

SCUBA News

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Hello and welcome to SCUBA News. Some good news this month. Three British studies into the real-world protection of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines show that even a single shot offers strong protection against infection, serious illness and death in all ages - giving hope that travel, and life in general, can become safer.

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What's New at SCUBA Travel?



Window on Turks and Caicos

Borders are open and the dive shops are waiting.

[LEARN MORE...](#)



Adventure Liveboards to the Cocos Islands

The Argo even has a deep-diving submersible in which you can travel down to 450 m. Plus there are some great deals at the moment.

[READ MORE...](#)

Dugong - the Lady of the Sea



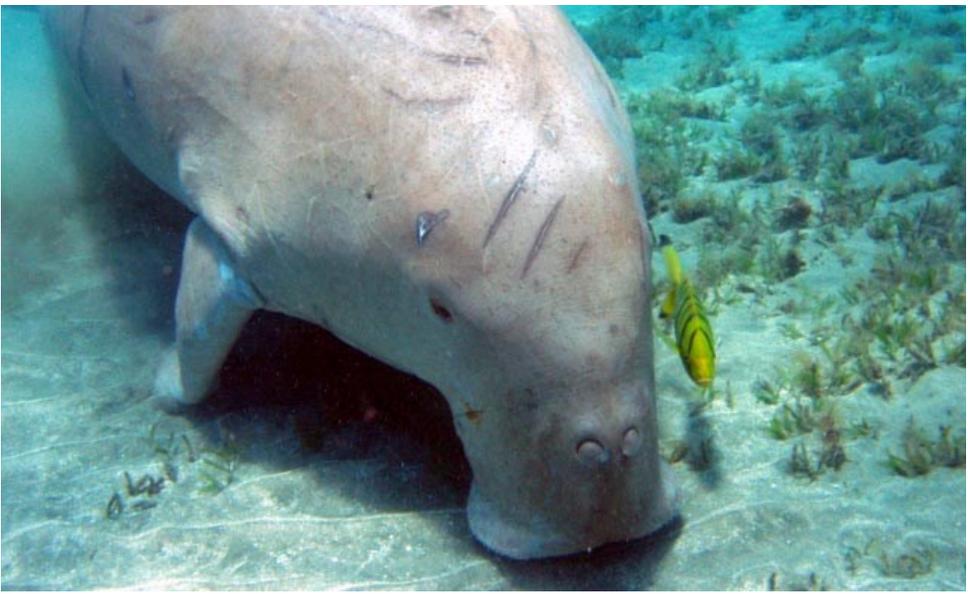


Photo by [Suzanne Challoner](#).

Dugong, [Dugong dugon](#)

Taken at Abu Dabab, Egyptian Red Sea.

Named from the Malay for "Lady of the Sea", Dugongs are said to have inspired the legends of mermaids.

They feed in the seagrass beds of the Indo-Pacific and are the only herbivorous, truly marine mammal. (The related manatee spends some of its life in fresh water.)

Being a slow swimmer, you'll find dugongs in sheltered lagoons and bays in warm water in the Indian and western Pacific Oceans, such as are found in the Red Sea, East Africa, the Philippines and Australia. In total they live in 48 countries, but in many places they are close to extinction.

Adult dugongs can grow to over 3.5 m (11 ft), and may weigh over 900 kg (2000 lb). Male dugongs begin to grow tusks between the ages of 12 and 15 years. If food is plentiful, the habitat protected, and predation low, dugongs may live more than 70 years. (The oldest dugong who has been examined for age was estimated to 73 years old.)



They can eat as much as 40 kg (88 lb) of seagrass a day, leaving distinctive troughs in seagrass meadows.

Dugongs are natural prey for sharks, killer whales and crocodiles, but they are most vulnerable to human activities. Hunting has drastically reduced dugong populations in some areas and dugong habitat is under pressure from coastal development, pollution, trawling, gill nets and other degradation. They are listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Part of the problem for Dugongs is their longevity and their slow rate of reproduction. They have only one calf at a time and nurse their baby for a year and a half. The young dugong might stay with the mother until she gives birth again, which can be as much as seven years later. Even in the best of conditions populations might only increase by 5% per year. When dugongs do not have enough seagrass to eat they delay breeding.



Face of the Dugong

Dugongs have dense, massive bones, which help to keep them submerged. Their lungs lie along their back and act like floats, keeping them horizontal in the water.

Dugongs are thought to use the "lek system" whereby males establish and defend courtship territories in traditional areas where females come only to mate.

They are the only representatives left in their family Dugongidae.

Where can you dive with Dugongs?

