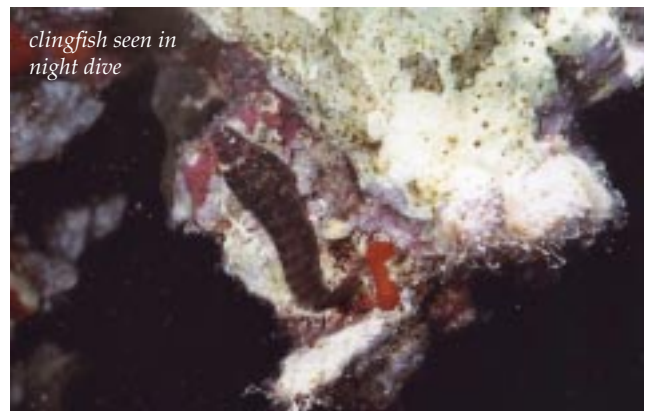


Day And Night In Paphos

Regular SCOTTISH DIVER contributor Alison Fuller-Shapcott wasn't expecting her trip to Cyprus to provide a dramatic experience but she found lots of diving interest on the beautiful Mediterranean island ...



the elusive cuttlefish



clingfish seen in night dive

LAST YEAR the family holiday was in Paphos (Pafos), Southern Cyprus and of course this included a reasonable amount of diving. I enjoy diving in the Mediterranean for both the underwater landscape and the marine life, but after a while the usual guided dive sites get a bit alike. However just occasionally it's possible to stumble over a couple of sites in the same area, which are as different as 'day and night'.

Sometimes the most intriguing dive sites lie in the most shallow of waters. These are my most favourite sites as not only can you spend a reasonable amount of time at these depths, limited only by the size of your tank, but the marine life is fascinating and the quality of light is much better for taking photographs.

Both the dives described here were in less than 10 metres of water and nor-

mally reserved for novices or 'try a dives', which is a pity really as both have a lot to offer in the way of unhurried, relaxing, yet interesting dives.

To begin with the diving in Paphos was slightly disappointing, the reefs are shallow and tend to be beset with large swells that make the boat rides out to the sites uncomfortable. There was also a lack of large fish which is due to two factors; one, the geological position of Cyprus within the Mediterranean and the other being over fishing.

The Mediterranean Sea is virtually land locked apart from a narrow channel between Gibraltar and North Africa; this channel is the only entrance through which there is an exchange of seawater to replenish the waters of the Mediterranean with nutrients. The very fact that the Mediterranean Sea is so clear is due

to the lack of nutrients, which the larger fish need to flourish.

The eastern side of the Mediterranean, where Cyprus is located, suffers most in this respect. Secondly there is a tendency to over fish the local waters, however there is talk of designated no take zones being set up, but this will be sometime in the future - if at all.

Day - Ancient History

If you ever visit Paphos, you are likely to take a stroll along the harbour front of Kato (lower) Paphos as this is not only extremely pleasant, but it is where the majority of the restaurants are to be found.

As you head east away from the harbour, look out to sea and you will see a line of rocks, these are the remains of the ancient harbour of Nea Paphos.

Between the 7th and 4th century BC, Cyprus was divided into city kingdoms, one of these being the Kingdom of Paphos.

At the end of the 4th century BC, the capital of the kingdom was moved from modern day Kouklia to an existing town, which was known to have a safe anchorage. The new capital was called Nea Paphos and part of its remains can be seen in the archaeological park behind the harbour.

As part of the plan to move the capital to Paphos, a grand harbour was constructed. This harbour was an important stopping point for maritime trade in the Mediterranean and because of it Paphos flourished. In 58 BC, Cyprus became part of the Roman Empire and Paphos continued to enjoy its grand status. However earthquakes struck the area in the 1st and 4th century AD and after this Paphos and its harbour fell into decline.

The construction of the modern harbour destroyed much of the ancient harbour, but the remains of the eastern external breakwater are still visible. Now named the 'Roman wall', it is the house reef for dive operator Cydive, which is based just over the road from the harbour.

I hadn't intended to dive this site, but the planned dive that day was cancelled due to sea conditions and this was offered as an alternative. The access couldn't have been easier; kit up in the change rooms of Cydive, walk fully kitted through the small shopping

Around the corner and lying on the sand was a cuttlefish just waiting to be photographed. Camera poised, strobe aimed, and before I could get a second picture, a large patch of dark ink appeared where the cuttlefish had been.

precinct, over the road, down the small shingle beach and into the water.

The maximum depth is only six metres and the bottom is flat shingle. However look carefully and in addition to the shingle, small rocks and occasional small fish and hermit crabs, the bottom was littered with bits of dull red pottery from amphorae, broken tiles and what looked like long thin stone fishing weights. I am no expert in these matters, but I found the debris left from a once busy harbour 2400 years ago absolutely fascinating.

