almost 3 months on and still not planning on leaving just yet. I want to get lots of experience and also join the guys on the Santa dive this coming Christmas.

MONDAY MORNING BLUES



The weekend has just gone by and the next one is days away. It doesn't have to feel that way though. Come and join the Atlantis Dive Centre's extra Clean Ups during the week.

On Monday morning, the 15th of August, Captain Ali, Enrique and myself (Jason) were out diving Palm Diera busily removing nets, axles and old fishing pots. Three dives later, we had quite a collection and another nicely cleaned up dive site.

If you're keen to join us on our additional clean up morning dives, please let me know so that I can book you in and who knows you may need to arrange a 4-hour meeting on any given Monday! All for the good cause of maintaining your marine environment.

All the data we collect is sent to Project Aware.

DIVE THE BIG 5



Lion City
Jasim
Hopper Barge
Anchor Barge
Mariam Express

For some fortunate ones out there, you have been on the African Safari and seen the big 5. Now you have a chance to join an elite group who have dived the big 5 right here in Dubai!

Throughout 2011 and 2012, the Atlantis Dive Centre have many fun events organized and the first one we are launching is the, yes you guessed it, 'Dive the big 5'!

The dive sites are Lion City, Jasim, Anchor, Hopper Barge and Mariam Express. The dates for the expeditions are:

MARIAM EXPRESS | 16th September
ANCHOR & HOPPER BARGE | 30th September
LION CITY & JASIM | 14th October

Please call the Dive Centre for more information and to book on the trips. We also offer FREE EANX to all those certified and lunch is also provided.

For those joining the expedition on the 14th October, we will have the award ceremony at 6pm where you will be awarded the one of a kind 'Big 5' T shirt and plaque.

It's going to be a lot of fun and we look forward to seeing you on the expedition.

INTRODUCING SHEESA BEACH DIVE CENTRE

FEATURE **NEIL MURPHY – DIVE OPERATIONS MANAGER** PHOTOGRAPHY **SIJMON DE WAAL**



Although Sheesa Beach Dhow Cruises is the oldest and largest dhow cruise operator in the Musandam, the dive centre is very new. A decision was taken on a year ago to expand into the growing dive market here in the Musandam due to the number of expatriates living in the UAE and Oman. We are a PADI Resort which means we have to abide by certain standards and conditions set out by the Professional Association of Diving Instructors. We are currently the only Scubapro partner facility and Scubapro Educational Association member in the Musandam.

Our fleet consists of 6 dhows and 3 diving speedboats. Our specialty lies in private diving live aboard trips and we have recently expanded into the sharing trips as well. Sheesa Beach also boasts a traditional date plantation camp that can accommodate 120 people and is a great way to spend a weekend with our camp and dive packages on offer. The convenience of the camp being only 1.5 kilometres from the port is ideal. The speedboats that predominantly operate on the weekends offer you the diver, a fantastic mix of comfort and the local knowledge as can only be offered by our Omani captains. Our guides have spent years honing their skills and have been trained by some of the leading names in the industry.

Sheesa Beach has recently started pushing slightly further north to offer diving without crowds combined with breathtaking scenery. We have also increased our zones and now have 4 zones. Zone 1 being to Lima Rock, Zone 2 to Ras Dillah (Habelyn), Zone 3 is up to Sheesa Bay and Zone 4 from Ras Musandam to Kumzar. Speedboat charters are available to all 4 zones on a regular basis. We are also exploring two brand new sites that we are certain have never been dived before.

The dive centre offers courses from experience programs on a daily basis from our daily dhow trips that leave the port at 11:45am to professional qualifications and a host of specialty courses designed to further your knowledge and skills. Importantly we welcome divers from all agencies and walks of life, so no matter what your qualification or experience level we can and will cater to all. There are some major developments in the pipeline that we are certain will turn the industry and the perception of diving in the Musandam on its proverbial head. They are coming, so stay tuned.



CLEAN UP DIVES IN AL AQAH



Diving should always be fun, and if it serves a good purpose, such as helping the underwater environment, all the better. With this in mind, Al Boom Diving arranged clean up dives in Al Aqah on Saturday, 13th of August.

A Coral reef is the nursery of the ocean where juvenile fish have shelter; which is what makes reefs so important to the ocean ecology. A few years ago, Al Boom Diving together with Le Meridien Al Aqah and partners, placed an artificial reef ball site just off the hotel beach in an effort towards creating a new reef site. This site has been left to mature and is not used as a dive site, except for check-up dives held once every six months – and that is what we set out to do on Saturday, 13th of August.

Armed with trash bags and gloves kindly provided by the Emirates Diving Association, divers headed out to start our clean-up day, starting with the reef ball site, Le Meridien Reef. Sitting at 10m, the reef comprises 50 artificial reef structures.

Sadly, some garbage was found on the site, some bit of old fishing net and small pieces of garbage. But a good team effort from all of the divers took care of that quickly. Jacks, Arabian angel-fish and lobsters looked on with interest at the diver-fish hard at work cleaning their home.

Most dive sites actually don't have any garbage on them which is good news for the local environment and says a lot for the environmental awareness of UAE divers in general. The old saying of 'take only photos, leave only bubbles' seems to be followed by divers in the UAE.

On to the second site, Dibba Rock. That was mostly clean. The clean-up crew did collect some small bits of garbage – plastic bags and bottles and even a lost snorkel!

Diving with a common goal certainly turned a boat load of strangers into good dive buddies by the end of the day and we headed to the Gonu Bar at Le Meridien Al Aqah for a well-deserved lunch.

To join the clean-up fun, follow Al Boom Diving on Facebook to learn all of the latest news.

Al Boom Diving runs daily dive trips from Le Meridien Al Aqah Beach Resort in Fujairah. Two dives, full kit, with a gourmet sub-sandwich and return transport from Dubai is AED 525. Email abdiving@emirates.net.ae to enquire or make a booking.



MUSANDAM DIVE WEEKEND 22 – 24 SEPTEMBER



Looking for a weekend getaway? Join our weekend live-aboard trip up into the Musandam.

The trip will depart from Dibba Port at around 6pm on Thursday 22nd September. We set sail for the top of the Musandam overnight while we relax on board with dinner served, and get a good night's sleep in our air-conditioned cabins. We wake up on the Friday, moored in a secluded bay, to start a great day's diving.

During the day, there will be the opportunity to complete three dives and a night dive. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.

On Saturday, we will offer two more dives, breakfast and lunch before we head back to Dibba Port for approx 4pm.

We can take 14 passengers in twin cabins (2 are en-suite and the other 5 share 2 bathrooms). These will be allocated on a first come, first served basis – so if you want to join the trip get your booking in early!

Cost per person is:

- AED 1,900 for en-suite
- AED 1,700 for a shared room

PLEASE NOTE: Equipment rental is not included in the price but can be rented for AED 100 per day. (T/W are included in the price).

This includes two night's accommodation, all meals and dives. Pre-payment is required to confirm your booking.

This trip is for our more confident divers. Divers must be at least PADI Advanced Open Water certified, with 40 logged dives to join. Divers must have dived in the last 6 months prior to the trip.

The Al Boom Diving Contact Centre is waiting to take your booking.

Email: abdiving@emirates.net.ae

Tel: +971 4 342 2993



AL BOOM DIVING DHOW TRIP INTO THE MUSANDAM

FEATURE **NAOMI WARMINGTON, PADI DIVEMASTER AFFILIATED TO AL BOOM DIVING**



Each Friday, Al Boom Diving arranges a day dhow trip to Leema, Musandam for divers, snorkelers and those just going along for the boat ride to enjoy a good day out. With transport from Dubai, breakfast and lunch included, it sounded like a relaxed day out and I had to investigate. Of course, good investigation calls for a team of friends to come along to verify your findings, and so I decided to round up some of the usual suspects.

After a good night's sleep, and an early start, we all boarded the bus at Al Boom Diving on Al Wasl Road and – after an hour and a half nap on board – arrived at the Dibba Port. On board the dhow, we found ample place to relax, enjoying breakfast on board, a cup of coffee and taking in the scenic surroundings – this was starting to feel like a holiday!

The Al Boom Dive Crew gave us an entertaining and informative briefing on the day's plan, dive sites, and necessary info, as we set sail towards Leema Rock – an area known for sighting of migrating whale sharks.

The great thing about diving on a day excursion, in a relaxed atmosphere, is that although you board the dhow with a couple of friends and quite a few strangers, by the time the first dive is done, everyone is your dive buddy.

The dives were well-organized, relaxed and fun, with a divemaster guiding each group. Trigger-fish, moray eels, angel-fish, the occasional turtle or black tip reef shark, and – just possibly – a whale shark, can all be seen according to the fellow divers on the dhow.

The first dive was at Leema Rock which is situated close to the Musandam village of

Leema. The barren rock juts out from the ocean, but underwater it is home to a variety of marine life! All sides of Leema Rock make for great diving, but the seaward side of the rock is prone to strong currents and is best avoided. Sea turtles, jacks and reef fish were abundant. The sloping sides of the island mean that it is possible to do two dives on Leema Rock, the south side at depth and the north side at a shallower level. The average depth is 3 – 27m.

An Arabic buffet lunch of chicken, salad, rice, hummus and Arabic bread was served after the first dive and on the way to our second dive site – The Caves.

The Caves is a classic Musandam dive site, with sloping sides and is, as yet un-spoilt. Named for the rocky overhang that gives the illusion that you are entering a cave, it is a good idea to take a torch on this dive. Ideal as a second, shallower dive of the day, this site has colorful corals and reef fish. Look out for sea turtles, black tip reef sharks and all of the characters from Finding Nemo! The average depth here is 5-15m.

Relaxing on deck was the activity of the afternoon as we sailed back to the Port, chatting to our new dive buddies, and feeling as if we had been on a mini vacation!

Snorkelers, boat riders and divers are all welcome on board the Friday Dhow Trip into the Musandam. Prices vary from Dhs 300 – 400, with an additional charge of Dhs 150 for return transport from Dubai. To book your place, contact the Al Boom Diving reservations team on email: abdiving@emirates.net.ae or call +971 4 342 2993.



DUPLAYS AND AL BOOM DIVING TEAM UP



DUPLAYS, the popular social sports organisers, and Al Boom Diving, the trusted name in scuba diving in the UAE, have teamed up to offer group dive classes. DUPLAYS is known for adding a social aspect to sports by getting together like-minded individuals with a common interest in a particular sport. Al Boom Diving is known as the largest, friendliest and most trusted name in scuba diving in the UAE. It seems to make perfect sense that they would team up to offer the best of both worlds.

"For those that are new to Dubai, or for those that don't have friends that are interested in your favorite sport, DUPLAYS is ideal for gathering together people who are looking to play sports and meet people," said Brian Sigafos, Director of Web Development at DUPLAYS.

"Scuba diving is not for everyone, and your brunch friends might not be that excited about taking the plunge into diving with you," said Samantha Joffe, Business Development Manager at Al Boom Diving. "This is where DUPLAYS are great at getting together people with like-minded interests.

Diving in the summer is ideal for most local residents and it's a busy time in diving. Where better to be than underwater with your dive buddies enjoying the wealth of marine life that the UAE has to offer?"

The PADI Open Water Course is your ticket to dive, and is valid all over the world for the rest of your life! Take the course, meet new people, go places and do things, as PADI advise us. If you don't ever dive, then you won't see 70% of the earth that is covered by the oceans. The course is all-inclusive, so you won't need to pay any extra for DAN diver insurance, transport or gear rental.

The upcoming schedule runs from 10th September – 14th October, with sessions every Saturday at Al Boom Diving.

On completion of the PADI Open Water Diver Course, you will be qualified to 18m depth and are able to dive with a buddy independently, anywhere in the world.



INDEPENDENT INSTRUCTORS AT AL BOOM DIVING, JEBEL ALI GOLF RESORT & SPA

FEATURE **STEVE WOOD**, INDEPENDENT PADI INSTRUCTOR WWW.SCUBASTEVE.AE



Independent PADI Instructors working with Al Boom Diving are able to train students in a resort environment close to the Dubai Marina, Springs, Emirates Hills and Jumeirah Village at the Al Boom PADI IDC Centre located inside the Jebel Ali Golf Resort & Spa.

As an independent instructor working alongside Al Boom Diving, I started using the dive centre at Jebel Ali Golf Resort & Spa about 2 years ago and am now running all of my Open Water courses there. The dive centre is perfect for small groups with a fully equipped classroom, new dive equipment and a large gearing up area. In addition, the pool has three levels including a four-metre deep end – so confined teaching is easy and the students have plenty of room to work on their buoyancy skills.

To give you an idea of how easy it is, here is the itinerary I use for the first two days of any Open Water course:

DAY ONE – I arrange for the centre to be open at 8am so my students can get straight into the classroom. We spend about an hour doing introductions, paperwork, giving the students an overview of the course and of course completing the Quick Review to check their understanding of the online work they have done. While all this is being completed, the staff or your Dive Master will be setting up the equipment in the large area outside the dive centre.

Then it's into the pool to complete Confined Water 1 and 2 till about 1pm.

Lunch at the beach bar gives the students the opportunity to relax and get to know each other. After a short break you can take them straight to the beach and complete Open Water Dive One.

DAY TWO – We head straight back into the pool around 9am to complete the confined water training sessions 3, 4 and 5 with enough time to give your students the opportunity to practice their buoyancy in the deep end.

Another leisurely lunch at the beach bar and then it's Open Water Dive 2 in the afternoon.

Running courses through Jebel Ali has a real 'resort' feeling. It makes for a really relaxed weekend and the feedback I get from my students is great.

Al Boom Diving at the Jebel Ali Golf Resort & Spa is open from 9am – 5pm Monday to Saturday. Tel: +971 4 883 2322 or email abdiving@emirates.net.ae

DIVING WITH SHARKS

FEATURE **SCOTT GUINAN, INDEPENDENT DIVEMASTER
TRAINEE AND MSD WITH AL BOOM DIVING**



A few months ago, I decided to "take the Master Scuba Diver Challenge" as PADI advertises. Who could resist the dive credibility that comes along with the rating – 'the highest non-professional level in diving'? Again, according to PADI, by gaining this rating, a diver is respected as having varied experience in a number of dive conditions, is a competent rescue diver and has logged at least 50 dives. I could do that, I decided.

A key requirement for the Master Scuba Diver rating is to complete five specialty courses, such as Deep Diver; certifying the diver to dive to the maximum allowed limit of 40m; Navigation Diver; providing the underwater navigation skills needed; Wreck diver; Underwater Photographer or Night diver.

Wanting to make the MSD a little more exciting, I decided to take on some shark diving specialty courses. These are labeled as distinctive specialty courses and also count towards the MSD rating.

I headed to Cape Town in South Africa in June to complete the 'White Shark Diving' Specialty course in Gansbaai with Mike Rutzen – otherwise known as the 'shark man' from Discovery Channel. What an amazing experience, especially when Mike had us diving with Great Whites – outside the cage. Well worth a visit if you are in that part of the world.

Heading back to Dubai, a friend of mine recommended the next step for my shark diving MSD course – the Dubai Aquarium Specialty Diver course at the Dubai Aquarium & Underwater Zoo, in The Dubai Mall. A course tailor made to train divers in the correct procedures for diving in the Dubai Aquarium – and a totally different take on the same shark diving theme compared to my experience in Cape Town.

The Dubai Aquarium Specialty course comprises three dives in the aquarium which can be done in one afternoon, or over two days – I opted to dive all in one day. What I did like about the course is the fact that you dive outside of the cage in the main aquarium, with amazing species of shark and, of course, guaranteed visibility.

Excited and, yes, a little nervous, I headed with some friends to the Dubai Aquarium & Underwater

Zoo one sunny Dubai day. The first dive started with a briefing on procedures and how to interact with the marine animals and the conservation issues around sharks. Diving in an aquarium environment is definitely something different – testing your buoyancy skills to the limit! The second dive focuses on underwater photography and allows an opportunity to take photos inside the aquarium, or from the inside looking out! It was then time for the third dive that took place inside the shark cage, while the aquarists from the Dubai Aquarium & Underwater Zoo fed the sharks. Photos can be taken, and believe me, they come out really well!

Once certified as a Dubai Aquarium Specialty Diver, divers can take photos underwater on any subsequent dives. Dubai Aquarium Specialty Divers can also apply to the Dubai Aquarium volunteers program and assist in the upkeep of the aquarium in their free time – something that I definitely plan to do!

The Dubai Aquarium Specialty Course is run by Al Boom Diving and costs Dhs 1,825 for three dives. DAN diver insurance, gear rental, a participation certificate and the PADI certification card are included.

Book now with the Al Boom Diving contact centre on email: abdiving@emirates.net.ae or by calling +971 4 342 2993.



30 DEG AT 30M

FEATURE **GEOFF BRADEN,
INDEPENDENT PADI
DIVEMASTER AFFILIATED
WITH AL BOOM DIVING**



Fred the Moray Eel. Photo by Francis Uy

Tropical diving is the way to go I say. What could be better than board-short and rash-vest diving in the Dubai summer; and what better way to cool off than a deeper dive like Inchscape I off the Al Aqah coast – a wreck sitting at 30m.

I recently dived the wreck again and was reminded what a great dive this is, right off the Al Aqah coast. A deeper dive is always somehow peaceful, cooler because of the depth and always exciting.

Inchscape I was originally a supply barge used to transport people and cargo. It was sunk intentionally to provide a dive site.

The wreck has a famous inhabitant, Fred, who is a large honeycomb moray eel. In recent years, Fred has been joined by his companion, Fredrina, a second large honeycomb moray eel. You will also see schools of yellow snapper; barracuda and, if you look carefully, some nudibranchs. On our dive, we were lucky enough to spot a seahorse on the deck rails that started shrieks of delight from one of our divers, even at 30m. Resting on the deck, look out for stone-shaped rocks, these are of course not rocks, but usually scorpion fish – best looked at from a distance.

Although the Gonu hurricane in 2008 did some damage to the wheel-house, the wreck is still intact. The best dive plan I find is to circle the hull, and then circle the deck. Being a small barge, this is possible well within the dive time of 15 – 20min.

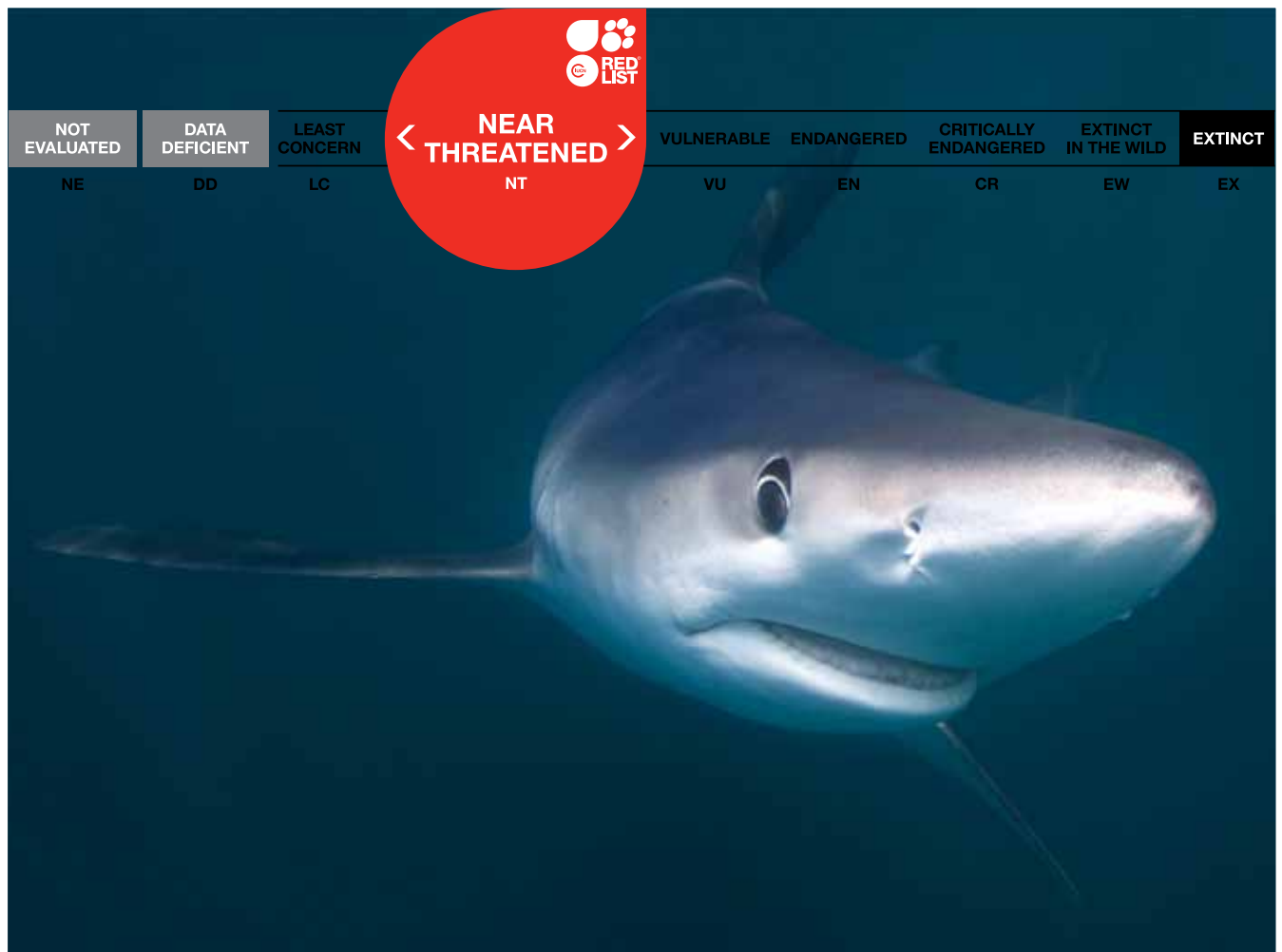
To avoid the crowds, head out on a Saturday. The dive trip departs at 9am and returns after two dives, by around 1pm. Just in time for a relaxed lunch at the beach at the Gonu Bar before heading back to Dubai.

Deep and wreck dives from Al Boom Diving at Le Meridien Al Aqah Beach Resort depart most days. Two dives with tank and weights is Dhs 300. Book with the Al Boom Diving contact centre on abdiving@emirates.net.ae or call +971 4 342 2993.

