

strangers in a multi-coloured world

Schools of silvery jacks and all kinds of gorgeously hued fish add another dimension to reef diving.



PHOTO JASON ISLEY



PHOTO ROGER MUNNIS

opposite:
False clown anemonefish (*Amphiprion ocellaris*), Sipadan, Sabah, Malaysia.

left, from top:
Black saddled toby (*Canthigaster valentini*) against coral, Lembah Strait, Indonesia; school of longfin batfish (*Platax teira*), Sipadan, Sabah, Malaysia.

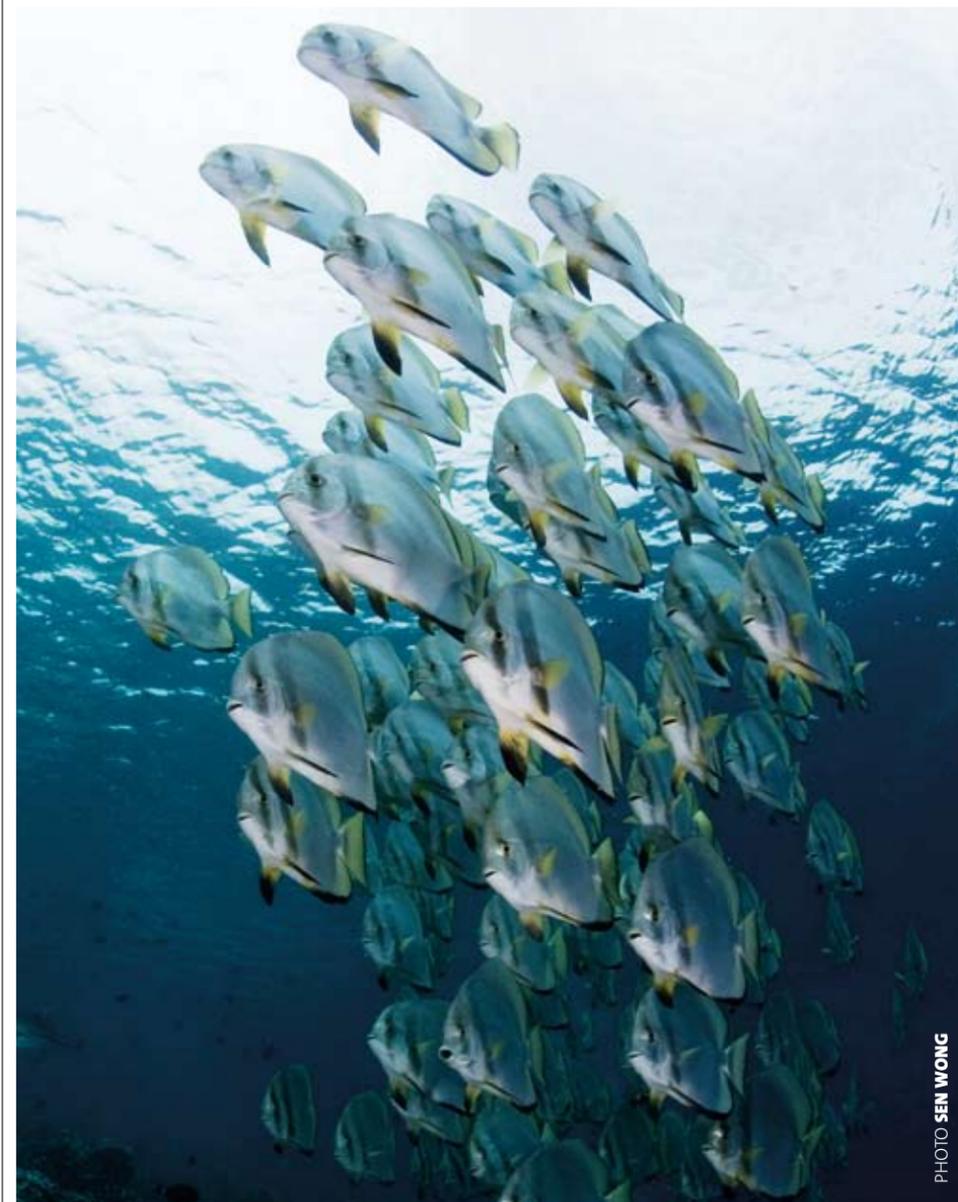


PHOTO SEN WONG

What we commonly call “fish” are actually mostly bony fish, belonging to the class *Osteichthyes*. You know them by their distinct upper and lower jaws, overlapping scales covering their bodies, bony rays supporting the fins and their bony skeletons. It is common for divers on tropical reefs to be immediately greeted by hundreds of different species of bony fish of many different colours and shapes.

