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L'ARCIPELAGO NASCOSTO



DIVING ROUTES IN THE
TUSCAN ARCHIPELAGO NATIONAL PARK



Parco Nazionale Arcipelago Toscano
Localité Enfola, 16 - 57037 Portoferraio (LI)
Tel. 0565/919411 - www.islepark.it - parco@islepark.it
pnarcipelago@postacert.toscana.it



Author

Stefano Acunto

with the contribution of

Luigi Piazza

Moreno Soldi (Isla Negra, Charter e Diving)

Capraia Diving Service

Laura Marianna Leone

Maria Francesca Cinti

Patrizia Stipcich

Ivan Guala

Editorial coordination

Maurizio Burlando, Francesca Giannini, Francesco De Pietro

Photos by

Stefano Acunto, Francesca Giannini, Fabio Iardino,

Alessandro Tommasi, Leonardo Ricci

On the back cover: specimen of the sea-slug *Antiopella cristata* (top) and moray eel *Muraena helena* (bottom).

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PREFACE

The protection of nature in the Tuscan Archipelago began in the 1970s with the establishment of the State Natural Reserve of the island of Montecristo, a sanctuary for terrestrial and marine flora and fauna, of about 10 km², located in the middle of the Tyrrhenian Sea. More than 50 years have now passed since this first step towards the conservation of the seven Tuscan islands, unique for their geological history and for the animal and plant populations found there and today much of their territory is included in the Tuscan Archipelago National Park, established in 1996 and which extends over almost 800 km², of which over 75% consists of marine areas including the waters surrounding the island of Pianosa: this is the largest protected area in the Italian sea. Cystoseira, posidonia meadows and coralligenous biocoenosis are the animal and plant communities typical of the first metres of the seabed, habitats that the diver can visit and get to know. Deeper, where the light no longer penetrates, the seabed is populated by particular animal communities made up of white corals, hydrozoans and crinoids.

Man is not excluded from this context but is an integral part of it with his own culture, history and tradition. Thus, the **MAB Unesco Biosphere Reserve «Isole di Toscana»** that extends over the entire archipelago and that was established in 2003, proposes and strengthens the combination of conservation of the natural heritage and development of local communities. The MAB Reserve is a global recognition that joins the recent appointment of the National Park among the protected areas included in the Green List of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the institution, starting from the end of the 90s, of 18 Rete Natura 2000 sites. fin des années 1990, de 18 sites du réseau Natura 2000.

Giampiero Sammuri
President Tuscan Archipelago National Park

INTRODUCTION

The submerged landscape can be divided according to the morphology of the substrate. The connection between the land surface and the deep abyssal plains takes place, in fact, through a gently sloping area made up of the continental shelf which is followed by the continental slope. The continental shelf extends from the coast towards the open sea and is characterized by the presence of light. Here the plants grow both on the bottom (*Phytobenthos*) and in the water column (*Phytoplankton*) and, producing organic substance and oxygen through the photosynthetic process (primary production), they start the food chain that allows the development of most organisms that populate the oceans. Along the contour of the bottom, from the surface towards the greater depths, some sectors are identified, called zones, characterized by associations of specific organisms. Two of these, the adlittoral zone and the supralittoral zone, concern the land surface influenced by the presence of the sea. The actual marine environment is divided into: mesolittoral zone, between high and low tide; infralittoral zone, between the low tide limit and the maximum depth in which the survival of marine phanerogams such as *Posidonia oceanica* is possible; circalittoral zone, mostly dominated by large expanses of unstable bottom made up of sand and mud that reach the limit of the continental shelf, but where coralligenous formations can develop under specific conditions.

MAIN COASTAL HABITATS

The *Posidonia oceanica* meadows

Posidonia oceanica is a superior plant wholly comparable to the terrestrial ones that lives exclusively in the Mediterranean Sea. What distinguishes it from algae is the presence of differentiated organs: roots, modified stems called rhizomes and leaves, each one assigned a specific function.

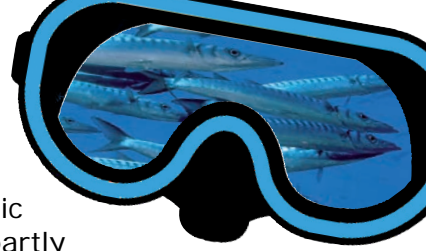
Horizontal growth allows the rhizomes to colonize the empty space around them and this is how the large green expanses of *Posidonia oceanica* called meadows are formed. The plant, as well as through lengthening the rhizomes, also reproduces sexually, that is, it produces flowers from which the fruits called "sea olives" grow, each



A *Posidonia oceanica* meadow

one containing a seed from which a new plant will originate. The meadows are considered the place with the highest biomass and productivity in the Mediterranean, they cover more than 2% of the submerged surface of our sea (about 20,000 square miles) occupying the continental shelf from a few tens of centimetres up to 30-40 metres deep. Even if the sand meadows are more frequent and extensive, *P. oceanica* can grow on sediments of different granulometry and also on rock. Thanks to the photosynthetic ac-

tivity, the plant is able to capture CO₂ and release up to 20 litres of oxygen per day into the environment for every square metre of meadow. The large quantity of organic substance produced is partly stored and partly constitutes a source of food for many organisms. The meadows are therefore frequented by a large number of marine species that also use it as a reproduction area and refuge: among these, various fish, molluscs and crustaceans. The *P. oceanica* meadows are also important because they are able to reduce the hydrodynamism and resuspension of sediments, thus protecting the coastline from erosion and maintaining high water transparency.



The shallow reefs

A very diversified number of biocenoses settle on the hard bottoms, certainly higher than what can be observed on mobile bottoms. The steep or eroded course of the reef will benefit sciaphilous species (who love shaded areas) or photophilic species (who love the most illuminated areas) or those more or less resistant to hydrodynamism. The shallow reefs of the Tuscan islands are often covered with real marine forests in miniature the «cistoseireti». The term, which we derive from the scientific name (*Cystoseira*) assigned until recently to these brown algae, groups together a considerable number of different but similar species.

These algae can reach a height of 50-60 centimetres and when



A *Cystoseira* "forest" covers the surface cliffs most exposed to light

they abound to form thick cistoseireti, as in a mountain forest, they make the environment more complex, creating the ideal conditions for the survival of a thriving community consisting of organisms of the most varied species. The dense populations of *Cystoseira* are also important breeding grounds; in fact, both among fish and invertebrates, there are many species that lay their eggs and that lead the first stages of their life here. The different species of *Cystoseira* in the more sheltered bays give way to populations dominated by other photophilic algae such as the brown *Dictyota dichotoma*, *Padina pavonica* and *Halopteris scoparia*, but also the green algae, among which the *Acetabularia acetabulum* with its characteristic Chinese umbrella shape stands out. The low rocky seabeds can be colonized by a multitude of invertebrates: polychaetes, crustaceans, echinoderms, porifera, bryozoans and molluscs. Among the latter are the large cephalopods, such as the octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*) and the cuttlefish (*Sepia officinalis*), which fascinate for their ability to camouflage themselves. Particularly rich and interesting is the fish fauna. Unfortunately in the Mediterranean overfishing has impoverished the local biodiversity, but thanks to the protection offered by the presence of the Park in the diving sites described here it is still possible to find oneself surrounded by clouds of white bream (*Diplodus sargus*, *D. vulgaris*, *D. puntazzo*) or dreamfish (*Sarpa salpa*) that graze on the rocks, and meet, even at shallow depths, moray eels (*Muraena helena*), different types of scorpionfish (*Scorpaena*



An example
of coralligenous formation

porcus, *S. scrofa*, *S. notata*), snapper (*Dentex dentex*) and shy brown meagre (*Sciaena umbra*) that look out from the cracks in the rocks. Groupers (*Epinephelus marginatus*) have also returned to populate the depths of the Tuscan Archipelago abundantly following the protection measures adopted.

