

Parting Shot 1

We had just finished our dive at “Barranco Seco II” (Los Gigantes, Tenerife, Canary Islands) and started our safety stop on a rocky arch at a depth of about 6 metres. There were several lizardfish (*Synodus saurus*, average size 40cm) perched on the rocks around us. They are ambush predators that remain motionless and rely on their camouflage to go undetected. The perfect macro subject, so I picked one and started taking some shots of it's head and teeth.

Andy Molloy (Los Gigantes Dive Centre) our dive guide, signalled to us that he was going up with his buddy and left us to finish our stop. Suddenly he got very excited and pointed to another area of the arch. So we went over to investigate.

When we got there I was surprised to see a lizardfish had caught the tail of an Ornate Wrasse (*Thalassoma pavo*, average size 15 cm) on some of it's teeth in the lower jaw. Over the next 6 minutes I was glued to this fascinating yet macabre spectacle, during which time the lizardfish thrashed it's head about from side to side in an attempt to get the tail of the wrasse inside its mouth.

I started taking photos immediately, but had to keep adjusting

my position and focus as the thrashing fish migrated over the rock in their struggle. The lizardfish took rests from thrashing and just let the wrasse struggle and wear itself out trying to get away.

In these moments of relative calm, I was able to refocus and grab a shot or two, eventually getting the whole sequence of the wrasse's demise. The conical teeth of the lizardfish point backwards and are barbed, so the wrasse can't just swim forward to get away, yet unfortunately in panic this is what it tries to do.

At one point, during some thrashing about by the lizardfish, the wrasse actually got free for about half a second, but the lizardfish was able to quickly pounce on the wrasse again. I think it was too tired or shocked to make a proper getaway. Then the lizardfish opened it's mouth as wide as possible and by thrashing it's head from side to side, it managed to get the tail of the Wrasse into the corner of it's mouth. After that there was



no escape for the poor wrasse, as it was slowly swallowed. Seemingly the lizardfish was swallowing a fish almost half it's size. (Lizardfish are voracious predator that will consume anything that fits into their considerable mouths. Cannibalism is not uncommon.)

Right up until it disappeared completely inside the lizardfish, you could see by the poor wrasse desperate for oxygen, opening and

closing its mouth trying to pump water over it's gills. What a way to go, swallowed alive.

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Parting Shot 2

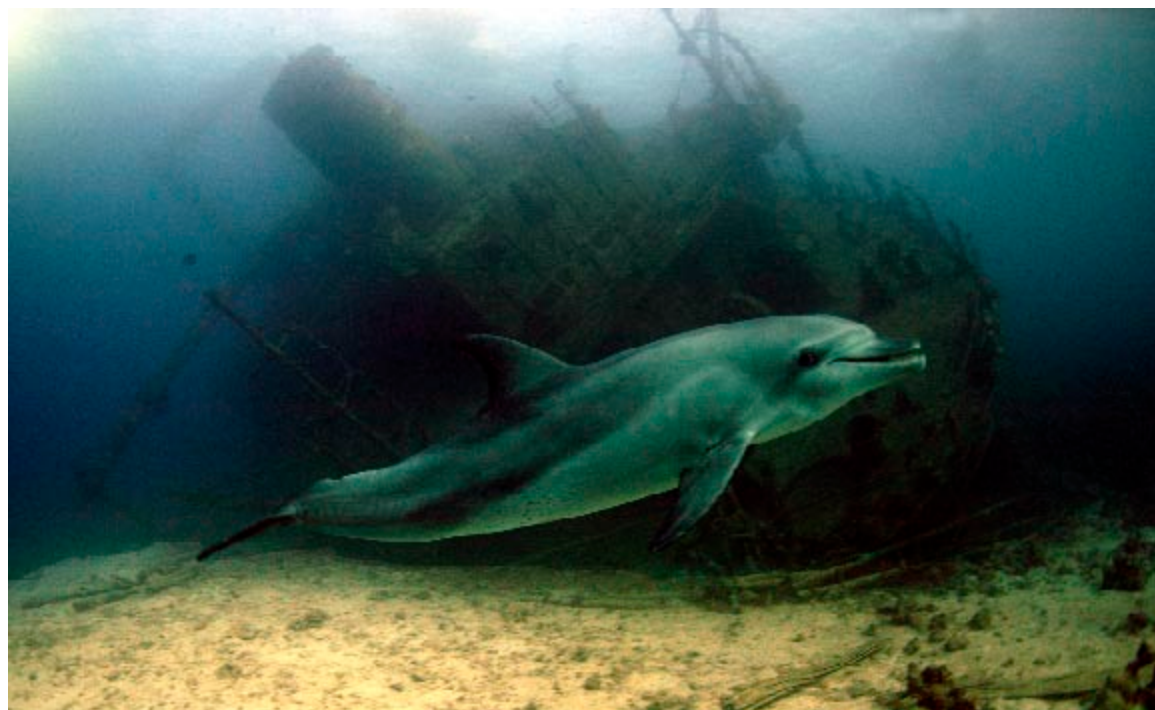
My liveaboard had just arrived at Abu Nuhas and I was looking forward to diving on one of my favourite wrecks, the Giannis D. I was the only photographer on the liveaboard, but the rest of the guests were a very accommodating group; allowing me extra personal space on the dive deck for my camera, a table in the saloon for my laptop, etc. In addition, the dive leader was relaxed about me being usually the last out at the end of the dives and not having to stick too closely to the group.

