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SCUBA News is published by SCUBA Travel in the UK, where the sun has finally come out. I hope the weather is diveable where you are. Please e-mail any contributions to the newsletter to news@scubatravel.co.uk.

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What's New at SCUBA Travel?



Wreck Diving in the Red Sea

Countless coral reefs have made the Red Sea difficult to navigate for thousands of years. This, plus ships sunk in the war, makes for many excellent wreck dives. We've added more dive descriptions, reviews, photos and maps.

<http://www.scubatravel.co.uk/redsea/wreckdive.html>



Diving Madagascar

Madagascar, the world's fourth biggest island, hosts one of the world's largest continuous coral reefs. She is home to over 34 types of cetaceans, 5 types of marine turtles, 56 types of shark, 300 hard corals and 1300 species of bony fish. There has been political unrest in Madagascar since 2009, when there was a coup. However, there are no travel restrictions in place. More at <http://www.scubatravel.co.uk/madagascar/>



Diving Cyprus

Cyprus' most famous dive site is the wreck of the Zenobia, which is currently rated the best dive site in Europe and one of top ten wreck dives in the World. More dive sites and reviews are now at

<http://www.scubatravel.co.uk/europe/cyprus-diving.html>



Photo Search

You can now search just for images on the SCUBA Travel site. For example, search for "coral" and click the Image tab to retrieve all our photos of hard and soft corals.

<http://www.scubatravel.co.uk/searchuk.html>

For regular announcements of what's new at the SCUBA Travel site see our Twitter feed at <http://twitter.com/SCUBANews>, the Diving Board at <http://www.scubatravel.co.uk/forum/viewforum.php?f=2> or our Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/SCUBANews>

Letters

Sharm El Sheikh

I had the most enjoyable time with Only Six Diving at Partner Turquoise Sharm el Shielk. The Hotel and dive centre are the nearest – 5mins by bus to the Trecco Port where all the dive boats go out to Ras Mohammed. We were the first boat out each day– even on days when many boats did not go due to the fuel shortages. I was so fortunate to have Max as my Guide. Diving is so much more than a job to him. I felt I was so privileged to share his underwater world that he knows, as he says, 'like I know my house'. The boat was the cleanest I have ever been on and I was happy to eat the price included lunch. I usually avoid this as normally have hygiene concerns. I would certainly recommend to anyone. Linda Rolfe (who asked about the dive centre at Partner Turquoise in last month's issue)

Diving the Marine World Heritage Sites

Forty-five World Heritage Sites - places of "outstanding cultural or natural value" - are located in marine areas. And many are also fabulous diving spots. Jointly, marine World Heritage sites comprise one third of the planet's marine protected areas, in 34 countries. They are designated by UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

The first marine Heritage Site to be listed was the [Galapagos Islands](#), in 1978. In the Pacific Ocean some 1,000 km from the South American continent, these 19 islands and the surrounding marine reserve have been called a unique living museum and showcase of evolution. Situated at the confluence of three ocean currents, the Galapagos are a melting pot of marine species.

Next listing was [Australia's Great Barrier Reef](#). It contains the world's largest collection of coral reefs, with 400 types of coral, 1500 species of fish and 4000 types of mollusc.

Australia has the most Marine World Heritage sites of any country: five. [Ningaloo Coast](#) was inscribed most recently in June 2011. Ningaloo, in Western Australia, is famous for its whale sharks. Also on the West coast is Shark Bay. This has three exceptional natural features: its vast sea-grass beds, which are the largest and richest in the world; its dugong (sea cow) population; and its stromatolites. Stromatolites are rock like structures built by microbes, similarly to how corals build reefs. Shark's Bay stromatolites are 2000 to 3000 years old, but stromatolites have been being built for 3.5 billion years. Shark Bay is also home to five species of endangered mammals.



Further north is the Philippines' [Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park](#). In the middle of the Sulu Sea, Tubbataha is 128 km from inhabited islands and is dived by liveaboard from March to June. The site comprises pristine coral reef with perpendicular walls, extensive lagoons and two coral atolls.

