

S P O R T DIVING

ISSUE 170

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**YOUR
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**SHOOTING BIG FISH
IN A BARREL**

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RICH REEFS & ANCIENT MYSTERIES**

APO REEF TREASURES

**A TASTE OF AFRICA:
ZANZIBAR**

**SUPREME DIVING:
WAKATOBI**

**AUSTRALIA'S CENTRAL
COAST BONANZA
PART ONE**

**DIVE MEDICINE:
MIDDLE EAR PROBLEMS
PART ONE**

DIGITAL IMAGING: TESTING THE PUPPET WARP TOOL



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**CELEBRATING 45
YEARS
2015**

[EDITORIAL]

Dear Reader

In issue Number 166 2014 we discussed the controversial shark culling program in Western Australia following a series of fatal shark attacks between 2010 and 2013. It is strange how things change; Northern New South Wales has succeeded Western Australia as the shark attack capital of Australia with one fatal attack early in 2014 and eleven other attacks in the months since.

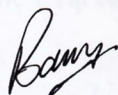
Recently the New South Wales Government announced that new shark monitoring measures have been put in place to protect the northern beaches and coastline, following the spate of attacks earlier this year. An A\$250,000 campaign will involve water surveillance by experts as well as the tagging and tracking of sharks to better understand their behaviour. World renowned shark experts from the Department of Primary Industries will be temporarily based on the North coast to lead this work. Scientists on board the research boat *The Swan* will monitor shark activity from Coffs to Ballina. Head of DPI's shark research centre Vic Peddemors said "we have no idea – and nowhere in the world does anyone have any idea – what causes these sudden appearances of groups of sharks along the coast."

At the opposite end of the spectrum the popularity and growth of shark dive tourism worldwide over the past decade is undeniable! Divers increasingly want to see and dive with sharks and are willing to pay well to have close encounters with sharks in the wild – world famous examples include Fiji's Beqa shark dive for interaction with big bull and tiger sharks, the Bahamas' shark dives, Mike Ball's Scuba Zoo shark feeds on Australia's Great Barrier Reef, plus a host of others.

Sustainable shark diving fills an industry niche by providing a one-stop source for best safety and environmental practices and guidelines for scuba divers established around the world. Some dive operators provide close encounters by baiting or hand feeding sharks; those that employ rigorous, well planned best practices ensure the safety of clients and the sharks.

A new website will be launched in December – www.sustainablesharkdiving.com. The site founder Rick MacPherson, marine biologist and conservationist, has stated: "I believe a living shark showcase for tourism over its lifetime is better than a dead shark used once for its fins and meat!" We'll keep you all up to speed on sustainable shark dive developments.

Happy and safe diving



Barry Andrewartha | Publisher

S P O R T DIVING M A G A Z I N E

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(Eco-Photo Explorers)

APO TREASURES



The flamboyantly coloured
yellow-spotted anemone shrimp
Ancylomenes luteomaculatus.
A broadclub cuttlefish *Sepia*
latimanus dazzles along the reef.
An electric fileclam *Ctenoides ales*
flashes its white mantle.
The reefs pulsate with life.



30 metres (100 feet), we could instantly appreciate the extent of the coral biodiversity: healthy stands of branching corals, brain corals and star corals mixed with soft corals and other types of reef building organisms.

All along the wall were clouds of anthias, damselfish and other reef fish darting in and out of the protection of the reef. Drifting in the current were schools of triggerfish and jacks and tucked beside huge barrel sponges were colorful anemones and their resident anemonefish. At South Corner, Apo Reef had its finest reef display on exhibit.



Eagle's Wall was our next stop, had a similar profile to South Corner. Here, we glimpsed several white-tip reef sharks tantalizingly swimming just beyond our maximum depth range. Closer to the surface on the back side of the reef wall were several Napoleon wrasse and bumphead parrotfish. These impressive but shy fish managed to hold their appearance until after we'd begun our safety stop. We could almost swear they were mocking us with their late arrival!

The Apo Reef system was, unfortunately, subjected to dynamite fishing prior to its designation as a marine reserve, and some of the detrimental effects of this can be seen in spots as piles of coral rubble can be found. Some of this damage is not attributable to blast fishing but, rather, typhoon damage through the years. Now that the reef system is protected, the damage has been contained.



Apo Reef has numerous macro critters and underwater photographers delight in searching for the riotously coloured nudibranchs, the gaudy mantis shrimp, the aptly named orangutan crab and many other creatures on their diving bucket lists. But for big animal action, divers must see Shark Airport, a unique stretch of reef with tracts of white sand where white-tip reef sharks are often found resting out of the currents sweeping

THERE'S MORE THAN 7000 ISLANDS IN THE PHILIPPINES. STRADDLING THE PHILIPPINE AND SOUTH CHINA SEAS, THIS ARCHIPELAGO IS CONSIDERED THE SECOND LARGEST IN THE WORLD, AFTER INDONESIA. LOCATED SQUARELY INSIDE THE CORAL TRIANGLE, A VAST OCEAN REGION WITH AMAZING BIODIVERSITY AND TEEMING CORAL REEFS, THE PHILIPPINES HAS NUMEROUS WORLD-CLASS DIVE SITES AND EXCITING TRAVEL OPPORTUNITIES.