Looking carefully between the rocks, the open necks of yet more amphorae

could be seen. These strange looking storage vessels are our equivalent of the disposable tetra pack used for drinks today.

Amphorae were once used to transport wine, fish sauce and oil, and since they could not be refilled they were simply discarded. Ancient ships would be described by the number of amphorae they could carry in the same way as we speak of the tonnage carrying capacity of today's ships.

Passing the remains of the breakwater we headed out to what was a lower outer wall running parallel to the first wall. I picked up the broken handle of an amphora and showed it to my buddy. In an effort to explain what it was I was showing him I drew the outline of the storage vessel in the water. Maybe he thought I was mad, or maybe he was trying to keep neutrally buoyant; this was only his second dive.

Having explored the outer wall, we headed back in to the first breakwater and it was then that I spotted the biggest fish of the dive. A beautiful flying gurnard called Bernard, apparently a regular visitor to the wall.

Night - Creatures of the Night

The Cynthiana Hotel boasts a natural rock swimming pool, which has a narrow and shallow rock strewn channel into the sea. Pass through this passage-way and the dive becomes a series of rock crevices and gullies on a sandy bottom.



scorpion fish



broken amphorae



octopus



2,400 year old pottery

Day And Night In Paphos

words/pictures
ALISON FULLER-SHAPCOTT

This is normally a daytime dive, but I was offered it as a night dive by Ray the owner of Dive Point Dive Centre, based on the outskirts of Paphos. Ray is an ex ScotSAC diver and his practical approach makes him a pleasure to dive with. Although access to this site is relatively easy from the swimming pool, any swell and the shallow channel becomes extremely hazardous.

On this occasion there was enough swell to make the passage uncomfortable, but I am glad to say that diver and camera remained intact. Once out into the open sea we slowly weaved in and out of the gullies and around the large outcrops of volcanic rock.

Previously I had been disappointed with the marine life, but not tonight, there was plenty to see. Large sea cucumber were grazing on the rocks, octopus were out for an evening stroll. One octopus was so tiny it would have

fitted neatly into the palm of my hand. The rock being volcanic, had small hollows, which made perfect sleeping quarters for one wrasse to bed down in. The small cracks and crevices between the rocks gave shelter to luminescent prawns, a small cling fish, a slipper lobster, and a

golden spotted moray eel who weaved in and out of sight whilst hunting.

Around the corner and lying on the sand was a cuttlefish just waiting to be photographed. Camera poised, strobe aimed, and before I could get a second picture, a large patch of dark ink appeared where the cuttlefish had been. Not to be out done, I looked around to see where it had gone, only to see it heading directly for me. Another patch of dark ink and it was gone again. This attacking behaviour was repeated several times, and discretion being the better part of valour, we headed off leaving it in peace.

Unfortunately our paths crossed several times during the remainder of the dive, and each time it made the same attacking behaviour. Later we discussed this, and Ray supposed that the cuttlefish had taken a dislike to my camera, the strobe on its arm may have looked like

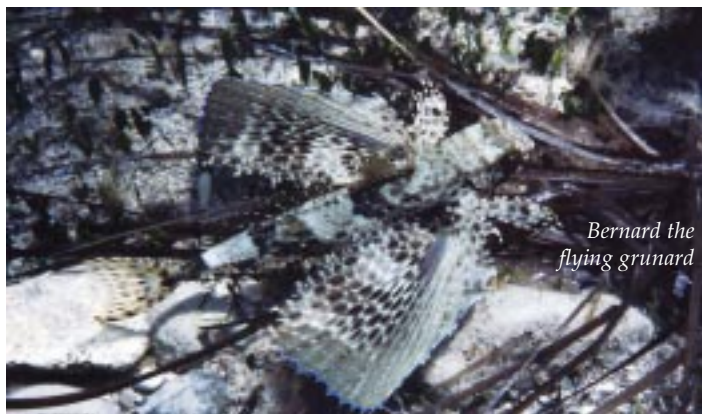
the outstretched tentacle of another cuttlefish. Now, I have photographed cuttlefish before, both in the Mediterranean and in British waters and never come across behaviour like this. Whatever its motives, it was extremely aggressive and if anyone has another explanation for this, I would be glad hear from them.

The end of the dive saw us passing back through the channel into the swimming pool again. We spent a few moments lying on the sandy bottom watching sand eels popping up and disappearing again before I could get the camera positioned. Eventually we made our way out of the pool and rather cheekily used the hotel's poolside showers to wash off ourselves and our kit. It was quite a surreal moment, standing there in the dark, under a warm shower, fully kitted, watching the lights of civilisation twinkling along the coast of Paphos.

For further information on diving in Paphos contact:

Cydrive Ltd., Myrra Complex,
Kato Paphos.
www.cydrive.com

Dive Point, Tombs of the Kings
Rd, Kato Paphos.
www.divepointcyprus.co.uk



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