

A whole lotta Rozi

By David Watson

An island set in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea, Malta has been historically important, with numerous invasions (or attempts), over the years. Nowadays it is a convenient summer holiday getaway for Europeans, but is also widely regarded as providing some of the very best diving in the Mediterranean Sea. Malta possesses a nice year round climate, water temperatures in the range of 18-28°C, visibility of 30m plus as standard and minimal tide and currents. It is also a wreck lover's paradise, being home to wrecks from both world wars as well as numerous artificial reefs. In fact the Maltese Islands (Malta, Gozo & Comino) are now home to over 10 artificial reefs, purposefully sunk vessels that have been cleaned and stripped to make them into permanent underwater homes for resident marine life and a welcoming attraction for visiting divers who come

here from across Europe and beyond.

Of these wrecks perhaps the most visited and (in my opinion) the most photogenic is the tugboat MV Rozi. Located at Cirkewwa, the most northerly point of the Maltese mainland, Cirkewwa is the most popular dive site on the island and also home of the ferry terminal that transports people and cars over to the sister island of Gozo. What makes it so appealing here for divers is the clear blue water and abundant marine life, ledges that are ideal for beginner divers and those undertaking training and underwater walls providing spectacular drop-offs down to depths of over 30m, for those more qualified. The underwater geology of the location provides numerous interesting features for divers such as arches, caverns, swim-throughs and overhangs most of which are accessible to the majority of divers. Combined with the

two wrecks situated here, the ex-patrol boat, P-29 and the MV Rozi there are 4-5 quality dives that can be undertaken.

MV Rozi was a Bristol built tugboat launched in 1958 as the Rossmore by Charles Hill & Sons Ltd. In 1969 she was sold to Rea Towing Company and renamed Rossgarth. In 1981 she was sold to Tug Malta, and renamed Rozi, operated in Grand Harbour Valletta. Intentionally sunk as a tourist attraction in 1992 as the underwater highlight for an unlikely and short lived, tourist submarine operation, she is now a magnet for scuba divers. While there certainly are more historical and grander wrecks in scale around the island, the Rozi provides a wonderfully charming and iconic attraction, especially for underwater photographers due to its scalable size and 'toy tugboat' appearance.

Cirkewwa has a number of entry and exit points ideal



Giant stride entry below the light house. Canon S95, Ikelite housing, Inon UWL-100 wide angle lens. Available light, 1/200th @ f.6.3, 80 ISO



Rozi and a lone Diver. Canon S95, Ikelite housing, Inon UWL-100 wide angle lens. Available light, black and white conversion, 1/125th @ f.2, 80 ISO



A Moray eel swimming along the reef. Canon S95, Ikelite housing, Inon UWL-100 wide angle lens, Sea & Sea YS-02 Strobe, 1/125th @ f.2 250 ISO

