

Numana the Italian Lembeh

By David Salvatori

Numana is a small coastal town in the province of Ancona, not too far from the famous tourist centers of Rimini and Riccione. This stretch of twenty kilometers of coastline along the Adriatic Sea from Ancona to Numana is called the Conero Riviera, taking the name from the Conero mountain which overlooks this area.

The steep limestone walls of the Conero mountain are the only “rocky island” in the sea of the sandy shores of the upper and middle Adriatic basin so all the small organisms requiring hard surfaces for living are concentrated here, finding the ideal conditions for their own survival. Also the organisms living on the surrounding sandy bottoms approach these rocks where life bustles.

From a biological point of view then, the seabed off the Conero Riviera represents an extremely fascinating environment: the waters are green because they are rich in phytoplankton, a microalgae, which are at the base of many food chains, and this is because the north Adriatic basin is a sort of a shallow and relatively calm wading pool, rich in nutrients carried by the huge Po river and needed by microalgae: all this life is sustained by this great abundance of food coming from the phytoplankton.

The availability of so much food and so little rocky space in a typically sandy sea has concentrated in a small area a large number of species and has promoted the adaptation to life



Macropodia rostrata crab and *Flabellina pedata* nudibranch - Nikon D300, Subal housing and Inon Z240 strobes, 105mm, f/16, 1/250 s., ISO 100

in a unique ecosystem; the large presence of sandy seabed can support the survival of many species which are extremely rare in the rest of the Mediterranean Sea and allows us to observe animals hardly encountered when diving in other areas. Finally, the strong seasonality (temperature is typically varying from 3 to 28 degrees Celsius)



Ready to be born: *Sepia officinalis* squid egg – Nikon D300S, Seacam housing and strobes, 60mm, Retra snoot, f/32, 1/250 s., ISO 100

allows also the life of cold seas animals and a huge variation in the fauna between summer and winter (in practice, the same space is inhabited by different organisms at different times of the year).

Two miles away from the coast, just in front of the port of Numana, the wreck of the MY Nicole lies on a sandy bottom of about 12 metres. The



(Above) Sepiola sp. cuttlefish during night dive - Nikon D800E, Seacam housing and strobes, 60mm, f/20, 1/320 s., ISO 100

(Left) Seashell Simnia spelta on Leptogorgia sarmentosa gorgonian at the Nicole wreck – Nikon D800E, Seacam housing and strobes, 105mm, +10 diopters Macromate lans, f/20, 1/320 s., ISO 100

wreck has a great importance from the biological point of view, in fact this is the only solid structure over many miles, and thus it offers a basis for settlement and shelter for many organisms typically found on hard surfaces, in an area where they

otherwise would not be able to live.

The limited available space ensures these organisms are very concentrated, and the walls of the wreck are covered and full of life; spider crab, porter crabs, blue crabs, small gobies, several species of

