

# Bali's Underwater *Life Still a Mystery*



Going which way?: Tuna schooling in Bali

**B**ali is Indonesia's most famous tourism destination, both on land and underwater. Balinese dive operators offer divers from all over the world a high variety of underwater scenery. Photographs of creatures dwelling on Bali's coral reefs have been published in diving magazines, such as "Asian Diver", and in the Periplus' guide "Diving Indonesia".

However, very little research has been undertaken with regards to Bali's marine life. To my knowledge, only in IUCN's (1988) three-volume "Coral Reefs of the World" can we read about surveys concerning the reefs of West Bali. In the recently published two volume "The Ecology of the Indonesian Seas" by Dr. Tom Tomascik et al. (Periplus, 1997), only six of nearly 1,400 pages have been dedicated to the coral and reefs of Bali. Only this year, thanks to Dr. Carden Wallace at the Museum of Tropical Queensland, Australia, do we now know that the rare staghorn coral *Acropora Suharsonoi* is not only found in neighbouring Lombok, but also at Pamuteran Beach, West Bali (see Dr. Wallace's story in IT&N, May 1997).



A dive operator promoting eco-tourism

thanks to cooperation with local fishermen. Instead of over-fishing the reefs, they make a living by assisting Mimpri Resort's nearby dive operations. In this way there are long-term benefits for everybody involved and the reefs are used sustainably.

After this, I joined "Bali Hai Cruises", which departs from Benoa Harbour for Nusa Lembongan, where it has established a reef appreciation area for its "Reef Watch Program". Underwater nature trails consist of signs that provide information to snorkellers and divers. With Bali Hai's speedboat, dive sites around Nusa Lembongan and Nusa Penida can be reached in

a short time. At one of these sites a red stony coral was found, which was completely unknown to me. According to Dr. Steve Cairns of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, who specializes in this kind of coral, the red coral belongs to a species that is either known exclusively to the Atlantic coast of the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa, or one that is new to science.

The above examples of Bali's coral fauna suggest that additional marine research may reveal more interesting facts about Bali's underwater life. Furthermore, field guides on Bali's coral reefs should help give relevant information to interested dive tourists who come to Bali. Readers who have suggestions for achieving these goals are welcome to contact the author.

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## Why is there is so little documentation about Bali's reefs?

Several scientific expeditions have been organized to eastern Indonesia and its rich marine life, but Bali, which is situated at the border of eastern Indonesia, seems to be overlooked.

There are no research stations and no universities that specialize in Balinese seas. If marine biologists want to learn more about Bali they have to find help from local dive guides. In turn, dive operators also need to know more about the underwater life at their most popular dive

sites in order to pass this information on to their guests. Maritime tourism and marine biology should operate in symbiosis, but the problem is how do they find each other, as not all dive operators may be interested in promoting ecotourism. Those who are mainly after exploitation of the reefs are probably not going to be helpful.

I would like to give two examples of very different, yet also very professional, Balinese dive operations that support reef protection by promoting awareness. Thanks to an invitation by underwater photographer Michael Aw, who has produced several books on coral reefs, I got an opportunity to stay at "Mimpri Resort" in order to have a look at the coral at Tulamben, Bali. Next to a famous shipwreck, a yet undescribed species of mushroom coral was found that earlier had only been encountered off Padang, West Sumatra and Jakarta. Fish species at Tulamben are abundant and very diverse



Rare Bali red coral possibly known only to South Africa