

Mar d'Amunt

by Ferran Sánchez

Mar d'Amunt is a spot in an occidental area of Mediterranean Sea located in Catalonia.

Catalonia is an European country located in the western Mediterranean region as a autonomous community of Spain. The Mar d'Amunt is part of the Cap de Creus Natural Park in the North of Costa Brava. The Mar d'Amunt is a place of great beauty. The effect of the predominant North wind called "Tramuntana" has created an unique and special landscape. In this special location, the water is clean and pure, and the underwater life is of exceptional richness with beautiful stones near of surface and amazing large coral gardens deep in side.

You can travel to this wonderful place using the two main airports: Barcelona (BCN) or the nearest Girona (GRO). The Mar d'Amunt has a steep coast that contains a few charming villages. The main village for diving is Port de la Selva. It is a quiet fishing village with white houses, and with the best beaches of the Costa Brava.

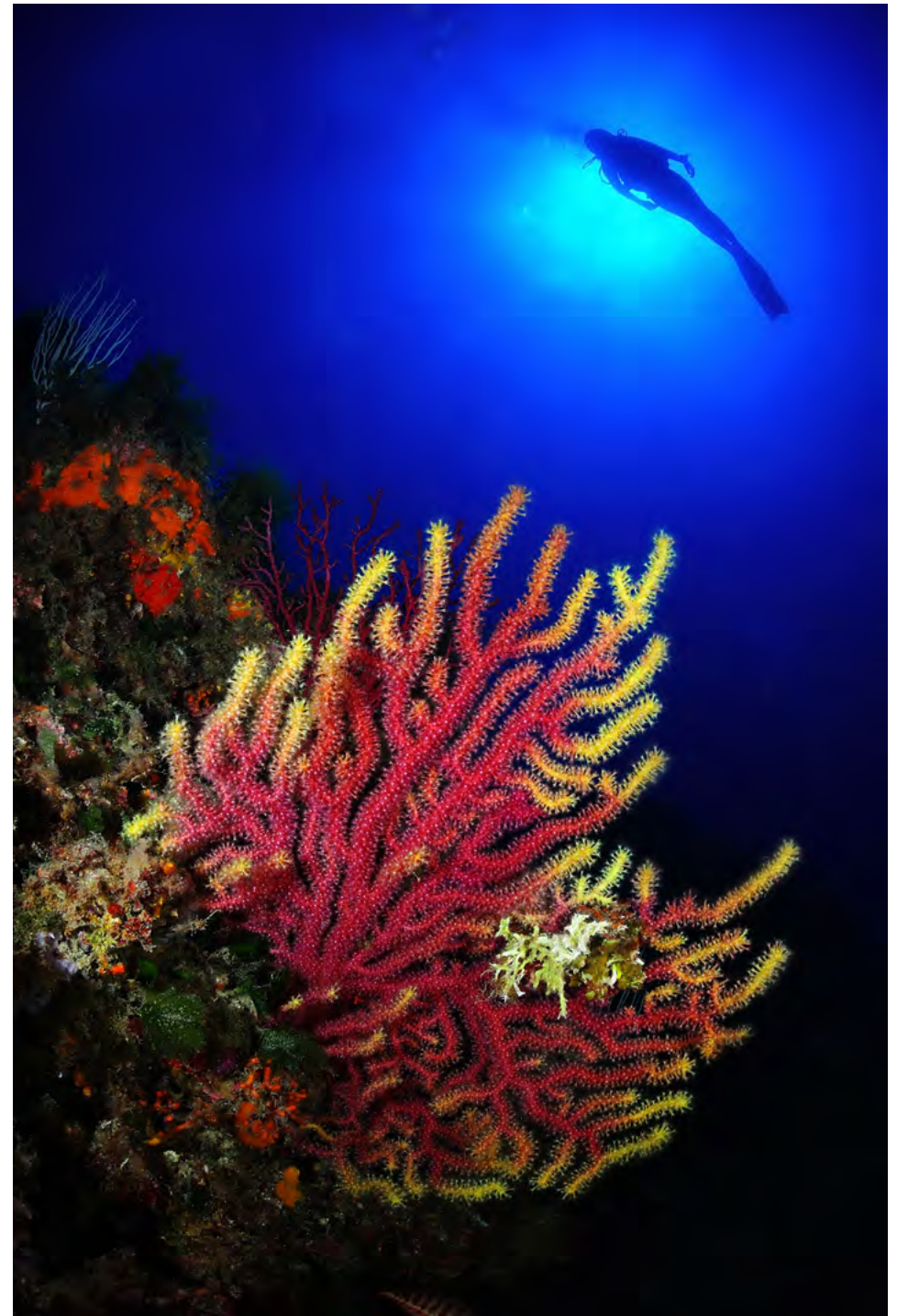
The seabed hosts special and unique wildlife in this spot. I speak of the large red gorgonians forest and the red coral.

The red gorgonians (Paramuricea clavata) are characteristic of this area of the Costa Brava. This habitat-forming species contribute with its three-dimensional

structure to the landscape and the marine ecosystem. Ecologically it is very important, as the gorgonian biomass brings an associated rich biodiversity. This is a long-lived species, thus it is very sensible to natural perturbations or to the human activity. Because Cap de Creus is a Marine Reserve, the gorgonians have not excessively suffered the human activity and you can enjoy the great gardens of red gorgonians. In the Mar d'Amunt, there are gorgonians forests from 15 metres deep, and are located in favor of the current to capture the plankton with their polyps. The main color is the red but you can discover all the colours of the mediterranean gorgonian in the dive sites of the Mar d'Amunt.

