Parting Shots 1

One of the many “lucky “ and “exciting” finds diving around the Blue Heron Bridge (West Palm Beach Fl.) is without a doubt a Southern Stargazer (Astroscopus y-graecum).

These elusive fish bury themselves in the substrate and ambush unsuspecting prey as they swim by. They are difficult to find when they are buried because all that is visible is the mouth and eyes. Most divers will just swim right over top of them without ever knowing what to look for.

On this particular dive I came upon a free swimming Stargazer perched on the sand under the East span of the bridge in 12 feet (4 meters) of water. Although I dive the bridge often and have seen them buried before, this free swimmer was indeed treat to observe and photograph.

As I set up to take a few shots with my Canon S90 I was very impressed with its size, shape and coloration. Feeling vulnerable the fish started to dig itself down into the sand. Using its fins like little shovels it shook itself from side to side displacing the sand creating a small dust cloud. Deeper and deeper it went and after a few minutes of digging only its head was visible.

To many people the image of a Southern Stargazer is simply its unique face which has the image of a “star” (follow the points from its eyes down to its mouth corners and you will see it).

Never failing to impress, again today, the Blue Heron Bridge delivered more of its aquatic magic.

Mark Sagovac
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Free swimming Stargazer under the East span of the Blue Heron Bridge. Canon S90 in Fisheye Fix housing, ISO 200 F2.5 1/40 sec (no strobe)

Stargazer smile. Canon S90 in Fisheye Fix housing, ISO 200 F3.5 1/320 sec (no strobe)

Stargazer body. Canon S90 in Fisheye Fix housing, ISO 200 F3.5 1/250 sec (no strobe)

Stargazer burying itself in sand. Canon S90 in Fisheye Fix housing, ISO 200 F3.5 1/250 sec (no strobe)

Parting Shots 2

If you do not dive in the temperate waters of the UK you might imagine life below the surface to be dull and grey and visibility limited to a couple of meters. Whilst there are stormy days that produce these conditions there are others when the conditions will challenge some tropical destinations for colour and diversity.

One fish species we have which looks like it should be on a tropical reef is the cuckoo wrasse. Like most wrasse these fish start life as a female only graduating to male when the dominant male within a territory expires. Becoming the dominant male means developing a very striking blue and orange livery and responsibility for a harem of female cuckoo wrasse.

These fish are very bold and guard their territory jealously and will immediately and fearlessly approach a diver to investigate and perhaps try to chase you off. This particular fish was giving me a hard time during a dive on a reef named Hands Deep some nine miles offshore from Plymouth. We had arrived here on a perfect summer day with flat calm seas as if by magic.....(for the uninitiated this is an extremely subtle but effective plug for our revered editor's charter boat and his exemplary seamanship.....)

From the moment I arrived in a gulley and began to set up for some wide angle shots this male cuckoo was with me peering into my mask, following my every move, nibbling my gloves and generally making a nuisance of himself!

I was literally having to gently push this fish out of the way as I set up a shot, but he kept persisting with his investigation of my every move. Eventually I gave up for a few minutes and let him come towards the dome port to investigate his own reflection which he obviously thought was a challenger to his harem. He came closer and closer and finally put his nose on the port and pushed several times to see off this impertinent intruder to his domain.





Nikon D300, Subal ND2, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200 f16 1/30.

So I ended up with a series of images which includes the cuckoo with his snout squashed against the dome, a real example of voluntary interaction!

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Parting Shots 3

Diving in the early morning hours is a favorite of mine. It is a peaceful time when the nocturnal sea life retreat and the day-time foragers begin their search for food. During a recent vacation, when the dive operator offered a 5:45 a.m. dive, I jumped at the chance.

Awaking in time to splash before dawn was a bit of a challenge even for an early riser like myself. My dive buddy is not an early riser by nature, but he took one for the team, so that I could enjoy the underwater sunrise. The sun was barely breaking the horizon as we did a giant stride from the back of the boat.

Up in the distance, we could see the outline of a turtle. Upon approach, it became clear there were two turtles in a turf war over a sponge destined to be breakfast. I observed as the smaller yet fiercer turtle aggressively pushed the larger turtle away. At one point, the smaller turtle resorted to biting the front flipper of the larger turtle. This was the winning maneuver in the war and allowed breakfast to begin.

Apprehension arose as I thought about staging my photos. Should I approach while the turtle is eating? Will I receive the same treatment as the larger turtle? Will I just scare the turtle away? I started taking photos from a distance and slowly began inching my way closer.

The turtle had absolutely no concerns about me, and knew that I would not impede breakfast. Breaking off pieces of sponge proved to be difficult for the turtle. He would often latch onto the sponge with his mouth and brace his front flippers to begin the game of tug-o-war (as shown in the picture). When the opponent finally let loose, the turtle would fall back in victory, munching on mouthful of sponge as his prize. Meanwhile, a nearby French Angelfish would swoop in and quickly grab up the sponge shrapnel suspended in the water then dart away awaiting the next opportunity.