Another fantastic diving area is the [French Pacific Ocean archipelago of New Caledonia](#). The Lagoons provide habitat to a number of emblematic or threatened marine species such as turtles, whales and dugongs whose population here is the third largest in the world.



Moving to the northern hemisphere, [Cocos Island National Park](#), 550 km off the Pacific coast of Costa Rica, is the only island in the tropical eastern Pacific with a tropical rainforest. The underwater world of the national park is one of the best places in the world to view large pelagic species such as sharks, rays, tuna and dolphins. Also listed in Costa Rica is [Guanacaste](#).

Colombia boasts the [Malpelo Fauna and Flora Sanctuary](#). This vast marine park, the largest no-fishing zone in the Eastern Tropical Pacific, provides a critical habitat for internationally threatened marine species, and is a major source of nutrients resulting in large aggregations of marine biodiversity. It is in particular a 'reservoir' for sharks, giant grouper and billfish and is one of the few places in the world where sightings of the short-nosed ragged-toothed shark, a deepwater shark, have been confirmed. Widely recognized as one of the [top diving sites in the world](#), due to the presence of steep walls and caves of outstanding natural beauty, these deep waters support important populations of large predators and pelagic species (e.g. aggregations of over 200 hammerhead sharks and over 1,000 silky sharks, whale sharks and tuna have been recorded) in an undisturbed environment where they maintain natural behavioural patterns.



Finally, Europe also has diveable Marine World Heritage Sites, notably [Saint Kilda](#) in Scotland with its oceanic blue water and visibility. The only dive site in Britain which is outside the green coastal waters.

Further Reading:
[World Heritage Marine Programme](#)

Creature of the Month: Potato Cod, *Epinephelus tukula*



The mighty potato cod of Australia and the Pacific grows to 2 m long and can weigh 110 kg (242 lbs or over 17 stone). It is a grouper, exceedingly territorial and very aggressive towards intruders. A diver has drowned after being knocked in the chest by one of these fish.

The potato cod prefers coral reefs, although also occurs on rocky reefs at depths of 10 to 150 m

Groupers are amongst the most tasty of fishes and fetch a high price, but potato cod

numbers, so far, are not at risk.

These fish take 5 to 10 years to become mature

According to legend, a grouper fell in love with a pretty girl but swallowed her by mistake. She had with her shells which she used to cut slits in the grouper and make her escape. The grouper was unhurt and became the first fish to have gills.

As well as gills the Epinephelini group of groupers have big mouths and small teeth. They are top-level predators, mainly found close to coasts.

Further Reading:

Froese, R. and D. Pauly. Editors. 2011. [FishBase](#).

Fennessy, S., Pollard, D. & Myers, R. 2008. *Epinephelus tukula*. In: IUCN 2011. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2011.2.

Diving News From Around the World



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Oil threat to Ningaloo Reef

Pristine areas of ocean near World Heritage-listed Ningaloo Reef and the far north Kimberley coast could be opened to drilling for oil and gas under Australian Federal Government plans.

Outrage as dolphin-safe tuna label 'banned' in US

The World Trade Organisation has effectively outlawed the sale of dolphin-friendly canned tuna in American supermarkets, ruling such labels were unfair to Mexican fishermen. The ruling, delivered on Wednesday, was the third from the World Trade Organisation against the use of a voluntary system of labels for dolphin protection and was immediately denounced by conservation groups.



Fifth of grouper species being fished to extinction

Groupers, a family of fishes often found in coral reefs and prized for their quality of flesh, are facing critical threats to their survival. As part of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Survival Commission, a team of scientists has spent the past ten years assessing the status of 163 grouper species worldwide. They report that 20 species (12per cent) are at risk of extinction if current overfishing trends continue, and an additional 22 species (13per cent) are Near Threatened.



Will Marine Reserve Protect Coral Sea Sharks?

Shark fishing needs to be banned at Osprey and Shark Reef in the Coral Sea for a Marine Reserve to work, concludes a study published yesterday.

