

Parting Shot

In February this year my buddy Sandy Webb and I dived a site near Phillip Island, just east of Melbourne, Australia. This site is by the San Remo pier and the bridge across to Phillip Island. It is a narrow channel that leads into a very large bay (Westernport Bay). There are extremely strong tidal flows through this channel that render it undiveable except in two half-hour tidal slack periods each day. Divers have to time their dives very carefully in this channel because the current is far too strong to swim against. If you dive for too long you will either be swept out into the ocean or into Westernport Bay. Despite the currents it is a very appealing dive site. The sides of the channel are white sand, and the bottom at 15m is covered with very diverse sponges and small red algae.

This area is also the home of a population of large smooth stingrays (*Dasyatis brevicaudata*). This species grows to a maximum width of 2m, and many of the rays in the channel are close to the maximum size for the species. These rays are common around Melbourne piers. They are generally not aggressive and tend to ignore divers. The rays here are also hand-fed in the shallows.

On this occasion a big ray behaved very aggressively, which is quite atypical of the species. We were about 10 minutes into the dive and busy photographing sponges. A ray appeared out of the channel, swam towards Sandy at high speed and rammed her. She saw it coming and ducked so it glanced off her shoulder. I managed to get one photograph of the encounter, which I took at the moment it hit her shoulder. The ray then swam off and we did not see it again during the dive.

I don't know what provoked this behaviour. When these rays are threatened they raise their tails in warning. But this ray did not have its tail up, as can be seen in the photo. This site is rarely dived because of the tidal flows, so possibly these rays are not used to divers. Was it territorial behaviour? Another possibility is that it was a result of the hand-feeding that occurs in the shallows here. Perhaps it was looking for a handout?

Phil Watson



This photo was taken with an Olympus E-PL3 in an Olympus housing fitted with a Zen dome port and S&S YS-01 strobe. Lens was the Olympus 9-18mm zoom at the 9mm end. Settings were F/8, 1/60 & ISO200. I had no time to adjust any settings because of the speed which it all happened. You only get the one chance with shots like this.

Do you have an image which has a 'story within a story'?
If so we'd love to hear from you.

**E mail us and yours could be
the next "Parting shot".**

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