

Wakatobi's House Reef Regulars

by Walt Stearns

Wakatobi's House Reef encompasses a vast area of seagrass meadows and shallow coral formations that lie between the beach and a precipitous coral rampart that plunges into the depths. Underwater photographers and critter watchers have been known to devote days and even weeks to exploring this expansive site, as it is home to a plethora of marine life. A complete listing of finds could fill a book, but for the sake of brevity, here are seven House Reef regulars that make for fascinating viewing and good photo ops.

The Odd Couple

A careful search of sand or rubble patches on the House Reef may reveal Wakatobi's own "Odd Couple." The Randall's shrimp goby (Amblyeleotris randalli) is a burrow-dwelling fish that isn't big on housework. Unlike jawfish and other species that dig their own dwellings in the seabed, this clever little fish lets its roommate do work. When you happen across one of these distinctively striped fish, you'll likely see a small

shrimp by its side. It's this crustacean that takes on the responsibility of building and maintaining their shared underground abode. In exchange for burrow maintenance, the near-blind shrimp enjoys the watchful protection of the keen-eyed goby, which maintains a peripatetic scan of the surroundings while the shrimp toils at debris removal.

Dartfish Trifecta

Sporting a dazzling range of rainbow hues, dartfish are among the most colorful finds on Wakatobi reefs. But fish waters and photographers who approach too aggressively will soon discover the namesake trait of these easily-spooked bottom dwellers. At the first hint of trouble, dartfish will pop back into the borrows they excavate in sand or rubble seabeds.

Dartfish watchers have a trio of options at Wakatobi. Two-tone Dartfish (Ptereleotris evides) are typically found on shallow reefs, making them an ideal find for snorkelers. These fish are among

Fire dartfish. Nikon D850 / Nikon 105mm macro at 1/125 sec., f/38, ISO 200. Lighting: dual Retra Prime strobes in manual mode set at 50.



Randall's shrimp goby. Nikon D850 / Nikon 105mm macro at 1/120 sec., f/27, ISO 200. Lighting: dual Retra Prime strobes in manual mode set at 25.