FEATURED CREATURE

BLUE SHARK (*Prionace glauca*)

FEATURE IUCN RED LIST 2011 BY IUCN PHOTOGRAPHY KARIN LEONARD/ MARINE PHOTOBANK



Local Species in the IUCN Red List 2011

RED LIST CATEGORY & CRITERIA: **NEAR THREATENED**

Scientific Name: *Prionace glauca*

Common Names: Blue Shark

Justification: This assessment is based on the information published in the 2005 shark status survey.

This abundant pelagic and oceanic shark is widespread in temperate and tropical waters. It is relatively fast-growing and fecund, maturing in 4-6 years and producing average litters of 35 pups. The Blue Shark (*Prionace glauca*) is taken in large numbers (an estimated 20 million individuals annually), mainly as by-catch, but there are no population estimates and many catches are unreported. The few fishery assessments carried out suggest relatively little population decline. There is concern over

the removal of such large numbers of this likely keystone predator from the oceanic ecosystem.

Geographic Range: The Blue Shark is one of the most wide ranging of all sharks, being found throughout tropical and temperate seas from latitudes of about 60°N/50°S. It is oceanic and pelagic, found from the surface to about 350m depth; occasionally it occurs close inshore where the continental shelf is narrow. The Blue Shark prefers temperatures of 12-20°C and is found at greater depths in tropical waters.

Native: Albania; Algeria; American Samoa; Angola; Anguilla; Antigua and Barbuda; Argentina; Aruba; Australia; Bahamas; Bahrain; Bangladesh; Barbados; Belize; Benin; Bermuda; Brazil; Cameroon; Canada; Cape Verde; Cayman Islands; Chile; China; Colombia; Comoros; Congo; Cook Islands; Costa Rica; Côte d'Ivoire; Croatia; Denmark; Djibouti;

Dominica; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; Egypt; El Salvador; Equatorial Guinea; Eritrea; Falkland Islands (Malvinas); Fiji; French Guiana; French Polynesia; Gabon; Gambia; Ghana; Greece; Grenada; Guadeloupe; Guam; Guatemala; Guinea; Guinea-Bissau; Guyana; Honduras; India; Indonesia; Iran, Islamic Republic of; Iraq; Italy; Japan; Kenya; Kiribati; Kuwait; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Liberia; Libyan Arab Jamahiriya; Madagascar; Malaysia; Maldives; Marshall Islands; Martinique; Mauritania; Mauritius; Mayotte; Mexico; Micronesia, Federated States of; Montenegro; Montserrat; Morocco; Mozambique; Myanmar; Namibia; Nauru; Netherlands; Netherlands Antilles; New Caledonia; New Zealand; Nicaragua; Nigeria; Niue; Northern Mariana Islands; Norway; Oman; Pakistan; Palau; Panama; Papua New Guinea; Peru; Philippines; Pitcairn; Portugal; Puerto Rico; Qatar; Réunion; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Saint Lucia; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Samoa; Saudi Arabia; Senegal;

Sierra Leone; Singapore; Slovenia; Solomon Islands; Somalia; South Africa; South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands; Spain; Sri Lanka; Sudan; Suriname; Sweden; Taiwan, Province of China; Tanzania; United Republic of; Thailand; Togo; Tokelau; Tonga; Tunisia; Turkey; Turks and Caicos Islands; Tuvalu; United Arab Emirates; United Kingdom; United States (Alabama, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Washington); Uruguay; Vanuatu; Venezuela; Viet Nam; Virgin Islands, British; Virgin Islands, U.S.; Wallis and Futuna; Western Sahara; Yemen.

Population Trend: Unknown

Habitat and Ecology: The Blue Shark reaches a maximum size of about 380cm TL. About 50% of males in the Atlantic are sexually mature by 218cm, although some may reach maturity as small as 182cm. Females are sub-adult from 173-221cm and fully mature from 221cm, although pregnant fish as small as 183cm have been recorded from the eastern Pacific.

Blue Sharks are placentally viviparous, producing litters averaging about 35 (maximum recorded 135) after a gestation period of 9-12 months. At birth the pups are 35-50cm long. Reproduction has been reported as seasonal in most areas, with the young often born in spring or summer although the periods of ovulation and parturition may be extended. The skin of females is about three times thicker than that of males to withstand the extensive courtship bites of males. Females can store sperm in their nidamental glands for extended periods, for later fertilisation. Ageing studies suggest a longevity of about 20 years with males maturing at 4-6 and females at 5-7 years.

Blue Sharks are highly migratory with complex movement patterns and spatial structure related to reproduction and the distribution of prey. There tends to be a seasonal shift in population abundance to higher latitudes associated with oceanic convergence or boundary zones as these are areas of higher productivity. Tagging studies of blue sharks have demonstrated extensive movements of blue sharks in the Atlantic with numerous trans-Atlantic migrations which are probably accomplished by swimming slowly and utilising the major current systems. More limited tagging in the Pacific has also shown extensive movements of up to 9,200km. Substantial data from the North Atlantic on the distribution, movements and reproductive behaviour of different segments of the population suggest a complex reproductive cycle. This involves major oceanic migrations associated with mating areas in the north-western Atlantic and pupping areas in the north-eastern Atlantic.

The diet of Blue Sharks consists mainly of small pelagic fish and cephalopods, particularly squid; however, invertebrates (mainly pelagic crustaceans), small sharks, cetaceans (possibly carrion) and seabirds are also taken. While most of the fish prey is pelagic, bottom fishes also feature in the diet. Blue sharks are known to feed throughout the 24 hour period but have been reported to be more active at night, with highest activity in the early evening.

Major Threat(s): Blue Sharks are rarely target commercial species but are a major by-catch of longline and driftnet fisheries, particularly from nations with high-seas fleets. Much of this bycatch is often unrecorded. Blue sharks are also taken by sport fishermen, particularly in the United States, Europe and Australia.

Periodically, small target fisheries have existed for Blue Sharks such as a seasonal longline fishery for juveniles of 50-150cm near Vigo, Spain. Some 3t of gutted individuals were observed over a two-day period at Vigo fish market. A Taiwanese (POC) longline fishery in Indonesian waters took about 13,000t live weight of blue sharks in 1993.

Blue Shark catch rates reported from commercial longlining in the Atlantic Ocean range in average values from 2.9-100t, while average catch rates as high as 145.0t have been recorded from research

longlining. Stevens (in press) estimated a catch of 137,800t of Blue Shark from high-seas longline fleets, and 2,300t from high-seas purse seining, in the Pacific in 1994. Bonfil (1994) calculated that 21,152t of Blue Shark were taken by high-seas driftnet fleets in the Pacific during the 1989-90 period. The annual global catch of blue sharks is likely to be around 20 million individuals.

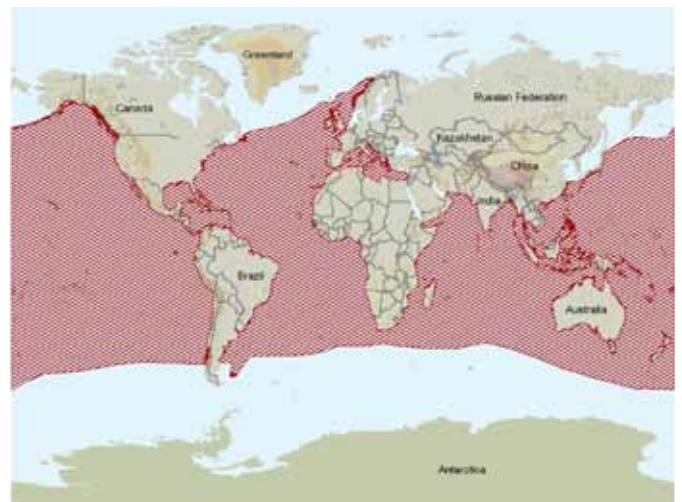
The limited fishery assessments carried out to date have shown no evidence of a declining trend in catch rates of Blue Sharks with time in the Atlantic or Indian Oceans. However, a 20% decrease was evident in the North Pacific between the periods 1971-1982 to 1983-1993. No consistent decline in catch rates through the fishing season was evident for Japanese longliners fishing in Australian waters.

Conservation Actions: The 1995 Fisheries Management Plan for pelagic sharks in Atlantic Canada established precautionary catch levels of 250t for Blue Shark in the target shark fishery. License limitation, a ban on finning, restrictions on gear, area and seasons, bycatch limits and restrictions to recreational fishers permitting hook-and-release only were also implemented.

In 1991, Australia brought in legislation that prevented Japanese longliners fishing in the EEZ from landing shark fins unless they were accompanied by the carcass.

Since 1993, shark fisheries in Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico waters in the US have been managed under the Fishery Management Plan for Sharks of the Atlantic Ocean. The plan set commercial quotas for 10 species of pelagic sharks at 580t dressed weight annually, with recreational bag limits also applied. Commercial fishers require an annual shark permit, and finning is prohibited. In Mexico, a high-seas longline fishery taking pelagic sharks was banned within the EEZ in 1990.

Source: Stevens, J. 2005. *Prionace glauca*. In: IUCN 2011. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2011.1.



www.iucnredlist.org



CORAL BLEACHING

FEATURE NOAA'S CORAL HEALTH AND MONITORING PROGRAM



Coral bleaching well within the borders of the Galapagos marine reserve.
Photo by David Jacobson-Fried

Coral colonies are made up of hundreds or even thousands of genetically identical individuals called polyps. These polyps have microscopic algae called zooxanthellae living within their tissues. The zooxanthellae work like an internal symbiotic vegetable garden, carrying out photosynthesis and providing nutrients which help reef-building corals create reef structures. When a coral bleaches, it loses its zooxanthellae, and will die within a matter of weeks unless the zooxanthellae can be replaced. The term bleaching is used because the dazzling colours of living corals are due to the colours of zooxanthellae in coral tissue, and when zooxanthellae are lost, corals appear white, or "bleached."

Coral bleaching is not well understood by scientists. Many different hypotheses exist as to the cause behind coral bleaching, but the strongest evidence points to unusually warm sea surface temperatures as being the main factor. Coral bleaching events worldwide have been attributed to sea surface temperatures (SSTs) rising and staying as little as 1°C higher than the usual average monthly maximum SST during the hottest months of the year. In Jamaica, significant coral bleaching and death occur when SSTs remain at 29.3°C or higher for one month. Therefore, in the Caribbean and Florida Keys, when SSTs rise and stay above this thermal threshold, coral bleaching is likely to occur.

Corals polyps are beautiful living animals that are enjoyed by millions of snorkelers and divers worldwide, but they are also of vital importance to the whole coral reef ecosystem that they live upon. The corals themselves are the main building blocks of coral reefs, building these massive structures bit by bit through the construction of their skeletons. If corals cannot survive and multiply, reefs will be lost through natural physical and biological erosion as waves, predators, and other factors affect corals.

The death of corals and the resulting disappearance of reefs would result in the loss of an uncountable number of marine invertebrates and fishes that rely on the physical structure of the reef for survival. Coral reefs are home to hundreds of thousands of species, including many not yet known to science. The elimination of coral reefs would also result in great losses of income and resources from tourism, fishing, and the discovery of new medicines. The

reefs of the Florida Keys alone account for 1.6 billion dollars of revenue annually. Coral reefs also protect coastlines by absorbing constant wave energy from the ocean, thereby protecting people living near the coast from increased storm damage, erosion and flooding.

Until the 1980's, the only coral bleaching event recorded was due to flooding from Hurricane Flora that resulted in a large drop in salinity that bleached and killed many corals in Jamaica. Mass coral bleaching was first recognized on the Pacific coast of Panama following the 1982-83 El Nino event. The warm SSTs associated with the El Nino event were identified as the cause of death of over 99% of corals and the complete loss of reef structures in the Galapagos Islands and the death of over 50% of corals in Panama. The sensitivity of corals to small temperature changes then became a major concern of researchers as predictions of global warming and stronger, farther-reaching El Nino events came to light. The 1997-98 El Nino event is the strongest on record to date, resulting in unprecedented coral bleaching and death across the globe. SSTs are expected to continue to increase worldwide and El Nino events are expected to increase in frequency, strength and duration, endangering the future survival of coral reefs.

It has been shown that stress caused by pollution, solar radiation, changing salinity, and bacteria can also result in coral bleaching. The Coral Reef Early Warning System (CREWS) implemented by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) considers various physical factors and issues 'bleaching alerts' when coral bleaching appears likely. The CREWS software evaluates the intensity of solar radiation, wind speed and sea surface temperatures (SSTs) when issuing coral bleaching alerts.

Wind speed and surface temperature must be considered together because low wind speeds allow greater amounts of solar energy to penetrate the smoother water surface, thus raising the temperature. Also, when corals are exposed to very high sunlight combined with low wind speed, the zooxanthellae may become photo damaged, making a bleaching response more likely. Using CREWS buoy data near coral reefs helps give scientists a heads up so that they can adequately monitor and study these events. During the 1997-98 El Nino event, the effectiveness of this system was shown as bleaching was predicted and occurred on Sombrero Reef in the Florida Keys. It is currently impossible for us to prevent bleaching of corals, but through the use of the CREWS buoy data we can at least predict and learn more about this destructive process.

A massive star coral (*Montastrea faveolata*) bleaching at Savana Island, St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands.
Photo by Tyler B. Smith



NATURAL THREATS TO CORAL REEFS

FEATURE NOAA OCEAN SERVICE EDUCATION



A cluster of Crown-of-Thorns Seastars jostle for remnants of corals.
Photo by Gerick Bergsma

Coral reefs face numerous threats. Weather-related damage to reefs occurs frequently. Large and powerful waves from hurricanes and cyclones can break apart or flatten large coral heads, scattering their fragments. A single storm seldom kills off an entire colony, but slow-growing corals may be overgrown by algae before they can recover.

Reefs also are threatened by tidal emersions. Long periods of exceptionally low tides leave shallow water coral heads exposed, damaging reefs. The amount of damage depends on the time of day and the weather conditions. Corals exposed during daylight hours are subjected to the most ultraviolet radiation, which can overheat and dry out the coral's tissues. Corals may become so physiologically stressed that they begin to expel their symbiotic zooxanthellae, which leads to bleaching, and in many cases, death.

Increased sea surface temperatures, decreased sea level and increased salinity from altered rainfall can all result from weather patterns such as El Niño. Together these conditions can have devastating effects on a coral's physiology. During the 1997-1998 El Niño season, extensive and severe coral reef bleaching occurred in the Indo-Pacific and Caribbean. Approximately 70 to 80 percent of all shallow-water corals on many Indo-Pacific reefs were killed.

In addition to weather, corals are vulnerable to predation. Fish, marine worms, barnacles, crabs, snails and sea stars all prey on the soft inner tissues of coral polyps. In extreme cases, entire reefs can be devastated by this kind of predation. In 1978 and 1979, a massive outbreak of crown-of-thorns starfish (*Acanthaster planci*) attacked the reef at the Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary in American Samoa. Approximately 90 percent of the corals were destroyed.

Coral reefs may recover from periodic traumas caused by weather or other natural occurrences. If, however, corals are subjected to numerous and sustained stresses including those imposed by people, the strain may be too much for them to endure, and they will perish.

SHALLOW TROPICAL REEFS IN THE INDIAN AND PACIFIC OCEANS BOAST THE MOST CORAL SPECIES

FEATURE NOAA CORAL REEF CONSERVATION PROGRAM PHOTOGRAPHY KONSTANTIN TKACHENKO/MARINE PHOTOBANK



Reef-building corals are restricted in their geographic distribution by factors such as the temperature and the salinity (salt content) of the water. The water must also be clear to permit high light penetration. Because of these environmental restrictions, reefs generally are confined to tropical and semitropical waters. The diversity of reef corals (the number of species), decreases in higher latitudes up to about 30° north and south, beyond which reef corals are usually not found.

To date, over 1,500 species of reef-building corals have been identified, with new discoveries occurring each year. Of the known species, over 1,400 are found in the Indian and Pacific oceans – an area known as the Indo-Pacific region – and only approximately 70 are found in the Atlantic/Caribbean region. There are over 500 species of coral found in the Coral Triangle alone – a region encompassing the waters around the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands – making this region one of the global hotspots of coral diversity. Even outside of the Coral Triangle, a typical reef in the Indo-Pacific region contains nearly twice as many coral species as an Atlantic/Caribbean reef. The diversity of other species found on Indo-Pacific reefs is also much greater than in the Atlantic/Caribbean.



BRUNEI ANNOUNCES PLANS FOR FIRST MPA NETWORK AND NATIONAL MONITORING PROGRAM

FEATURE REEF CHECK EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DR. GREGOR HODGSON

Brunei, a tiny country located on the north coast of Borneo, is probably best known for its Sultan – who is one of the richest people in the world. Perhaps because of the immense wealth coming from oil production, Brunei has not focused on marine conservation as much as neighbouring Malaysia and Indonesia. Located within the Coral Triangle, close to the world centre of marine biodiversity in the nearby Philippines, Brunei is an important coral reef country. A just published book by Lyndon Devantier and Emre Turak describes over 400 species of reef building corals found there.

Since 2010, Reef Check has been training a team from the Fisheries Department to monitor Brunei's coral reefs and to design a national monitoring network as part of implementation of its first Marine Protected Area network.

In June, during World Ocean Day celebrations, Reef Check's Executive Director Dr. Gregor Hodgson invited Brunei's Minister of Industry and Primary Resources, Pehin Orang Kaya Seri Utama Dato Seri Setia Hj Yahya Begawan Mudim Dato Paduka Hj Bakar, to scuba dive for the first time. An avid mountain biker, the Minister had grown up on the water in a "stilt house," so despite a strong current and less than ideal visibility, the minister was relaxed in the water and enjoyed the dive.

After the dive, the Minister stated, "We're doing this to bring light to the richness and the potential threats and dangers to coral reefs. I happened to see netting caught in the coral reefs damaging the coral life, and plastic floating around," he said. He also suggested that all students in Brunei should have the chance to see the coral reefs.

Later, during a speech, the Minister formally announced that Brunei will establish a network of MPAs and place a moratorium on trawl fishing licenses. As part of the MPA plan, Reef Check has helped the Fisheries Department to formulate a draft "Coral Reef Monitoring Plan." The plan stipulates carrying out 65 surveys twice per year at 15 reef areas. It also includes monitoring sites that will fall inside and outside the MPA network for comparative purposes once the MPAs are in place.

"It will be fun to watch the fish come back to the reefs once the MPAs are implemented," said Dr. Hodgson. "We don't need to prove anything. We know that if you allow a system to return to its natural state, the fish are part of that equation. It is wonderful to have a scuba diving Minister who understands the importance of marine conservation."

Photo by Quratul-Ain Bandial/The Brunei Times



SWIMMING WITH THE STARS TRAINING THE FIRST REEF CHECK ECODIVER TEAM IN HAITI

ARTICLE REEF CHECK EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, DR. GREGOR HODGSON



Many people from developed countries who grew up swimming in pools, lakes or the ocean are surprised to learn that a high percentage of people living on small islands in developing countries do not know how to swim. Perhaps even more surprising is the number of fishermen who do not know how to swim. For this reason, when ferry boats sink in island nations like the Philippines, the death toll is high.

Beginning in March 2011, Reef Check's Haiti Coordinator, Erika Pierre-Louise, began recruiting university students from the three top universities to see if some would be interested in learning to swim, snorkel and scuba dive prior to being trained as EcoDivers. In all, some seventy students applied to join the course. Of those, we selected about 40 to attend. Although some of the applications were passionate ("I love the sea and always wanted to be a marine biologist"), what we didn't know is if anyone would actually show up for the course. The students had to take time off on Saturday or Sunday for three weeks and to pay for their own transportation to the training pool.

On the first day of class we were surprised and excited when almost all the students in the first group arrived – some quite early. For many, it was the first time they had been in the water. A few could swim a few feet. The professional swim instructor, Madame DePeste was very strict. After three weekends of training some students dropped out and some simply could not get the hang of it. But by the end of three sessions, we were left with 15 students who will now be trained as EcoDivers and will form the first survey team in Haiti.

In July, the selected students will learn to snorkel in the sea and begin their EcoDiver certification training. Reef Check is actively seeking donations of new snorkel and dive gear to equip the team.

The Reef Check surveys of the coral reefs of Haiti continue and another 50km of coastline between Gonaives and Kaliko Beach was surveyed in April.

With the new government in place in Haiti, there is a lot of excitement about the possibilities for establishing a network of marine protected areas in the country.



GRENADINES MPA STAFF TRAINED IN REEF CHECK METHODOLOGY FEATURE SUSTAINABLE GRENADINES INC. INTERN MOLLY BREWIS



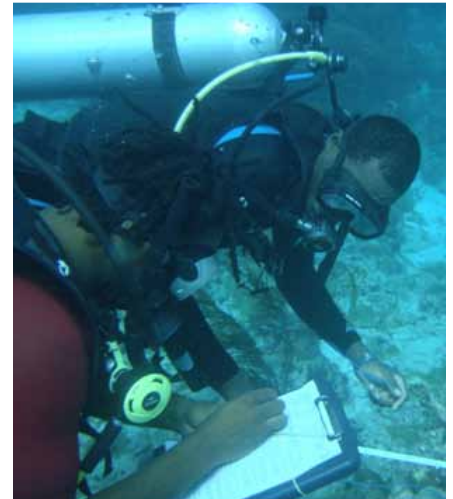
Staff at two recently established Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the Grenadine islands are now better equipped to monitor the health of their coral reefs, following a training course on the Reef Check (RC) methodology which took place on Carriacou, Grenada in early February.

The course was just one component of a larger project to strengthen the ability of MPA managers to effectively manage their valuable marine resources. Coordinated by Sustainable Grenadines Inc. (SusGren), a transboundary NGO that spans the countries of Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines in the southern Caribbean, the project is generously funded through a grant from the United States National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF).

Reef Check EcoDiver Trainer Orlando Harvey, marine biologist for the Tobago Cays Marine Park, was assisted by ranger Benjamin Wilson in delivering the course to participants over a 4-day period from February 8-11, 2011. Three wardens from the Moliniere-Beausejour MPA (Ann-Marie Taitt, Cecil McQueen, and Coddington Jeffrey) travelled from mainland Grenada to join their counterparts from the Sandy Island Oyster Bed MPA on Carriacou (wardens Bryan Prince, Kordel Simon, and Jody Placid, along with board chair Davon Baker) in

taking the course. SusGren staff Molly Brewis and Valerie Francella were also on hand to help with course organisation and participate in the training sessions.