The coralligenous

Among the most important phenomena in the circalitoral zone is bioconstruction, that is the deposition of calcareous substance by living organisms that allows an increase over time of a hard substrate known as coralligenous. The coralligenous formations have very specific needs: reduced light, low and relatively constant temperature, clear waters with little resuspension of the sediment and hydrodynamics present, but not excessive. There are essentially two types of them: rims and banks. The rims develop in the outer part of sea caves and along the vertical walls (cliffs) at a depth between 20 and 40 m, but in the Western Mediterranean they can also develop up to -130 m. The thickness, which varies from 20-25 cm to more than 2 m, usually increases with depth. This type of coralligenous, which is also defined as a «wall» or «cliff», is characterized by a basal layer dominated mainly by red calcareous algae, sponges and bryozoans. On these an elevated layer can develop dominated by gorgonians (such as *Eunicella cavolinii* and *Paramuricea clavata*) and occasionally by red coral (*Corallium rubrum*). The banks, also known as coralligenous "shelf", are flattened or



Aplysina cavernicola
and *Corallium rubrum*



pinnacle-shaped structures that arise from more or less horizontal bottoms at depths between 30 and 150 m. Coralligenous is considered the second most important «hot spot» of Mediterranean biodiversity, after the *Posidonia oceanica* meadows. The calcareous red algae are, as already mentioned, the main builders; in particular, *Mesophyllum alternans* is the most important species in the archipelago formations and especially in shallow waters. With increasing depth, the main builders become *Lithophyllum frondosum*, *L. stictaeforme* and *Neogoniolithon mamillo-*

sum. The structures built by coralline algae are then strengthened by those organisms that are defined secondary bioconstructors, such as other red algae (the *Peyssonneliaceae*) and various species of polychaetes, scleractinians (e.g. *Leptopsammia pruvoti*) and bryozoans (e.g. *Pentapora fascialis*; *Myriapora truncata*). The growth of coral formations is partly counterbalanced by mechanical demolition or by the action of demolition organisms such as sponges (e.g. the *Cliona* genus) and molluscs (e.g. the «sea date», *Lithophaga lithophaga*) which are capable of piercing, crumbling or dissolving calcium carbonate.

Map of diving spots

CAPRAIA ISLAND

Secca dell'Aereo



Punta della Fica
(Bellavista)



Punta della Civitata



Lo Scoglione



Secca
del Turco



2000 m

Sp6
Sp7
Sp3



PIANOSA ISLAND

Sp2



Sp4



Sp5



2000 m

Punta Secca



Secca di Punta Secca



Punta Scaletta



Le Cerniette



Gli Archetti



Punta di Cala
Ischiaiola



Cala
del Lino



Punta
San Francesco



GIANNUTRI ISLAND

1000 m

CAPRAIA



SECCA DELL'AEREO

Type of dive: shoal

Minimum certification required:
experienced

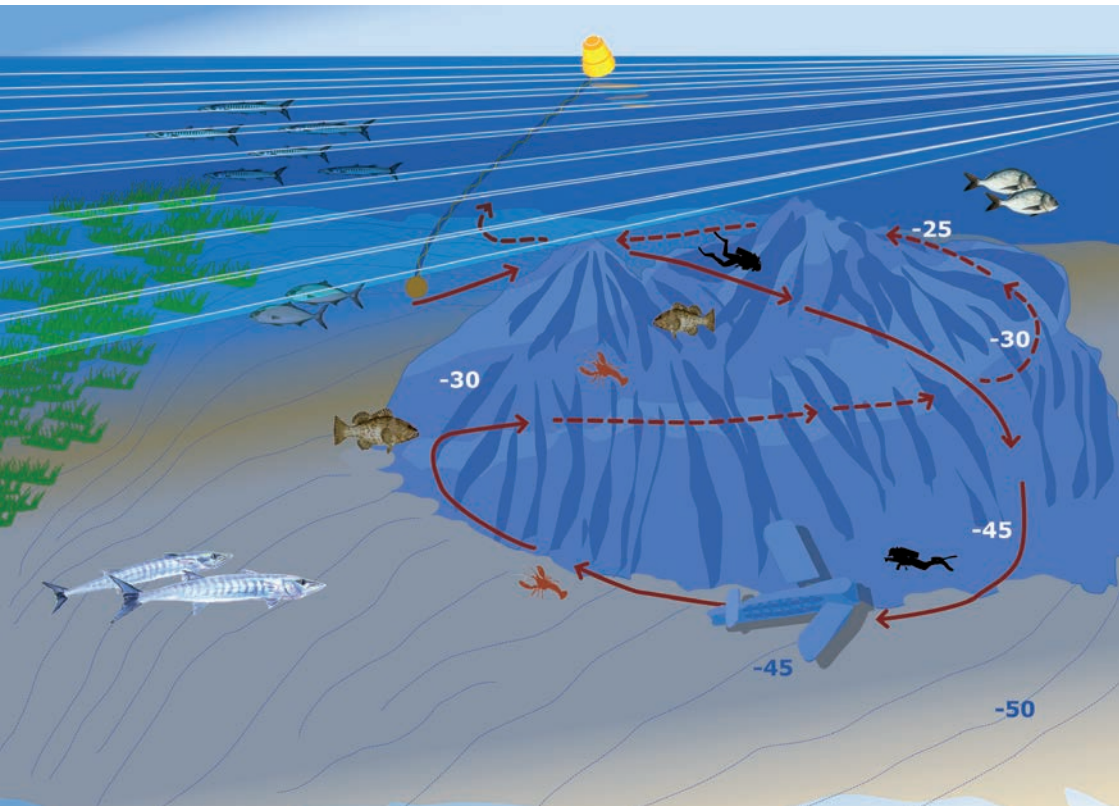
Depth: min 25 m, max 50 m

DESCRIPTION

We are in front of the Capraia lighthouse, once moored we will descend on a flat bottom about 25 metres deep, we will immediately head towards two large rock formations that show us the point from where the wall that sinks to a depth of over 50 metres starts. We will skim the wall on the side facing south where we will be able to see, resting on the bottom and leaning against the wall, the **wreck** of what remains of an **Arado Ar 196 A-3 seaplane** from the Second World War. The current position of the wreck is not that of the sinking but is due to the action of a net that hooked it and dragged it to where we now find it. The central section with the two cockpits is clearly visible while part of the engine is turned towards the bottom crumpled into the net together with the wings. We will observe the wreck by limiting the depth, to a maximum of about 40 metres. In fact, the dive is carried out, not so much for the skeleton of this wreck, as for the beautiful wall adorned with typical **coralligenous** organisms such as the **encrusting red algae** *Lithophilum stictaeforme*, *Mesophyllum alternans*, various species of *Peyssonnelia*, the **green algae** *Flabellia petiolata* and *Halimeda*



tuna, the sponges (*Aplysina cavernicola*, *Axinella* spp.) and the **bryozoans** (*Reteporella* spp., *Myriapora truncata*, *Pentapora fascialis*). The wall therefore appears very abundant in benthic organisms, but it also offers us the opportunity to meet pelagic fish, **groupers** and **crustaceans**. The dive is recommended for experienced divers due to the possibility of encountering strong currents on the top of the shoal and the need to go down and back up into the water.





