

National Park De Oosterschelde

by Patrick Kranenbroek

In the province of Zeeland, in the southwest of the Netherlands, lies National Park De Oosterschelde. The Oosterschelde is a popular diving area, but it has a turbulent history. In 1953, a large part of Zeeland was flooded during the North Sea flood disaster. Many people lost their homes and some villages almost completely disappeared. After the disaster, the Netherlands built the Delta Works, a system of dams and storm surge barriers, to protect the area from the sea. The storm surge barrier in the Oosterschelde was constructed so that the ebb and flow of the tides would be preserved, but it can be completely closed during expected storms. Thanks to these measures, the Oosterschelde remains a unique area, where tides still flow freely and rich underwater life can be observed. For divers, it is a place full of adventure, history, and stunning underwater life.

I am a diver and underwater photographer and an editor for the Dutch diving magazine “Duiken” and frequently dive in the Oosterschelde. I always take my camera underwater during my dives.

The camera is an Olympus E-M5 MKII in a Nauticam Housing. “The

Oosterschelde is truly beautiful, and there’s so much to see.” Seahorses, many species of nudibranchs and fish, numerous sessile animals, and various mussel farms can be found in the Oosterschelde. The mussels are cultivated on long ropes that together form “walls” hundreds of meters long. Among these mussels, you can find small crabs, sea squirts, skeleton shrimps, and more. Both wide-angle and macro photography can keep divers occupied for hours. The dive sites are not deep, allowing for long dives.

National Park “De Oosterschelde” is a popular diving area in the Netherlands due to its salt water and rich marine life. Visibility usually ranges between 2 and 10 meters, with the best conditions around slack tide.

The tides have a major influence: dives are almost always planned at high or low water to avoid strong currents.

Access is well organized, with dikes, parking areas, and specially designed dive stairways.

Many dive sites are easily accessible from the shore.

In total, there are over 40 well-known dive sites spread throughout



When a storm comes, all the gates are closed





*Olympus
E-M5 MKII in
a Nauticam
Housing,
8mm F1.8
lens, Sea and
Sea YS 3D
Duo strobes,
1/30th @ F5.6.
ISO400*

the Oosterschelde. Around the dive-sites there are several locations to fill your tanks. It works with coins or digital with a QR code. In the province of Zeeland there are also several dive-shops.

Cuttlefish

Every spring, when the water temperature reaches about 13°C, cuttlefish swim from the Atlantic Ocean through the North Sea into the Oosterschelde. They instinctively follow the tidal currents to lay their eggs. In the past, they often laid their eggs on lobster traps, so divers have set up many cuttlefish tents. These

are wigwams made of bamboo poles that divers place in the water for the cuttlefish to lay their eggs on. For divers, this is a remarkable spectacle: female cuttlefish attach their eggs to the poles while males stand guard. If rival males approach, the male defends his partner. This often leads to fights, which are fascinating to watch. When the eggs hatch in summer, juvenile cuttlefish are countless at the dive sites.

Seahorses

From May/June onwards, seahorses arrive from deeper waters and also visit the cuttlefish tents.



*Olympus
E-M5 MKII in
a Nauticam
Housing,
8mm F1.8
lens, Sea and
Sea YS 3D
Duo strobes,
1/400th @
F22. ISO200*

Finding them is an art, as they are masters of camouflage. If you look closely for their tails wrapped around the poles, you can spot them. Once found, they usually stay nearby all summer, showing strong site fidelity.

Seahorses usually live in pairs, with both male and female together. The male carries the brood pouch, meaning he carries the offspring.

The downside is that the presence of seahorses attracts many



Olympus E-M5 MKII in a Nauticam Housing, 8mm F1.8 lens, Sea and Sea YS 3D Duo strobes, 1/60th @ F8. ISO200

divers. Because Zeeland is close to the Belgian border, divers come from both the Netherlands and Belgium.

