

1st Mabini (Anilao) Philippines Dive Guide / Spotter Workshop

by: **Nonoy Tan**

On May 11-12, 2006 local dive guides and “spotters” for underwater photographers converged at Solana Bezo Resort (www.divesolana.com) of Anilao, Philippines to participate in a workshop organized by the Mabini (Anilao) Resort Owners Association and the local government.

Conceptualized by videographer Marissa Floirendo, the workshop intends to strengthen local capability of providing world-class dive guiding and spotting services to underwater photographers. Also, the aim is to deepen cooperation among stakeholders (private and government) in providing alternative sources of income for subsistence fisher folks.

Throughout the Philippines, numerous dive areas continue to be discovered that are of special interest to macro underwater photographers. The potential of these areas are yet untapped because the underwater macro life have been largely unknown, even to local residents. However, as more divers explore these seemingly barren reefs, the need for professionally trained dive guides and

spotters will surely increase. Hence, this workshop, which is a precursor to a series of training activities, especially targeted for those residing in coastal villages. Before becoming dive guides, some of the trainees in the workshop had been subsistence fishermen.

The trainees came from different parts of the country. Six dive guides were from Anilao, one from Calatagan (Batangas), two from Davao (southern Philippines), and two from Donsol, Sorsogon. Anilao is a popular destination for muck diving, and a frequent host to professional underwater photographers. At the same time, Davao is being explored as a macro photography destination. Donsol, albeit known for its whale shark interaction, will soon be promoted for macro photography too. This convergence of dive guides/spotters from different parts of the Philippines was the first of its kind. Coming from varying backgrounds, the trainees were able to share experiences, learn from each other, and develop camaraderie.

During the workshop sessions, the trainees were presented with a



set of protocols to follow before, during and after the dive with an underwater photographer. They were also given an introduction to basic camera setups, and had an opportunity to handle different cameras. Also, the trainees were provided tips on where and how to find macro critters, including an explanation of behavioral characteristics that are of interest to underwater photographers. After completing actual dives, the trainees were able to develop maps of the dive spots, which illustrated the various critters found in the areas. Furthermore, with the aid of books, they tasked to identify their common and scientific names. The list of critters included species of frogfishes, ghostpipefishes, sea moths, dragonets, nudibranchs, commensal shrimps, eels, etc. Finally, the workshop closed with a “graduation” ceremony and

night socials.

The workshop was a tremendous success and has inspired the organizers to expand the training course to other places in the Philippines, as well as convert the training materials into local dialects.

The project received invaluable support from various stakeholders. These included Joel Uichico (President of the Resort Owners Association of Mabini) and Mayor Rowell Sandoval (Mabini, Batangas). Trainers were Nonoy Tan, Gutsy Tuason, Karina Escudero and Marissa Floirendo – all Filipino underwater photographers and videographers.

Nonoy Tan

nonoytan@yahoo.com