PUNTA DELLA FICA

Type of dive: wall

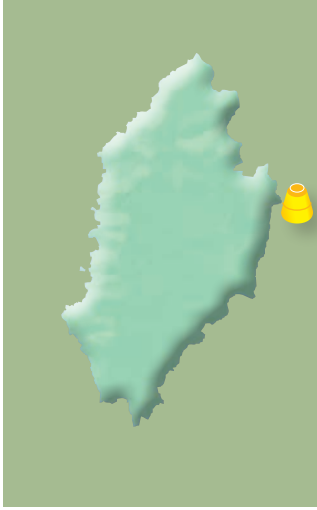
Minimum certification required: basic

Depth: min 5 m, max 40 m

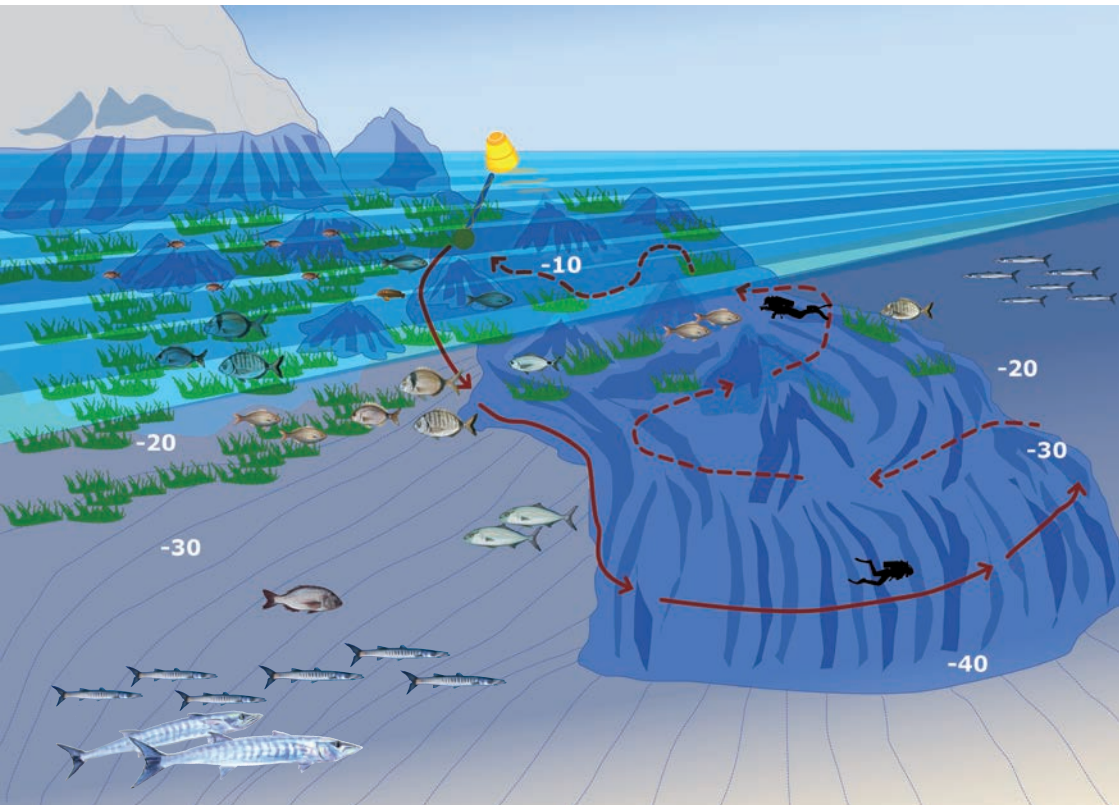
DESCRIPTION

The dive site is located in the immediate vicinity of the port and is easily located due to the presence of a semi-outcropping rock not far from the point.

We will dive in a few metres of water on a bottom characterized by the presence of **Posidonia oceanica** mixed with rocky outcrops. It is the ideal environment where you can see a very large number of marine organisms that choose to live there, reproduce or hide from predators. A multitude of **damsel fish** (*Chromis chromis*), **wrasse** (*Symphodus spp.*), **combtooth blenny** (*Blenniidae*), **white seabream** (*Diplodus spp.*), **rainbow wrasse** (*Coris julis* and *Thalassoma pavo*), **saddled seabream** (*Oblada melanura*) and **dreamfish** (*Sarpa salpa*) surround us. At a depth of about 15 metres, the walls of the rocks sheltered from direct sunlight are covered with colourful sponges and the intense yellow of the **yellow cluster anemone** (*Parazoanthus axinellae*). As we move away from the coast, the bottom becomes increasingly steep until we reach the rocky wall that plunges into the blue until it reaches a depth of about 40 m. The reef is a succession of rocks and canyons



that, illuminated by torches, reveal an infinite range of shapes and colours typical of the **coralligenous**. **Porifera**, **coelenterates**, **crustaceans** and **molluscs** occupy every smallest space, but don't forget to always take a look out in the blue where it is not uncommon to see the passage of predators such as **snappers** (*Dentex dentex*), **amberjacks** (*Seriola dumerili*) and **barracuda** (*Sphyraena viridensis*). The dive is suitable for all levels of experience, and is also suitable for night diving.