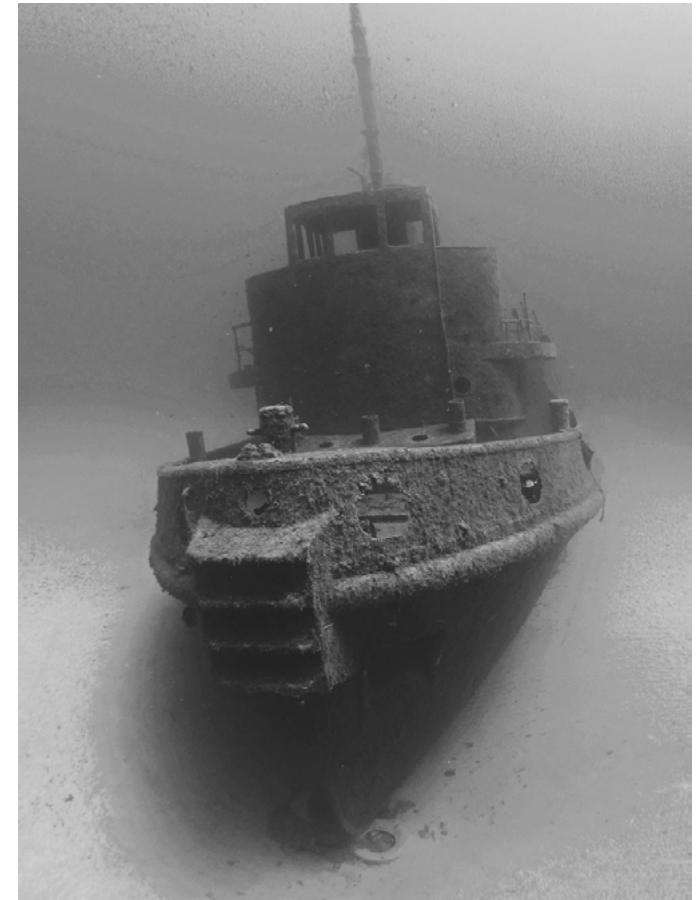
for divers. To reach the Rozi it is recommended starting with a giant stride into the sea just under the old lighthouse. From here it is approximately a 7-8 minute swim to the wreck, either using a direct compass heading of 270° (a surface 'wreck' marker buoy is present in the summer months) or following a curved reef which descends down to the stern of the wreck. The Rozi lies upright sitting on a sandy seabed in 35m of water, intact except for the engine and propeller which were removed before her scuttling. As you near the Rozi you are likely to be approached by a mob of friendly sea-bream that will escort you down to the wreck, a result of some divers feeding the fish here. In fact, if you plan on using a strobe flash you are in danger of photographing a wall of fish they are so used to associating a flash with being fed!

The wreck is home to a wide range of marine life. The site of Cirkewwa has already been



The sea bream make you feel welcome. Canon S95, Ikelite housing, Inon UWL-100 wide angle lens, Sea & Sea YS-02 Strobe, 1/125th @ f.2 80 ISO

designated a 'voluntary marine reserve' and it is hoped that in the near future it will be awarded the full 'marine reserve' status of which a site like this deserves. In close proximity to the Rozi can be found plenty of damselfish (*Chromis chromis*), various wrasse and sea-bream species and schools of amberjacks (*Seriola dumerili*) and dentex will pass by at times to feed. Currently there is a large moray eel (*Muraena Helena*) residing behind the



MV Rozi. Canon S95, Ikelite housing, Inon. UWL-100 wide angle lens. Available light, black and white conversion, 1/125th @ f.2, 80 ISO

wheelhouse, having a more dignified home than his predecessor/ancestor who made his home in the toilet bowl of the ships head! For those that love shooting in macro there are various blennies and gobies and a selection of nudibrachs, most commonly *Creatina peregrina* and *Flabellina affinis* on the deck railings. The reefs at Cirkewwa have plenty of resident scorpionfish which wait patiently for a passing meal (and sit nice and still



The reef walls can be full of colour. Canon S95, Ikelite housing, Inon UWL-100 wide angle lens, Sea & Sea YS-02 Strobe, 1/150th @f2 250 ISO

for us photographers) and plenty of dusky grouper (*Ephinephelus marginatus*) which, if you are lucky, you will see a specimen of a decent size before they dart into the sanctuary of a cavern or small cave. It is at these reef features where you can see that the Mediterranean Sea, though not tropical, can still provide some wonderful colours of soft corals and sponges, and a torch is a must to fully appreciate both the wreck and reef walls.

