

EMMA AND LYNDON TURNER



Slow down and look carefully to find the fingernail-sized *Flabellina nudibranch* amongst the pylon growth.

WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT THERE'D BE HIDDEN SECRETS REMINISCENT OF TROPICAL SPLENDOUR IN THE SOUTHERN COASTAL WATERS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA? JETTY DIVES AT PORT HUGHES AND EDITHBURGH ON YORKE PENINSULA EACH HAVE THEIR OWN TEMPERATE WATER ATTRACTIONS LIKE SEAHORSES, CUTTLEFISH AND NUDIBRANCHS, BUT STENHOUSE BAY JETTY HAS ALL THIS AND MORE.

SENSATIONAL STENHOUSE SECRETS

On its day, Stenhouse will have you thinking you are swimming through a tropical undersea garden rather than cool southern waters. Divers are greeted with an array of brightly coloured marine life not normally seen on other jetties in South Australia. The most apparent and striking feature is the abundance of gorgonia corals. Red, yellow and orange fans flourish, overlapping and competing for attention. Remaining areas are filled by soft corals, sponges and ascidians. Like Christmas trees on steroids, the pylons are adorned with decorations of alien-like basket starfish of all sizes, from the small zebra striped Southern *Conocladus australis* to Erna's *Astroboa ernae* the largest of the southern shallow water species, entwining its pink legs through the holes and crevices of gorgonia. These normally nocturnal creatures are usually bundled into a tight ball during the day; but on overcast days under the cover of the jetty, their lacy branches unfurl to feed on planktonic morsels swept past in the light current. The colour, shape and texture combinations of starfish and gorgonia will challenge even very experienced photographers and keep them coming back for more, striving for the perfect shot of an incredible creature.



Flabellina sp: Brilliant coloured tassels disguise the harpoons borrowed from its stinging hydroid meals.



Astroboa ernae: Erna's basket starfish, the largest of the southern shallow water species, is normally found bundled into a tight ball during the day.



Above:
A majestic leafy seadragon gliding along in the current.



Left:
Pylons adorned with hard and soft corals, like Christmas trees on steroids; *Tambja verconis*: The flamboyant Verco's nudibranch feeding on blue polyzoan; Exploring the marine garden beneath Stenhouse Bay Jetty.



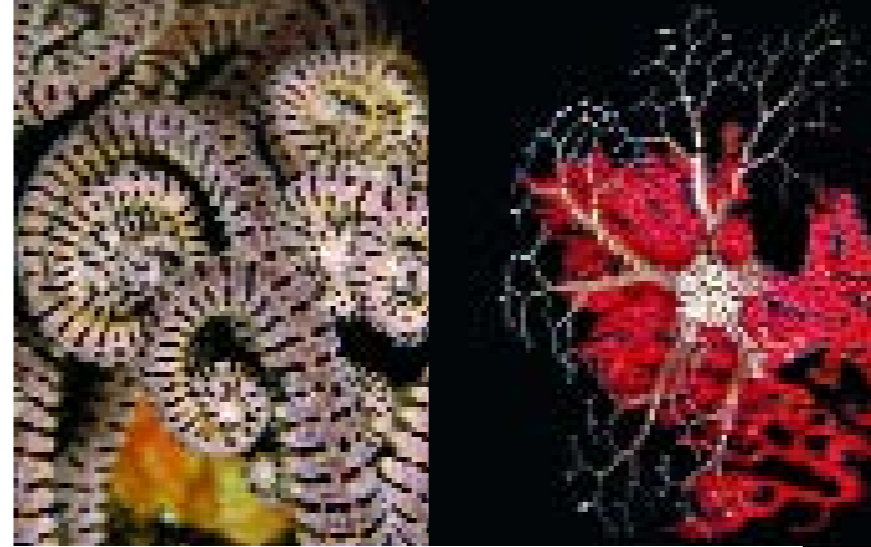
Macro-photographers will be delighted to find the resident Verco's nudibranchs *Tambja verconis* with their bright yellow body and intense blue spots. Find a patch of blue sea moss or polyzoan and they're sure to be nearby. These nudibranchs are usually only prevalent during the warmer months at other sites, but at Stenhouse we have seen them all year round. In the cooler months though, they're generally smaller and more difficult to find, so it pays to slow down and take your time looking; besides you never know what else you might find!

Also taking advantage of the good growth on pylons is the fingernail sized orange-tasseled *Flabellina Flabellina* sp. This slug stores the stinging harpoons of its hydroid meals in its brilliant coloured tassels, saving them for its own defence. With their small size, about two

centimetres long, they're hard to spot, but once you find one, it is amazing how many others you'll find nearby.

If the jetty and its pylons aren't enough, the jetty is surrounded by seagrass beds, home to pipefish, weedy seadragons and of course SA's iconic critter (and State marine emblem), the leafy seadragon.

A short snorkel southward towards the granite headland that protects the jetty leads to the wreck of the *Hougomont*. Metal location markers are embedded in the boulders for those that would rather rock-hop to the sloping entry site and spend more time at the wreck. Or if you prefer to conserve even more energy for underwater exploration, this site makes a great boat dive. The *Hougomont* was



Left:
Conocladis australis: Zebra-like colouration on the legs of a Southern basket starfish.

Conocladis australis: An unfurled Southern basket star on a red gorgonian feeding on planktonic morsels.

Below:
Stenhouse Bay – It's a long walk from the car park to dive entry and don't forget your long gear ropes! The jetty is in great condition due to reinvested National Park entry fees.

deliberately sunk in 1933 to provide a breakwater for ships serving the gypsum mine adjacent to the bay. The years haven't been kind and her remnants are now broken up, scattered and overgrown with kelp. The fact that she's now hard to recognise doesn't seem to bother the Southern rock lobster that can occasionally be found hidden in parts of the wreck.

Stenhouse Bay isn't commonly visited by divers due to its challenging access and exposure to the full forces of the Southern Ocean. The car park is a long 500 metre walk, then entry and exit are via a choice of two three to four metre vertical rung ladders. Long ropes assist with cameras and other heavy equipment.

While the starfish, coral and pylons are tempting, for wide-angle subjects care needs to be taken in timing a photographic trip to Stenhouse Bay as the water can be cloudy with up to 10 metre visibility on a good day. Conditions are most favourable during periods of NW-W winds. Any easterly wind quickly produces a swell that stirs the water and creates an uncomfortable surge. The depth is only six to eight metres so photographers and sightseers will have plenty of time to explore and discover Stenhouse Bay's exclusive delights.



Stenhouse Bay is situated just within the Innes National Park, on the southwestern tip of the boot-shaped Yorke Peninsula. Scuba diving this site is achievable in a day trip but is better planned as a weekend away, as it is located about 300km or 3 hours drive from Adelaide. The nearby Rhino's Tavern and store is the only place to eat, refuel and restock in the park.

There's a small daily entry fee into Innes National Park (AUD\$10) however the money collected is directly reinvested, as evidenced by the new decking, handrails and ladders on the jetty. The park is one of the few remaining areas of native coastal mallee vegetation close to Adelaide and is becoming increasingly popular with camping tourists. Fishing, surfing, snorkeling and bushwalking are other popular activities.

Nearby, Marion Bay and Pandalowie Bay serve as gateways to the off-shore islands in the Investigator Strait. Besides crystal clear water these islands, are popular sites for those seeking crayfish, seals and unspoilt diving.