Following an initial classroom session, participants were given a practical introduction to the RC methodology in a shallow area of the Sandy Island Oyster Bed MPA. They tried their hand at placing the transect line, recording substrate cover, and counting indicator organisms while snorkelling. On the last two days of the course, participants collected data in deeper areas of the MPA using SCUBA. Following a delicious meal of saltfish souse on the final day, participants successfully completed the required test and became certified Reef Check EcoDivers! This training will assist the MPA managers involved in implementing a standardized protocol to regularly monitor the effects of stressors such as tourism, climate change, and coastal development on the coral reefs of the Grenadines. Additional support for the implementation of reef monitoring is being provided through a year-long small grant program for each of the participating MPAs, which is also being delivered by SusGren and funded through NFWF.



AN ASIAN-AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE ON SHARK FINNING FEATURE SUE CHEN – CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, REEF CHECK FOUNDATION



Nancy Boucha 2005 Marine Photobank

I was born in Taiwan but grew up in Florida. As a Chinese-American I remember attending many banquets where shark fin soup was served. I never liked the taste or the texture and as a young girl, I would occasionally wonder...what happened to the rest of the shark? I was also surprised to learn that since shark fins are cartilage, they don't really have much flavor – so the chef has to add chicken powder or other ingredients to flavor the soup.

I learned to scuba dive as an adult, and I was lucky enough to see a shark on my very first dive. I was transformed by the beauty, grace and fragility of these amazing animals. I then learned that encounters like this were increasingly rare and sharks were quickly being exterminated throughout the world – all because of shark fin soup. It is estimated that 75 million sharks are killed each year for their fins. When I learned that many shark fins are cut off while the sharks are alive and the animals tossed back into the ocean to die, I felt horrified and ashamed. I vowed to never have shark fin soup again, and to make it my personal mission to do all I could to stop this senseless massacre of our sharks. At this rate, how long can shark species survive?

Traditional Asian culture emphasizes honor – doing what is right, and keeping our lives and planet in balance. We also want to make the world a better place for our children. I know that it is not the intention of my fellow Asians to wipe out the sharks of the world, and threaten the health of our oceans. They just need to get more information about the problem of shark overfishing and how this affects the marine ecosystem and our beloved seafood to make sustainable decisions.

Conserving sharks and keeping their populations healthy fits well with Asian culture and cuisine. Asian cuisine is rich in seafood...so many species of fish, scallops, kelp, crab – and much more. I am not personally against eating seafood and at Reef Check we support sustainable fisheries management. Although Reef Check is best known for our volunteer citizen-science monitoring programs – we also continue to work on the issue of sustainable reef fisheries in the US, Mexico and in several other countries. Unfortunately, shark finning has decimated shark populations worldwide and is not sustainable.

REEF CHECK

A serious issue with shark fishing is that sharks grow slowly, do not begin to reproduce for several years, and most bear only a handful of young sharks. These special features of shark biology make it particularly easy to overfish shark populations. As apex predators, sharks are vital to maintaining a healthy ocean ecosystem including other fish populations. If we continue to decimate shark populations, much of the seafood that we love – our Asian cuisine and culture – could be lost.

Recently, several countries and Hawaii have signed laws to prohibit or limit shark finning. There is currently a bill (AB 376) in California to prohibit the possession and trade of shark fins. Please learn the facts about shark finning, and help conserve our remaining sharks.



Jessica King, Marine Photobank

NEW ECODIVER TRAINING IN PHILIPPINES

FEATURE **NINO JACINTO, REEF CHECK PHILIPPINES**



Students from International School Manila go Eco-Snorkeling. Photo by Nino Jacinto

Congratulations to the EcoDivers who completed the EcoDiver training course on February 6, 2011! The course was conducted over a 2-week period. It consisted of 4 classroom sessions held after office hours, one pool session in Metro Manila, and culminated with 2 days of field work in Anilao, Batangas, Philippines.

The photo shows the EcoDivers displaying the hand signals used underwater by Reef Check for identifying the substrate. It turns out that hand signals are good for photo opportunities too!



Group Signals. Photo by Rivka Nagtalon

In March 2011, the EcoDiver training was conducted for 6 partners of Conservation International – Philippines (CIP). Three partners were from the Local Government of Occidental Mindoro in the Philippines and the other three were university partners of CIP. The group was joined by 2 trainees from the University of the Philippines' Marine Science Institute.

Dr. Wilfredo Licuana, EcoDiver Course Director of Reef Check Philippines, and Ms. Carina Escudero, Reef Check EcoDiver Trainer, conducted the training. The training venue was the Brother Alfred Shields Marine Station of De La Salle University in Sitio Matuod, Lian, Batangas.

In addition, students from the 10th grade of the International School Manila went on an Ecology Field Trip to De La Salle University's Brother Alfred Shields Marine Station in Sitio Matuod, Lian, Batangas, Philippines earlier this year. The 46 students were divided into 2 groups and each group stayed one night in the Marine Station.

On the field trip, the Reef Check Survey method was discussed and how it assists in monitoring impacts of human activities such as overfishing for food or for the aquarium trade, and destructive fishing practices on coral reefs and marine life.

The field trip participants learned how to identify certain species of fish and invertebrates. They also learned how to differentiate between hard and soft corals. For example, they learned that corals are colonies of thousands of tiny animals. Hard corals have tentacles that come in multiples of 6, while soft corals have multiples of 8 tentacles.



Second Batch of EcoDivers. Photo by Carina Escudero

The first batch of students donned their snorkeling gear and did a Reef Check survey of the coral reef. The next morning, it was raining a bit so the water was not as clear. Instead of snorkeling, the second batch of trainees explored mangrove forests and seagrass beds located nearby.

SUCCESSFUL REEF CHECK ECOEXPEDITION IN HONDURAS

FEATURE BIOSPHERE EXPEDITIONS' KATHY GILL PHOTOGRAPHY BIOSPHERE EXPEDITIONS



We've also fit in a visit to the school that is set up on one of the nearby islands. The children are taken here by boat from the neighbouring islands and it is great to be able to come here and talk to them about what we are doing and how they can help to protect the life in the seas all around them. It's also fun to hear their ideas and stories.

a perfect sequence of survey dives. We had a dive without our slates to celebrate the completion of a very successful expedition. All that remains is to pack it all up and ship out, which we will do over the next day, our last on Cayos Cochinos.

Thanks to the team and the fantastic support crew!

The Honduras EcoExpedition is the first of three this year organized by Biosphere Expeditions, upcoming are trips in September to the Maldives and an October trip to Musandam, Oman. If you are interested in joining an expedition, please visit:

www.biosphere-expeditions.org

27 MARCH

This March, a small international team of volunteers joined a Biosphere Expedition trip to Honduras to undertake important Reef Check surveys on some beautiful sites in a marine protected area just off the coast. The team was made up of qualified divers with lots of dive experience, but no knowledge of Reef Check – they left with an amazing experience under their belts, brilliant knowledge of coral reef ecosystems and having contributed a whole load of important data to the worldwide fight to understand what is happening to our reefs. The following are extracts from the team's diary:

21 MARCH

Today saw the first aquatic day for the Honduras Reef Check expedition. The team of eleven are all experienced divers and after a day spent brushing up on critical skills such as buoyancy control, they are ready to go underwater with the tools of research.

We are on the Cayos Islands, between the Honduran mainland and the Bay Islands, in a fantastic location where we find ourselves marvelling over hummingbirds, big iguanas, pink boas (not the feather variety) and fluorescent green tree lizards on a daily basis. That's to say nothing of the life beneath the waves.

Tomorrow we will be running the first trial underwater survey. It will be a challenging exercise as it entails the use of various apparatuses, the identification and counting of numerous indicator species and the usual load of regular diving-related tasks. I've no doubt the crew will shine in their duties.

24 MARCH

We are now well into the survey phase and the team has come together as a well oiled critter-counting machine. The set-up of the sites for the Reef Checks is quick and the processing of the sites enjoyable and efficient. People are logging their data before lunch and with very little direction. All this after only two days of actual surveys!

A well-earned day off from survey diving was almost unanimously spent diving! The three team members who did not come to the Roatan Banks for a morning of pleasure diving, walked through the lush and beautiful rainforest of the island. Those who did dive the Banks saw something big – the first person to put their head under the water came up swearing in three different languages. "WHALE SHARK" and the boat ditched its contents like a cliff full of lemmings. We spent the next 10 minutes following the world's biggest fish as it rose and fell below us. I have seldom seen a more excited bunch of divers in nearly 25 years of diving. The Roatan Banks seamount itself was pretty awesome as well, absolutely pristine, with visibility at easily 30m and probably more.

Tomorrow morning we plunge back into the surveys, reinvigorated and doubly aware of what it is that we are working to protect.

30 MARCH

The final day of data collection has capped off



REEF CHECK MALAYSIA EXPANDS EDUCATION PROGRAM

FEATURE REEF CHECK MALAYSIA



learning about the importance of the forest ecosystem through station games along the jungle tracks. A poster drawing competition was held in the latter part of the program to encourage participants to express their creativity. Our thanks go out to Berjaya Hotels and Resorts in Tioman and Redang, Flora Bay Resort, and Watercolours Dive Centre in Perhentian for assisting us with the transport of participants.

Reef Check Malaysia also has started annual EcoDiver survey trips this year with the assistance of our highly committed certified EcoDivers. Thanks to their efforts, numerous surveys have been conducted so far in Redang, Perhentian, and Tioman. More surveys are scheduled for Bidong (July 22nd-24th) and Tenggol (September 9th-11th).

For more information, visit the Reef Check Malaysia website www.reefcheck.org.my or email wecare@reefcheck.org.my

In March of 2011, our first environmental education program was implemented at three schools in Dungun, Terengganu. The program was funded by CIMB and supported by the Tanjong Jara Resort. The schools selected to participate in this program, SK Kuala Abang, SK Seberang Dungun, and SK Pulau Serai, varied in terms of size and student body. We also worked with the Tanjong Jara Resort to run the program for a group of children from the Garden International School in Kuala Lumpur and Kuantan.

This half-day program consisted of three station games, namely Build Your Own Reef, the Sustainable Fishing game, and the Turtle Action game (by the Turtle Conservation Centre). Each contains lessons on the importance of coral reefs, the need for sustainable marine resource management, and the life cycle of sea turtles. In addition to the station games, we held a colouring competition for students in Standard 5, and six prizewinners were selected from each school to participate in a snorkelling trip, provided by the Resort. At the end of the program, all participants were given Reef Check Malaysia stickers to remind them of the small steps they can take toward protecting the environment.

The program was met with an enthusiastic response from both students and teachers. As a head-teacher from SK Seberang Dungun noted, "This is a good opportunity for the children to be exposed to environmental education. Our students do not get opportunities like this often compared to urban school children." A parent of the winners commented, "My son was so excited about this program. He told me of the lessons he learnt in the program and how he went diving in the pool. I could see he enjoyed himself very much." A teacher who accompanied the winners agreed: "Programs like this are essential for the students' development. These are activities where they cannot obtain from day to day classroom settings."

We would like to thank our sponsors for making this program possible and express our hope that the program will be expanded to other coastal schools in the near future.

In addition, the Rainforest to Reef (R2R) Programme for the Marine Park Island schools has continued to run in 2011, marking its 3rd year in existence. The first supporting activity was successfully carried out on all three islands: Tioman, Perhentian and Redang. A total of 100 students participated in the program, in addition to the 20 Alstom staff who volunteered as program facilitators. The children were given the opportunity to appreciate nature through a jungle trekking activity,



REEF CHECK TAIWAN CONTINUES TO GROW

FEATURE REEF CHECK TAIWAN'S LULU KENG



2010 was the second year that the NGO TEIA (Taiwan Environmental Information Association – www.e-info.org.tw) organized Reef Check (RC) in Taiwan, creating partnerships among community volunteers, government agencies, scuba diving centers, and other non-profits. Last year, over 32 transects from a total of 6 survey sites were completed, with 121 volunteer divers from different backgrounds joining together with RC in Taiwan.

Many people in Taiwan, an ocean nation, have very little understanding of our marine system; the invaluable resources of this beautiful coral paradise are not well appreciated. In fact, environmental conditions are optimal for coral growth in Taiwan; as a result, the island is surrounded by well-developed reefs. However, conservation measures are lacking and the reefs are consistently under stress from over development and overfishing. On the islands where tourism flourishes, such as Green Island and Liukiu Island, untreated domestic sewage is directly released into coastal waters, resulting in the degradation of coral reefs. One of the consequences may be the outbreak of a species of black sponge at Green Island. Furthermore, coastal fishery management within reef areas is underdeveloped and lacks proper enforcement. Unregulated fishing activities are still a major problem in reef areas, evident from the large amount of ghost nets.

According to the 2010 survey data, living coral coverage was less than 25% on some transects from 2 of the survey sites (North-east coast & Liukiu Island); coral coverage was even less than 10% on one transect from Liukiu Island. On the other hand, living coral coverage was above 50% at some of the survey sites at Green Island and Lanyu Island.

Unfortunately, the data from the species survey showed the reef was degrading. Large fishes were not seen at any of our sites. The fish species recorded were unvaried among sites – butterfly fish, snapper, and parrotfish, all less than 8 individuals/100m. In the invertebrate survey, the average abundance of species varied with location, but most of the abundances were very low. The number of crown-of-thorns and lobster were zero at every site.

Compared to the general public, the glory of coral reefs is well-known to scuba divers, but the role the reefs play in all of our lives is not fully perceived, thus not all recreational divers care about the health of coral reefs to begin with. However, scuba divers are becoming more aware of the urgency to protect the reefs. Hence the action of Reef Check was well-received. Chen, a volunteer diver who participated in both 2009 and 2010 Reef Checks in Taiwan, said, "the coral reefs in Taiwan are comparable to most diving hot spots in the world, and we hope Taiwan can become the paradise for divers worldwide in the future."

In conjunction with the underwater surveys, Reef Check Taiwan also organized on-land activities on Penghu Islands and Taitung coast, such as beach cleanups and cultural work camps, namely the Reef Check Working Holiday. We hope to expand the vision of the divers to care not only for the underwater coral ecosystem, but also the problems occurring along our coastlines. Through Reef Check Working Holidays, volunteers have the opportunity to interact with people from the local communities, gain insights to the difficulties that local people face, and the cause and effect of the marine crisis.

This year TEIA will continue to organize Reef Check in Taiwan. The number of survey sites will increase to 7; and more local divers and communities are being recruited as collaborators to build the foundation for sustaining the action. The accomplishments of Reef Check Taiwan are immense, considering scuba diving is not very popular in Taiwan, our people are unaware of the value of our ocean, and our government neglects the importance of marine policy. Nevertheless, we still have the passion and faith to persist with Reef Check in the years to come, in the hopes of seeing our coral reefs being treasured someday.





TAGGING JENAN

FEATURE **DAVID ROBINSON** PHOTOGRAPHY **SIMONE CAPRODOSSI**

On July 8th 2011, underwater photographer Simone Caprodossi and I travelled to Doha to conduct a field survey with the Qatar Ministry of Environment (QMOE) to look for whale sharks and collect data for my PhD investigating regional whale shark ecology. Myself and other team members have been travelling to Qatar on a weekly basis (when the winds allow) since early April to collect information on the whale sharks found in Qatari waters as part of the Qatar Whale Shark Research Project.

This trip was especially exciting as we were carrying with us two satellite tags, one of which was sponsored by EDA and Al Ghurair foods. EDA have been extremely supportive of my research efforts in the region and I was extremely excited to have the chance to try and deploy their tag.

We awoke the next morning in Doha at 02:00am and started the long journey into the field. We were picked up by the QMOE team and transported to our usual coastguard vessel. After a little over an hour of travelling at speed on our coastguard vessel, we spotted a large and familiar fin in the water; we stopped the boat and began to survey. It soon became apparent that this was a whale shark and it was not alone. As we began to count, we estimated that there were over 100 whale sharks all actively ram feeding in one relatively small area. There have been similar aggregations photographed in this region, but to date they are unstudied, and so, very excited, we began to prepare to collect as much information as quickly as possible.

Simone and I jumped in the water together with the EDA tag in hand. Simone's job was to take ID photographs of the sharks whilst I tagged. The other members of the team spread out amongst the sharks armed with cameras to collect images of the unique spot patterns that the sharks have on either side of their bodies. With the knowledge that the area to photograph for spot ID is behind the gills and above the pectoral fin, the work began.

It wasn't long before a 5m shark swam close to us both in perfect position; Simone took the necessary images and then dived to identify the sex of the shark. Gender ID can be done by confirming the absence or presence of claspers, which are found between the pelvic fins. Once Simone had all the information stored safely on his camera, he gave me a signal and I approached the shark. Using a modified pole spear I pulled back the sling, took aim and let go. The anchor for the tag hit right on target, just below the dorsal fin and attached perfectly in the muscle tissue under the skin. The skin of a whale shark is the thickest in the animal kingdom and is 14cm in some places. The sharks usually do not react at all when they are tagged and it certainly doesn't seem to cause any pain.

I swam and gave the tag a quick tug to make sure it was attached correctly and then left 'Jenan', as EDA named the shark, to continue on its journey. The tag we attached was a Wildlife Computers MK10 PAT tag that collects data on location, temperature and depth at an interval of 10 seconds. The MK10

is an archival tag, which means that it collects and stores data. As sharks are underwater for the majority of the time, familiar GPS tags, such as the ones we use on turtles, cannot be used for fish. The tag is programmed to collect data for a defined period of time, in this case 120 days. After the set time period the tag automatically detaches itself from the animal and floats to the surface where it transmits the collected archival data back to us via satellites.

After an amazing five hours, we had managed to collect over 50gb of spot IDs, plankton samples, genetic samples, and environmental information and also managing to successfully deploy two satellite tags, the second tag sponsored by the Emirates Natural History Group. We then left the whale sharks and headed back to the mainland, the atmosphere on the boat was electric on the journey home and everybody seemed very content with themselves and the experience. This wasn't the first aggregation we had encountered but it was certainly the largest we had confirmed to date.

Simone and I travelled back to Dubai to start the image downloading and data processing. My job was now to identify all the individual sharks we had seen using their unique spot patterns and compare them to the Sharkwatch Arabia database to see if any of the sharks we encountered in Qatar had been seen elsewhere in this region; which they hadn't!

Towards the end of July, I received notification that the tag we had deployed on Jenan had

detached and started to transmit its collected data back to us. Excited to find out what Jenan had been up to, I waited patiently for the next five days whilst the tag slowly transmitted the data it collected to me via the ARGOS satellite system. One problem with the archival tags is that they have a limited battery life and only transmit a percentage of the collected data back to us before the tag battery runs out. The benefit of a short deployment is that I get a much better idea of the daily behaviour of the shark.

Once the data was transmitted and safely on my laptop, I started the analysis. My first point of interest was why had the tag come off. The tag managed to transmit that it had activated a premature detachment because the tag had been at a constant depth of 56m for a period of 192 hours.

Armed with the information that the tag had indeed been at 56m for 8 days with no variation in depth I started to examine the behaviour of the shark prior to the premature release. Interestingly enough, the shark displayed a normal diving pattern, diving between the surface and bottom everyday and passing between temperatures varying from 20 to 34 degrees celcius. 192 hours before the detachment, the shark dived deep to 56m and the tag never resurfaced. After discussing this with a few whale shark scientists around the world, I have concluded that there are two scenarios that are possible:

- 1.) that the shark died and the tag and the shark sunk to the bottom
- 2.) that the tag became snagged on something at depth and pulled out of the shark by the anchor

I am hoping that it is the latter of the two that occurred.

Jenan managed to produce a very interesting insight into how sharks utilise the water column in the Arabian Gulf and this will be built upon as other tags are deployed and data is collated. Since April I have deployed seven MK10 tags on both male and female whale sharks in Gulf waters and I have a further two to deploy before the end of the year. I

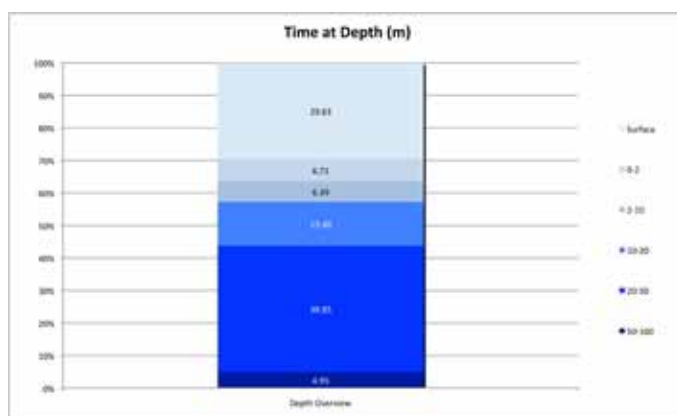
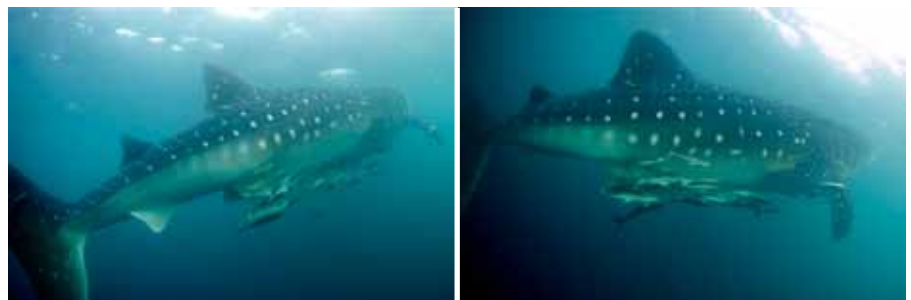


The daily location track Jenan made in red and the tag's GPS locations in green after it detached.