Review reef shipping routes: Marine pilots

Marine pilots have joined green groups in calling for a review of shipping routes to avoid disaster in the Great Barrier Reef.

Bulk carrier ID Integrity lost power off the far north Queensland coast on Friday, and drifted close to Shark Reef over the weekend.

90% Shark Loss at Populated Pacific Islands

Pairs of SCUBA divers towed behind a small boat have been recording shark numbers at both heavily populated Pacific islands and islands away from humans. The numbers show the enormous detrimental effect that humans have on reef sharks, with 90% loss in places.

New Zealand to Launch Book of Life

New Zealand is the first country in the world to catalogue its entire known living and fossil life from 530 million years ago to today. The catalogue, is an international effort that has taken a decade to complete.

Fishing observers 'intimidated and bribed by EU crews'

Observers monitoring European fish quotas are being regularly intimidated, offered bribes and undermined by the fishing crews they are observing, British Newspaper - The Guardian - has discovered.

How Healthy are Mediterranean Rocky Reefs?

Intense exploitation over millennia has depleted Mediterranean Sea species from the large to the small. What would a 'healthy' Mediterranean rocky bottom look like? SCUBA divers surveyed the rocky reefs throughout the Med, from Morocco to Turkey.



Ocean giants' annual Great Barrier Reef love-in

Scientists are taking to the sky to work out what parts of the Great Barrier Reef whales find the most romantic.

Scientists to survey Scotland's coral reefs

International scientists will set out on a month-long voyage to survey Scotland's coral reefs. The team hope to discover whether Scotland's cold-water corals will die out within 100 years or whether they will adapt and survive.

Sonar blasts might hurt more sea life, says Navy

The U.S. Navy estimates its use of explosives and sonar may unintentionally cause more than 1,600 instances of hearing loss or other injury to marine mammals each year. It also calculates the explosives could potentially kill more than 200 marine mammals a year.

Coral Reef Fish Save Jobs

A study in the journal Ecology finds that jobs, ecotourism and diving industries depend on a diverse supply of weed-eating fish on the world's coral reefs.



Protection for whales as numbers rise

Marine researchers in Australia have welcomed the New South Wales State Government's protection of Southern Right Whales.

Plastic trash altering ocean habitats

A 100-fold upsurge in human-produced plastic garbage in the ocean is altering habitats in the marine environment. New study shows that nine percent of the fish contained plastic waste in their stomachs. That study estimated that fish in the intermediate ocean depths of the North Pacific Ocean ingest plastic at a rate of roughly 12,000 to 24,000 tons per year.

Wind pushes plastics deeper into oceans, driving trash estimates up

While working on a research sailboat gliding over glassy seas in the Pacific Ocean, oceanographer Giora Proskurowski noticed something new: The water was littered with confetti-size pieces of plastic debris, until the moment the wind picked up and most of the particles disappeared. The wind was pushing the lightweight plastic particles below the surface. That meant that decades of research into how much plastic litters the ocean, conducted by skimming only the surface, may in some cases vastly underestimate the true amount of plastic debris in the oceans, Proskurowski said.

EU Ministers' 'irresponsibility' caused cod collapse, says study

The marine conservation organisation Oceana warns that there is a link between the collapse status of cod from the North Sea and bad decisions taken by the Council of Fisheries Ministers of the European Union (EU).



Pacific Islands May Become Refuge for Corals in a Warming Climate, Study Finds

Scientists have predicted that ocean temperatures will rise in the equatorial Pacific by the end of the century, wreaking havoc on coral reef ecosystems. But a new study shows that climate change could cause ocean currents to operate in a surprising way and mitigate the warming near a handful of islands right on the equator. As a result these Pacific islands may become isolated refuges for corals and fish.

Stronger protection needed to save Antarctica's marine diversity

WWF has unveiled a new vision for the creation of the world's largest marine protected area across Antarctic marine habitats. Antarctic waters make up almost 10 per cent of the world's seas and are some of the most intact environments left on earth. They are home to almost 10,000 diverse species such as penguins, seals and whales, yet they are under increasing pressure.

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