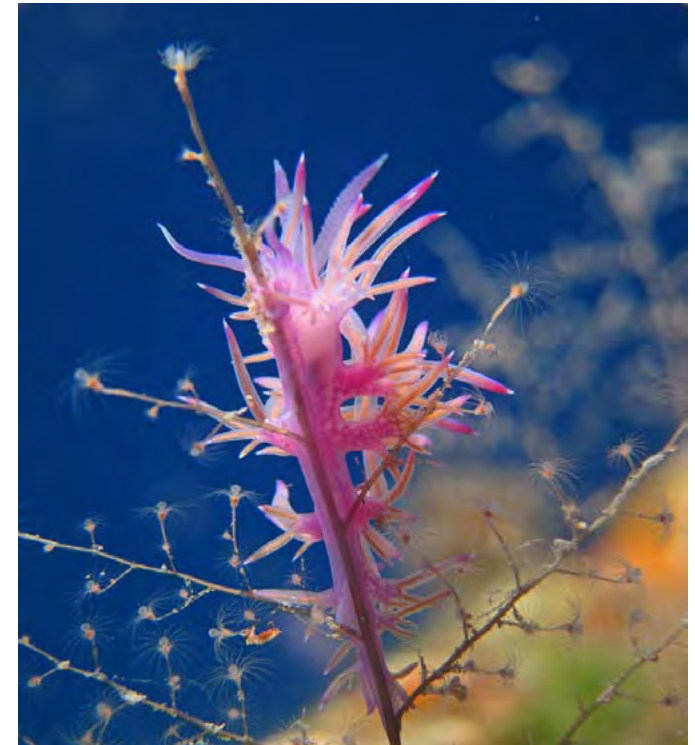
To photograph the Rozi a wide angle lens or preferably a dome port will allow you to get nice, close shots with lots of detail. Due to the great visibility and the size of the boat (33m long, 9m wide) even us compact camera users can get a good shot if the correct angle of view is selected. The main challenge photographing here is the depth and therefore restricted dive time, so a Nitrox mix of 32% is recommended to give an extended bottom time. There are numerous photogenic features of



A diver investigates the wheelhouse. Canon S95, Ikelite housing, Inon UWL-100 wide angle lens, Sea & Sea YS-02 Strobe, 1/125th @f2 80 ISO

this tugboat. The wheelhouse can be easily visited and the prominent chimney stack and mast provide the wreck with a distinctive profile. Penetration for those qualified and wishing to do so, is an option, although due to the compact size of the wreck internal space is rather limited. Doors have been removed and the engine space is also open (the engine cover sits where the reef meets the sand at the stern of the wreck).

Once it is time to depart from the wreck it is easy to return back via the reef at the stern which will provide a gradual ascent and the opportunity to view and photograph the marine life in the vicinity. An alternative is to stay at depth and visit the large anchor at 30m on the sand just a few minutes swim off the port side. An impressive size the anchor also makes a good photo opportunity, especially using a dive model. Safety stops can be safely completed back on the ledge in 4-8m of water and the minutes



Flabella affinis on the deck railings. Canon S95, Ikelite housing, Epoque DML-2 macro lens, Sea & Sea YS-02 Strobe, 1/800th @f3.2 250 ISO

soon fly by with time spent searching the rocks and stones for the distinctive signs of an octopus nest or hunting for an elusive seahorse!

Overall the Rozi is a must do wreck for any diver and keen underwater photographer visiting Malta. What she lacks in history she easily makes up for in character, and I for one can never tire of visiting her!

David Watson
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South West Ramblings 5

by Mark Webster

The last edition of my ramblings focussed on a mild obsession with nudibranchs and a particularly satisfying start to the season in terms of the variety of species which have been seen in the south west this year. UK nudibranchs are small and often blend very well with their chosen diet of hydroids and sponges and are a real challenge to spot and that is certainly a part of the hunt that I enjoy. As the summer months pass the numbers of nudibranchs decline and so the addicted underwater photographer must seek alternative challenges.