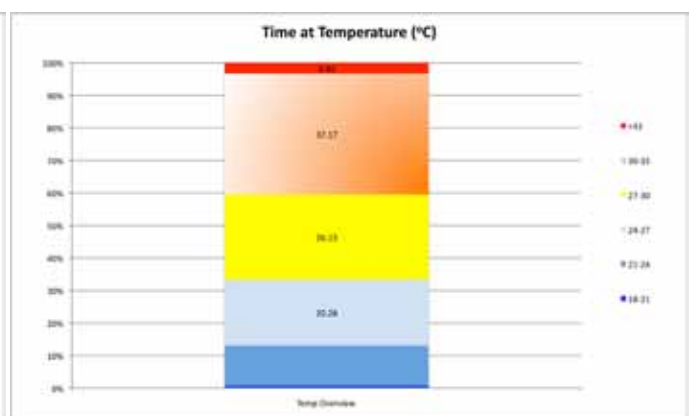
am hoping that these next tags will build up a picture of where the sharks travel over the winter period.

Jenan not only showed that there are distinct behaviour patterns relating to depth and

temperature throughout the day but that Jenan displayed distinct site fidelity during the time the tag was attached. Jenan spent certain times of the day at the surface, presumably feeding and then, at night, the majority of time was spent at depth between 20m and 50m.



Percentage time Jenan spent at temperature and depth.



POSEIDON MKVI REBREATHER TRAINING IN SOUTH WALES

FEATURE JASON SOCKETT – ATLANTIS DIVE CENTRE



Oh how everyone laughed when I said I was doing my training in Wales. To be honest all I could think about was the cold, rain, and diving in a quarry! Argh... but thee who has the last laugh, lasts longer. As I woke for day one, I was met with glorious sunshine and blue skies. What a great day to go diving. Admittedly as I crossed the bridge into Wales, it did rain for about 30 seconds, I put that down to Welsh humour.

Arriving at the National Dive Centre, Chepstow way too early...07:00 as I couldn't sleep, my confidence waned somewhat when all I saw were...dry suits after dry suits...

I would be spending the next 3 days training with the Legendary Jack Ingles. To be trained by Jack is a great honour; to those avid divers especially Tec divers/Rebreather divers you know who Jack is. His diving career started back in 1980 and since then he has been diving and running expeditions all over the world diving on some famous wrecks, Andrea Doria, HMS Repulse, HMS Prince of Wales. But for me more importantly, what Jack does not know about rebreathers, you don't need to know. The unit I am learning to use is the Poseidon MKVI which Jack has been involved with from day one from developing and testing the unit.

DAY 1

Keen as mustard, I sat in the car park waiting for the legend. I would be doing the course with Adam who owns a Dive Centre in Nottingham; we hit it off straight away. For having never met Jack, it was rather easy to work out who he is. In he drove, his van having Jack Ingles written on the side and then everyone in the car park shouting out '... morning Jack', so legend status confirmed.

Cup of tea in hand we got straight into the paperwork, the hardest part of the course to

be honest, Name...oops can I have another form! Jack also went through what we would be doing in the next 3 days.

Over the next couple of hours we built the units from scratch. Jack going through every detail leaving nothing to chance and some good old banter throughout the day. It's going to be a great course.

After lunch we sat down for some theory and a very detailed brief on the dive site and what we were going to be doing on dive #1.

For the first time on entering the water; you have the unit set to Open Circuit and to be honest the water was not that cold, 17 degrees! Very much like we do with our OWV students, descend down the line to a few metres and sit there to get used to breathing off a closed circuit...AWESOME, PERFECT, BRILLIANT.

Once we were comfortable, off we went. You almost have to take your open circuit diving brain out, cause buoyancy is totally different. After about 20 minutes you pretty much have your buoyancy sorted.

The first dive was 90 minutes! We did a few skills such as learning to bail out to Open Circuit in the unlikely event the unit detected a problem. But pretty much, we dived around land rovers, tanks, containers, missiles, and boats. As soon as we surfaced, both Adam and I could not stop yapping on about how cool it was, wow what an awesome experience.

Back up in the dive centre, Jack goes through how to break the units down, stowed them away for the night and headed off to the Bed and breakfast where we were staying for a much deserved refreshment and some theory training before dinner.

DAY 2

08:00 hours we are setting up the rebreathers and doing the checks. The computer is something out of Nasa but yet designed so someone who still struggles with Facebook can use it.

Once the units are assembled, the computer is turned on and the computer does its 55 checks. If it fails one of the checks, it even prompts you with a failure code so you know what it failed on and then you can sort out the problem. The unit will not let you dive if it detects a problem. So anyone out there who thinks rebreathers are dangerous, they are only as dangerous as the user.

Dive # 2 this time entering the water in closed circuit mode, descending on the line and head off to the platform to complete some training skills. More bail out skills, mouthpiece recovery, the gurgle exercise, out of air. Honestly not too many skills to do and Jack had us repeat them over and over again so they became second nature. Then off for a dive to 20m. Another 90 minute dive and a little colder at depth...13 degrees!

Over lunch, we went through some more theory and like all divers, we could not stop talking about the dive and good old dive stories and experiences shared.

Dive # 3. Don't need to change the tanks! Just the dive checks, suit up and off we went for another 90 minute dive. Practicing some more skills, so now both Adam and I are getting very proficient, even when Jack got us to go through an out of air situation whilst hovering one metre off the platform, we cracked it.

It is about by dive 3 you really realize and appreciate how quiet it is underwater. The first few dives your busy getting used to

diving on a rebreather, going through the training exercises, but by dive 3 you are very comfortable diving with the rebreather.

exercises, out of air exercises. Now you can perform the skills without thinking. 90 minutes later we surfaced.

its addictive. Diving on the A300, Zainab, Hopper Barge...it has been great. Paul on the Inspiration, me on the MKVI, wow we



DAY 3

The time has gone by way too quickly. Checked out of the B&B, 56 pounds for 2 nights and 2 meals a day...bargain.

Units set and to be honest it only takes about 3 minutes to put them together. Fresh dilute and a top up of O2 into our two 3 litre tanks. The computer checks and breathing checks takes about 5 minutes. The checks are the part where you have to, as Jack explained, 'take your time'.

Dive # 4. Down to 40m, oh yes.

The Poseidon rebreathers are recreational units so we still follow the recreational dive limits. As we descended down the line, I was surprised how remarkably crystal clear it was at 40m and how cold it was at 40m...10 degrees. So my 7mm semi dry is now only 2.5mm thick!

The great part about the rebreathers is that the computer not only works out your bottom time (NDL), but it also works out your breathing rate and if you have to go to open circuit to surface regardless of whether you have enough bottom time. The computer will give you a warning to ascend to a shallower depth.

As we ascended to the shallower depths, I was surprised how 13 degrees felt warm...been here too long or am I still narced! Back on the platform, we completed some more bail out

Dive #5 the last dive. Almost sad to know it is almost over. For the last dive, Jack steps back and lets Adam and I run the whole dive from checks to actually doing the dive. Apart from the last skill practice, it's all up to Adam and I to run the dive and navigate. So after seeing the tank 3 times from all angles we headed off in another direction...and back to the tank...no only joking.

How silent are the units? We were swimming

have logged an incredible amount of hours. Underwater filming is a great passion of mine and filming in Musandam has been incredible for getting close to the marine life.

At the end of September I am back in the UK, again with Jack to do my instructor course. So starting in October, I will be running the NEW PADI rebreather courses. We have the new books on their way and also the PSAI courses.



behind the pike (fish) and able to hold their tails!

The dive completed, units stripped down, kit put away and off to the train to head back to Dubai. What an amazing course, one I recommend to everyone.

Since being back in Dubai, I have been diving with the rebreather pretty much everyday...

So if you are keen, I am running Discover rebreather courses – pool only 7th and 8th of October and the full course the following weekend. Please call the dive centre to book on and see you diving.

WARNING: Rebreathers are addictive!

SUBIOS

Seychelles Festival of the Sea

November 4th - 6th 2011



Official Publications:

ASIAN
Geographic
2011 WITHOUT BORDERS

AUSTRALASIAN
SCUBADIVER
THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE RECREATIVE DIVING SOCIETY

AsianDiver
BY DIVERS FOR DIVERS

ASIAN
Geographic
passport
TRAVEL WITHOUT BORDERS

SUBIOS EXPANDS TO BECOME 'SEYCHELLES FESTIVAL OF THE SEA'

FEATURE **GLYNN BURRIDGE** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKYFIELD - STB**



Seychelles Underwater and Image festival, SUBIOS, which has been an annual event since it first became a fixture in the Calendar of Events in 1989, is expanding to embrace a broader spectrum of activities as 'Seychelles' Festival of the Sea.'

SUBIOS has long been a popular forum for showcasing the islands' magnificent marine heritage with a tantalising suite of marine-oriented activities, presentations, film-shows, school projects and, of course, image and film competitions.

The twin-pronged approach of educating visitors to the islands as well as the local Seychellois population has been especially successful. Each year, the organizers have chosen a specific theme that focuses attention on a particular marine domain and which showcases

its potential as well as the challenges facing it. Recent themes have included 'Cetaceans: Our Ocean Cousins', 'The Gardens Below', 'Wrecks as Ocean Habitats' and this year's theme, 'Wonders Beneath the Waves.'

Traditionally, reinforcing each year's theme have been the guest speakers who enrich the festival with their expertise and whose various films and presentations serve to provoke discussion and so enhance public knowledge of Seychelles' marine worlds. SUBIOS has also been very popular with the local schools which have received visits from the guest speakers and which have also contributed to the festival with poetry and painting competitions while at the same time benefiting from intro dives and boat trips.

This year, SUBIOS has ambitious plans to build on the excellent foundation that it has built over more than 20 years and expand its raft of activities to become 'Seychelles' Festival of the Sea.' Due to be held between 4th-6th November 2011, the Festival of the Sea will retain certain traditional elements such as the popular Film and Image Competition while embracing several new concepts in a venue on the beach front at Beau Vallon against a backdrop of a flotilla of decorated boats. Plans include importing a giant inflatable whale and

octopus all the way from Florida, organising a schools' raft-building competition and race, arranging for a choice of floating eateries as well as food-stalls with a seafood theme and a raft of other entertainment options, competitions and live music shows.

In a drive to give the new festival greater international exposure, four high-profile magazines are set to become official partners of SUBIOS. The four magazines of the Asian Geo group: Asian geographic, Asian Passport, Asian Diver and Scuba Diver are all set to become official partners of SUBIOS as well as official publications of the event.

Now, all four publication logos will appear on all SUBIOS posters and adverts and will be prominent in all marketing campaigns. The new partnership will involve free adverts in all four magazines prior to SUBIOS 2011, pre and post coverage of the event in the group's e-newsletter which boasts a database of 568,000 readers. SUBIOS will also appear on the group's website.

Event organisers will continue working on the event over the coming months to ensure that it 'packs an entertainment punch' designed to be a real crowd-puller for Seychellois and visitors alike.



THE LAST WILDERNESS OF THE UAE

FEATURE JONATHAN ALI KHAN, WILD PLANET PRODUCTIONS

Previously known for his natural history TV projects such as the 12 part series, "Arabia's Cycle of Life" and his currently in-production shark documentaries "Sharkquest Arabia", Jonathan Ali Khan's UAE based company – Wild Planet Productions, is working on pre-production and fundraising for what promises to be the flagship natural history TV series of all time featuring the UAE's remaining natural world. JAK takes a break from his ongoing shark work to explain why "The Last Wilderness" will be an important project and provides us with an overview of this fascinating project, asking us all to help raise interest in order to find sponsorship.

The Last Wilderness of the UAE is a series of 12 natural history films documenting the wildlife, ecology and last remaining wilderness areas of the United Arab Emirates.

This blue-chip documentary is an attempt to document on film what may be the last wilderness areas of the UAE, showing the various types of habitats and ecosystems used by whatever wildlife remains in our dwindling range of natural habitats. More than anything, this will be a labour of love created for posterity as a natural history documentation for current and future generations. Starting from under the seas of the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean driven waters of the Gulf of Oman, we will travel through the desert of the Rub Al Khali, moving to stretches of desert close to Al Ain and Sharjah, before reaching the mountain strongholds of the Hajar mountains that bridge the UAE between boundaries of Oman and the Musandam. In the mountain wadis, we find pockets of life around seasonal and perennial water pools, that gradually form into dry dusty wadis snaking their way down towards coastal plains. Here we find an assortment of salt flats and wetlands, including mangrove ecosystems at the edge of the sea. This is the tapestry of ecosystems that form the backdrop to the real stories of interest – the wild flora and fauna that inhabit these habitats. What will distinguish this series about the UAE from anything else is the focus on the macro world of details and close-up photography. Often overlooked by the more charismatic larger animals, we will feature the small and easily missed denizens of the marine world and terrestrial habitats.

We reveal how the landscape has changed in recent times as the Arabian Peninsula is a hot spot for the extreme impacts of climate change that is increasingly placing the region's natural environment under pressure. Higher

temperatures, greater salinity of ground water and seawater join forces with increased storm activity, climate change and the Human dimension with all that implies; pushing the last few remaining endemic species to the limits of their tolerance level. Part of nature's ability to adapt to changing conditions is to evolve behavioural patterns or physiological adaptations in order to survive. This includes becoming nocturnal and many of our most interesting species become active after day turns into night. In this series, we will adopt the very same starlight and thermal cameras used to film lions hunting at night in Africa.

Under constant pressure from both natural and urban development, the UAE is shrinking daily as a haven for endemic and indigenous wildlife and the region's biodiversity is limited to a few remaining strongholds that have truly become the UAE's last wilderness areas. I think it's high time we went out and filmed this before we lose it completely! Oh, but if only it was that simple!



Jonathan Ali Khan – Photo by Thomas Vignaud

Obviously my interest in this subject is borderline obsessive, but to me natural history TV is the key to safeguarding Arabia's natural world. The more people learn about their own natural world and the remarkable links between all living things that we share our environment with, the greater chances are that people will become interested and motivated to reflect on how this affects their own lives. When that starts to happen, people start to question in turn how their own life is affecting their immediate environment and generally improves their attitude towards assuming responsibility for their actions and their feelings about animals.

The relationship between many Arab cultures and the natural world has long been a dramatic one. Historically we know that the Arabian Peninsula was once a rich and fertile environment, covered in swamps and

forested mountains. Obviously the simple fact that this region has the biggest oil deposits in the world bears testimony to just how rich the primordial vegetation used to be. From later periods, fossilized remains of crocodile, hippopotamus and other large mammals that are now confined to areas of Africa or Asia; reveals they were once roaming the landscapes in significant numbers. And those numbers must have been truly significant at one time, if some of the remnant statistics of certain species are anything to go by.

For instance, we still have the largest nesting population of Loggerhead turtles in the world on the island of Masirah and the largest nesting population of green turtles in the Indian Ocean, also in Oman. In the UAE and waters of Qatar and Bahrain, we find the 2nd largest population of endangered dugong in the world. This is purely a personal observation, but to me that surely illustrates that this region was once heaving with life, mainly due to a set of conditions that favoured the use of these waters, beaches and other habitats as ideal sanctuaries for nurseries and nesting sites.

With our intense capacity as humans to consume and alter our environment in so many ways, it is not improbable that the arrival of humans in this region is the primary cause for what became a rapid and dramatic transformation from ecosystems rich in biodiversity to the arid deserts of today.

It's fascinating to see that the animals that are most loved and cherished in the Arab culture today are the species that have historically played a direct role in the survival efforts needed to cope and survive within the

harsh conditions of this land – the animals that were used to hunt down and exploit prey. Camels, horses, falcons, hunting dogs all share a deeply romantic and almost spiritual link to the psyche of this region. These are all species that shared the arduous practical task of helping people survive, whether to help with hunting, as beasts of burden, waging wars or sometimes even as food. Virtually all other species represented fair game and were there to be exploited.

Whatever the needs of the time warranted, developing an intimate understanding of the natural world was vital for the Bedouin culture in order to survive within what is one of the harshest conditions on our planet. But for the most part, that instinctive knowledge was passed down from generation to generation in order to hunt down food and to use the natural resources to sustain what became an



Jellies and salps – Photo by Thomas Vignaud



Crested Tern – Photo by Paul Brough



Clown fish – Photo by Thomas Vignaud



Small coral crab – Photo by Thomas Vignaud

opportunistic approach to exploiting whatever could be obtained from the land and sea. Hunting and killing animals, has forever been part of mankind's relationship with his natural world and has always required a certain emotional detachment in order to do so.

I believe the residual ghost of that emotional disconnect still resides in the minds of many in this region, where sudden oil driven economies changed the nature of how people lived in a very short time span but has not really given enough time to change the psyche according to societies values and priorities. As a result, the task of getting people to care about the wildlife that does remain and the natural order of our remaining environment is rendered all the more complex; as we also need to focus on ways to heal the emotional detachment and reconnect people with the magic of the natural world.

As people's livelihood has been reshaped in society by government's that have done everything in their power to render people's lives more comfortable and secure, prioritizing the welfare of their citizens through education, healthcare, family life, welfare and infrastructure, there is now more time to consider other issues that transpire around us. In recent years, the environment and resulting changes to the land and seas of our natural world have become issues that more and more people want to understand better. As the world has well and truly moved into a reactionary mode in order to tackle global issues such as global warming and climate change, pollution, fresh water supply, overpopulation issues and the over-exploitation of our natural resources – this region has also obviously begun to participate in tackling some of those troubling issues too. As more and more people start to ask questions about the true status of their environment, for the most part, they realize how little information they have at their disposal. It is arguable that the Arabian Peninsula has still much to reveal about it's natural world and how life adapts and copes in order to survive not only the harsh natural conditions, but more recently; the impacts from human encroachment and dramatic changes to the rapidly changing landscape. People want to learn about their natural world and where they fit into the big wide picture of all living things on our planet. That's exciting stuff for film makers!

And that's where Wild Planet Productions steps in. As have some international TV channels and production companies from other parts of the world. The world's natural history industry has recently focused their attention towards the Arabian Peninsula and we are at the starting line of a race that aims to exploit the many untold stories of Arabia's natural world. With projects such as the BBC's Wild Arabia TV series that has already begun filming in Oman and due here in the UAE this fall, or Icon Entertainment's Saudi focused 'Desert Seas' commissioned by Saudi Aramco and aired recently on National Geographic, not to mention our own projects such as

'Sharkquest Arabia' – it is fair to say that this region's natural history and the resulting awareness about the natural world are being given a much needed shot in the arm! I should be ecstatic – but frustratingly I'm not!

It's down to money of course – what else?! Those with the biggest budgets will get in there first and exploit the most interesting stories briefly – and then they will leave and we have to ask what will happen next? I find it a little disappointing that the BBC's production of Wild Arabia, which promises to be as amazing as all of their natural history productions, is being made with a relatively small budget by their standards. But that is a reflection of the times. Ironically and somewhat embarrassingly for the Arab world, I remind myself that Arabia's big time entrance to the international world of the natural history television arena is actually being made with UK taxpayer's money!

What this highlights is that natural history has predominantly remained under the responsibility of national TV channels with resources derived from taxes, TV licenses and government subsidies. Whereas, many independent channels have done some of the best work out there, natural history production seems to require the support of a nationally driven set of interests. Here in the UAE it should be Abu Dhabi TV or Dubai TV that develops the support base for gestating a content industry featuring this genre. But that is still not happening, so we are limited to what we can develop as one of our only budgetary support mechanisms is sponsorship. And we only need a quick look at our economic reality to gauge the reality of this region's sponsorship mindset! So where we differ from those cash rich channels and projects coming in from overseas that will love us briefly then leave, is that we still find it hard to raise budgets – despite living in a relatively cash rich environment. The presence of National Geographic Abu Dhabi does portend the possibility of hope as eventually they will want to show local and regional content instead of just regurgitating dubbed international content off the shelf. But their interest will favour buying finished product rather than the sizeable investment in commissioning content even from people like us.

So where we really differ from these international players, is that at the heart of all of our own projects we really care about the conservation message as our focus is on making our films to serve the additional purposes of educating people as part of an awareness outreach initiative on top of the entertainment values. For the internationals it remains just about entertainment and filling programming quotas. For us it's about trying to create the interest in regional TV channels to actually have programming quotas in the first place! How sad is that? Despite the UAE now being the heartland of major MENA region TV broadcasters such as MBC, Showtime, National Geographic, BBC World, CNN and Fox, sadly our reluctant regional TV channels have failed to embrace the importance of natural history

“What will distinguish this series about the UAE from anything else is the focus on the macro world of details and close-up photography. Often overlooked by the more charismatic larger animals, we will feature the small and easily missed denizens of the marine world.”

or have clearly underestimated the desire from this region's viewers to watch nature programs about Arab world subjects.

So what's the solution you may ask? Whatever the motivation, what is really needed right now is a nationally focused natural history series that highlights the UAE's natural world as a flagship awareness effort and for the posterity of documenting the true nature and wildlife of our last remaining wilderness areas. We need a media driven vehicle to crystallize public attention towards the important work being undertaken by our conservation authorities and scientific community, as well as to actually document behaviour and diversity of the wildlife that survives in the range of dwindling habitats. We need more positive stories pertaining to the role of protected areas and conservation programs, including captive breeding and the role of NGOs amongst a range of subjects in our seas and on land. We need inspiration and information – the two greatest agents of change. And we need this now!

What I am proposing is a series of 12 x 30 minute documentary films featuring the natural history of the UAE's marine and terrestrial environments and conservation efforts towards safe guarding the last remaining areas of ecological importance and marine life.

This will be an honest and penetrating socio-anthropological, natural history and ecological documentary series that starts off by showing viewers the surprising range of biodiversity of our seas, featuring specific marine life, the connection of people with their natural world and how the marine environment of the UAE has changed over recent times – due to natural conditions, global warming, rapid development, pressures on marine resources and other changes to the environment.

“The Last Wilderness” will give a complete overview of the range of marine habitats, ecosystems and general wildlife of all coasts of the UAE, with a special focus on the Western Region of Abu Dhabi's waters. From underwater reef ecosystems to sea grass beds sustaining endangered species, to highly important mangrove forests, artificial reef habitats and exceptionally important bird nesting sites on off-shore islands – the first 6 episodes of this film series will showcase the delicate and surprisingly diverse natural history of what we are calling the last wilderness of the UAE. As such, we will show how Abu Dhabi's Environment Agency and NGO's such as the Emirates Wildlife Society, EDA and EMEG are committed to protecting and safeguarding the marine environment within the UAE



through the creation of awareness initiatives and protection of a vast area of immense biodiversity importance, whilst elsewhere in the region, development projects are sadly still damaging large areas of marine ecology. By contrast, the Murawah Marine Protected Area and the biodiversity found within its boundaries allows us to witness the research and ongoing conservation efforts that will hopefully lead to the return or sustainable recovery of various threatened wildlife, including tiger sharks that once used the area as a nursery.