The Indo-Pacific is one of the most frequented underwater areas in the world and is home to incredibly diverse fish life that has become accustomed to divers blowing their noisy bubbles around them. One of our best sites for fish filming and photography has always been Sipadan. Nowhere else do you find friendlier fish life — from blennies and gobies hiding among the reef to hawkfish, angelfish, butterfly fish, morays, hunting trevally and the occasional giant grouper passing over the reef.

With that said, there are many other locations with huge fish numbers and diversity, such as the Maldives, Bunaken in Indonesia, the Coral Sea in Australia, and Papua New Guinea — particularly the new find, Raja Ampat.

On a recent survey at Raja Ampat, over 970 species of fish were recorded — including a record-breaking 283 species discovered on a single dive at Cape Kri! ▶

right:
Portrait of reef lizardfish (*Synodus variegatus*), Mabul Island, Sabah, Malaysia.



bottom, left to right: :
Longfin batfish (*Platax teira*) being cleaned by a bluestreak cleaner wrasse (*Labroides dimidiatus*), Kapalai, Sabah, Malaysia; juvenile emperor angelfish (*Pomacanthus imperator*), Lembah Strait, Indonesia; portrait of a bicolor blenny (*Ecsenius bicolor*), Sipadan, Sabah, Malaysia.

opposite:
Diagonal-banded sweetlips (*Plectorhinchus lineatus*) being cleaned by a pair of bluestreak cleaner wrasse, Sangalaki Island, Indonesia.