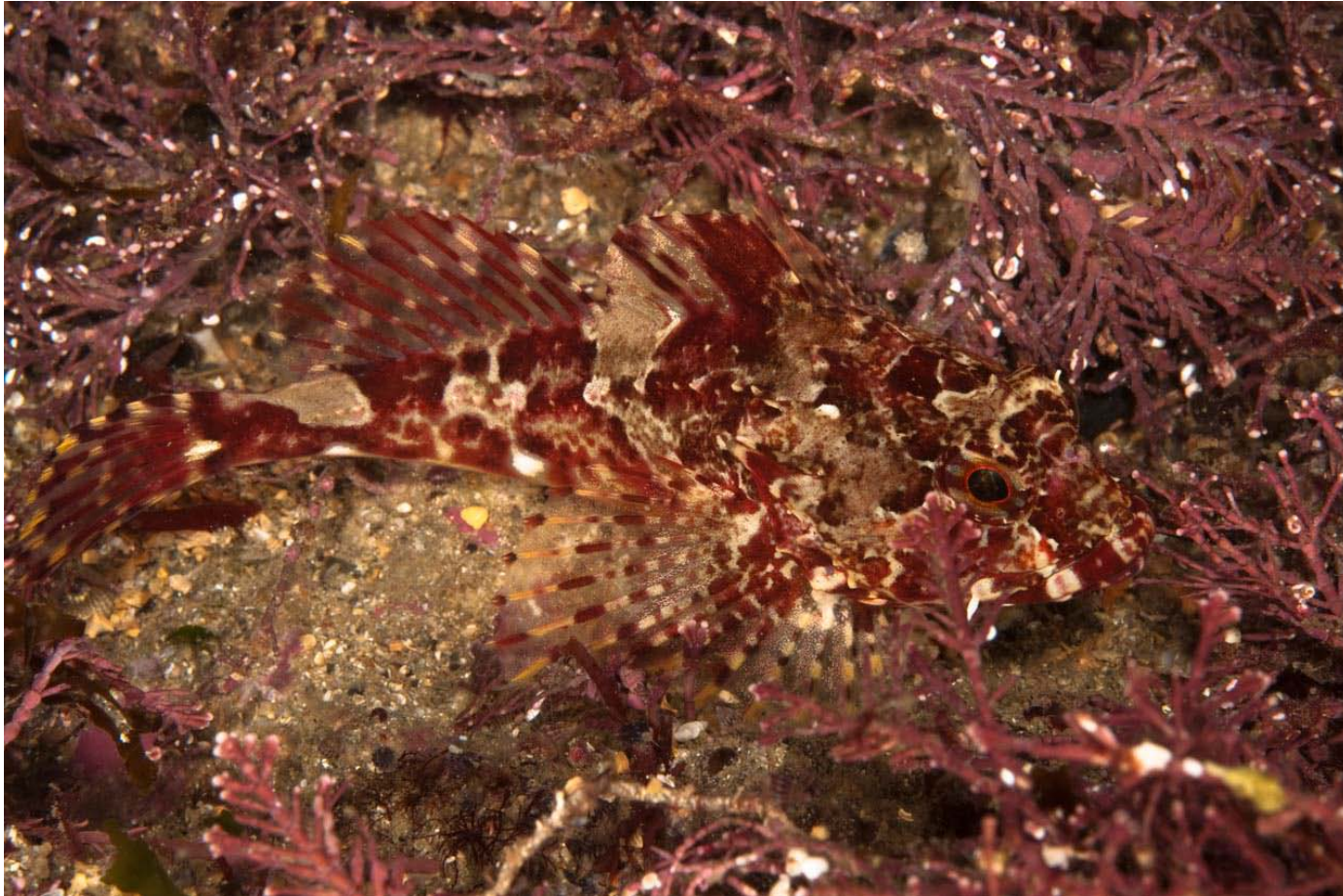
Another well hidden species which is irresistibly magnetic to me (much like tom pot blennies and clown fish) are scorpion fish which in the UK are much smaller than their tropical cousins, generally range in size from 25mm to a maximum of 400mm although the average would be closer to 100 -150mm. There are normally plenty of these bold little fish around, but just like their tropical cousins they have excellent camouflage which they can adjust colour and pattern to suit the selected habitat. They remain motionless most of the time unless they are disturbed, or moving to a new ambush location

or striking at prey. They often like to hide under weed so it is worth carefully lifting weed on the seabed and if you find one they are normally so convinced of their camouflage that your subject will not move. They are most common on or close to the reef in shallow water up to 20m depth but will also often be found in rock pools between the tides.