“THE LAST WILDERNESS OF THE UAE – OUR SEAS”

THE FIRST 6 EPISODES

As this is a diving magazine and only the first 6 episodes of our series are marine focused, I have briefly broken down only those episodes to give you a glimpse of what they would feature. If anyone is interested to see the breakdown of the whole series, then please email me at jak@wildplanetfilms.org to ask for a full project proposal.

FILM 1: An overview of natural ecosystems, underwater marine habitats and related marine life from throughout the Arabian Gulf (Abu Dhabi's offshore islands, Dubai's artificial coastline & the Northern Emirates) and the Gulf of Oman coastlines (Khorfakkan, Khalba and Fujairah).

FILM 2: We show how development is changing the face of our marine environment and thus affecting our marine life; in some areas resulting in the creation of artificial habitats that are rapidly replacing natural ones. We will also look at the impacts of a growing infrastructure on the environment in line with pollution and desalination. We assess how coral is surviving in the face of so much adversity. Corals are an excellent indicator species and can tell us the true status of the marine health of an area. We show why and how reefs and associated life make this region so special. The fact that coral is surviving and regenerating despite the pressures facing them may make the international scientific community observe this region more closely; as

elsewhere scientists believe corals cannot withstand the changes from global warming.

FILM 3: Fishermen are forced to go out further and for longer periods to find fish and the returns just don't cut it. We focus on the life trials and tribulations of local East Coast and Abu Dhabi island families as they try to eke out a living in these changing and challenging times. In this film we also focus on the status of sharks and the role the UAE has played as a distribution hub for shark fins to the Far East.

FILM 4: In this film we visit the Murawah Protected Area and feature the ongoing conservation work of EAD as they study the importance of this 4500 square kilometre area of what might well be considered, the UAE's true last remaining wilderness. In this episode we witness the dugong research project and learn about our turtle and cetacean populations.

FILM 5: The UAE has many globally important bird stories and we visit some of the most important bird nesting sites for a range of seabirds. In particular, we witness the nesting cycle of terns on the island of Qamein, one of the biggest nesting colonies in the Gulf. Other species featured are the Osprey, Sooty Falcon, Cormorants and greater flamingoes, as well as a multitude of species that frequent mangrove habitats and coastal wetlands.

FILM 6: In a region where any structure underwater becomes an instant artificial reef habitat for marine life, we ascertain the role that recent development projects and their sudden impacts on our natural environment play relating to the welfare of marine species. We see the ongoing work of UAE based academic researchers as they study the conditions created by Dubai's massive offshore developments and observe how Abu Dhabi's offshore oil platforms are also acting as protected marine habitats thanks to their security zone status. As such, we find that despite the destructive process of building and land reclamation, given time, nature has a way of staging a comeback.

WHAT WE NEED

To move this forward, I have begun to reach out to the corporate sector biggies looking for anyone interested to support what will be a hugely important flagship project for both TV and education reaching current and future generations of Emiratis and residents for years to come. Anyone interested to learn more about this project and able to assist with introductions to potential sponsors, etc. please visit our website and get in touch through our contact page: www.wildplanetfilms.org

EMBARKING ON NEW ADVENTURES

FEATURE **TIFFANY JOINER**



In the middle of the night on December 12th 2008, my life drastically changed forever. Sometime after going to sleep, I somehow managed to fall six meters off my first-floor balcony in Dubai. I landed on my feet on the concrete terrace below, and the impact caused a compression fracture in a vertebra in the lumbar region of my spine, along with breaking my right foot and left eye socket. I also suffered a severe concussion that caused short-term memory loss, resulting in my having no recollection of anything that happened from about 23:00 that night until finally gaining consciousness in the hospital around 8:30 the following morning.

Within minutes of the fall, my legs and feet were completely paralyzed. After numerous CT scans and X-rays, it was determined that small fragments of bone from the fracture in my spine caused irreparable damage to my spinal cord. Two days later, I underwent a seven-hour surgery to repair the bone fracture through the use of titanium rods screwed into my spine. I was officially declared a paraplegic with an Incomplete Spinal Cord Injury at the L1 level. The typical prognosis for this level of injury is a certain degree of recovery of motor function in the legs with an almost definite chance of life confined to a wheelchair.

In the beginning, I had no feeling, no sensation, and no movement from the navel down. I felt as if my body had been sawed in half. However, in the few weeks that followed my accident, I started slowly gaining back feeling and movement, starting from my hips and slowly spreading down to my toes. I immediately began physical therapy, and by the time I left the hospital twenty-five days later, I was able to take a few assisted steps on a walker.

From the beginning, I always believed that I was the best person for this to happen to, and I was the worst person for this to happen to. I was born with a passion for sports and the outdoors with a side of hyperactivity, and I was rarely, if ever, sitting down. I was a gymnast for eight years throughout my childhood, I owned the 400m race in middle school, and as a teenager I was a cheerleader and played on my high school's football/soccer team. In my adult life I had become an avid rock-climber, snowboarder, surfer, and hiker. Even my jobs were active: throughout university I was a gymnastics teacher, lifeguard, and swimming instructor, eventually becoming a certified personal trainer, yoga teacher, and aerobics instructor. Needless to say, to me, losing the ability to use my legs was pretty much a death sentence.

However, I also recognized that I was simultaneously the best person for this to happen to, in that I am an extremely independent and painfully stubborn person, I never take "No" for an answer, and self-pity disgusts me. My greatest pet peeve is when someone tells me I can't do something when I see no rationale for why I can't. I'm still not sure if it

was due to these personality traits or simply good old-fashioned denial, but I refused to accept that I was going to spend the rest of my life in a wheelchair, and I looked at my predicament as a challenge. I felt that my injury had happened for a reason, and since I had gotten myself into it, I was just going to have to get myself out of it.

After getting discharged from the hospital in Dubai, still in a wheelchair, I spent two months in the US at a sports-based physical therapy centre specifically geared for people with spinal cord injuries who strive to walk again (www.projectwalk.org). I built up my strength, and by the end of March 2009, just over three months after my injury, I had graduated to slowly walking on a walker. Two weeks after that I was back in Dubai: back to my job, my first-floor apartment (with no lift!), and a life I wasn't so sure of anymore.

Nearly three years have passed since that fateful December night in Dubai, and my life has been a roller-coaster ride ever since. I've had numerous setbacks in my health and my personal and professional life, and I've dealt with a plethora of disappointments, frustrations, and tears. I am still about 75% paralyzed in my legs, and I have to wear braces on my feet. But as the saying goes, what doesn't kill you only makes you stronger! I retired the walker and, while it's not what you would call graceful, I now walk on crutches. I have a new life: new outlook, new job, new friends, and a new apartment (with a lift!). I've even recently gotten back into some of my former passions, including rock-climbing and yoga.

Now that I've allowed myself time to heal, I'm now ready to embark on a new adventure, one that entails utilizing my experience to raise awareness and find solutions to improve the lives of people living with disabilities in the region, particularly those with spinal cord injuries. I started researching what's available for the disabled in Dubai, and sadly I was very unlucky finding anything. Fortunately, I came across an article about Tawasul and the Disabled Diver Program at Pavilion Dive Centre. I immediately got in touch with Course Director Ernst Van Der Poll, and the next thing I knew, I was ensconced in scuba gear and gliding along the bottom of the pool at Jumeirah Beach Hotel.

One unfortunate but inevitable perk that goes with a disability is the way people look at you. I get stared at when I walk, stared at when I go up or down a staircase, stared at during yoga classes. People stop in the street to stare. They shake their heads and click their tongues and stare at me with pity and sympathy. I hate that. However, the first thing I realized about scuba diving is that I look exactly the same as everyone else underwater. Once I'm in the water, nobody can tell I have a disability, myself included. I can agilely swim through the water like a fish, and the pains, cramps, and soreness that I experience when walking on crutches simply melt away in the water.

I have just completed my first open water diving course, but I'm not stopping there. I have committed to seeing this adventure all the way through to my becoming a certified dive instructor. I hope to inspire and encourage other people living with spinal cord injuries and disabilities like myself to break free of the fear and social stigmas and to discover their own independence and freedom, both in the water and beyond.

The jury is still out on whether or not I have gotten any wiser since my injury, but I am exponentially more passionate for life than ever. Scuba diving has definitely fuelled this passion, and I'm looking forward to the challenges that lie ahead on this adventure as well as helping others work through these same challenges in their own lives.

As for that wheelchair? Well, six months after my accident, I bid that wheelchair adieu after gifting it to a taxi driver in Bali. His grandmother needed it more than I did.

LIGHTING, VISIBILITY & BACKSCATTER

FEATURE AND PHOTOGRAPHY **WARREN BAVERSTOCK – VERSTODIGITAL.COM**



EQUIPMENT KEY BREAKDOWN: a) Subal ND2 Underwater Camera Housing | b) Sea & Sea YS250 PRO Strobes | c) Ultralight Strobe Arm | d) Sea & Sea Nikonos 5 Pin Dual Sync Cord | e) BossK 1x5 LED Underwater Video & Focus | f) BossK 3x5 LED Underwater Video & Focus Light | g) Subal Flat Port | h) Woody's Wet Diopter | i) Subal 8" Dome Port

Ever since I did my very first try dive on a cold stormy November's evening 15 years ago in Fort Bovisand Harbour (Plymouth UK), I have always wanted to bring my underwater experiences to the surface for others to see. I initially started being torn between shooting video and capturing 35mm stills, but after realizing that it was either one or the other that I had to pump my hard earned money into, I decided to go for underwater still photography. It was not until I first moved to Dubai in 2002 that I really started to develop as a good underwater photographer, much thanks to the inspiration, support and sound criticism from wildlife documentary filmmaker, Jonathan Ali Khan. Another thing that helped me improve was when I switched from film to digital in 2005. Generally, underwater photography can be an expensive hobby. For me this was definitely the case and as an example of this in the last 10 years I have upgraded from Canon to Nikon, film to digital, D70 to D200 in Sea & Sea housings, D200 to D2X's in Subal Housings and more recently added to the collection, a D3s in another Subal Housing. On top of that, there are dome ports, flat ports, TTL converters, strobes, sync cords, focus lights, diopters, lens gear and the list goes on. I have very few regrets about all the equipment I have invested in although, if I

could offer any advice to anyone investing in a new underwater camera system, it would be:

- Do your research, especially with online forum sites such as WetPixel.com
- Make sure you choose your camera brand very carefully. It is a very expensive project to invest in with the various lenses for your Canon camera, only to switch over to Nikon later. Try KenRockwell.com
- When researching on the web, don't just look at the good reviews, bad feedback can be useful in helping you make the right choices.
- Speak to other photographers that use the same brand that you are considering to invest in and get their opinions.
- Don't scrimp on the price so you can have the equipment today. Consider being patient and waiting a little longer so you can have what you would really like.

The goal of this article and future editions is to share photographic examples accompanied by extra information such as environmental conditions at the time of the photograph, manual settings and critical observations on how I could have achieved better results. In addition, I will also be doing reviews of equipment, gadgets, books...anything that I

feel is relevant and useful to my fellow UAE photographers.

The picture above shows my two Nikon D2Xs, Subal ND2 housing systems. One set up for wide-angle Nikon AF-S DX Nikkor 17-55mm f/2.8G IF-ED and the other macro Nikon AF Micro Nikkor 60mm f/2.8D. I consider both of these set ups to be perfect for diving in the UAE and I regularly take both of them to the Musandam. "Both of them at the same time? Surely not?" – some may consider it overkill, but with high humidity and cramped boat conditions, it makes total sense not to be opening up housings, changing your macro lens and ports over to wide because there is a leopard shark around. By taking both systems I have both the close up and wide-angle photography covered. I will use the 60mm macro on days when the visibility is very bad or when I particularly want to shoot medium to small animals such as sea horses. By simply slipping the Woody's Wet Diopter over the front of the port I can get even closer to my subject by magnification. In UAE waters I prefer the 60mm to the Nikkor 105mm as it allows me to get closer to my subject (8cm away instead of 13cm). This is very important in poor visibility environments as the reduced distance between the lens and my subject

means less poor water quality in front of my subject. Another thing to remember is that although the 105mm macro lens is a great lens, it focuses slower in low light (especially night dives) and will regularly get confused, focusing on large particles that may happen to float in front of your subject. An example of the Woody's diopter with the 60 macro can be found in the previous EDA magazine issue, June 2011/Volume 7/Issue 2 – page 81.

For wide-angle photography I prefer to use the Nikon 10.5mm f/2.8 DX Fisheye, which is a great digital format lens that gives you 180 degree coverage. Sadly, unless you are filming in water with good visibility and nice light, good results are hard to achieve. Saying that, I would certainly choose this lens for filming whale sharks in the Musandam with the use of ambient light. You could also use this lens for close up wide-angle (CFWA) photography, but I will cover this topic in later articles. Determined to produce good wide-angle photographs from our region, I have been using the Nikon AF-S DX Nikkor 17-55mm f/2.8G IF-ED and have found with the correct use of lighting, even in the poorest of visibility, it is possible to come away with a great photograph. An example of this 17-55mm lens in action in Musandam in 2 metres visibility can be found in the previous EDA magazine issue, June 2011/Volume 7/Issue 2 – page 79.

Lighting your subject correctly is extremely important and one thing that I have learnt is not to scrimp when it comes to buying your strobe lighting. The main challenges that we all experience in the UAE are poor ambient light and lots of particulates that when lit up by a camera strobe, become backscattered. Therefore a powerful strobe that's power can be adjusted for close up work is desirable. Having only one strobe is fine for a beginner or creative lighting, but for the option of balanced lit photographs, I strongly advise you invest in a second unit when your budget allows. However, be warned, when I first started underwater photography my budget would only stretch to one strobe and by the time I had enough money for the other, the unit had been superseded and I ended up having two different strengths of lights. Based on this I always advise trying to get two identical strobes so that lighting levels are consistent with each other. In the past I have relied on through the lens (TTL) metering photography, letting the camera decide on how much light the strobes should produce to illuminate the subject. Without a doubt using a TTL convertor does help produce, good consistent results with little hassle, however, it does hamper creativity. The strobes that I use are the Sea & Sea YS250 PRO's using Sea & Sea 5 Pin Dual Sync Cords mounted on Ultralight strobe arms and are considered one of, if not the brightest lights on the market. However, this does come at a price, as each strobe alone weighs 1.78kg. With air travel

weight limitations in mind, a lot of people invest in the Inon Z-240 strobe, which is an extremely good strobe and only weighs in at just over ½kg. This combined with its physical size, which allows almost no restrictions when trying to get the strobe into tight overhangs and close to the camera port, makes this strobe a very popular choice.

With all of the above in mind, you do not have to spend a fortune on the best equipment to achieve great results. For example the new cheaper Nikon 7000 beats the D2Xs hands down and with it being marketed to the average camera consumer, housings are competitively priced. If you are thinking that your budget may not stretch to that, then have a think about the Canon G12 housed in their custom WP-DC34 housing with a set of fiber optic triggered Sea & Sea strobes. It's a very tidy flexible camera that shoots RAW, allows full manual control and has a very nice HD video feature.

BLACK BACKGROUND PHOTOGRAPHY

The following photographic examples were all taken where visibility and or ambient light was poor and challenging. One of the ways around these challenging conditions is black background photography, achievable by shooting with fast shutter speeds, small apertures and having your strobes positioned at the sides, pointed slightly inward towards the camera housing. In my opinion the key factor to overcoming such environmental challenges and producing good photographs is to avoid relying on automatic TTL lighting control and instead, taking photographs using your manual settings.

BLACK BACKGROUND FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY

EXAMPLE 1: FAST MOVING SUBJECTS.

This close focus wide-angle (CFWA) photograph of an impressive soft coral surrounded by red sea anthias was quite a challenge to take. On this particular morning at around 10am, ambient light at 20 metres was very limited. In addition there was strong current, carrying suspended particles making it even darker. Equipped with a 10.5mm fisheye I was able to get in very close to the subject, filling the whole frame with the coral and fish. After firing off a few test shots, I realized that my strobes were too close to the housing and subject, causing backscatter. Moving away from the subject, I adjusted the position of the strobes, extending them as wide as possible for a portrait photograph. In addition I directed the angle of the strobes slightly away from the coral to avoid further illumination of particles. After a few more test shots and fine tuning of the strobe power output, I settled down in front of the subject and waited a minute for the fish to settle. Wanting to keep the anthias close to the coral, I found exhaling loudly through the regulator was enough to make them take cover tightly

around the coral. Wanting the background of this photograph to be very dark I adjusted the aperture to f18. I also wanted all the subjects to be very sharp, so with the fish moving very quickly in the strong current I decided to set my shutter speed to 250. Getting the light just right was very difficult and I found myself re-adjusting the angle of my strobes after each shot until I got the shot I was happy with. Post photograph considerations include: Be prepared to take several shots before you get your strobe positioning just right. Take your time when checking your photograph in your viewfinder – I did not quite illuminate the top of the coral.

TTL FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY

EXAMPLE 2: BAD VISIBILITY CAN RESULT IN BACKSCATTER.

This is an example where I have used TTL and unlike example 1, 3 and 4, the foreground and background has been illuminated by the strobes. This Allied Cowrie was photographed in quite a strong current with very poor visibility. The subject was just over a centimetre long and so I attached the Woody's Wet Diopter on the front of the 60mm macro port to fill more of the frame. Shooting in TTL mode I left my aperture and shutter speed on my preferred set point, moved my strobes in very close over the subject and let the TTL convertor do the rest of the work. After each photograph, I reviewed and adjusted my strobe positioning. Looking at the photographs on a mac after the dive, I realized that I had not considered the bad visibility/particles in the water. The end result was nearly all the photographs contained a large amount of backscatter making the images useless. Upon reflection of the poor conditions that day, I should have switched off the TTL, chosen a small aperture (f22) along with a relatively high shutter speed (250), adjusting strobe power so I just illuminated the subject. The end result would have meant that backscatter would have been avoided with fore and background being blackened out. Post photograph considerations include: I did not see the eye and snout to this cowrie until uploaded onto the computer. Take your time to slowly examine even the smallest of subjects as you may see something that might enhance your photograph more. Never take what you see in your rear viewfinder for granted, when checking your photograph for quality, if in doubt, zoom in.

BLACK BACKGROUND FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY

EXAMPLE 3: ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR.

Knowing your subject and how it will behave is of huge benefit when taking an underwater photograph. When taking photographs from inside an aquarium exhibit, not only do you know that your subject will most definitely make an appearance at some point, but by studying it from outside the exhibit you will be able to note some behavioural characteristics which may help you get a better photograph.

By watching this humphead wrasse I had a clear idea of where I would get the best encounter for a photograph. On this occasion I made use of the 17-55mm zoom as I was aware that I would not get close enough to the subject with a fisheye lens. Watching the swimming pattern for two or three minutes, I adjusted my strobe power, aiming tightly at the subject. With a small aperture (f22) and a high shutter speed to cope with the fish's fast swim by's I managed to capture a pleasing shot while avoiding backscatter. Post photograph considerations include: Be aware of aquarium acrylic behind your subject for light bounce back and never corner a large animal in an aquarium, always provide adequate space for the animals to pass/move away from you. Avoid stressing the animal with several strobe bursts.

BLACK BACKGROUND FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY EXAMPLE 4: TOO MANY DIVERS? FIND A QUIET SPOT.

Sometimes when diving with a group of photographers, finding something to photograph with a bit of a space can be tough. Luckily when I found these shrimpfish, they were quite happy to swim away from me into deeper water. Moving away from the group, my buddy and I followed/guided these fish into deeper clearer water. Allowing the fish to settle, I took this time to think about the shot, position my strobes for a portrait black background shot and adjust my manual settings accordingly. With the shrimpfish re-grouped and settled, I approached and took the photographs I wanted. Post photograph considerations include: Always be aware of the difficulties of lighting silver fish and use the outside of the strobe beam to light your subject. Observe fellow photographers when they have a subject that you would like to photograph from a suitable distance.

AMBIENT LIGHT AND FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY COMBINED

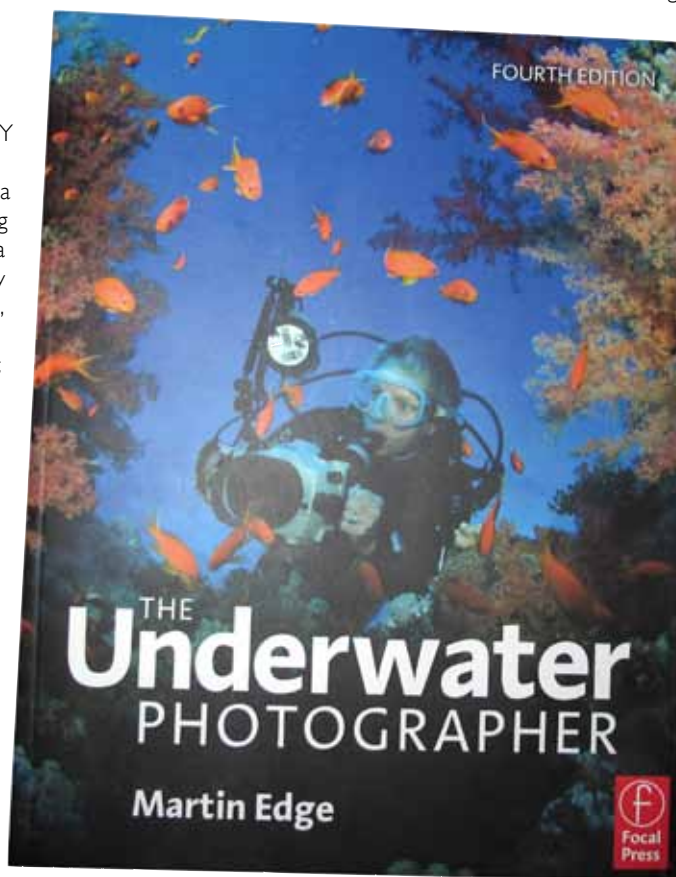
EXAMPLE 5: FAST MOVING SUBJECTS IN POOR LIGHT.

