



HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED HOW SQUID MANAGE TO REPRODUCE FAST ENOUGH TO MEET THE WORLD'S FEROCIOUS AND EVER-GROWING APPETITE FOR CALAMARI?

# MAKING calamari

Bigfin reef squid in courtship dance  
Mating Bigfin reef squid

Until a recent trip to the house reef of Malapascua Exotic Dive Resort in the Philippines, I really never put much thought into it. I had come to photograph the now-famous thresher sharks and was pleasantly surprised to find out that the resort had set up a house reef just 500 metres from its frontage. House reefs are always an attraction for divers because of their closeness to the resort (sometimes shore entries are all that is required to dive it) and because it

is usually in shallow water. Another positive aspect is it can be protected from fishing and other activities that dwindle marine resources. This particular house reef has been in existence for about a year and a half, consisting of two large passenger jeeps and a small *banca* (native Philippine fishing boat).

Some of the animals that have taken up residence there include three different schools of trevallies, rainbow runners, broadclub cuttlefish, a flamboyant cuttlefish, a 1.5 metre great barracuda

named Dick (the owner of Exotic resort is Dik), several frogfish and a school of about 200 bigfin reef squid. The squid are mostly around 15 centimetres in size with a few large males reaching a good 45 centimetres or half a metre. It was quite a treat to see these squid hovering around the manmade structures at a relatively close distance. Normally squid are hard to approach during the day, but this population has seemed to have taken up residence around the house reef and don't wonder off very far. Having noticed them on the first dive, I knew this would be a

good opportunity to photograph squid during the day. But as I dived the house reef again and again it was apparent they were doing more than just hovering, things were starting to look like the set of a porno movie and I was getting excited. The thought of catching squid on film making calamari got me.... well, never mind.

On the first couple of dives I noticed pairs of squid would approach the artificial reef bamboo structure, the larger one would hover as if guarding the area and the smaller one would get right next to the



**THE PAIR WOULD SWIM OFF TOGETHER WITH MALE ON TOP OF THE SMALLER FEMALE, THEIR PIGMENTATION WOULD CHANGE AND BOTH SEEMED TO BE ENTANGLED IN SOME SORT OF AN UNDERWATER TANGO**

cluster of eggs and extend one or two of its tentacles into the eggs. As this was happening, the larger one would seem to light up and display an array of pigmentation. I'm not a squid expert but this appeared to be the male guarding the female as she deposited her fertilized eggs into the cluster. After this happened for a few times, the pair would then swim off together with male on top of the smaller female, their pigmentation would change and both seemed to be entangled in some sort of an underwater tango. This dance wouldn't last for very long, around 10 to 15 seconds, and from what I've read the male at this point inserts his sperm packet into the receptacle below the female's mouth, using his specially modified tentacle. The fertilization of the egg happens internally within the female, which forms the egg capsule. The capsule is then attached together with other eggs, which are stuck to either a man-made structure (as in this case) or to the bottom of the sea floor. Like many other species of squid, the females die after spawning.

I dove the house reef for three days straight all day and there didn't seem to be a particular time of day in which they



Left page: A large male squid displaying its colours.

A large male squid guards a female as she deposits one of her egg capsules (seen as a white mass inside the body) onto the cluster.

This page: Hundreds of egg capsules in different stages of development are attached to the bamboo structure.

A male squid jets off after having successfully mated.



spawned. I was able to capture images at 10:00am, 14:00pm and 17:00 pm, sometimes there was current, sometimes there was not. One thing was for sure – when not spawning they were almost impossible to approach, but when things started to heat up I was able to shoot them with my 13mm fisheye lens, something that I thought would never be possible.

I have captured squid on film before but mostly at night and not mating, this time was special, mating squid during the day and capturing it on wide-angle was pretty much one of my dream images in my list of many.

Next time I think of ordering calamari, I will recall the strange and beautiful process that it took to produce it – and probably just order the chicken instead.