PUNTA DELLA CIVITATA

Type of dive: wall

Minimum certification required: basic

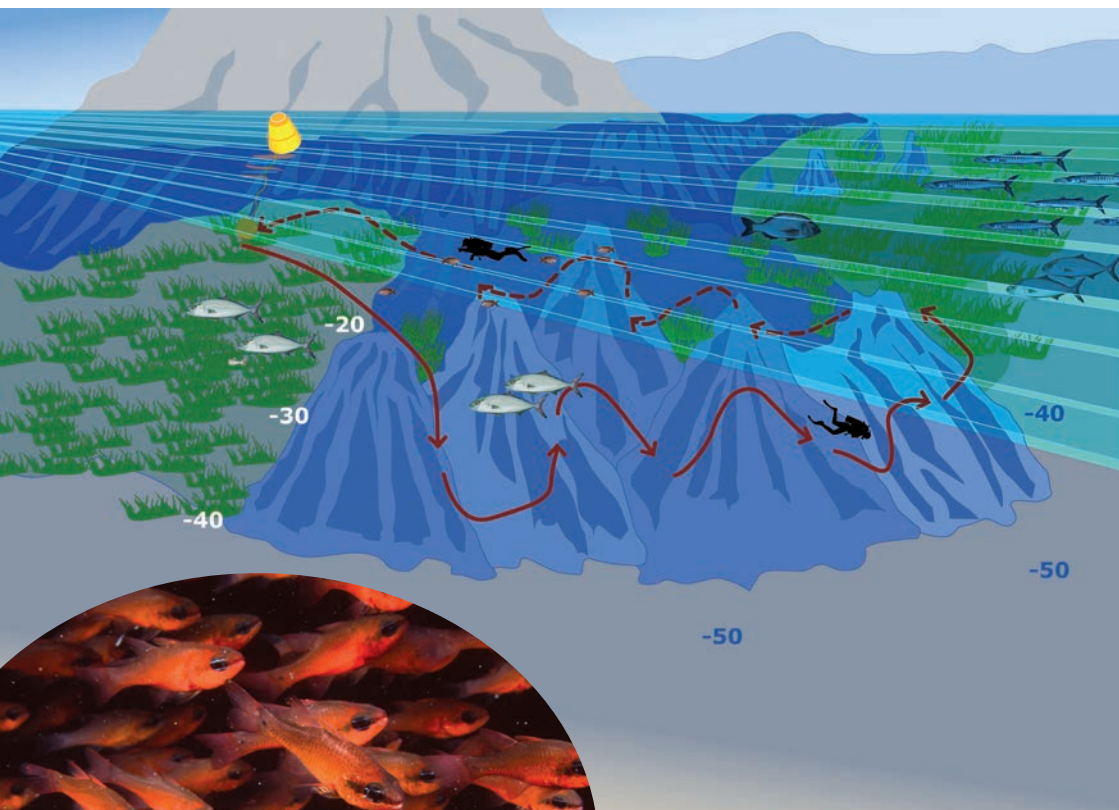
Depth: min 5 m, max 50 m

DESCRIPTION

Punta della Civitata offers the possibility of making multiple types of dive, the site thus becoming suitable for every type of diver, from the most experienced to the one with a new certificate. In any case we will go and see the wonderful rocky conformations that rise from the sandy bottom that is at a considerable depth, over 50 metres, giving rise to walls, pinnacles and canyons. The presence of pelagic fish is almost guaranteed. Mooring south of the point, we descend onto a bottom dominated by the presence of *Posidonia oceanica* and then swim with flippers towards the open sea and pass over a slightly inclined rock bottom. Having reached a depth of 20 metres, the reef falls sharply with a wall that ends at about -45 metres. On this cliff there is a gully that rises from the bottom to the top, where an abundant **coralligenous** develops. In fact, the rocks appear covered by a heterogeneous sample of **encrusting red algae** that act as a substrate for other algae (especially *Flabellia petiolata* and *Halimeda tuna*) and animals, among which the bright colours of the **sponges** (e.g. *Axinella spp.*) and the delicate textures of beautiful bryo-



zoans such as **sea lace** (*Reteporella spp.*). In the darkness of a ravine, numerous **king of the mullets** (*Apogon imberbis*) stop motionless and it is not rare to see some **forkbeards** (*Phycis phycis*); deeper down there are the burrows of some **conger eels** (*Conger conger*). Another dive can be done near the rock a short distance from the point, with depths that drop in great leaps up to 40 metres in an alternation of boulders and cavities completely covered by **yellow cluster anemone**.



Cardinalfish
(*Apogon imberbis*)



LO SCOGLIONE

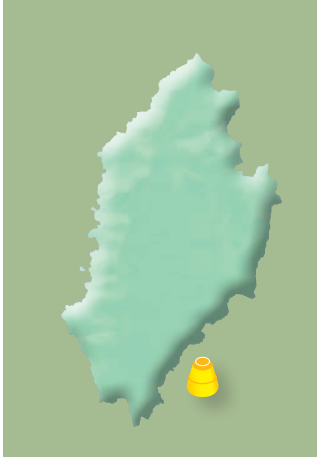
Type of dive: wall

Minimum certification required: basic

Depth: min 12 m, max 50 m

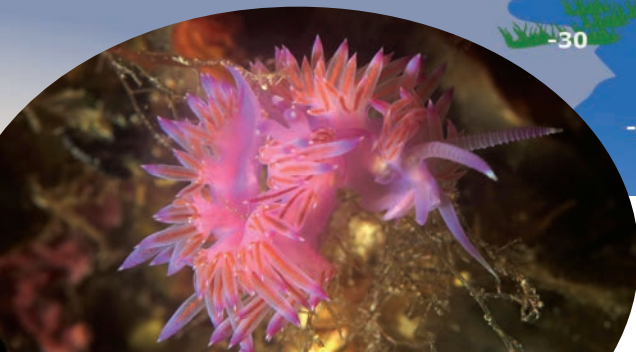
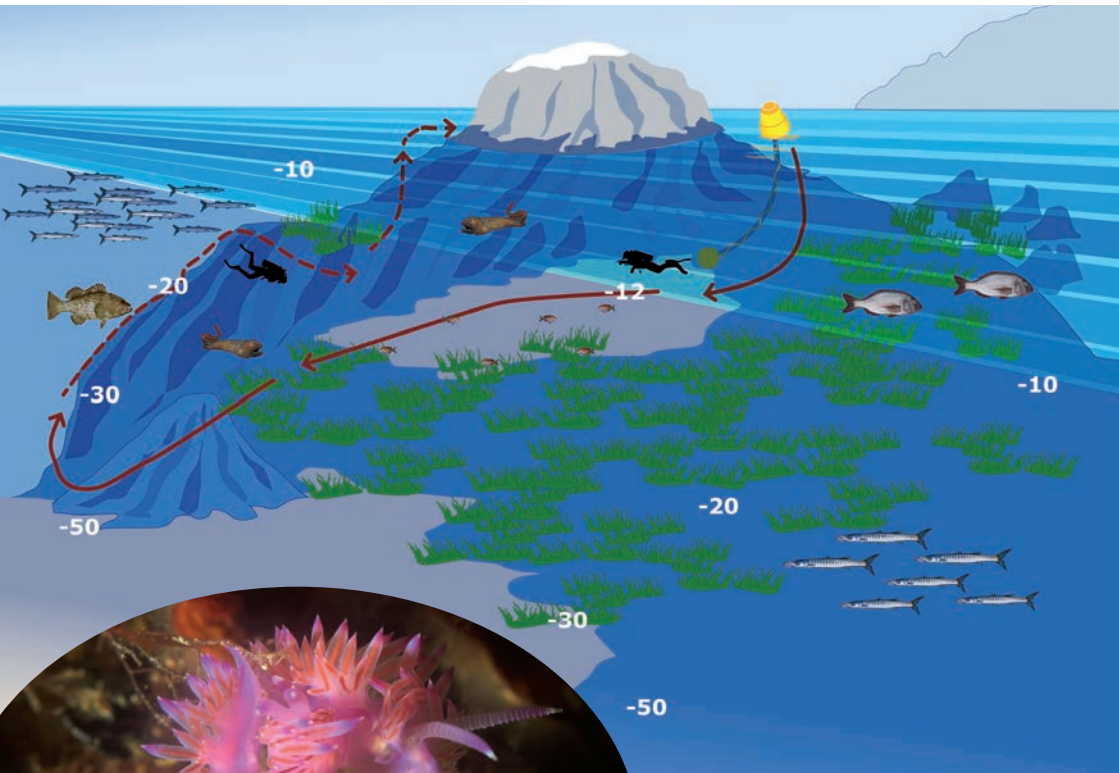
DESCRIPTION

Along the eastern side of the island, past Punta della Civitata, you reach a gulf dominated by a large isolated rock where one of Capraia's most popular dives takes place. The rock offers a small shelter in any sea condition, giving the possibility to enter the water in complete peace of mind. It descends to -12 metres onto a sandy clearing surrounded by a dense *Posidonia oceanica* meadow. Keeping the rock on the right you reach several rocky ridges, separated by deep cracks. The maximum depth that can be reached at the base of the wall is about 50 metres, but the numerous steps that precede it give the opportunity to stop at different depths, thus making the dive suitable for any level of experience. The walls encrusted with calcareous algae give rise to a **coralligenous** rich in **sponges**, **sunset cup coral** (*Leptopsammia pruvoti*) and **bryozoans**. The most curious divers will not miss the presence of numerous **nudibranchia** molluscs that show off their colourful liveries while feeding on sponges and hydroids. On the ridges it is common to encounter large **snappers** hunting, while in the crevices you can see specimens of



forkbeards, scorpion fish, conger eels and moray eels. Going up, it is best to complete the circumnavigation of the rock along the south-facing side where, among the rocks interspersed with tufts of posidonia, several **groupers** will peep out, intrigued by the passage of divers. Large groups of **barracudas**, hunting for small fish stationed in mid-water, are always present. The algal covering with thick expanses of **brown algae** belonging to the

Cystoseiragenus is very rich and contributes to characterizing the superficial landscape of the cliff, making it the ideal habitat for various animal and plant species.