Taking this type of picture in the Dubai Aquarium is very difficult as available light is almost nonexistent. Being aware of the light restriction and the size of the animals I would be photographing, I decided to use the 10.5mm fisheye as this lens works well in low light (allows a large aperture) and is wide enough to fit large animals into the frame. With a subject like this being nearly two metres away, getting a good balanced well-exposed photograph from behind bars within

an acrylic cage is tough. The Nikon D2Xs really struggled with the low light and looking closely at the example you can see areas of noise from where I pushed my ISO settings to make the photograph brighter. All cameras that have adjustable ISO will have a threshold where photographs will become very noisy and distorted. ISO can be increased to assist with low light photography although every camera has its limit (the higher the ISO, the greater the risk of noise). As per the example, I needed to increase the aperture to its maximum, as it was important that I captured the trevally behind the shark. After a couple of test shots, I found that I still needed more light to make the photograph work and therefore pushed my ISO set point higher. Another option

slightly darker (by doing this in your mind you will naturally work towards getting a brighter shot in your viewfinder).

There are no firm rules and directions of how to exactly position your strobes. There will be plenty of occasions when you will think that you have done everything right, but the results are still hampered by backscatter. However, only with repeatedly practicing different lighting techniques and having a full understanding of the basics behind manual camera adjustments will you learn and be able to anticipate different photographic scenarios and get good results. I have found the following book to be an excellent reference providing really useful tips on lighting techniques and strongly recommend that any keen underwater photographer buy a copy. The book is available locally and is normally in stock in Kinokuniya Book Store, in Dubai Mall.



USEFUL KIT LINKS:

- Nikon D2Xs Digital Camera - <http://www.kenrockwell.com/nikon/d2xs.htm>
- Subal ND2 Underwater Housing - http://www.subal.com/en/produkte/gehaeuse/nikon/2h_d2x/2h_d2x.php
- Nikon AF-S DX Nikkor 17-55mm f/2.8G IF-ED - <http://www.kenrockwell.com/nikon/1755.htm>
- Nikon AF Micro Nikkor 60mm f/2.8D - <http://www.kenrockwell.com/nikon/60mm-afd.htm>
- Nikon AF Micro Nikkor 105mm f/2.8D - <http://www.kenrockwell.com/nikon/105af.htm>
- Woody's Wet Diopter - <http://www.nexusamerica.com/Misc/Misc.html>
- Nikon 10.5mm f/2.8 DX Fisheye - <http://www.kenrockwell.com/nikon/105fe.htm>
- Sea & Sea YS250 PRO's - <http://www.seaandsea.jp/products/strobe/ys250pro/index.html>
- Sea & Sea 5 Pin Dual Sync Cord - <http://www.seaandsea.jp/products/strobe/accessory/019.html#03470>
- Nikon DX 7000 - <http://www.kenrockwell.com/nikon/d7000.htm>
- BEST UAE SUPPLIER of Sea & Sea: Al Boom - www.alboomdiving.com - + (9714) 342 - 2993
- BEST UAE SUPPLIER of Nikon: Grand Stores - www.grandstores.com - + (9714) 282 - 3700
- BEST UAE SUPPLIER of Subal: Scuba Dubai - www.scubadubai.com - + (9714) 341 - 9490

to allow me to get a brighter photograph was to reduce the shutter speed. However, slowing down the shutter speed too much would have resulted in the fast moving trevally being blurred. With all of the restrictions of taking this photograph from within a cage, I placed my strobes on full power, positioned high above the camera and angled out of the cage, at the area I anticipated the shark to be. Combined with the right timing of a shark being in the right place at the right time, without a feeding pole in the frame, this is a very challenging photograph to get. Post photograph considerations include: Always anticipate that the light will be poor, make sure your strobe batteries are fully charged, go with a wide lens, always check the rear viewfinders brightness setting and adjust it so it views

WIDE ANGLE - VERY LOW LIGHT
RELATIVELY HIGH PARTICULATES

1



NIKON D2XS NIKKOR 10.5 FISHEYE

f 18 S 250 ISO 200 TTL No

PLACE & NOTES AQABA JORDAN

NEPHTHEDAE CORAL WITH
RED SEA ANTHIAS

20 METRES DEPTH WITH LIGHT
POOR LIGHTS POSITIONED NICE AND
WIDE TO KEEP BACK SCATTER OUT
OF THE SHOT. EXHALED NOISILY TO
KEEP FISH CLOSE TO CORAL TOOK
SEVERAL PHOTOGRAPHS TO GET
THE LIGHT RIGHT

2

MACRO WITH WET DIOPTER
VERY POOR VISIBILITY

NIKON D2XS NIKKOR 60MM MACRO

f 11 S 160 ISO 100 TTL YES

PLACE & NOTES DUBBA ROCK

PURPLE GORGONIAN
ALLIED CORAL

12M DEPTH VERY BAD VIZ WITH A
LOT OF SUSPENDED PARTICLES
TOOK THE PHOTOGRAPH USING TTL
HIGHLIGHTING BACKSCATTER
SHOULD OF SWITCHED TTL OFF
SLIGHT SWELL MADE TAKING
PHOTOGRAPH VERY DIFFICULT

WIDE ANGLE - LOW LIGHT
AQUARIUM PHOTOGRAPHY

3



NIKON D2XS NIKKOR 17-55MM

f 22 S 250 ISO 200 TTL NO

PLACE & NOTES BURN AL ARAB

NAPOLEON WRASSE

SET F STOP SO THE APERTURE WAS
SMALL AND SHUTTER SPEED FAST
AS FISH KEPT ON SWIMMING
QUICKLY AWAY ON EACH CLOSE EN-
COUNTER - PUT STROBES ON 3
QUARTER POWER AND AIMED
TIGHTLY AT SUBJECT - WAITED
PATIENTLY FOR THE RIGHT SHOT



NIKON D2XS NIKKOR 60MM MACRO

f 16 S 250 ISO 100 TTL No

PLACE & NOTES REDANG MALAYSIA

CORAL SHRIMP FISH

FAST MOVING SHOAL OF FISH WITH VERY POOR LIGHT WITH VIZ STIRRED UP BY OTHER DIVERS FOLLOWED THE SHOAL CLOSELY MOVING THEM INTO CLEARER WATER AND ALLOWED SHRIMP FISH TO SETTLE - SET STROBES TO HALF POWER AND TOOK 4 SHOTS

MACRO WITH WET DIPTER
VERY POOR VISIBILITY

4

WIDE ANGLE - VERY LOW LIGHT
AQUARIUM PHOTOGRAPHY





NIKON D2XS NIKKOR 10.5 FISHEYE

f 3.5 S 100 ISO 250 TTL No

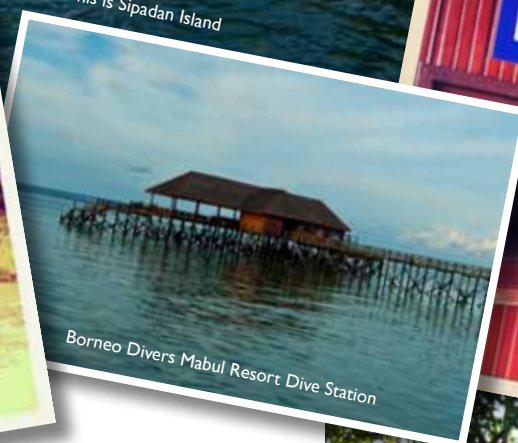
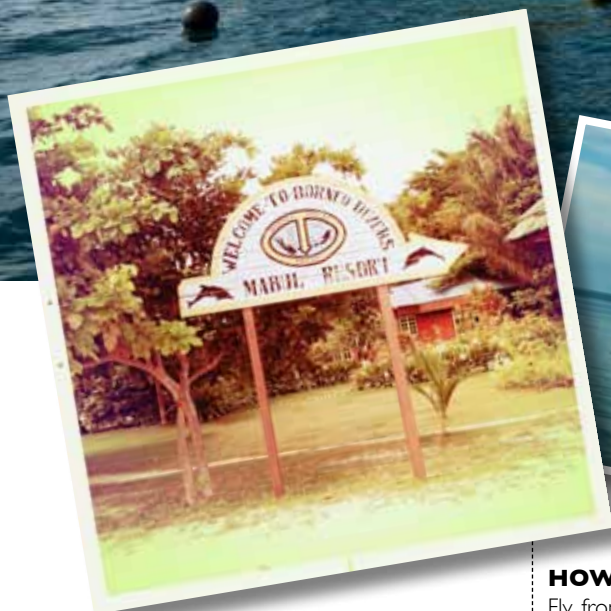
PLACE & NOTES DURA AQUARIUM

SAND TIGER SHARK + TREVALLY
SHALLOW CAGE DIVE BUT WITH
MANY CONSIDERATIONS - VERY
LITTLE LIGHT CAGE BARS IN THE
WAY SUBJECT DISTANCE AND FAST
MOVING ANIMALS - CAMERA
REALLY STRUGGLED WITH LIGHT
SHOULD OF SWITCHED OFF TTL
AND GONE MANUAL

DIVING A DREAM

MABUL AND SIPADAN WITH BORNEO DIVERS MABUL RESORT

FEATURE AND PHOTOGRAPHY **ALLY LANDES** UUV PHOTOGRAPHY **SIMONE CAURODOSSI** – WWW.SCAPRODOSSIPHOTO.COM



I was last on Mabul and Sipadan Islands with Borneo Divers back in July 2008 and I have returned three years later, in August 2011 to find that this place is still one of my favourite places on earth. Leaving it behind, proved much harder the second time round.

INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY BDMR:

BORNEO DIVERS MABUL RESORT

Located on the South Eastern coast of Sabah and about 20 minutes from Sipadan, 30-40 minutes from Semporna, perched on the Continental Shelf, lies the island of Mabul, rated the "Mecca of Muck Diving."

Mabul is surrounded by the Celebes Sea and white sandy beaches. Borneo Divers Mabul Resort is wholly owned and operated by Borneo Divers & Sea Sports (Sabah) Sdn Bhd – pioneers in recreational diving tourism in Sabah and the Dive Resort management in Sipadan. The underwater world of Mabul houses the most incredible marine habitats where divers today continue discovering new species.

HOW TO GET THERE

Fly from Kota Kinabalu to Tawau (40 minutes) and then take a coach of about 90 minutes to the coastal fishing town of Semporna where you will catch a ferry to Mabul Island in about 30-40 minutes.

MABUL ISLAND

Mabul is recognized as one of the world's best "muck-diving" sites. It has a shallow reef profile with a sandy bottom with patches of sea grass and is one of the richest single destinations for exotic and small marine life in the world.

The diversity of macro life inhabiting the coral rubble and sea grass sites are what put Mabul on the diving map. Flamboyant cuttlefish, blue ringed octopus, mimic octopus, gobies and frogfish are everywhere, as are morays, snake eels and practically the whole scorpion fish family. You will also get to see the beautiful Mandarin fish at dusk performing their mating rituals. There is no doubt about it, Mabul is a magical macro site. The beauty of Mabul will also greatly appeal to non-divers.

SIPADAN

Sipadan diving was pioneered by Borneo Divers. Above the water, the island is just a tiny 40 acre spot of jungle with a white sandy beach. But below the water, Sipadan's vertical topography and abundant marine life make it one of the world's most desired destinations.

Sipadan entered a new age of conservation on January 1st 2005 when all resorts were vacated from the Island and it became a fully protected conservation zone and listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Borneo Divers are proud to have supported this conservation effort and they continue working with the Malaysian government to secure Sipadan's future protection.





Blackfin Barracuda

Diving in Sipadan is not rated as the best in the world without good reason. The waters are calm and warm, visibility is generally good, and the quantity and variety of marine life is astounding. A mere 15 metres from the beach is a vertical wall starting at a depth of 3 metres which plunges straight down to 600 metres.



No single dive site epitomizes the diversity of Sipadan quite like Barracuda Point. Named after the huge schools of Chevron (Blacktail) Barracuda that are frequently found there. In addition to the Barracudas, large schools of Jacks, Batfish and scores of huge Bumphead Parrotfish can also be seen there. Turtles

abound as well as dozens of sharks. You never really know what you will see at Barracuda Point from one dive to the next, you just know that whatever it is, it will be good!

For more info go to:
<http://www.borneodivers.info>

If I had a soundtrack to dive to in this magical place, it would have to be from *Gladiator*, the music, 'Elysium', 'Honor Him' and 'Now We Are Free' by Hans Zimmer and Lisa Gerrard! All I have to do is close my eyes and I'm right back under water in Sipadan with the turtles, the sharks, the walls of barracudas, the jacks and the bumphead parrotfish. Diving a dream.

I have been fortunate to dive quite a few places before getting to Sipadan. I have dived the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico, Bentota in Sri Lanka, Seychelles, Terengganu in Malaysia, Djibouti, Oman and the UAE and can't wait to continue expanding my list, but I have got stuck on rating Sipadan as my absolute favourite place to be both above and below the surface. This beautiful and protected marine environment is exactly what I imagined Paradise to look and feel like.

The journey to get to Mabul is long but worth the stretch from anywhere you are based in the world. The minute you arrive on Mabul Island you are warmly welcomed by the Borneo Divers Mabul Resort (BDMR) staff whom are not already out diving with the other guests and given refreshments, a full brief as to how everything works, where everything is found

and then left to relax in your chalet to unpack, refresh yourself before lunch and get ready for your first dive of the day.

The new and fully equipped dive station is now found on a platform stood tall over the reef where the exquisite dive site Paradise 2 is found right below your feet. You can jump off the jetty and snorkel at any time you want and see an incredible variety of life. They've got Frogfish, Ghost Pipefish and Mandarin fish just below the ladder. Keep a look out for Indian Walkers, we found three of these strange looking fish (with what looks like chicken feet hanging out of their sides) at this site and I had never seen them before.

When you're at the Dive Station, you are introduced to Amin who is in charge of the daily operation of the diving centre and he makes sure you are fully equipped and makes sure you have everything rinsed and placed in a crate under your room number for your next dives. Your dive equipment is so organised that you get onto the dive boat and find everything has already been lined up and assembled for you. There are no excuses for being late on leaving for your dives, it's efficient and prompt clockwork management.

Amin also gives you access to the new photography room made especially for your video and photography equipment setups. This is a fantastic room with electrical outlets at every individual photographer's spot on the work bench for you to recharge batteries, change lenses and safely leave your equipment

overnight while you stay on the island if you choose to do so. It is air conditioned so you don't have to fear the housing fogging up when you put your cameras back into place.

We then met Eljer; a familiar face to me from my last visit who has been with BDMR for 18 years and incredibly well suited to the island/diving life. All the guys there are, they have a fantastic sense of humour and they know how to strum a guitar and sing away for hours when the days diving is done.

Eljer took us on our first two introductory dives on our first day around Mabul and it was exactly as I remembered it and a perfect start to the trip. He pointed out a new species of Frogfish which has been discovered under the jetty. New stuff still gets discovered here, it's incredible. He pointed out the first two poisonous Indian Walkers to me which had me look twice. The chicken claws really did surprise me. They are such a strange looking fish and once I'd seen one, I seemed to find them more regularly which I had not seen or noticed back in 2008.

The rest of our week's dives were put into Maadil's care who took care of us on our last trip over while Eljer went off to start a diving course for another couple who had arrived on the island.

I said it three years ago and I say it again, Maadil has one hell of an eye on him. We set out to do a dive at Mantabuan Island and this particular dive site is known to have the very small Orangutan Crabs which Simone wanted to photograph. I looked into every single bubble anemone I could find for 50 minutes and didn't come across one and Maadil found the smallest bugger there was to find hidden in an angled gap in a very large boulder. Go figure. Same went for a Sea Moth. I was desperate to find one, they are such awesome little creatures and Maadil sure enough found one in Sipadan. I lost it the minute I took my eyes off it.

We went down to the Turtle Cavern dive site just off the Drop Off in Sipadan and Maadil took us straight down to see two beautiful resident Ornate Ghostpipefish. It was the first time I had been able to see these beautiful creatures with my own eyes. I spend so much time looking into my view finder trying to capture all these moments on film that I keep telling myself I should plan at least one dive with absolutely no video camera whatsoever so that I can actually take the time to enjoy it without having to watch it all through a small window and housing. But alas, I never do in fear of missing a great opportunity that I can then watch back over and over again. I always look back at my footage and still watch it in awe at how things move and appear and knowing that they had actually been right in front of me for that moment I filmed them. That's pretty special in my book.



Bumphead Parrotfish



Sea Moth

I'm so glad Simone was with me as the EDA Underwater Photographer to capture them in his own style as they are two very different mediums and where would a story be without images to illustrate it. To select but only a few of the photos out of the hundreds that he took was quite a challenge for both of us.

To provide a list of all the species you can see in Sabah would be ridiculously long, but the great thing is knowing there is so much more out there to discover. I've already seen 4 new fish on this 5 day trip from my last one 3 years ago. I will keep going back to this place and know that I will add more to my seen list.

The really big stuff in Sipadan is just so exciting. The walls of Chevron or Blacktail Barracudas are always such a spectacular sight to see as are the huge schools of jacks that you swim upon at the shallower depths. My favourites are the Giant Bumphead Parrotfish. They are so huge and beautiful in their own unique way and from a distance they look like a herd of buffalo grazing on pastures. They are fantastic to film.

There is always a gorgeous backdrop with all the beautiful colours of the corals. They are huge and healthy and teeming with all sorts of colourful Anthias, little Humbugs, the beautiful Coral Groupers, Butterfly fish and so much more. White Tip Sharks beat the numbers I saw last time which was fantastic and looking out into the deep blue you can see the Gray Reef Sharks as well so we know that all is well in Sipadan.

The turtles as always are everywhere, both Green and Hawksbill and you shouldn't see fewer than 30 of them on one dive. With it being the turtle mating season, we even got to witness a Green turtle couple coming together to mate right in front of us as we were coming up from one of our dives at Hanging Garden. They did not shy away from the cameras and if anything, the turtles actually pose for you. Our cover star was a little poser herself.

In Mabul, Simone and I spent 70 minutes under the jetty at Paradise 2 on one dive at dusk watching and photographing the one and only, Mandarin fish. Unless you know which

DIVING DESTINATIONS



Juvenile Lionfish



Juvenile Harlequin Sweetlips



Orangutan Crab

rubble it is exactly to look in for them, you won't see them! A dive guide is mandatory to point them out to you. We didn't explore any more on that dive as we went down for that sole purpose and didn't take any torches with us so wouldn't have spotted any of the other cool stuff that comes out at night. Paradise 2 really is exquisite and just so easy to dive or snorkel for that matter. There are Trumpetfish, Cornetfish, Pipefish and Blennies everywhere you look. They even have Ornate Ghost Pipefish, Stargazers as well as the Indian Walkers which are the 3 that were added to my seen list. And of course, you can see the awesome and very camouflaged Frogfish of all kinds, new species included.

We also got to dive in Kapalai and Mantabuan Island which I had never done before. Mantabuan is the furthest away taking 50 minutes to get to by boat. We didn't see as much as expected which happens sometimes, but the drawback was how cold it was with all the thermoclines. At least we found an Orangutan Crab after all the time we spent looking for one and I also got to see a Juvenile Harlequin Sweetlips which was great to see as they are so unexpectedly different from the adult. The juveniles are brown with large white blotches and mimic the movement of a poisonous flatworm for defence against predators. They gain more spots and the spots

reverse from white to black as they age. I didn't have much worth filming in this area, but it was a merit for the shots Simone got from there even if we did freeze a bit. Saying that, I was not put off with the dives and I would like to give it another try when I next go back as I know you can fall on a very good day there.

I really liked Kapalai and recommend going there as well which is just next door to Mabul. The island of Kapalai was a beautiful island two hundred years ago, but is now only a sand bar. Erosion has reduced the island to sea level and the village now sits on the edge of the extensive Ligitan Reefs. All of the buildings are on stilts which go down into the water. We managed to get one dive in at Kapalai and there are a lot of dive sites to explore, but our diving schedule was already packed. As you will see, there are no lack of sites to dive in this area and they are all so close by.

Another thing to do when you are staying on Mabul if you're not diving, is to go for a walk around it. It takes approximately an hour to cover it and along the way you will see the many children of Mabul Island. On the left side you will find the small settlement of the Filipino Water Gypsies if you are looking at Borneo Divers straight on and on the right, the larger settlement of the Malaysian fishing villagers. Although they are both of fishing backgrounds,

both poor and one is prominently stateless in Sabah, having no birth identity in Malaysia, they are both superior examples of sheer content! They lead such simple lives and yet so colourful, they want not and they take not. Three years earlier I had visited them and taken their photos and not one of them asked me for anything in return, I've come back and noticed how much bigger the populations and settlements have become and still no one asks you for anything. They ask you to take their picture as they pose smiling so profusely you think they might explode waiting for you to show them what they look like and they thank you for it when you're done and erupt into fits of giggles. It's quite remarkable at how humble their lives are.

Clement Lee has explained how he has tried to help them out and given them ideas of how to work with the tourists that come to the island with all the resorts that are scattered around, but they have no interest whatsoever in making money or working for that matter. They are perfectly happy just the way they are and they don't feel the need for anything more as they are self efficient and practical in everything they do.

One problem that the resorts continuously try to tackle with the villagers though, is how hard it is in educating them about the





Maadil surfing the big blue



cleanliness and the impact that waste has on the environment. They are hoping that the children of the island will be the ones to grasp the concept and be the ones to pass on the knowledge and understanding to the adults through the education the school on the island provides them with. As you walk through the villages you will see large holes that have been dug out every few metres and filled with rubbish, the majority including plastic packets and sweet wrappers and when the holes overflow, the rubbish is disposed of by burning them into the ground. Rubbish is scattered absolutely everywhere you look and not just in the holes, but this is still a road toward the right direction as I had not seen these last time. The children spend

most of their time in the water and already know how to fish seemingly the minute they have learnt to walk. One good side to the larger junk lying about, is the entertainment and the imagination the larger objects create for them when they play. You see that the adults do monitor the safety of the children through it all. A large polystyrene box makes a perfect boat and one little boy had made a perfect kite.

Clement Lee has said, the trick is to not give up and continue trying to educate them the best way they can and he's absolutely right!

If you ever plan to go and discover the diving world of Sipadan for yourselves, I can promise only wonderful memories. I know from personal experience and from the people that I have met, that you will want to keep going back there to rediscover it all over again. Listen to my three consecutive soundtrack pieces and close your eyes, it will prepare you mentally for your first breath underwater in the magic that is Sipadan...