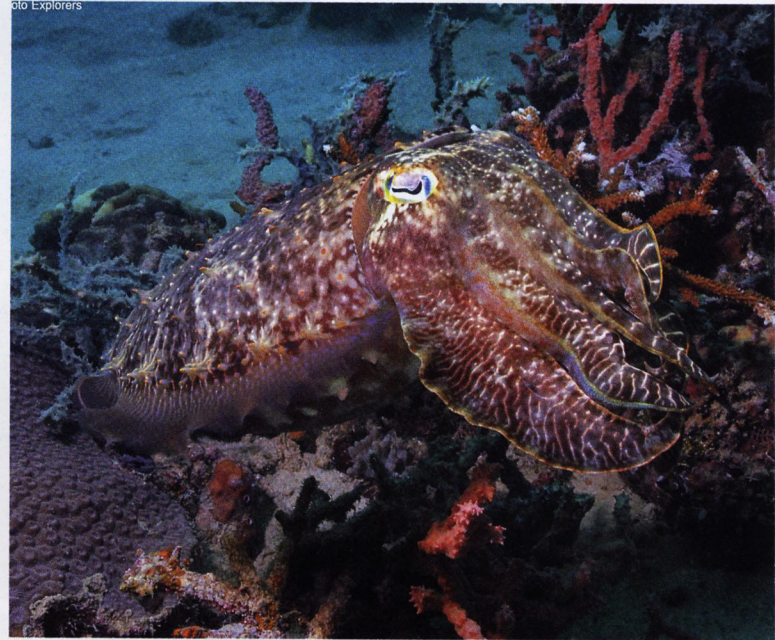
Perhaps topping this list is the remote Apo Reef Island and its exquisite reef system. Our journey began a few miles from Puerto Galera on White Beach when we boarded Marco Vincent Dive Resort's 82-footer *Big Beth* and pointed the bow west.

Apo, an impressive reef structure that rises from the ocean depths and breaks the surface at low tide, was a bumpy 12-hour run from our base at White Beach. We spent our evening marveling at the shimmering reflection of the full moon and the curtain of stars above and enjoyed a sumptuous meal prepared by Omar the onboard chef. The anticipation of visiting one of the most spectacular reef systems in the world was palpable.

By daybreak, the light of the Apo Reef Island Lighthouse flickered from across the horizon and before long we were moored alongside this tiny sliver of land, surrounded by miles of open ocean. The entire area is a designated Philippine Natural Park covering 15,792 hectares (39,000 acres) and is known for its extensive coral cover and high level of biodiversity. The island is tiny (just 22 hectares or 54 acres) but it is home to a protected mangrove forest and other tropical island habitats, along with the unique and historical lighthouse and a small ranger station where you can learn more about this unique and protected ecosystem.

There are more than 20 established dive sites. Our first was at South Corner and a school of barracuda cruising slowly along the reef wall immediately greeted us. Descending to

Photo Explorers



Eco-Photo Explorers





Marco Vincent's dive vessel *Big Beth* preparing to leave for Apo Reef. The Ranger station and visitor pavilion on Apo Reef Island

it highlights why the entire Coral Triangle is such an essential marine ecosystem.

After several days of mesmerizing dives, we headed back to Puerto Galera. Along the way we dived alongside Bonita Island, and explored lush coral gardens so healthy that some have referred to these stretches of coral jungle as 'God's Gardens'. We also explored Verde Island with its famous current-swept dropoffs teeming with life. We think Puerto Galera, Apo Reef, and Verde Island should be considered a mini-Coral Triangle in it's own right!

The entire area surrounding Puerto Galera is a diver's amusement park. You can explore ghostly shipwrecks,

experience current-swept dramatic walls, search for weird and wonderful macro subjects and count the myriad species of coral and fish inhabiting these waters. But Apo Reef holds a special place for divers willing to journey to this remote site.

As we stepped off *Big Beth* and dug our toes into the sand of White Beach, we turned to look back over the tranquil waters of the South China Sea. We'd left a piece of our hearts at Apo Reef so we simply had to return!

GETTING THERE

Apo Reef National Park, Occidental Mindoro

Apo Reef was declared as a protected area through Presidential Proclamation No. 868 dated September 6, 1996. It has three islands: Apo Island, Apo Menor and Cayos del Bajo with white sandy beaches ideal for recreation and sporting vacation. With an area of 15,792 hectares, Apo Reef is one of the largest coral atoll in the Philippines with a wide variety of habitat types. The reef waters abound with 385 species of marine fishes including families of sharks, sting rays, mantas, school of jacks and snappers and 500 species of corals which include soft and branching hard corals. There are shipwrecks in the area.

How to get there

Via ferry – Manila to Batangas Pier (bus)
Batangas Pier to Abra de Ilog Pier (ferry)
Abra de Ilog to Sablayan (bus)
Batangas Pier to Sn Jose Pier (bus)
San Jose to Sablayan (bus)

Via airplane – Manila Domestic Airport to San Jose Airport
Air Philippines or Zest Air t
San Jose Airport to bus terminal (tricycle)
San Jose to Sablayan (bus)

Activities: Scuba diving, swimming, snorkeling, wind surfing, kayaking, fishing, river cruise, sport fishing, waterfalls trekking, camping, hiking, mountain climbing, caving, birdwatching, Mangyan Culture and Community Tours, Rural Life Tours, Penal Farm Tours and Bio-diversity Conservation Tours

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