Sea slug
(*Flabellina affinis*)



SECCA DEL TURCO

Type of dive: shoal

Minimum certification required:
experienced

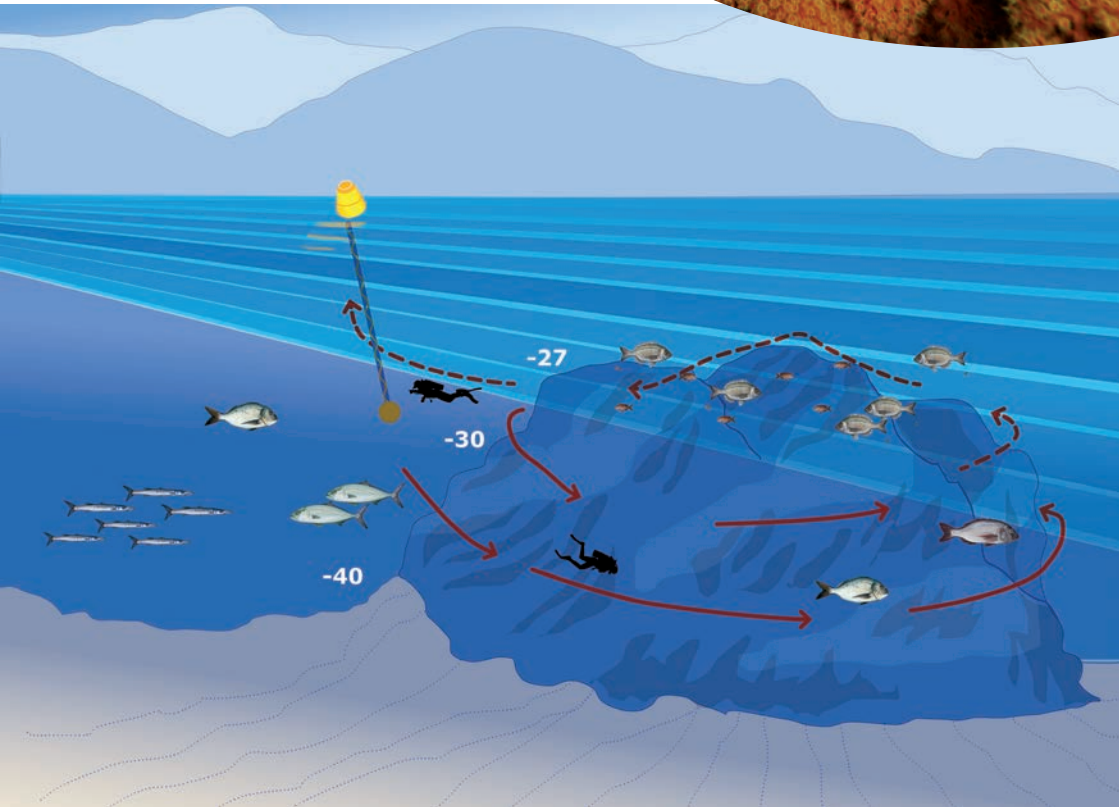
Depth: min 27 m, max 50 m

DESCRIPTION

Still along the eastern side of Capraia and just before reaching **Cala Rossa**, a panettone-shaped rock rises up to about 27 m from a depth of over 50 m. It can be accessed either by starting from the Punta del Turco wall, or by anchoring directly near the shoal. This is one of the island's most interesting dives, a real natural oasis, full of life: **sponges**, some enormous (e.g. *Spongia spp.* and *Axinella spp.*), **bryozoans**, **Mediterranean fanworms** (*Sabella spallanzanii*) and **sea peaches** (*Halocynthia papillosa* and *Clavelina lepadiformis*) cover the walls. As the coralligenous bursts with incredible colours that sparkle in the torchlight, pelagic predators, such as **large snapper**, **amberjack**, **tuna** and **barracuda**, whiz through the sea. **Bream** and **groupers** of considerable size are resident and, not to be missed in April, the show offered by the **black seabream** (*Spondyliosoma cantharus*) that meet in great numbers on top of the shoal to mate. Due to the characteristics of the site and the frequent presence of strong currents, this dive is only recommended for more experienced divers.



A rock face covered in yellow cluster anemone (*Parazoanthus axinellae*)