The other most important species is the red coral (*Corallium rubrum*). It is in fact animals of Anthozoa class (animals with the shape of small

Nikon D90 in housing Aquatica with Tokina in 12mm, F16, 1/100th sec, ISO200. Two strobes Sea&Sea YS D1





Bay of Port de la Selva: waters of Mar d'Amunt in the Cap de Creus Natural Park. Camera LG-840, F2.4, 1/250, ISO 50

leafless bushes). The red coral is part of the family of precious coral species that are distributed throughout the oceans.

This red coral of the Mediterranean has suffered a strong fishing pressure for the use of its skeletons in the ornamental industry. Only grows 1mm a year, and only small branches of this hard coral remain, as it has been practically destroyed by the large number of years of abusive exploitation. At present, this coral is protected by law, and its fishing is prohibited throughout the Mar d'Amunt. In 2015, red coral was included in the red list prepared by the IUCN in the category

of “endangered species”

The best way to view and discover these characteristic species of the Mar d'Amunt is diving in its underwater spots. The Mar d'Amunt contains more than thirty dive spots, suitable for all levels. All dives are made by boat leaving the harbour of Port de la Selva. The Scuba Diving Section of the Nautical Club of Port de la Selva will take you to the best dive sites in the Mar d'Amunt. The Nautical Club has excellent diving center facilities. The boats are specifically customized to accommodate divers and the engines are powerful to move around the dive spots.



Wide view of the Nautical Club of Port de la Selva, with the typical menorquin boats and white houses. Camera LG-840, F2.4, 1/2000, ISO 50

The three best dives recommended for diving and discover the special fauna in this place are: El Molar, the WoodSide Wreck and Els Furallons de la Prona.

El Molar is a very relaxing dive site that starts descending through a wall to 12 metres deep with a seabed of coarse sand, where you can do a comfort check of your scuba gear. The first interesting zone to observe is a wall with a great number of the sponges *Aplysina aerophoba*, where it is highly recommended to inspect them because the opisthobranch *Tylodina perversa* feeds on these sponges. At 15 metres deep, two huge and beautiful rocks indicate the

path to the next wall, which is at 25 metres deep and with a U shape. This is the most interesting zone because it is completely covered by gorgonians of different colours and shapes. The way back is ascending slowly through the wall, and at 5 metres deep the safety stop could be done observing the wall covered by the yellow cluster anemone (*Parazoanthus axinellae*).

The Woodside Wreck is an english steamboat sunken between the Xiulet Coast and the Portaló Island, where this old boat collide due to fog in 1884. The diving in this place starts at 10 metres deep with seabed gravel and *Posidonia oceanica*, and descend to 25 metres deep. At the beginning



(Above) Corallium rubrum, Nikon D90, housing Aquatica. F9, 1/125, ISO 320. Continuous light by Orcatorch D950V

(Left) Mixed lights. The face and hair of the model with continuous light by OrcaTorch D950V and gorgonian by two strobes Sea&Sea YS D1. Nikon D90, housing Aquatica, lens Tokina in 10mm, F9, 1/100th sec, ISO200

(Right) Nikon D90, housing Aquatica, lens Tokina in 12mm, F16, 1/100th sec, ISO200. Two strobes Sea&Sea YS D1



of the dive, at 16 metres deep we can observe some nacras (*Pinna nobilis*), a large mollusk that is endemic to the Mediterranean Sea and currently at risk of extinction. We continue and once reached 25 metres deep, we will begin to see the remains of this wreck, part of the stern and keel, which are covered by large red gorgonians. In addition, in this dive we can entertain ourselves with the large number of nudibranchs and ascidian colonies that live in the remains of this wreck. Moreover, among the variety

of marine life hosted, it is often common to find a three-tailed fish bank (*Anthias anthias*) on the inner side of the wreck hull.

Furallons de la Prona is a dive site with the most complete biodiversity of the Mar d'Amunt. In addition, it is also one of the most demanding for the diver. The dive computer and the air in the tank should be very well controlled, because of the square profile of this dive, under 20 meters deep. The dive consists of diving through a set of

successive channels that begin at a 20m anchor and reach 36m deep. The shallowest part of the channels contain white and yellow gorgonians. As you gain depth, the great purple gorgonians begin to appear. In the deepest part of the canal between the sand and the wall is where the large sponges of the species *Axinella polypoides* are found. For the return route, it is advisable to visit the high and vertical rocks that protrude from the sea, while making the safety or decompression stop. In them,



Surface stones with mixed lights: ambient light and continuous light with Orcatorch D950V. Camera Nikon D90 in Aquatica housing with Tokina in 10mm, F5, 1/200th sec, ISO200

you will see large fish balls and backlights.

To take underwater pictures I use a DSLR cameras, Nikon D500 and Nikon D90, with Tokina 10-17mm fisheye lens. My preferred configuration for illuminating the landscapes is the use of continuous light to see the result directly through



Corallium rubrum, Nikon D90, housing Aquatica. F29, 1/125, ISO 200. Two strobes Sea&Sea YS D1. Subsee +10

the viewfinder. The divelight that I use is the Orcatorch D950V. This powerful divelight allows me to visualize completely the image, thanks to the 120° coverage and to be able to use closed aperture since it has 10500 lumens of power.



Ferran Sánchez

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Ferran is an underwater photographer based in Barcelona. He shows diving sites around the world and mainly in the Catalonia Coast through his photographs, together with his underwater model Cristina Molnar.

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