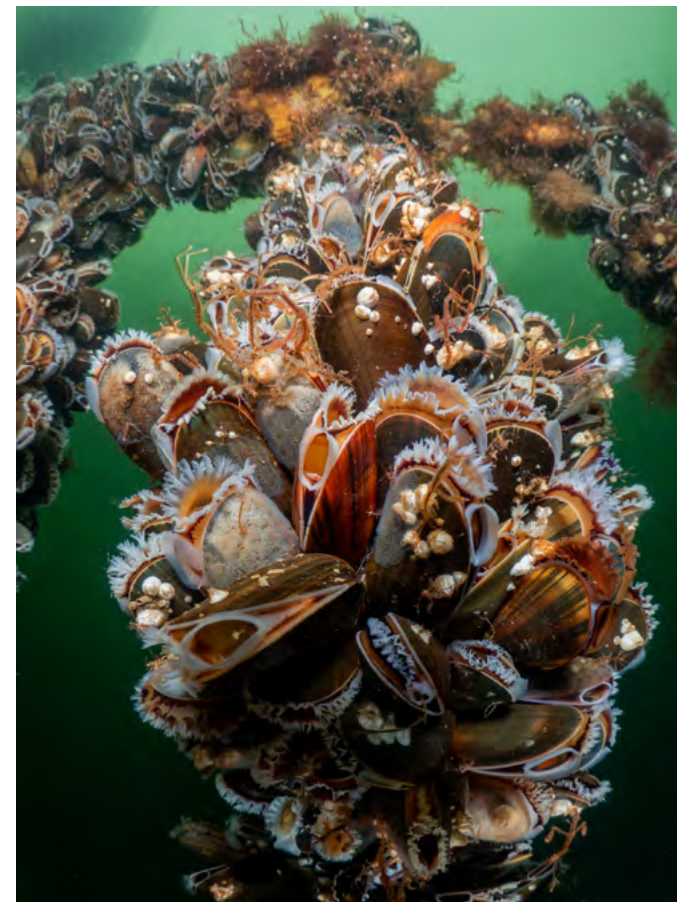
Lumpsucker

In the Oosterschelde, you can also encounter the lumpsucker. This often well-camouflaged fish is most visible in winter when it spawns. The male plays a prominent role: after the female lays



Olympus E-M5 MKII in a Nauticam Housing, 30mm macro lens, Sea and Sea YS 3D Duo strobes, 1/60th @ F8. ISO200

the eggs, he fully takes over the care of the nest. He guards and tends the eggs until they hatch, while the female swims elsewhere. For divers, it is fascinating to watch this caring father protect his eggs, a rare example of parental involvement among fish, even in colder months. Once the eggs hatch, juvenile lumpsuckers are often found among the seaweeds in shallower areas.



Olympus E-M5 MKII in a Nauticam Housing, 8mm F1.8 lens, Sea and Sea YS 3D Duo strobes, 1/60th @ F8. ISO200

Marine life

Between the basalt boulders of the submerged dikes, large American lobsters and thousands of crabs hide. Gobies have found their homes among the huge rocks, which are exposed at low tide. Pipefish, various nudibranchs, starfish, and thousands of gobies can be found among the oyster beds. As the sun sets, the chances of encountering cuttlefish and eels increase.



Also above the surface Zeeland is beautiful



Olympus E-M5 MKII in a Nauticam Housing, 8mm F1.8 lens, strobes, 1/250th @ F11. ISO200

Zeeland has also beautiful windmills. This is the wind mill in St Philipsland

Above the surface

Above water, Zeeland is also stunning. The expansive North Sea beaches, beautiful flower fields in spring, and numerous windmills are a feast for the eyes. Don't forget the picturesque village of Veere. Yerseke is famous for its oyster farms. Also visit the Watersnoodmuseum in Ouwerkerk, which tells the story of the great 1953 flood, which led to the construction of the Delta Works. Cities like Rotterdam, The Hague, and Antwerp are all within an hour's drive.

The Oosterschelde is therefore more than just a diving spot: it is a living story of history, nature, culture

and unique underwater creatures waiting to be discovered.

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