PUNTA SAN FRANCESCO

Type of dive: wall

Minimum certification required:
experienced

Depth: min 12 m, max 90 m

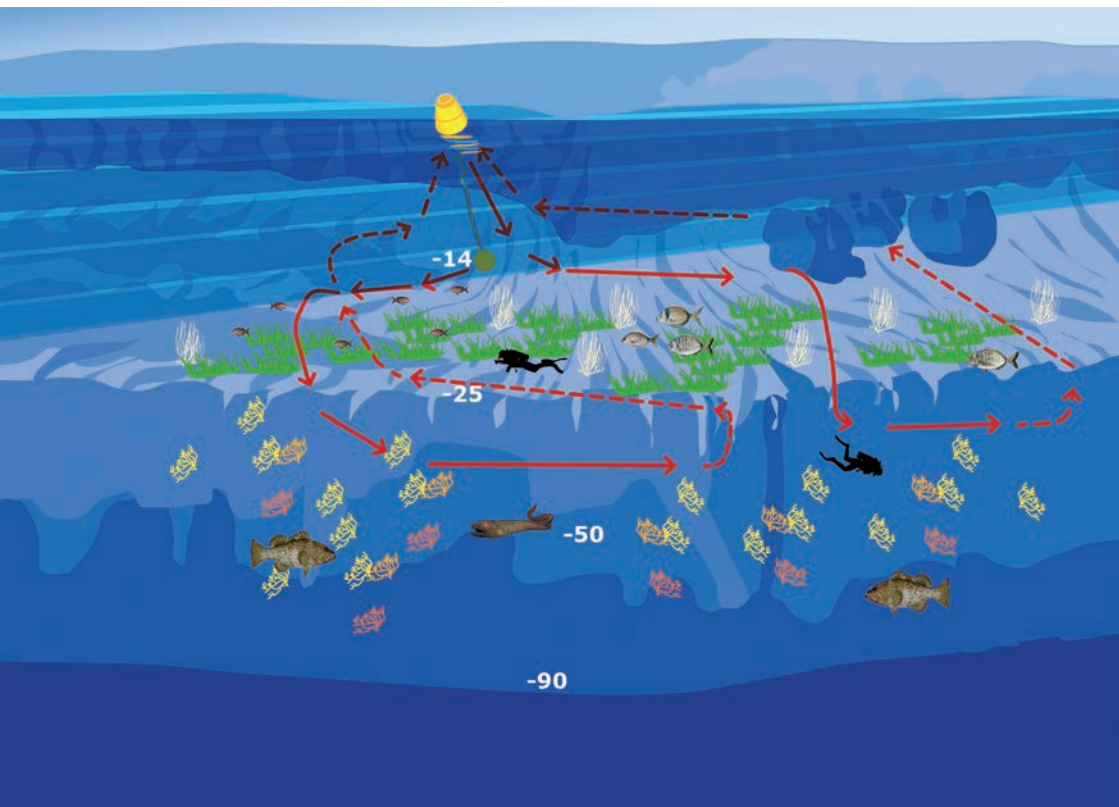
DESCRIPTION

The dive takes place not far from the fully protected area of the **protected sea area of Giannutri** and, for this reason, guarantees the possibility of spectacular encounters at all depths. The site is marked by two mooring buoys anchored at a depth of about 12/14 m on a bottom characterized by rocky outcrops alternating with patches of *Posidonia oceanica*. Proceeding in the East-South East direction you reach the real goal of this dive, which is an imposing wall rich in typical coralligenous organisms. From 25/30 metres, the wall drops steeply down to -50 metres, and then continues to over -90 metres, making it perfect for technical diving as well. The **encrusting red algae** *Lithophyllum stictaeforme*, *Mesophyllum alternans*, and the **green algae** *Flabellia petiolata* and *Halimeda tuna* abound and characterize the submerged landscape, but also the animal component is particularly rich especially for the presence of splendid fans of both yellow **gorgonians** (*Eunicella cavolinii*) and red (*Paramuricea clavata*), **sponges** (*Aplysina cavernicola*, *Axinella spp.*) and **bryozoans** (*Reteporella spp.*, *Myriapora truncata*, *Penapora fascialis*) which are often observed



also settled on the branches of the larger gorgonians. In the ravines among the surface rocks and in the cracks of the cliff it is easy to spot large **scorpionfish** (*Scorpaena scrofa*) and **lobsters** (*Palinurus elephas*), while **barracudas** and **snappers** are common out in the blue. Going up, you will cross a slightly sloping stretch of rocky bottom, colonized by **white candelabra gorgonians** (*Eunicella singularis*),

which will take us back to the mooring chain where **groupers** and **moray eels** are not uncommon and where some **electric rays** often roam.





PUNTA SECCA

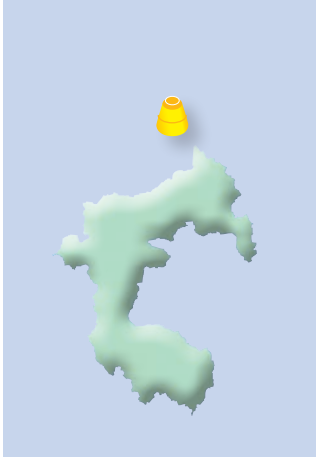
Type of dive: wall

Minimum certification required:
experienced

Depth: min 14 m, max 55 m

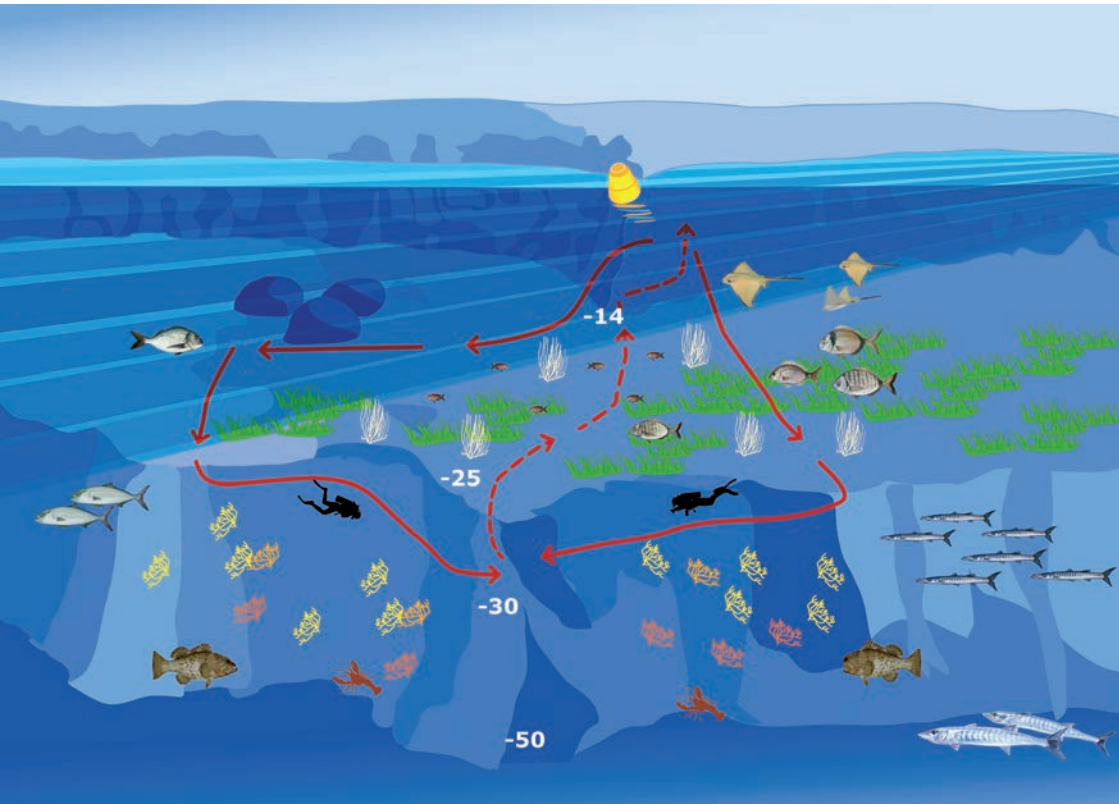
DESCRIPTION

From the mooring point, located about 14 m deep near the peak, we head out to sea following the rocky slope until we meet the wall which begins abruptly at a depth of about 20/25 metres. On the cliff that runs NW-SE, the **coralligenous** reaches its maximum development already starting from -30 metres, with the basal layer consisting of encrusting red algae richly colonized by the typical organisms of these formations such as **porifera** and **bryozoans** and above all by large fans of **red** and **yellow gorgonians** enveloped in clouds of **red damselfish** (*Anthias anthias*). The larger gorgonians often host numerous epibiotic organisms, such as bryozoans, serpulidae and the **basket star** (*Astrospartus mediterraneus*), a species much sought after by underwater photographers for its characteristic appearance and which has now become uncommon elsewhere. Furthermore, in the crevices of the wall coralligenous, **lobsters** and **homarus lobsters** (*Homarus gammarus*) are by no means a rare encounter. The dive continues keeping the wall to your right until, once the bottom time is over, you will begin to ascend following the course of the slope. In summer there are numerous **sea**



hares that can be found on the rocky bottom surrounding the mooring or along the wall that quickly reaches 10 m depth from the surface. In this case too, we are on the border with the integral protection area of the **protected sea area of Giannutri** and it is therefore easy to meet unusual species such as **Peter's fish** (*Zeus faber*), as well as numerous **scorpionfish**, **fork-beards** (*Phycis phycis*), **groupers** and large schools of fish at all depths, includ-

ing, depending on the period, **snappers**, **barracudas** and **amberjacks** on the hunt.