For twenty minutes, we watched as the turtle devoured the sponge, oblivious to our presence. The turtle headed to the surface, but soon returned to the sponge buffet. We watched for another twenty minutes, and then had to head back to the boat. It was an up-close experience I cherish, and reaffirmed my conviction that early morning dives do not disappoint.

Lisa Kelly
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Parting Shots 4

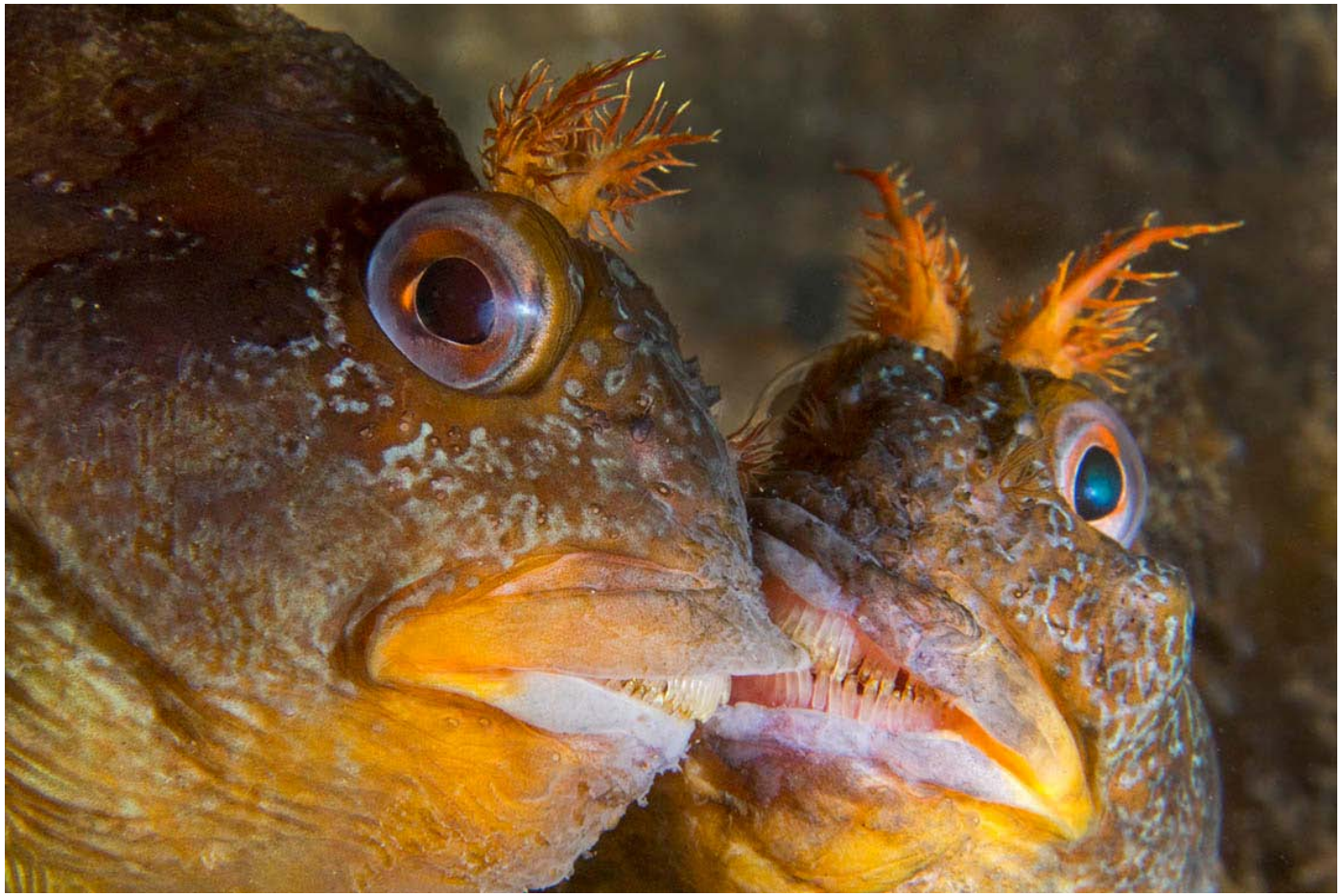
Tompot blennies look cute. I watch them every year scooting around under Swanage Pier, UK as they become increasingly bold throughout the diving season.

I laugh as they sometimes nibble my gloves while I'm lining up to take a photo of them. Make no mistake though, if these little critters were the size of labradors, Swanage Pier would not have nearly the diver footfall that it enjoys.

The crazy independently-rotating eyeballs, adorable unkempt eyebrows and precocious behaviour would not be nearly so cute. These two bruisers were taking no prisoners in their battle for territory, their razor sharp little teeth digging into each other's (misplaced?) scarred face.

Taken with the Olympus OMD-EM5, 12-50mm lens, Nauticam NA-EM5 housing, F18, 1/100, ISO 200.

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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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