Just prior to this trip I had acquired a Magic Filter & was keen to experiment with it in conjunction with my new 10.5mm fisheye lens. The visibility on the Giannis D that morning was 30 metres plus and I spent the first half of my dive at the stern using the same composition but varying my camera settings and adjusting the White Balance to get the most pleasing image. The rest of the group had moved up to the bow section and were slowly returning back to the stern when a solitary dolphin appeared from out of the blue.

The dolphin was obviously in a playful mood and swam repeatedly around & through the group of divers, breaking off to charge away and

return again to the delight of all. Eventually she disappeared back into the blue and the group ascended to the ships gantry for their safety stop. Although I still had plenty of air left I joined the group & their dive leader as I was happy to return to the boat and view my results. A few minutes later the group had all ascended to the surface and were awaiting the arrival of the Zodiac when I caught sight of Barry (the DL) frantically waving to me. The dolphin had returned and was circling immediately below us.

What happened next will remain in my memory forever. Barry & I looked at each other and, as one, descended back down. Now, I have seen dolphins before when diving, but mainly at a distance and usually disappearing off. Not this time, for Eli (so named due to some scars on her flank that seemed to spell the letters ELI) made it clear that we two 'intruders' were there for her enjoyment! Initially, she approached me, circling round and round and staying so close that she overfilled my fisheye lens. Barry filmed her as she



turned me around like a top, making me dizzy and effectively stopping me photographing her. After a time, she broke away and did the same to Barry, so I was able to get some shots of them both together. Then she swam back past me, using her tail fin to kick up a huge cloud of sand, almost as if to say 'You can't photo me now!' – and then turned vertically upwards; accelerating up to the surface.

With the Zodiac approaching, the surface group were completely unaware of what was going on beneath them – only to be more than a little startled by Eli completely breaking the surface, turning in the air and re-entering the water just metres

from the group. She then charged back towards me, turning 90 degrees and heading past the stern of the wreck. This time I was ready for the shot.....

Back on board the group were very excited by 'their' encounter and were unaware that Barry & I had spent so much time with Eli. Needless to say, I was the centre of attention that evening when I downloaded the day's images onto my laptop.....

Ralph Mortimore
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Parting Shot 3

... this is what happens if you deprive a serious underwater photographer of travel opportunities (due to digital post production workload and general poverty). In his desperation he (or she) WILL find water. The neighbors duck pond in this case. It could have also gone as a test shoot to see how low you can go in visibility before the results resemble a Jackson Pollock or how high you can go in choli bacteria exposure and live (... outside the dunny for three days).

As it was the ducks were incredibly cheerful and the water had only a very subtle manure flavor. It would have been jolly entertaining, the birds pecking away at the dome if I wouldn't have been busy fighting off several dozen gigantic fresh water eels that were trying to chomp at any exposed bit of flesh. It does ruin your concentration. Something you cannot do without in the life after Nikon F4 autofocusers and youthful, sharp eyesight.

And then it happened, as I was lying on the bottom of a dirty puddle, holding my breath for minutes, being pecked at by horny beaks from the top and nibbled at by slithering, slimy creatures from below. It happened, that state of bliss you enter when you know IT is working, you are working on something worth your while. And all that without the guilt of clocking up carbon debt. Then again maybe it was just an asphyxic brain releasing nice chemicals into the system. Whatever it was I hope



Camera & settings: Nikon D2x in Subal. 10.5mm fisheye. 250th/f22. 2x Sea&Sea YS350 on full power diffused.

all you fellow photographers are having as much fun as me and as curious as me as to "WHAT ON EARTH NEXT"?

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**Do you have a nice shot with a short story behind it?
If so e mail me and yours could be the next "Parting shot".**

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