In Egypt, you may see dugongs at the lagoon of Abu Dabbab, Marsa Alam. In the Philippines there is diving with dugongs along the Busuanga coast of Palawan. Australia has large populations of dugongs at [Shark Bay and Ningaloo Reef](#) on the west coast. In [Mozambique](#) they live in the protected

area of Bazaruto. [Bangka island](#) in Indonesia is another place where you could encounter these peaceful animals.

Keep a safe distance from the animals, around 4 m, and don't touch them. Move slowly and the dugongs will keep eating the seagrass and let you take photos.

Class: Mammalia > Order: Sirenia > Family: Dugongidae > Genus: Dugong > Species: Dugong dugon

Further Reading

[The Blue Planet](#), by Alastair Fothergill, Martha Holmes, Sir David Attenborough, BBC Consumer Publishing, 2001, ISBN 056-33-8498-0
Marsh, H. & Sobotzick, S. 2019. Dugong dugon (amended version of 2015 assessment). The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2019: e.T6909A160756767. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2015-4.RLTS.T6909A160756767.en>. Downloaded on 11 February 2021
[Dugong: Status Report and Action Plans for Countries and Territories](#), Helene Marsh, 1990.

Diving News From Around the World

Our round up of the best underwater news stories of the past month. For breaking news see our [Twitter page](#) or [RSS feed](#)



[Dolphins and humans have similar personality traits](#)

Researchers find dolphins to be far more similar to humans than previously thought.



[In the fight to save the vaquita, conservationists take on cartels](#)

The critically endangered vaquita porpoise, a species endemic to the Sea of Cortez, is at severe risk of extinction due to illegal gillnet fishing for the critically endangered totoaba fish.



[Changes to the guidance for diving medicals and returning to diving following Covid-19 infection](#)

Following concern about the long-term effects of suffering from Covid-19 infection, the UK Diving Medical Committee produced a scorecard to help divers assess their personal risk and signpost the steps to be taken in being signed off as fit to dive.



[Loggerhead turtles lay eggs in several locations to help babies survive](#)

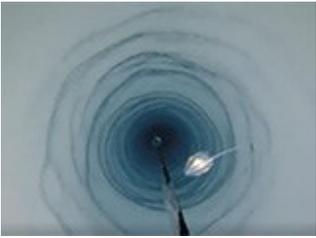
Although loggerhead turtles return to the same beach where they hatched to lay their eggs, a new study finds individual females lay numerous

clutches of eggs in locations miles apart from each other to increase the chance that some of their offspring will survive.



Lush meadows of underwater seagrass are removing plastic from the sea

Underwater seagrass may be naturally trapping millions of pieces of marine plastic and removing them from the sea. When seagrass sheds leaves, fibres in the leaf sheaths intertwine, forming tangles known as Neptune balls. These balls trap plastic items.



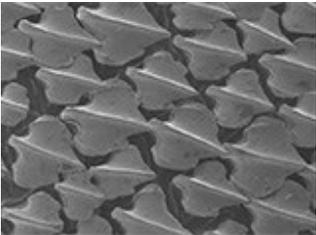
Life found beneath Antarctic ice sheet shouldn't be there

The inadvertent discovery of sea life on a boulder beneath an Antarctic ice shelf challenges our understanding of how organisms can live in environments far from sunlight, according to a team of biologists.



Moray eels thrive on coral reefs close to people

Overfishing of other predators, like sharks, may be the cause



Sharks' tooth-like scales help to boost their acceleration rates

Tooth-like scales on shark skin reduce drag as they manoeuvre through the ocean, and they are at their most effective when the sharks accelerate.



Heavy Metals Found In Shark Tissues In The Bahamas

Researchers from Beneath the Waves have documented and revealed alarmingly high levels of 12 heavy metals, including mercury, in the muscle tissues of large reef and tiger sharks sampled throughout The Bahamas.



Fewer than 100 of these giant whales make up a newly described species

Only between 33 and 100 Rice's whales exist, researchers estimate. The species is listed as endangered in the U.S.



Fianlly bottom trawling ban for protected areas

Dogger Bank and South Dorset are already designated as protected areas, but in reality they are not patrolled - and they're both over-fished.



Tourism mainly responsible for marine litter on Mediterranean beaches

Recreational use of Mediterranean island beaches during the summer is responsible for up to 80% of the marine litter accumulating on those beaches, and generates huge amounts of microplastics through the fragmentation of larger plastic items.



Environmentally friendly behaviour is easy - tourists just need a nudge

Nudging visiting divers towards environmentally friendly behaviour works

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