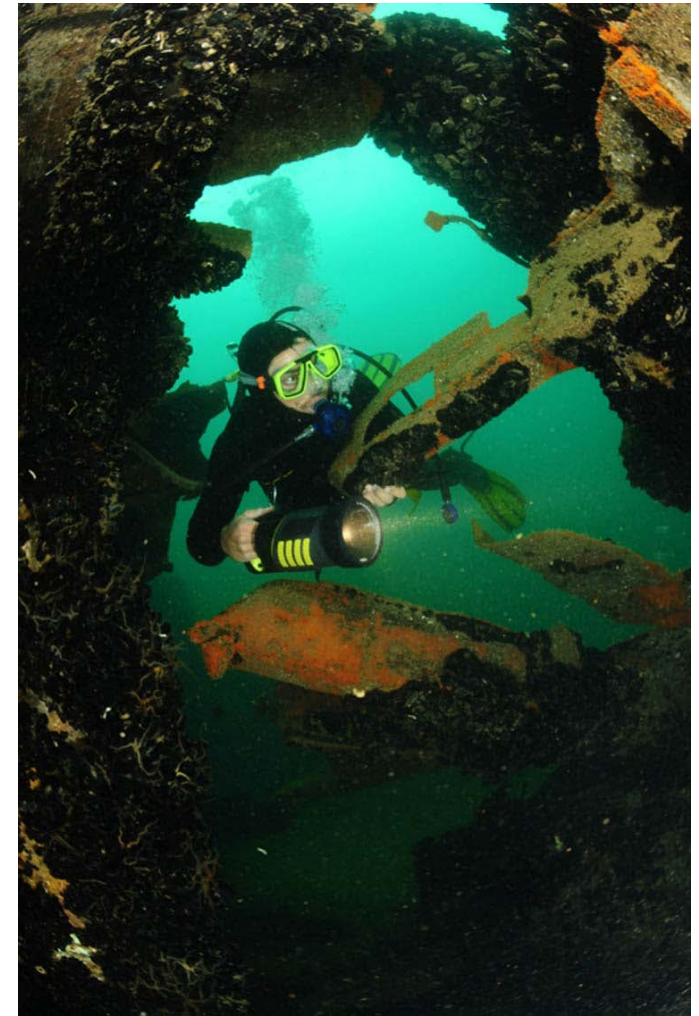


Pagurus anachoretus hermit crab on top of a Sabella spallanzanii tube worm- Nikon D300S, Seacam housing and strobes, 60mm, f/29, 1/60 s., ISO 100

shrimp, and an incredible amount of species of sea slugs battle for living space in a unique ecosystem where hard and soft bottom organisms live together, especially in the Spring. Big fish such as grey mullets, brown meagres and even young amberjacks are sometimes found sheltering and shading under the sheet arches crossing the holds and within the closed areas of the wreck, where bogues and saddled breams are always present. For this reason

this wreck is referred to as a FAD (Fish Aggregating Device).

In this article you can see pictures I have taken in only one weekend. They depict very rare and shy subjects or very unusual situations, and the number of subjects taken in so few dives confirms the great biodiversity and uniqueness of this area, whose marine biology recalls very much to us the seas of Philippines or Indonesia.



Nicole MY: inside the wreck (courtesy of Centro Sub Monte Conero)

In Numana we always meet our friends of the diving “Centro Sub Monte Conero” of Marco Giuliano. Until a few years ago Numana was not very well known among divers, because this is a sea difficult to appreciate if you are not “fan” of marine biology, but the passion of Marco Giuliano, successfully managing his diving since 22 years,



Gobius niger goby with eggs - Nikon D300, Subal housing, Inon Z240 strobes, 105mm, f/13, 1/250 s., ISO 100



Shrimp Periclimenes amethysteus, aka ghost shrimp or gem shrimp, it reaches 3 cm as maximum length – Nikon D800E, Seacam housing and strobes, 105mm, +10 diopters Macromate lans, f/22, 1/320 s., ISO 100



Rostanga rubra (1,5 cm max) with brittlestar, nudibranch very rare in the Mediterranean - Nikon D800E, Seacam housing and strobes, 105mm, +10 diopters Macromate lans, f/22, 1/320 s., ISO 100

(Right) *Hippocampus guttulatus* seahorse - Nikon D300, Subal housing and Inon Z240 strobes, 60mm, f/25, 1/320 s., ISO 100



Maja squinado spider crab while spawning eggs during night dive - Nikon D800E, Seacam housing and strobes, 60mm, f/22, 1/320 s., ISO 100



finally managed to get an increasing number of people coming here year after year to see which treasures the sea of the Conero hides, and today more and more people talk about Numana as “the Italian Lembeh”. And since when we speak about “muck diving”, having a guide knowing perfectly where to find the critters is fundamental, Marco has built a team made up of guides who have worked with him for many years and know all the corners of this sea by memory; in the team you can find



(Above) Numana
(Left) Marco Giuliano and the official trademark of his diving “Centro Sub Monte Conero” (courtesy of Centro Sub Monte Conero)

also a marine biologist, Federico Betti, author of many books and always helpful and enthusiastic in commenting with guests the critters seen in the last dive!

David Salvatori

The identification of the species and the comments to the photos in this album are from Federico Betti

www.federicobetti.it

For info and reservations please contact Marco Giuliano at

www.centrosubmonteconero.com



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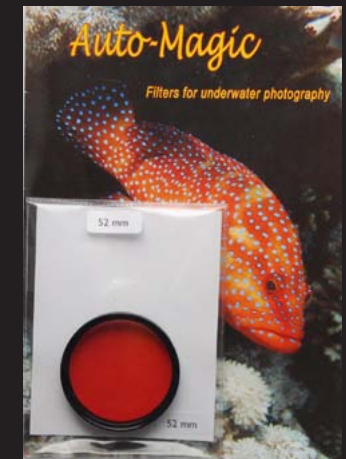
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