

Parting Shot 1

“Always be looking down current!” OK, Jim, I get it. This must have been the forth time he’s mentioned which way to be looking during our dive briefing. By the time he stopped talking he said it two more times. We were over the Little Bahama Bank and I was ready to get wet. There were now quite a few large slowly swimming animals under the boat. No giant strides here; you do a quiet head first seated entry and proceed to the sand below. It didn’t take long before we were in position with some ten good sized lemon sharks doing their version of pacing around us. I, of course, immediately got distracted and focused in on a pair of photogenic lemons. I felt completely calm and was enjoying the warm water when suddenly I was being shaken like a tambourine. At the same time I heard through a cascade of bubbles JJOOOOEEEE...BLUB BLUB...WAH WAH...LOOOOK and there was Jim Abernethy about six inches from my face yelling at me while twisting me around to see a gigantic head less than two feet away staring at me. It was Emma, the “playful” 14 foot female tiger shark who delights sneaking up on the clueless newbie. I hadn’t even been in the water ten minutes and I had

already forgotten – you guessed it – “Always be looking down current!”

I for one never bought into the ravenous eating machine label even after seeing Jaws, I also never really connected to sharks either. Over my underwater career I’ve seen quite a few but always from some kind of distance both figuratively and at times physically. The week I spent in the company of someone who knows these animals from over 30 years of diving with them helped me reach a new awareness. Day after day I could get into a rhythm with whatever sharks came around. It didn’t take long to see patterns emerge. Some liked to come in close while others kept their distance. Some paced around the reef taking the same path every time and some never repeated the same track twice. You could “feel” some of the bolder animals as they swam by, their dark eyes seeing, trying to understand what the noisy, clumsy, vertical beast was in their domain. Clearly they have more to fear from us then the other way around. Half the sharks we saw had fishing lines, lures and one even had bullet holes in them. It’s a sad state of affairs.

Despite my inauspicious beginning with the Little Bahama



Nikon d700, Nikon 17-35mm WA @ 35mm, Aquatica housing w/ 9.5 inch dome, 1/160 sec, f16, ISO 800, Two Ikelite DS-125 strobes @ half power w/ diffusers.

Bank sharks, I quickly got the hang of it. I made 23 more dives swimming with tigers, lemons, nurse, black tip, grey, and hammerheads. At no time did I feel threatened or see any aggressive behavior toward any dive members what so ever. My experience with Emma felt more like an alien life form giving me the heads up rather than sizing me up for food. The best way to put it was said by Henry Beston long ago: “They are not brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations, caught with

ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth.” Logically to be in their world we need rules and procedures, including the celebrated phrase “Always be looking down current!” Actually, I thought, not such bad advice once I got back to my world either.

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Parting Shot 2

Having been on a number of trips to the Red Sea my wife, Sally, and I decided any future trips there needed to have more of a sense of purpose. With that in mind we headed for Marsa Alam in anticipation of diving with the resident dugong, known locally as Dennis. Failing that there was also the possibility of an encounter with the pod of spinner dolphins at the aptly named (for once) Dolphin Reef.

On the 3rd day of our trip we headed for Marsa Abu Dabab, where Dennis had at one time been a resident and encounters were commonplace. However, the dive guides said it had been quite a while since Dennis had been seen there but there would be plenty of turtles around and possibly a few guitar sharks to keep us amused.

There were dozens, possibly hundreds, of swimmers and snorkelers at the site and I couldn't help thinking that if I were a dugong I'd look for somewhere a bit more peaceful to spend my days. Unsurprisingly, Dennis did not put in an appearance but turtles were there in abundance and I happily took numerous photos of them and their attendant remoras as they went about their business seemingly unconcerned by the human activity.

The trip to Dolphin Reef was equally unproductive. We could spot some activity in the lagoon but the dolphins didn't stray from the security of that protected environment.

We had set out on our holiday more in hope than expectation of diving with dugongs and dolphins but hope had just about been replaced by resignation. Our penultimate day of diving was at Marsa Mubarak which promised more turtles but was not known for dugong encounters. Sally and I were last back to the boat from the first dive only to find that the rest of the divers had headed straight back out across the surface to where a dugong had been spotted but it was too late for us to join in. Over lunch we looked enviously at the video footage one of our fellow divers had obtained and scanned the bay in hope of further sightings. Just before we were about to kit up for our second dive there were some excited shouts on board and much finger pointing towards a grey blob in the distance. The dugong was now heading back in our direction again.

We quickly put on our gear and snorkelled out towards its last seen position. Within a few minutes we saw the magnificent beast below us grazing nonchalantly on sea grass in



Nikon D300, Subal Housing, 2 X Inon Z-240 strobes, Sigma 12-24 lens at 16mm, F10, 1/50th sec, Manual Exposure, ISO 200

about 12m of water. We descended slowly, making sure not to drop down too close to the dugong and disturb it. I finned carefully forward with my camera and began taking photos. There was only time for half a dozen shots or so before it was in need of air and rose towards the surface.

Back on board I reviewed my photos and the heavily scarred body of the dugong suggested it was indeed the famous Dennis. Our time with

him had been fleeting but it was a great privilege to see such a fantastic creature at very close quarters and to get a few photos to provide a reminder of our encounter. We went home very much satisfied with the trip and, who knows, next time we may get to meet the spinner dolphins.

Morris Gregory
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Parting Shot 3

There we were, hanging on the shot-line at five metres, off-gassing after an extraordinary dive on the wreck of the Thistlegorm in the Northern Red Sea. The strong surface surge was pulling us in all directions and I found myself glancing nervously at my SPG as the needle moved ominously into the 'red' while my remaining deco time ticked down painfully slowly.

In the shallows, a school of batfish cruised effortlessly around us as we clung, white-knuckled, onto the line. One batfish in particular was zipping around us at enormous speed, much faster than I'd ever seen a batfish moving before and in the blur of its movement I noticed that it seemed to have longer than average pelvic and tail fins. It was moving with such velocity that I couldn't quite put my finger on why it looked so strange so I decided to snap a couple of shots to freeze its movement before surfacing to the welcome comfort of the boat.

Back on board, it quickly became clear that this was no ordinary fish and what we had discovered may well contribute to redefining Darwinian theory of evolution. The fish's ability to move with such speed

and agility seemed to be down to the abnormal growth of two extending fin protrusions bearing a striking resemblance both in shape and colour to a set of the ever-popular fluorescent yellow Mares Avanti X3 fins. We immediately contacted the Egyptian Marine Research Centre and they have just confirmed this to be a new species of batfish to be named *Platax Batavianus Mares Avanti X3*. They blame GM foods and global warming for this strange aberration.

And that's what really happened....

Alex Tattersall
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Nikon D300s, Nauticam NA-D300s housing, Tokina 10-17mm Fisheye at 17mm, 2x INON Z240, F9, 1/320 ISO 320

Do you have an interesting shot with a short story behind it?

If so e mail us and yours could be the next "Parting shot".

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