PHOTOS JASON ISLEY



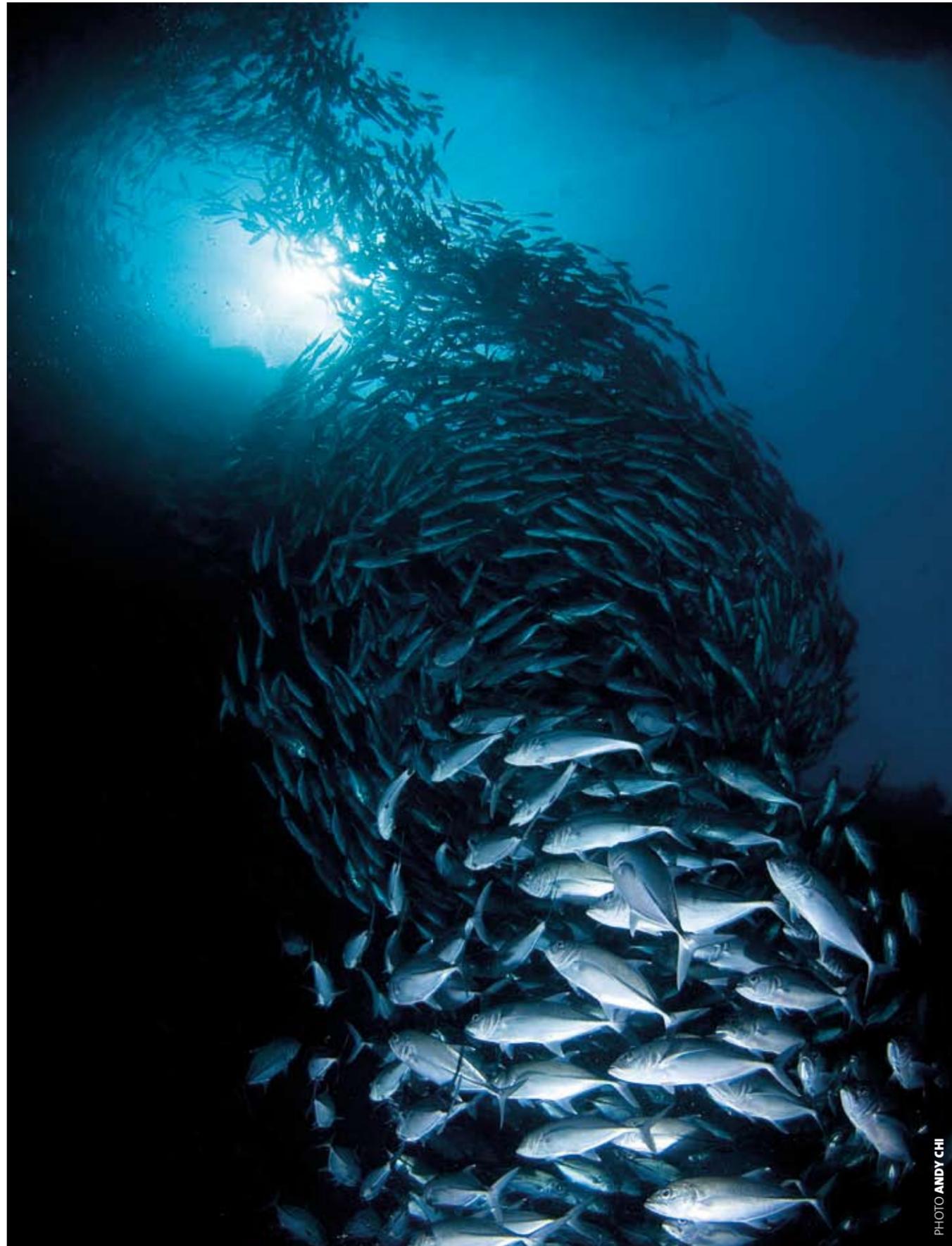


PHOTO ANDY CHI

Tornado of bigeye trevally (*Caranx sexfasciatus*), Sipadan, Sabah, Malaysia.



PHOTO JASON ISLEY

Schooling fish like these chevron barracuda (*Sphyræna qenie*) can form all sorts of elaborate shapes, Sipadan, Sabah, Malaysia.

SCHOOL'S IN!

One of the most enjoyable experiences you'll ever have underwater is being completely engulfed in a school of fish. Locations such as Palau, Sipadan and Layang Layang in Malaysia; Maratua in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea have large numbers of barracuda and jacks that will usually let you swim among them. Having the light from the sun disappear behind hundreds of barracuda, each a metre long with a mouth packed with razor-sharp teeth, is an awesome experience.

This schooling behaviour is one of the best ways for fish to survive an attack by a predator. Their reflective scales and bright colours and patterns further help each individual fish to merge into the school and confuse predators. Some schools are loosely organised and temporary, with different species congregating in current-swept areas to feed; others are more permanent and consist of a single species.

Other schooling fish include fusiliers, batfish and bumphead parrotfish. In fact, divers visiting Sipadan will often be asked to endure early morning starts (5am!) to have the opportunity to encounter the resident bumphead parrotfish resting in the shallows. In the Maldives and the Coral Sea, large numbers of sweetlips can be seen, providing an extremely colourful experience. ▶

AD



PHOTOS ROGER MUNNINS

Ocean sunfish (*Mola mola*) in Bali, Indonesia.

Seeing this daily routine of *Mola mola* lining up along the reef edge, waiting for their turn to be cleaned by the bannerfish, is certainly high on the list of must-dos for many divers.



Head-on with an ocean sunfish.

SUNNY SIDE UP

Of all the bony fish in the sea, the largest and most unusual-looking is, by far, the *Mola mola*, otherwise known as the sunfish. Divers travel from all over the world to Bali, Indonesia, not only for great muck diving, but also for a glimpse of this crazy-looking "all head" fish.

These huge animals visit cleaning stations in deep water, not far from Bali's beaches, to be picked clean by schools of bannerfish. The *Mola mola* can, at times, be seen lining up along the reef edge, waiting for their turn to be cleaned by the bannerfish. Seeing this daily routine is certainly high on the list of must-dos for many divers. **AD**