

Divers help Egyptians to seize shark-boats

THE EGYPTIAN AUTHORITIES

seized four fishing boats and their crews in mid-June, after the vessels were caught illegally fishing for sharks.

The shark-finning boats had voyaged from the Yemen. They were impounded and about 60 crew were placed in custody.

The seizures were the result of a strong collaborative effort on the part of a number of diving liveboard operators.

First, on 13 June, the *Desmondo* and *Golden Dolphin 3* managed to corner two of the fishing boats off Zabargad Island until the police were able to arrive and make arrests.

The next day *Red Sea Defender*, the research vessel of the Hurgada Environmental Protection and Conservation Association (HEPCA),

spotted the other two fishing boats 35 miles out from *Hamata*.

The authorities were alerted, and patrol police were able to track and apprehend them.

The possibility of such arrests being made had been building for a while. In April, Egypt's Chamber of Diving & Watersports launched an initiative called "Capture the Catcher" (*News*, June).

All tourism operators and other sea-users were asked to be especially vigilant and to co-operate with the authorities over any suspected illegal fishing. Reports could be made via a newly created email link.

Even before *Desmondo*, *Golden Dolphin 3* and *Red Sea Defender* made moves leading to arrests, a process was already under way involving "the efforts of many", said Amr Ali,

MD of HEPCA.

A "large number of boats" had first spotted, reported and tracked the Yemeni craft. Those involved included the vessels *Seven Seas*, *Obsession*, *Sea Serpent* and *Longimanus*.

On those occasions the chasers may have been given the slip, but they were able to seize lines that had been laid and to release "over a dozen hooked sharks".

On other occasions, said Ali, the safari boats *Eldabaran* and *Royal Evolution* had managed to pull from the sea "over 11km of hooked lines

that potentially would have killed dozens of sharks".

It was found that the fishermen had been using "dolphin and juvenile shark meat" as bait.

Reports to Capture the Catcher, complete with any photographic or video evidence and specifying the date, time and, if possible, name of boat and its exact location, can be made to fishing@cdws.travel. ■



Cuttlefish under the microscope

EU-FUNDED RESEARCH into the homes and habits of cuttlefish in British waters is being carried out by Devon-based organisations – and divers can help with the work.

Over the next three years, Plymouth's Marine Biological Association (MBA) and the University of Plymouth's Marine Institute are conducting the research along English Channel coasts.

The work is being carried out as part of the EU Interreg 4-funded CRESH (Cephalopod Recruitment from English Channel Spawning Habitats) project.

"There are still many questions to be answered regarding this species, including where the key spawning grounds exist and what is the current status of stocks," researcher Isobel Bloor told *DIVER*.

"We're keen to get divers, fishermen and as many other interested parties involved as possible, and hopefully to increase general interest in this species, while also disseminating our results to as wide an audience as possible."

The research team is available for talks at diving clubs on the ecology and biology of cuttlefish. It also wants to discuss "possible issues and solutions" with fishermen, to ensure that catches remain at sustainable levels.

The general consensus among divers with whom Bloor has been in contact is that UK cuttlefish populations are in an "apparent decline", she said. A stock assessment and ongoing monitoring would help to clarify the

situation. In terms of fisheries, the creature has "not yet reached the plates of the mainstream British public". However it is targeted both by offshore trawlers and by inshore potters for the more developed Continental market.

This summer, the researchers are carrying out diving surveys of egg-density patterns in different habitats along the South Coast, such as seagrass, seaweed and rocky reefs.

They are also conducting a micro-project centred on Torbay, trialling artificially laid substrates to attract egg-laying by cuttlefish.

A key problem is that the female, thought to breed just once in her lifetime, is often attracted to the cuttlefish pot as an egg-laying substrate. Many of the eggs are then lost during harvesting or pot-cleaning.

THE ARTIFICIAL SUBSTRATES WORK is being carried out by the MBA, University of Plymouth, Devon Sea Fisheries Committee, Sea Torbay and local skipper Rick Parker with his boat *Jennifer Ann*.

Two artificial substrates have been laid in nearby Babbacombe Bay. One extends from 50°28.860N, 003°30.394W to 50°28.845N, 003°30.337W. The other runs from 50°28.810N, 003°30.241W to 50°28.795N, 003°30.187W.

Divers are invited to inspect and help monitor the sites.

The reporting of cuttlefish sightings or, if you have the knowledge to recognise them, egg



A courting pair of common cuttlefish.



Cuttlefish eggs.

clusters from anywhere along the South Coast would also be welcome. Cuttlefish are likely to be spotted in British waters between May and September.

Contact Isobel Bloor at CRESH@mba.ac.uk, 01752 255026 or text 07806 938789.

CRESH – www.unicaen.fr/ufr/ibfa/cresh
Cuttlefish biology – www.marlin.co.uk ■

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