SECCA DI PUNTA SECCA

Type of dive: shoal, wall

Minimum certification required: basic

Depth: min 2 m, max 50 m

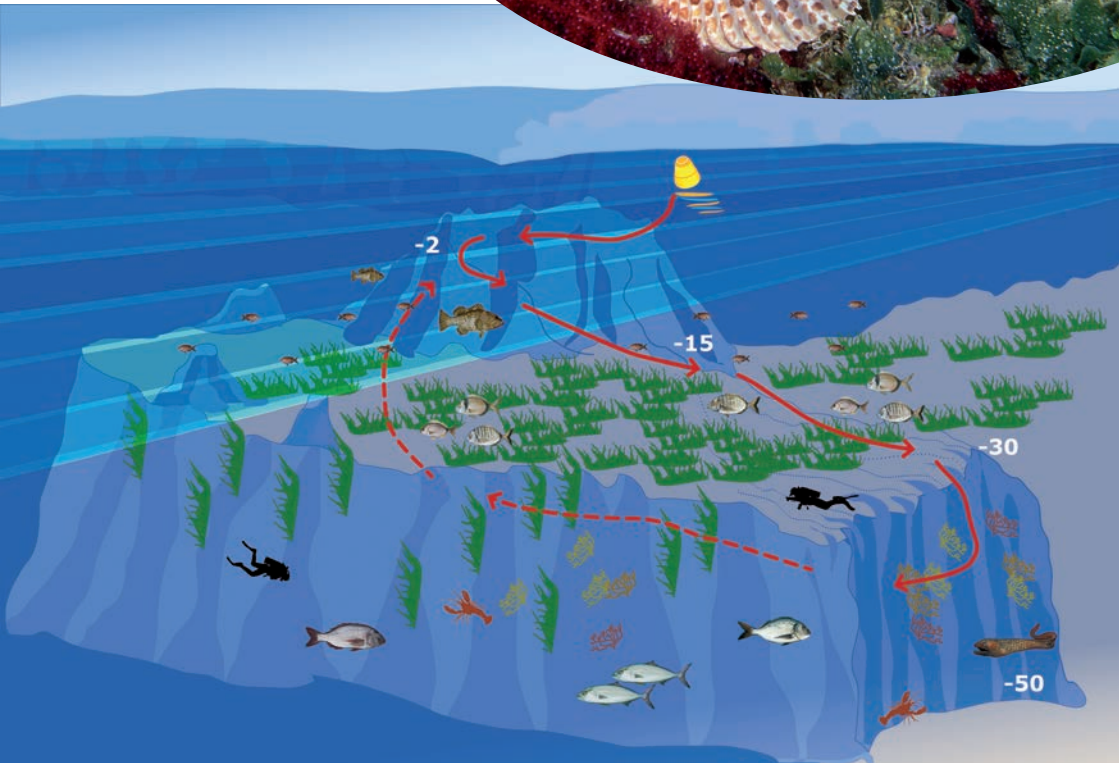
DESCRIPTION

It is one of the most interesting and full of life dives on the island of Giannutri, perfect for all licence levels. The «top» of the shoal starts from 2 metres down and is constantly surrounded by groups of **damsel fish** (*Chromis chromis*) and **saddled seabream** (*Oblada melanura*). It is easy to spot large and small groupers and a couple of **Peter's fish** that roam around the mooring buoy chain. Moving away from the shoal towards the North-West, you pass a sandy plateau at a depth of about 15 metres, richly colonized by both macro-algae and **Posidonia oceanica**. The plane gradually descends until it meets the first gorgonians at a depth of about 30 metres which announce the beginning of the vertical wall. The coralligenous is characterized by the **encrusting red algae** that act as a substrate for bryozoans, sponges and gorgonians that colour the wall in a motley way. Some guests, such as **lobsters** (*Palinurus elephas*), **scorpion fish**, **moray eels** (*Muraena helena*) and **congers** (*Conger conger*), peep out from the ravines and it is possible to spot **melon sea urchins** (*Echinus melo*) and **basket stars** clinging to some gorgonian. After having covered a stretch of the rocky wall, we will

begin the ascent to bring us back to the shoal which does not fail to offer several interesting ideas. **Snappers** and **amber-jacks** can be found at all depths.



Scorpionfish
(*Scorpaena scrofa*)





GLI ARCHETTI

Type of dive: rock, Posidonia

Minimum certification required: basic

Depth: min 5 m, max 30 m

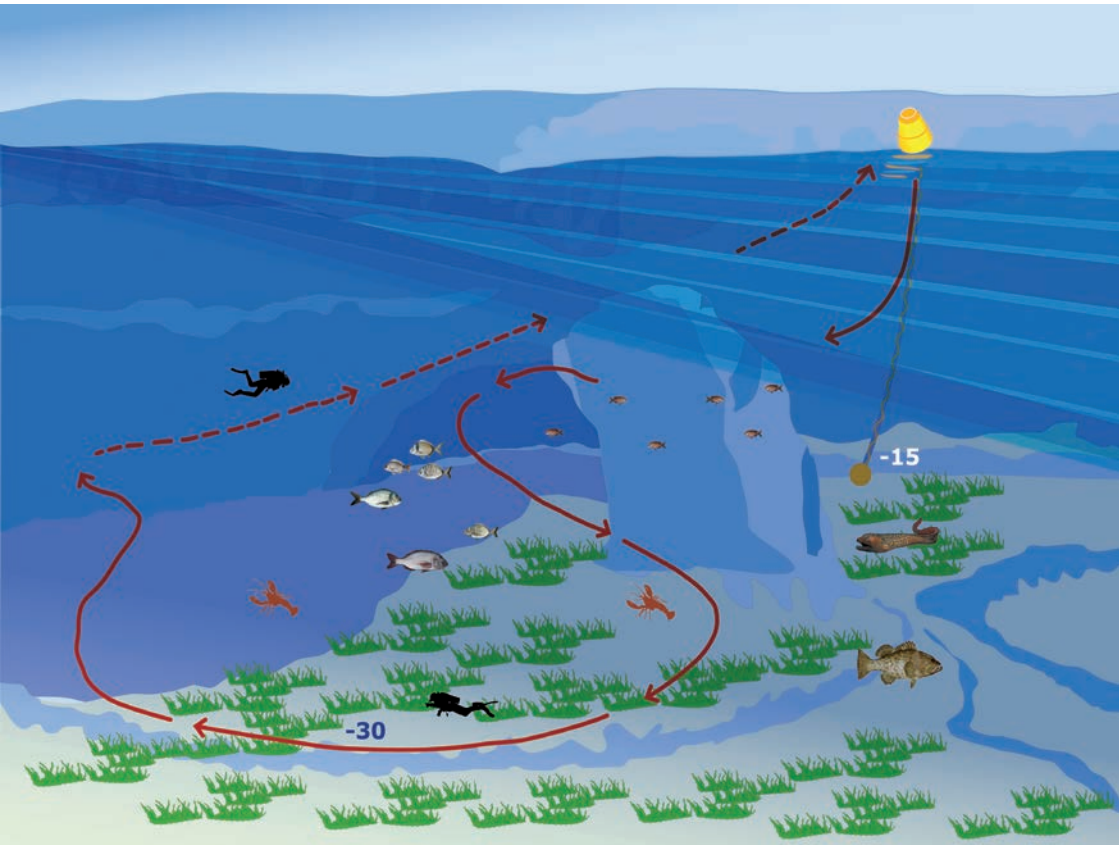
DESCRIPTION

This dive site is accessible to all licence levels. The buoy is anchored at a depth of about 15 m on a mixed bottom of rock and *Posidonia oceanica*. As the name itself suggests, in this point there are natural arches and narrow siphons that connect from a maximum depth of 15 metres to the wall that continues to the surface. The tricks of light that are created thanks to these geological formations are truly unique and make this dive one of the most evocative of Giannutri.