DIVING DESTINATIONS

In our five day dive itinerary, we managed to do 15 dives with an average of 4 dives a day and out of those I've listed some of the dive briefs of the dives we did given to us by Borneo Divers.

Contact Borneo Divers for the seasonal package costs and availability at <http://www.borneodivers.info>

The Borneo Divers Mabul Resort package is inclusive of:

- Airport - Hotel return transfer within Kota Kinabalu on arrival and departure day
- Schedule land transfer from Tawau Airport to Semporna return by van/coach (1st schedule - 7.45am and 2nd schedule - 2.20pm)
- Schedule boat transfer from Semporna to Mabul Island return
- Semi-detached chalet at Mabul Island
- 3 meals a day plus light snacks and beverages while at the Dive Resort (Except alcohol and/or carbonated soft drinks)
- 3 boat dives a day between Mabul, Kapalai, Sipadan, Si Amil or Mantabuan Island with professional Divemaster
- Unlimited Jetty House Reef Dives at Mabul Island (Conditions apply)
- Boat, tanks and weights

Extras:

- Night Dive is at MYR50.00 per person/per boat with a minimum of 3 pax (With professional Divemaster)
- Full sets of diving equipment can be rented from the dive station at MYR95.00 per day/per person (Excluding Dive Computer and Dive Torch)



RAY POINT

Located on the southern tip of Pulau Mabul, this site slopes to about 30 metres down to the sandy bottom. Currents sweeping through this point bring clear water and good visibility. Sea fans and soft corals in the current areas are home to gobies, blennies, moray eels, butterfly fish, damselfish, parrotfish and stonefish.

SEAVENTURE RIG

A flat sandy area in a depth of approximately 17 metres. This is an old oil platform which has been converted into a hotel owned by Seaventures Dive Resort. It stands on huge pillars and this is an amazing dive site. Look close around this site as there are always several frogfish around. Ghostpipefish (Harlequin and sea grass), wasp fish, nudibranchs, stonefish, flying gurnards, crocodile fish, batfish and flutefish can all be found here.



Borneo Divers Mabul Resort beach in the morning light



STAGHORN CREST & SOUTH POINT

There are usually very strong currents present at these sites. Dives here can take you through up to three marked sites. Very large shoals of pelagics feed here: barracudas, jacks, sharks and turtles. On the upper reef, a multitude of smaller reef fish abound. Corals burst with colour and huge anemones and clownfish are found here.

DROP OFF

Just 6 metres from the shore, the wall plunges a staggering 600 metres down and is rated as one of the top 5 beach dives in the world. The wall is encrusted with different varieties of coral, turtles abound and a multitude of lionfish and smaller reef dwelling fish live on this wall. The entrance to **TURTLE CAVERN** is also found about 20 metres down along this wall.

BARRACUDA POINT

As the name suggests, Barracuda Point is where a large concentration of pelagics converge. Expect to see large shoals of barracudas, jacks, grey and white tip reef sharks. The schools number in the high hundreds. Currents are strong making it a fast moving, high voltage dive site.

HANGING GARDEN

This wall is covered in a multitude of soft coral. Hawksbill and green turtles live on the ledges at this site and the current is usually quite calm. A great spot for photographers as corals hang from the cracks and crevices along the wall.



Water Gypsy boats

INTERVIEW BY EMMANUELLE LANDAIS (THECARBONCULT.COM)

EMMANUELLE | Can I get a quote from you regarding your before and after experiences of diving Sipadan?

ALLY | You can't prepare yourself for the before as you don't know what to expect unless you have dived in the few other parts in the world that offer the macro life you get in Mabul and the really big stuff you get to see in Sipadan. I've dived in Mexico, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Djibouti, Terengganu in Malaysia, Oman and the UAE and I can finally say on the diving front, I've seen and experienced the best diving I have ever done, right in Mabul and Sipadan! I haven't seen hammerheads yet though and I'm going to see them on my next trip over there, they promised me hammerheads!

After you have been to and dived Sipadan though, there is the problem of every other dive you do being quite dull. Having only just recently come back from there and with it still so fresh in my mind, I wake up in the mornings wondering if it had all been just a dream...

SIMONE | My before experience dates quite sometime back as it was 6 years ago when they had not yet established the permit system and Sipadan could be dived daily. I had amazing memories of that trip and I was a relatively less experienced diver at the time having tried only a few destinations so I was wandering if it would impress me as much. Well it was well beyond what I remembered! Sipadan fully lived up to the memories of more than 30 turtles in a dive, with turtles coming out of everywhere and sharks, barracudas, jacks in great numbers as well as gorgeous reefs, and it is rare to find a very renowned diving destination keeping so well.

EMMANUELLE | Even if changes are minimal, how has it differed between the times you have dived there?

ALLY | Not much has changed apart from the visibility this time round hadn't been as good as the first time I had been there 3 years ago. Visibility worked with the weather and it in no way spoilt anything. The marine life and coral is just so rich and varied and it's just such an incredibly beautiful place and the crew at Borneo Divers Mabul Resort are fantastic and always pointing out new stuff that you miss with everything else there is to look at. I was on overload trying to film everything. Oh and of course the new Dive Centre on the jetty is just fantastic.

SIMONE | The really great surprise for me was how rich Mabul and the rest of the islands were. The introduction of the permits not only helped preserve Sipadan but also forced us to experience more of Mabul, Kapalai and the other locations, I did not dive much of it last time as we were going to Sipadan everyday and I realize how much I missed out. Just below the jetty in Mabul there is incredible macro life, you literally jump in the water 100 meters from your room to find frogfish, mandarin fish, ghost pipefish... I could have easily spent 2-3 days just under the jetty!

The other positive surprise was the improvement of the Borneo Divers Resort. This was already a very good and friendly operation, but very simple and there was a lot



of walking with tanks to do to reach the jetty. I was blown away by the great new diving setup with the diving centre on the jetty, a jump away from the reef with lots of space to manage your photographic equipment and a great rest area with a bar to spend the diving surface time. Also, what was quite a bare sandy ground between bungalows has blossomed into a beautifully landscaped garden. But the simple and friendly spirit of the resort has not changed!

EMMANUELLE | What does it mean to you to be able to dive in a place where you need a permit?

ALLY | It means that there won't be a traffic jam of divers underwater; that the marine life will be plentiful, varied and thriving, the corals will be intact and huge and that I'm going to cherish every single moment of my breath beneath that surface. Permits are compulsory to protect our reefs in this day and age! Sipadan proves it!

SIMONE | The introduction of permits is necessary and more destinations in the world

should be as wise as the Malaysian authorities have been. As a diver you are aware of the impact you have on the marine environment, as careful as you may try to be. It makes perfect sense to limit the number of people to preserve a unique environment like Sipadan. It also makes the day you spend there feel more special and you try to really treasure every minute.

EMMANUELLE | What's the natural high you get from going all that way to dive in that one place?

ALLY | Distance means nothing when I think of Sipadan. If I could live there, I'd move tomorrow, but then I might start growing scales so maybe not. I just want to be underwater the entire time I'm there, but like everything else the novelty might wear off doing it day in, day out after a while, so the memories are good to live by until the next time I go back and visit. I'm already thinking about it.

SIMONE | You have to go remote to find pristine environments! Being a hard to access location limits it from becoming a mass tourism destination and every travel hour spent to reach it makes it only more special. I actually enjoy the long way over; as at every next plane, bus and boat you feel closer to somewhere unique and very privileged to be there. I thought it would be a lot of travelling to go for just 5 days... after 2 days alone I could have come home thinking it was totally worth the

trip! Still, next time I'll go for 2 weeks!

EMMANUELLE | Can you add how many dives you have done and what the best thing you saw in Sipadan has been till now?

ALLY | How many dives I've done my last trip there, or how many I've done in my diving career? 15 dives last there and I couldn't tell you a precise number of total dives I've done up till now. When you've worked in the diving industry and taught every single day, you stop logging. I might have done a thousand dives and not even known it, who knows!

Best thing I've seen in Sipadan? Where do I start, my list is huge! But if I am to name only one, then my absolute favourite are the Bumphead Parrotfish. I love how ugly and huge they are, they're gorgeous and great fun to film.

SIMONE | I also stop counting dives but we must be in the 400 range... Most amazing thing I saw were turtles mating! I still have to switch on my computer and look at the photos to believe I actually witnessed that!





Frogfish

BDMR TEAM



I want to thank Tourism Malaysia's, Tuan Razali Tuan Omar and Amir Muhammad Hanif for continuously following everything up with all our travel needs and for organising this trip. Royal Brunei Airlines for the comfortable flights and extra luggage allowance with all the extra camera equipment Simone and I had to take with us. I want to thank everyone working at Borneo Divers Mabul Resort, you all made it such a fantastic week, we loved the homemade cookies inbetween all our dives (we've gained extra kilos in the process). Maadil for being such a great dive companion and such an opened eyed guide. Eljer thank you for the first days introduction dives and for the music. Amin for being so organised and looking after our every divers need. Omar for being such an awesome and patient boat captain. And to Clement Lee for your friendship, your humour and your outstanding hospitality!



ELJER

DESIGNATION: Instructor
FROM: Tawau, Sabah
YEARS WITH BDMR: 18
DIVE LEVEL: MSDT
FAVOURITE DIVE SITE: South Point, Sipadan



MAADIL

DESIGNATION: Instructor
FROM: Semporna, Sabah
YEARS WITH BDMR: 6
DIVE LEVEL: OWSI
FAVOURITE DIVE SITE: Barracuda Point, Sipadan
Paradise 2, Mabul



OMAR

DESIGNATION: Boat Captain
FROM: Semporna, Sabah
YEARS WITH BDMR: 25
DIVE LEVEL: Open Water
FAVOURITE DIVE SITE: Barracuda Point, Sipadan



AMIN

DESIGNATION: Incharge of Dive Station
FROM: Semporna, Sabah
YEARS WITH BDMR: 7
DIVE LEVEL: Open Water
FAVOURITE DIVE SITE: Paradise 1, Mabul

TOURISM
MALAYSIA

Malaysia
Truly Asia



ROYAL BRUNEI





CLEMENT LEE

DESIGNATION: Managing Director
FROM: Labuan, Sabah
YEAR OPENED BDMR: 1984
DIVE LEVEL: PADI Course Director #22210
FAVOURITE DIVE SITE: Barracuda Point, Sipadan
 Paradise 2, Mabul

INTERVIEW WITH CLEMENT LEE

Q | Where are you from in Malaysia?

A | I was born in Labuan – an island some 30 minutes by flight from KK. Labuan is now a Federal Territory of Malaysia.

Q | When did you first start diving?

A | I started diving in 1983, my fellow partner, Randy Davis – an American and PADI Instructor certified me as a PADI Open Water Diver in his first ever class and I subsequently went on to continue my education to Dive Master and have never looked back.

In 1985, I went to Sydney to take on the PADI Open Water Instructor course. I went to Australia because there was no Course Director conducting any PADI Instructor course back then and in 1991, I went to California USA to take up the PADI Course Director Training Course together with another fellow Malaysian, Andrew Lee, and I became the first Malaysian PADI Course Director.

Until today, even though Sabah has a few more Course Directors, I still remain the ONLY Sabahan PADI Course Director.

Q | What made you start up Borneo Divers?

A | I did not start up Borneo Divers alone. In 1983, American Instructor, Randy Davis and British Assistant Instructor, Ron Holland, came to meet with me about setting up Borneo Divers. I did not hesitate to jump straight in as I felt very strongly about diving. It was still new to me and it presented me with a new challenge to jointly pioneer this industry in Sabah.

After getting myself certified as a PADI Open Water Diver, my interest in scuba diving picked up and when the opportunity came to invest in this industry to become a pioneer of scuba diving...I went in and together we started Borneo Divers in 1983 and officially registered as Borneo Divers And Sea Sports (S) Sdn Bhd in 1984.

We were 4 partners. An American, a Brit and 2 Malaysians.

Borneo Divers was born and we introduced PADI courses to Sabah and at the same time Borneo Divers pioneered the Resort management of the now famous SIPADAN

island. We actually brought in our first overseas divers in 1984.

There were no chalets, no bathrooms, no kitchen, etc at that time...we hired a big boat, purchased whatever we needed, packed our compressors, equipment, tents, supplies and went camping/diving in Sipadan during those first years.

It was a very TOUGH endeavour, as we were on our own. We had no financial support and no assistance on the infrastructure. The Sabah State Government had never heard of the dive industry and so we had to promote ourselves. I must admit that the Borneo Divers partners went through hell...but we have been very focused. Despite all the odds, we knew there was such a thing as a "Dive Industry" and we knew there was a future in it with the potential particularly in Sipadan. When we first dipped our heads in the waters of Sipadan, we knew instantly that we had found our future. And we continue to slog on.

An opportunity came along in 1987/1988 when Cousteau's Society research ship "Calypso" came calling in to Sipadan. After some initial dives they called the legend himself, the late Captain Jacques-Yves Cousteau who flew into Sabah and landed on Sipadan island and immediately authorized his crew to make a documentary which was titled, "Ghost of Sea Turtles". This documentary was shown in the 1988 Film Festival and it "exploded" Sipadan.

From then on, Sipadan had been exposed to the world and it was during the year of 1988 that we started the construction of simple, rustic chalets, etc...and the rest is history.

But I must emphasize that fame had its toll on Sipadan and I could see the environment and the marine life was starting to change. I have said this many times and I am going to say it again...

"The environment is our "Silent Partner", particularly the ocean environment and it does not speak words as such, but it does fight back...if it becomes sick, so do all of us!"

When the Minister asked us to vacate the island...Borneo Divers was the FIRST to stand up and leave...without a cent of compensation. We left in 2004 and so did all the other operators. We lost millions of ringgit of course but I can tell you one thing...there are no amount of dollars that you can equate to the environment...you can always get the dollars back, but you can't get the environment back if it is already gone.

We moved ourselves to Mabul and started Borneo Divers Mabul Resort in 2003 and instituted and complied with all the environmental measures required of us by the Environmental Impact Assessment (or EIA) in Mabul.

Was the sacrifice worth it? Yes of course. You can still dive in Sipadan, just that now a daily permit is required in order to keep the diving controlled. The expressions on all the diver's faces gives me the greatest satisfaction in knowing that NOT only did we do the right thing to move out of Sipadan, but we also know and confirm that the marine life and the ocean environment is recovering. In 1984 I put Sipadan on a scale of 1-10 and gave it a 10 back then. It has dropped over the past 10-15 years, but what I then considered a 3 or 4 has now climbed back up in the 6-7 years. It is not yet back to the top...but it will be... yes it will be!

Sipadan is out of bounds from 6pm to 6am. This 12 hour time frame really gives the marine life and environment good 'recuperation'. The fact that by 3 or 4pm, all the operators have left Sipadan for the day gives it an additional couple of hours more resting time which it deserves.

This is what I call pay back time...

Myself and the Sabah Tourism Board, (I am a Board Member in charge of the Dive Industry) are now starting to promote other islands such as Mantabuan, Bohey Dulang, Si Amil and Denawan...we wish to take the pressure off Sipadan further...and perhaps re-build another icon.

Will we succeed? Yes given the time...we will.

This is what I have said to divers, "Put it this way, if you do one dive less in Sipadan, you are contributing one dive to the betterment of Sipadan's environment." Most, if not all divers are environmentally conscious and I am sure most will support what we do.

Q | What is your favourite dive site?

A | My favourite dive site? Undoubtedly it is Barracuda point in Sipadan. This is the site I always describe as a "living aquarium". In an actual aquarium, you walk alongside the walls of glass to see and view the marine lives inside the tanks and always in awe of what you see next. In Sipadan and in particular at Barracuda Point, you jump into the water and the current carries you along the walls where you never know what to expect to see next. It's always such a surprise and you are a part of it.

Just like the day when you and I and the rest of the EDA team jumped into the water, we were met by schools of jackfish, then came the school of Bumpheads, then the never ending sights of turtles, then the huge giant Trevally, then the hunting sharks and when you turned your head to the blue...you saw the ocean's swimming grey reef sharks, then the multi-dimensional colours of the corals, garden eels, big eyes...then you glided into the valley and when you looked up, behold, the dark clouds above and there are the Barracudas – hundreds of them swimming in such harmony

parading whilst you are led by the current and you simply watch – awesome is what you utter...

I still remember PADI's Brian Cronin's first words when he surfaced from the water, "How did you make this happen?" and how many hundreds of times I've heard divers mention, "This is the best dive I have ever done"...even Simone and Antony made the same remark when you were last here.

The most spectacular remark I heard years ago and still remember to this day was from a diver from the UK. "My 20 years of diving told in one SINGLE dive".

That is how famous Barracuda Point is still to this day!

But after having said all the above, I wish to reiterate that among all the dive sites these days, taking into consideration my love of macro photography and the convenience of diving...there is no dive site that can beat the BDMR Jetty House Reef – aptly named Paradise 2.

I can find almost anything on my wish list there...frog fish, Bantail frog fish, nudibranchs, (OMG how many species I cant even remember) scorpion fish including Indian walkers, blue ring octopus and the flamboyant cuttle fish...I never tire of this site even having done hundreds of dives there. My own staff and DM's are always so surprised whenever I go to BDMR and I spend so much time down there.

Apart from Barracuda point, this is my second most favourite dive site considering the convenience as well as the variety of marine life I am able to capture down there.

Q | How often do you get to dive with your busy schedule?

A | Not a lot. But I do get a kick out of whenever I immerse my head in the water...I go to Mabul maybe 6-7 times a year...and I AM NOT joking when I tell people (you all included) that I am always looking for excuses to come to Mabul and I have urged all of you to tell me if you come so I can come too (lol).

I travel overseas a lot for promotional work, sometimes with Sabah Tourism. I do wish to further improve the dive industry...but please bear in mind diving is NOT to be promoted for mass tourism. We need to strike a balance somehow and we can not afford to repeat an episode such as Sipadan's.

I have to keep moving the pace and I see there is a great future in the dive industry, provided we "nurture" the industry and manage the environment well.

Q | How did becoming a board member for Tourism Sabah come into place?

A | Well some 8 years ago, I was called to the Ministry of Tourism along with some others and in the meeting with the Minister, I was handed a certificate that said I was appointed as a Board Member. The Minister then said only one thing, "We want to tap your expertise and we want you to stand above the rest and lead the industry", the rest is history.

9 years ago, Sabah Tourism did not have any collateral or much information about the dive industry, but today we have brochures and promotional videos in English, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, etc. The Sabah Tourism Dive Committee (STDC) headed by myself, is one of the most active committees in terms of moving the industry. Sabah Tourism participates in no less than 10 different dive shows/seminars a year and along with Tourism Malaysia we offer no less than 15 different dive shows/seminars a year and open the opportunities to dive resorts and operators to participate and charge them only a nominal fee. The number of annual divers coming to Sabah today has reached over 40,000 and it is still improving. It is something I am very proud of indeed to see in the industry as it started from zero some 27 years ago to where we are today.

Q | What plans do you have for the future?

A | Retire?

Honestly, the future of the dive industry is bright and undergoing what I call a 'revolutionary' change. This includes dive equipment, dive computers, dive resort facilities, booking engines and IT, etc. It will directly and indirectly control the industry.

Things have already changed in a big way. You don't see film anymore, underwater cameras get smaller, are now digital, compact and the quality of the pictures have improved greatly.

I also believe the pattern of divers will change...if you are a dive resort and still use the traditional modes of promotion, you will find yourself out of business soon.

I remember when I put out a questionnaire before we built BDMR to whether people thought WIFI and internet was a MUST...the majority responded to the negative...but we went ahead with it anyway and my goodness me and thank god...it has become a competitive edge these days...there are divers who have told me that it is because I have WIFI, that they book with us.

So things have changed, mode and trends have changed...we just need to be on our toes all the time and move with the times.

But one thing still remains...the ocean environment is the key. People say that diving may one day go virtual, but nothing is better than being in the water...that is ME!





RETURNING TO SIPADAN AND DISCOVERING A MACRO PARADISE

FEATURE AND PHOTOGRAPHY **SIMONE CAPRODOSSI** – WWW.SCAPRODOSSIPHOTO.COM

I have been to Sipadan and Mabul for the first time 7 years ago. I had only done about 30 dives and it was my first remote dream destination, one of those that you read in the top 10 best dive sites in the world and you promise you'll get to it at least once in your lifetime. At the time I had never seen a sea turtle and stories of more than 30 turtles in a dive was an incredible prospect. We had unlimited daily access to Sipadan, going every morning for 2-3 dives; expectations were obviously met and well exceeded, satisfying my sea turtle craving and leaving me great memories of shark sightings, huge schools of barracudas and amazing coral reefs. My only regret was the lack of any photographic memories as the small compact underwater camera I had, flooded on my second day.

When I was offered the lucky opportunity to head back to Sipadan to shoot underwater for EDA, I was really excited to go back but wondered if I would be as impressed now with more than 400 dives in some other top diving destinations in the world. But sure I was keen to get some photo memories and test my brand new underwater camera system.

I can no doubt say that I was even more impressed than the first time. When the bunch of palm trees crowned by perfectly white sand and crystal clear emerald water came to sight I could see that nothing had changed in Sipadan and the dream island I remembered was still perfectly intact. Only addition was a little coastguard hut at the end of the pier where

divers now have to register as the permits to dive the island are limited daily. So this time we would not get to go there everyday, but we still got the chance to experience 2 incredible days packed with 7 dives. It honestly felt very good to be only allowed limited access to the island when I put my head underwater to find a greatly preserved reef, still flourishing in sea life. Barracuda point was as incredible as I remembered it with walls of jackfish and white tip and grey reef sharks in abundance as well as large schools of barracudas and noisy



Green Turtle

herds of feeding bumphead parrotfish. Drop Off by the jetty keeps holding the record for density of sea turtles with an excess of 30 encounters in a dive. And at Hanging Gardens we got to cruise by some gorgeous shallow reefs teeming with red anthias, colorful reef fish and turtles just in case we missed some more. Now to make this time more special we got the incredible luck to witness turtles mating in front of our eyes and lens, surely one of my most memorable diving moments ever. Not many places unfortunately live up to

memories from 7 years before, but Sipadan fully did and it is thanks to the wise diving policies put in place.

With limited Sipadan access, we got more chances to experience the rest that this amazing corner of Borneo has to offer and did some great diving in Mantabuan and Kapalai, but my best surprise was the island of Mabul itself, and especially the incredible macro diving spot that lays just a jump away from the Borneo Divers Jetty.