There are two species to look out for in the UK, the short spined sea scorpion (*Myoxocephalus scorpius*) and the long-spined sea scorpion (*Taurulus bubalis*). The short spined species is also commonly known as the Bullhead, Bull-Rout, Rockfish, Clobberhead, Father-Lasher, Rock Sculpin, Short-horned Sculpin, and Granny Fish! The long spined cousin strangely seems to lack this variety common names

The 105mm macro lens on DX or FX is the perfect tool for capturing a classic portrait pose of these small fish. Nikon D300, Subal ND20, 105 micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO 100, f16 1/200.



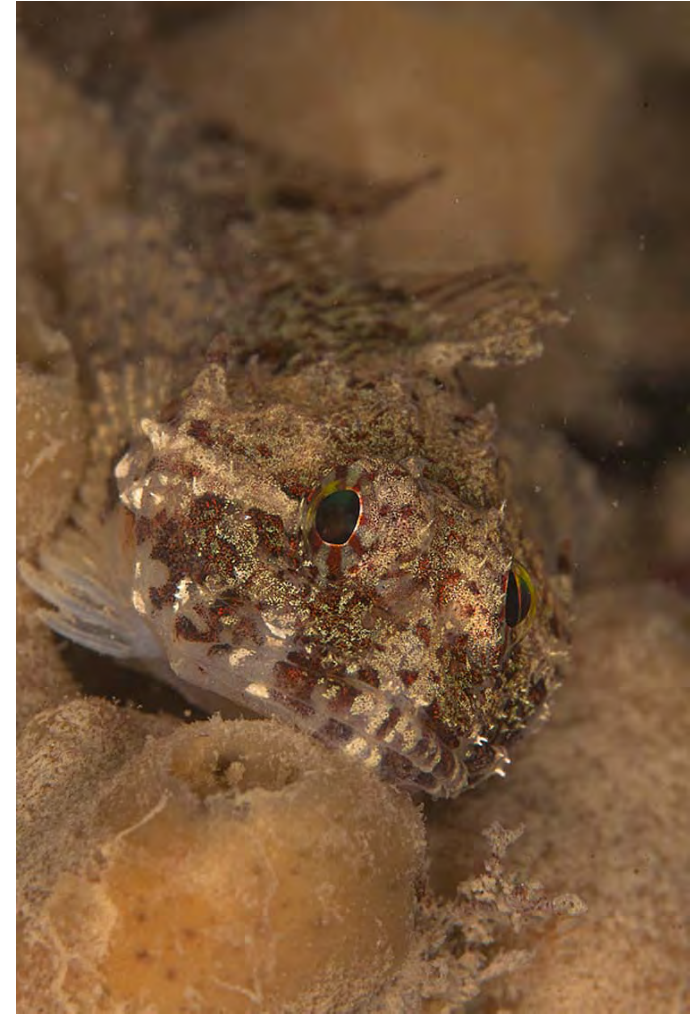


First you must find your subject! This long spined scorpion fish is hiding amongst calcified seaweed and blends with this and the seabed very well. Nikon D300, Subal ND20, 105 micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO 100, f11 1/60.

At first glance these two species look very similar although the short spined species is often significantly larger reaching up to 18 inches (40cm) in length and the UK rod record for this species is a whopping 2lb 7oz, although I have never seen one this big! The long spined variety tends to be smaller and if you look carefully you will see a prominent white spine at the corner of the mouth which is the

obvious distinguishing feature between the two species. There are other differences but I won't dwell on that here as there are plenty of reference sources to pursue for the fine detail.

Interestingly, in recent years there have been more frequent sightings of the Mediterranean species *Scorpaena scrofa* which is significantly bigger at 30-50cm and has a brighter orange to



This juvenile short spined scorpion fish was barely 25mm long but was still bold enough to endure the approach of a +10 wet lens without flinching. Nikon D300, Subal ND20, 105mm micro, +10 SubSee wet lens, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200, f16 1/125.