We also stayed at Borneo Divers 7 years before but I do not recall much of the diving in Mabul. The dive center was far from the reef so going for a dive meant a long walk with full dive gear on, plus the perspective of small creatures did not seem very exciting to me at the time. So after the diving mornings in Sipadan, we used to spend time sunbathing and chilling rather than going out to explore the Mabul reef.

This time with full fledged gear for macro photography, the small and weird creatures made very attractive prospects. Borneo Divers has made a fantastic upgrade of their facility creating a fully equipped dive center on stilts right at the reef's edge, complete with a camera room dedicated to photographers to charge and assemble equipment, nice freshwater tanks and a great sundeck area and bar to enjoy the time between dives. So the only effort required for the jetty dive is basically jumping into the water.



Crinoid Squat Lobster – *Allogalatea elegans*



Spider Crab – *Xenocarcinus conicus*



Mandarin Fish



Stargazer



Yellow Banded Pipefish – *Corythoichthys flavofasciatus*

After 2-3 dives a day going out by boat, Borneo Divers offers unlimited diving from the jetty for the rest of the afternoon and at night. The jetty dive sites are called Paradise 1 and 2, and paradise has never been so easy to access. Paradise 2 was our first dive of the holiday and from then on, I made it a point to take as much advantage of that little treasure as I could. I ended up with 2 afternoon dives, 2 night dives and a dusk dive off the jetty, and I wish I could be there again this afternoon and evening.

There is not a dull second in Paradise. As we jumped in and descended to 5 meters, we nearly kicked an octopus hugging the top of a rock and pretending to be the rock itself. Immediately next to it, was a very unusual frogfish, apparently a new species, just sitting right under the jetty. Eljer, our dive guide, had to nearly poke it in the eye for me to actually see it! It was different from any frogfish I had seen before, very flat on the rocks and totally camouflaged. I ended up spending a good quarter of the dive looking for an angle that would make it actually visible in a shot, highlighting the mouth and eyes, only parts that actually distinguish it vaguely from the rocks behind.

From then on it was constant pointing out to fascinating creatures, a massive Stargazer

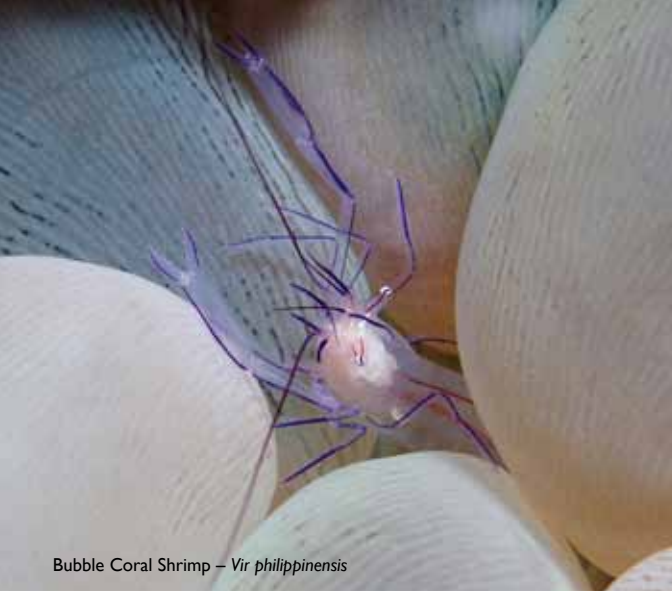
staring upwards perfectly blending into the sandy bottom, large Crocodile fish with their unusual eyes that are a work of art, a gorgeous baby Lionfish, and a pair of Indian Walkers that required the little board sign "Indian Walkers, very poisonous!" by Eljer who had probably noticed how close I was getting to the fish to get an angle I liked. All this and not to mention the ever present Green Turtles that you regularly bump into, while they rest in the reef. A macro lens is not the ideal photo set up for a turtle, but in Mabul they are so tame that you can get an extremely close up portrait.

This little stretch of sea is also host to a variety of seahorses and pipefish. We saw Banded Pipefish, Dragonface Pipefish in little groups of 10-15, and my absolute favourite the Ornate Ghostpipefish. We saw the ghostpipefish in Sipadan first but photo opportunities were limited by my wide angle lens so, I specifically requested for Maadil, our great dive guide for most of the trip, to find another one for me at Paradise 2 while I was armed with macro gear. Five minutes into the dive I was shooting away at this perfect little creature standing against a nice white feather coral background. There are also Robust Ghostpipefish and Pygmy Seahorses around, those are on the list for the next trip.

The diving days are long and it takes strong will to choose to wear very wet gear again around 6.30pm when everyone else is getting out of a hot shower to get a sunset drink, but I love night dives and at Paradise 2 they are really rewarding. Twice we got in the water with a plan for a short half hour dive, and both night dives lasted 70 minutes.

After dusk, the reef comes to life. Crinoids open up blossoming into feathery flowers and coral polyps come out giving life to the hard reef structures. Highlight of the night dives for me were the tiny shrimps and crabs, miniatures of design perfection. We found a beautiful black and white striped Squat Lobster, perfectly placed on a white feather coral that seemed to come out of a fashion shoot, and an incredible pink gorgonian Spider Crab with its head camouflaged into a coral polyp to appear as an integral part of the pink coral fan.

Bigger creatures also come out on the hunt. I found myself suddenly face to face with a giant Cuttle fish, more than a meter long, I must say quite scary for a moment. Just by the jetty poles, there are also big schools of Razorfish piled together vertically and moving with the swell with the odd Trumpet fish pretending to be one of them, just double in size.



Bubble Coral Shrimp – *Vir philippinensis*



Spine-Cheek Anemonefish



Ornate Ghostpipefish

The other unmissable jetty dive is a dusk dive to see the Mandarin fish mating. I have been on a mission to get this shot for a while and had the chance to try before in Micronesia, spending a whole hour at 3 meters where a little male Mandarin fish unfortunately seemed to be having an unlucky night with the girls. To find the Mandarin fish in Mabul you really need your dive guide to show you where they are as there is a little colony, but they live in a single reef spot that looks exactly the same as everywhere else.

Maadil, our guide, obviously found it in a minute, showed me one little Mandarin fish and wrote on his board "wait here". So I nestled myself just below the rock with the Mandarins and started watching the very shy and slow courting. This one was a lucky boy with three females hanging around and crossing paths from time to time. You need a lot of patience as they can go on swimming about and feeding for more than half an hour before the flirting ends and the mating starts. It is also important not to shine torches at them until they start mating as that seems to stop them. Unfortunately a couple of other divers came to check the same Mandarins with

torches at full blast and shooting away at the individual fish. I thought the chance was lost but fortunately the divers got bored quickly and moved on. With the kind agreement of my very patient buddy, Ally, while dusk was getting fully dark, we stayed in position with just a bit of light pointed away from the fish, by now a good 55 minutes into the dive. And then magic started, just a few minutes after the disturbing lot had left, the Mandarins started their mating dance. When they start mating, the male and the female actually come close on the rocks and shoot up in open water together to finally join in a "kiss" for a few seconds. Once this starts, they seem to get carried away and ignore the disturbance from the light. It's very tough to catch the moment but fortunately the ritual goes on a few times. In our case, the lucky Mandarin boy was alternating the mating with a harem of 3 so I had quite a few chances and happily swam out of my 70 minute dive with a frozen Ally and some good shots.

What made this visit really amazing this time round, was the fortune of meeting and diving with Clement Lee, the owner of Borneo Divers who is the most wonderful enthusiastic diver I have ever met. He has been diving

Sipadan and Mabul from the time of Jacques Cousteau's first visit and still shakes with excitement at the sight of a turtle or a pretty clown fish like a first time diver. It's this passion for diving that marks the quality and energy of the whole Borneo Divers operation.

I want to also especially thank the keen eyes of Maadil, our amazing dive guide, the constant helpful smile of Amin who is in charge of the dive stations daily operation and who patiently waited for us to come out at night from extra long dives and welcomed us every morning with fully ready gear for the day and our great boat captain Omar, who carefully handled my underwater system getting in and out of the dives everyday.

The limited accessibility to Sipadan is sometimes considered a turn off for the long trip: "go all the way there for just 1 or 2 days in Sipadan for a week?". I plan to go back there for sure, and I would say this trip is fully worth it, even just for Mabul and the other amazing macro sites of Kapalai and Seaventure just opposite. It is simply excellent macro diving with a bonus of turtles and sharks on a gorgeous island.

MARSA ALAM, RED SEA – EGYPT

FEATURE AND PHOTOGRAPHY **PHILIPPE LECOMTE**



Everyone knows of Sharm El Sheikh in Egypt as a diving destination, but few people look further than this spot.

The coast of Egypt has a lot of amazing places to see and visit. On this visit I decided to go south, to Marsa Alam. This little city now has an international airport with a daily flight to Cairo.

After checking for hotels and what there is to do around the area, I headed to a little Eco village, to a place called Shagra Village Red Sea Safari.

This eco lodge is in front of a very famous dive site called ELPHISTONE. This reef is known for its walls and especially for its shark diversity (Hammerhead, Grey Reef, Oceanic White Tips and more). This site is for experienced divers due to some very strong currents that occur:

Summer is the season for Hammerhead sharks, so I have decided to go in August.

We started heading out at 6am from the dive club with a RIB in order to reach Elphistone within 20 to 30 minutes depending on the sea conditions. A live aboard yacht is attached at one

of the 1,500 mooring buoys made by HEPCA Red Sea. In fact, the Red Sea's coast holds the world record for the most mooring buoys in order to preserve the marine environment.

There are two spots on the reef. The north side where the reef goes down from 2m



from the surface with one plateau at 30m and another plateau at 50m heading into the big blue. Hammerheads are normally swimming above the last plateau.

When all the divers were ready to go, the captain counted down to 3 and everyone did a backwards roll into the water with

stunning visibility of more than 25m. You need to get down to the 30m, just above the last plateau and then need to be on the all around lookout. After a few minutes, the dive master pointed his finger out into the blue and gave the shark sign. You focus so hard

at that emptiness to see something and then you suddenly make out the shape of a Hammerhead, followed by another and then a third. These graceful creatures swim effortlessly against the currents and turn under you without any fears. My buddy and I tried to get closer and reached the 40m limit without difficulty. You must keep a close eye on your computer because the clarity of the water is so clear that it's easy to get carried away and go too deep.

In total we saw 3 Hammerheads and 2 Grey reef sharks. We stayed with them between 5 and 10 minutes and

then made our way back up along the wall in order to finish our dive in the best conditions. The wall is full of life and corals. Giant moray eels, Coral groupers, Great barracudas, schools of Chevron barracudas, tuna and so much more dances around this reef. If you swim away from the wall, you will see the thousands of Anthias darting about in order to eat the



DIVING DESTINATIONS

plankton and other micro animals.

Back at the dive club after a deep dive, you can enjoy the reef (North and South) that is accessible from the shore or by RIB or relax in one of the other 7 dive spots available nearby.

During the dives in Marsa Alam, you will also be able to see turtles, Black tips, Napoleons, groupers, octopus and plenty of other beautiful fish that make diving fun!

If you book the day before, you can also do some amazing dives reachable by truck and boat for a few extra Euros. You can dive at Dolphin House, Nemo City or Sharm Abu Dabaab.

Snorkeling with dolphins or diving with Dugongs is one of the other amazing experiences that you can have around Marsa Alam.

People are very nice and helpful. This eco dive club was a great experience and should be visited by all.

RED SEA DIVING SAFARI

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THE “NEPTUNE” WRECK

FEATURE **STEPHANIE DAVIES, SCUBA DUBAI**



LOCATION: Off Dubai, on the West Coast of the United Arab Emirates

DESCRIPTION: Wreck dive from a support boat

DEPTH: 25 metres (82 feet) dependent upon the tide height

GPS CO-ORDINATES: N 25 30 360 E 055 04 587

The Neptune is a drilling rig tender barge, measuring approximately 79m long, 15m wide and 10m deep. The Neptune initially collided with the drilling rig “WD Kent” in bad weather. It then sunk whilst being towed back to Sharjah in 1973. It currently lies upside down at around 25m. There is often no marker buoy for this site, so a GPS system is definitely needed and a fish finder strongly recommended.

The Neptune was carrying drilling equipment at the time it sunk, and this plus other debris from the accommodation deck lies mostly on the port side. Over the last few years the Neptune has split in two, making penetration possible from both sides, however, care should be taken on the port side as strong currents can occur. For safety reasons, carrying a delayed marker buoy (DSMB) is advised in case coming back to the anchor line is impossible or buddies are separated.

Visibility can change depending on the time of year and through weather conditions. It ranges from 5m to 12m. Having said that, there is always plenty to see at this site, stingrays, snappers, batfish, angelfish, banner fish, blennies, shrimps. Nudibranchs and soft white coral, and that's just the life outside the wreck! Dolphins have even been spotted nearby or on the journey to and from the site!

If you like penetrating wrecks, and are qualified to do so, looking inside a ship that was once lived in and trying to make out what the coral covered objects once were adds an extra dimension to a dive.

Two other sites, Hopper Barge and Anchor Barge, are situated around 1nm from Neptune, making a nice alternative if wanting to do a two tank dive.

My buddies and I dove Neptune one warm, sunny Friday in November. Setting off from Jumeirah Beach 1 Harbour on the beach road from the Burj Al Arab, pass Jumeirah Beach Park and Dubai Ladies Club, u-turn at the lights by the Town Centre, and then take street 7A or the one before it onto street 2.

Unlike the East Coast, the West doesn't really suffer from thermoclines and is still quite warm at this time of the year. I was able to get away with wearing shorts and a rash vest, although most divers wear a short wetsuit or skin, mainly to protect themselves from injury on the wreck or from jellyfish that appear throughout the year.

On this occasion, my buddy and I found the outside interesting enough not to penetrate, making this suitable for both advanced divers who are not comfortable penetrating and experienced wreck divers who are looking for a bit more excitement. However, I still took my torch as the wreck itself is covered in a white, soft coral which if you look closely, hides some pretty white, purple and yellow nudibranchs. They blend so

well that you might think at first that they are part of the coral. Having a torch helps highlight these difficult to see creatures and enables you to have a look inside the wreck. If you are not penetrating, a small torch will suffice.

The batfish, a particular favourite fish of mine, hang around this wreck. They are harmless and are quite curious and friendly, sometimes swimming right up to divers. Another favourite here is the yellow, black and white striped banner fish, with their distinctive banner-like dorsal fin. These colourful fish are from the butterfly family, of which there are no less than 120 species around the world.

Angelfish are also a close relative of the butterfly family, and one type, the Arabian angelfish, has made this wreck their home. Although similar to the butterfly fish, it can be distinguished by the spine which is located on the lower corner of the gill cover. The interesting thing about juvenile angelfish is their colouring, which is very different from the adult. You could mistakenly think it was a different fish altogether.

There are also several shoals of snappers that seem in a hurry to get nowhere, darting in and out of the wreck as well as around it.

One surprise on this dive was finding a large cow tailed ray sitting in a shallow hole barely big enough for its body, its tail sticking out and vertical. It just seemed to be turning around and around in this tight space, not sure what it was doing.

As we were going over the top of the wreck at the end of our dive, I noticed a school of large barracuda, circling around watching us intently. Then suddenly we were surprised for a second time, as an even larger cow tailed ray glided over the top of Neptune, closely followed by a couple of yellow and black pilot fish. Although stingrays are often seen on the Neptune, they are usually spotted just beyond the wreck, not on the wreck itself. These were also the biggest rays I have seen on this site, the second around 5ft across, making it a pleasant end to a very enjoyable day.



DIABETES MELLITUS AND SCUBA DIVING

FEATURE **BARBARA KARIN VELA, MD**

Glucose is a simple sugar; when it is abnormally elevated due to the deficiency of the pancreatic hormone called insulin (essential for regulating the level of glucose), it is called diabetes mellitus. This occurs when the body can't produce enough insulin, or is unable to use the insulin properly. The pancreas as a response to eating or drinking produces insulin. In diabetes, the glucose builds up in the blood instead of being fully absorbed by tissues. Some of this excess sugar is removed through the kidneys, but persistent elevation of blood glucose causes the symptoms and complications of diabetes. There are 2 major forms of diabetes, namely type 1, or Insulin Dependent Diabetes (IDDM), and type 2, or Non-Insulin Dependent Diabetes (NIDDM).

Until some years ago, diabetes mellitus, (both types, 1 and 2), was an absolute contraindication for SCUBA diving. This ban has been recently lifted from an absolute to a relative contraindication in recreational diving following extensive research in this field. However, in diabetes, it is not the type of it that matters, but the discipline of the patient shown in his/her diet, therapy, and the ability to pursue sports while on medication.

The UK banned diabetic patients from SCUBA diving in 1975 following an incident where a diabetic diver who was diving on a wreck in British waters collapsed after having ascended to 30m normally within the no-stop times according to the BSAC/RNPL 1972 tables. On the surface, the diver signaled "OK" to the boat, but was unable to swim after it, and was dragged on board where he finally collapsed. This was put down entirely to him having diabetes mellitus, and a diagnosis of decompression illness was not considered. He hadn't received proper therapy for many hours, and when finally recompressed he became permanently paralyzed from the waist down. Unfortunately, the patient committed suicide as a result of depression. In 1992, as a result of studies by Moon and Wilmshurst on patent foramen ovale (PFO) the case was re-examined and it was found that the unfortunate diver had a large PFO, which allowed gas bubbles to get into the arterial system and brain, causing arterial gas embolism, with its typical symptoms on the surface. PFO is an opening in the heart located between the left and the right atrium and present in approximately 25% of the healthy population. In everyday life its presence doesn't cause any problems, but when SCUBA diving it can allow passage of gas bubbles from the right to the left side of heart without them being filtered by the lungs.

The current approach to diabetes and SCUBA diving depends on the long-term control of diabetic patients and the development

of complications of the disease. Major complications of diabetes come from the damage done to small vessels that affect the eyes, feet and kidneys. A diabetic patient, either type 1 or 2, can not dive if he/she has had inadequate control of glucose levels and episodes of hypoglycaemia (very low blood sugar) in the past 2 years. It means that a diabetic diver should not have had any hospital admissions for treatment of hypoglycaemia, treatment with glucagon, or help from another person to manage hypoglycaemia. Adequate glucose control is checked with a specific blood test that records overall control in the period of 3 months. The test is called HbA1c and its result should have been below 9% for the whole previous year. Furthermore, a

should be aware of the fact that the diver is diabetic. In the diabetic diver's dive kit there should be:

- oral glucose tablets or paste (sugar)
- emergency intramuscular injection of glucagon
- glucometer with sticks and clear instructions how to use it.

Also, it is essential that there is at least one person in the dive party who is able to administer glucose tablets, intramuscular injections, and use the glucometer kit. It seems sensible that a diabetic diver has slightly higher blood sugar prior to a dive by consuming glucose in any form (juice, chocolate, sugar cube, etc). Following the dive, diabetic divers



Photo by Joe Bartoszek/Marine Photobank

diabetic patient cannot dive if he/she develops any of the chronic complications of diabetes that affect the eyes, kidneys or heart. However, highly disciplined, sports-experienced and well controlled diabetics can dive if they adhere to the rules for handicapped divers, and have restricted diving such as:

- All dives should be no-decompression dives with the depth limit of 30m.
- Diabetic divers should have a yearly medical check up for the fitness to dive assessment with a diving medical examiner or a diving doctor.

For those who dive and have diabetes, it is important to adhere to some rules before and after the dive. Before diving, a diabetic diver should be well hydrated, should dive only with a non-diabetic diver (his buddy should not have diabetes) who is familiar with the diabetic person and the problems he or she is likely to experience, and the Dive Guide/Dive Master

should check their glucose level, and if necessary correct it appropriately (by taking insulin if high or taking food if low). Any symptoms or signs should immediately be reported either to the diving buddy or to the Dive Master and should not be considered as "a part of diving".

Divers with diabetes are at risk of sudden loss of consciousness because low blood sugar can happen while underwater. This carries the risk of drowning and implies additional risks for their diving buddy. This is the reason why diabetic patients have restrictions for recreational SCUBA diving. Currently, all diver-training agencies worldwide have an opinion that a diabetic diver can not become a diving instructor.

Dr. Karin Vela is a Diving Medicine physician EDTC/IECHM IIa and works in Dubai London Speciality Hospital.

UPCOMING EVENTS

AL GORE'S CLIMATE REALITY PROJECT

15 September at The Shelter

BIOSPHERE EXPEDITION

9-16 September in Maldives | 9-15 October in Musandam

BIRMINGHAM DIVE SHOW

22-23 October

SUBIOS SEYCHELLES 'FESTIVAL OF THE SEA'

4-6 November

CLEAN UP ARABIA

18-19 November

INTERESTING LINKS AND RESOURCES

HYPERBARIC CHAMBERS

- <http://www.hyperlite.co.uk/index.php>
- <http://www.perrybaromedical.com/index.html>
- <http://www.diversalertnetwork.org/membership/alert-diver/article.asp?ArticleID=959>
- <http://www.diversalertnetwork.org/medical/faq/faq.aspx?faqid=179>



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MISSION STATEMENT

To conserve, protect and restore the UAE marine resources by understanding and promoting the marine environment and promote environmental diving.

LEGISLATION

Emirates Diving Association (EDA) was established by a Federal Decree, No. (23) for the year 1995 article No. (21) on 23/02/1995 and chose Dubai as its base. The Decree stipulates the following responsibilities for EDA.

- To Legislate and regulate all diving activities in the UAE.
- Ensure environmentally respectful diving practices in all EDA members.
- Promote and support the diving industry within the UAE by coordinating the efforts of the diving community.
- Promote diving safety in the commercial and recreational diving fields through standardization of practices.
- Promote and preserve historical aspects of diving within the gulf region and enhance environmental education to diving and non diving communities through EDA activities.

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In the blue waters of Malaysia,
one doesn't dive.
One takes a spiritual journey.



Explore some of the best dive
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From the colorful coral atolls to the vibrant marine
creatures, diving in Malaysia is like swimming through an
untouched piece of art. This is one of the reasons why
Malaysia is more than just a holiday destination. It is an
experience that will last you a lifetime. So, come and embrace
all that you can ever imagine and more.



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