In addition to the scenographic aspect, the dive offers the possibility of observing, in a limited area, the succession of species adapted to different levels of illumination: one passes from strictly light-loving organisms such as the **brown algae** of the *Cystoseira* genus and the **sargasso** others which, on the other hand, like to stay in poorly or not lit at all environments such as **encrusting red algae**, *Peyssonnelia*, **green algae** *Flabellia petiolata* and *Halimeda tuna* and even sponges and bryozoans. In this variety of environments there is no shortage of typical fish that populate the rocky infralittoral such as **wrasse**, **damsels**, **white seabream**, **moray eels** and



some small grouper that shyly looks out from its den. For those who so wish, the site also allows you to reach a deep wall that reaches -30 m and beyond. The wall always offers some surprises: two **homarus lobsters** have their den in the only grotto and then **lobsters** and large **scorpion fish**. Whether you dedicate the entire dive to the arches, or reach them on the way back from the deepest part, emotions are always guaranteed.





LE CERNIETTE

Type of dive: rock, boulders and Posidonia

Minimum certification required: basic

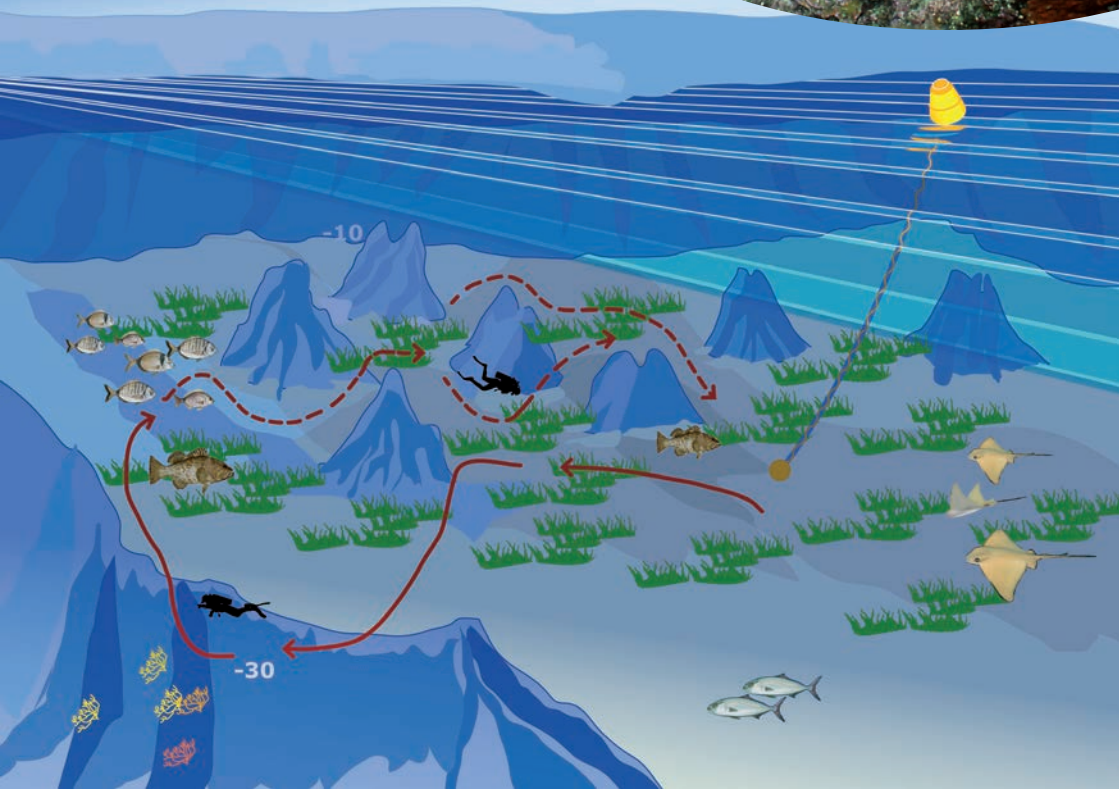
Depth: min 5 m, max 30 m

DESCRIPTION

Starting from the buoy, you go down to a sandy plateau partially colonized by thick crowns of ***Posidonia oceanica***. Leaving the open sea behind us and swimming towards the coast we reach the first of the large boulders, about 20 metres deep, where it is possible to meet several **groupers** (*Epinephelus marginatus*), the protagonists of this site. You can continue in depth to reach natural steps colonized by gorgonians and shy bioconstructions at about -30 metres. On the way back you can better admire the beauty of the superficial cliffs colonized by algae of the *Cystoseira* genus which form a dense cover, an ideal habitat for organisms that prefer these depths. Making the safety stop will therefore not be boring given the high biodiversity represented by large groups of white **breem** (*Diplodus spp.*) with an eye always out towards the blue in search of large pelagics such as **snappers** (*Dentex dentex*). In summer there are numerous **sea hares** (*Aplysia depilans*).



Grouper
(*Epinephelus marginatus*)





CALA DELLE GROTTE (CALA DEL LINO)

Type of dive: rock, Posidonia

Minimum certification required: basic

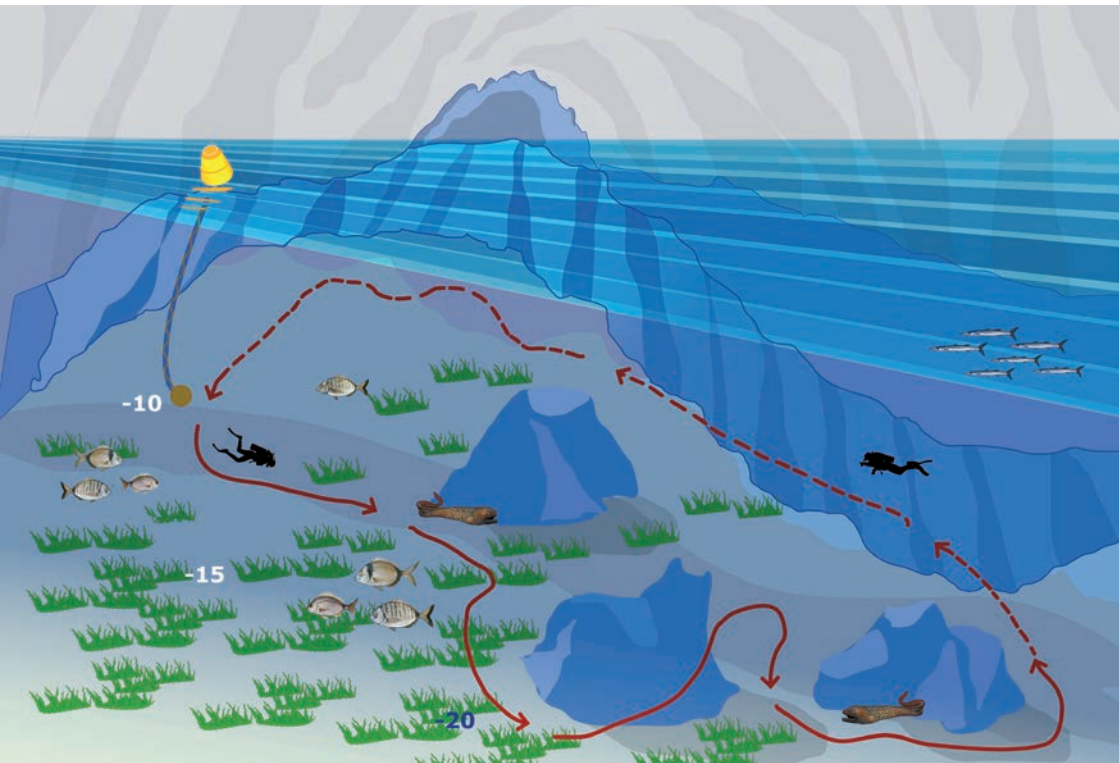
Depth: min 5 m, max 20 m

DESCRIPTION

This dive site is accessible to all licence levels and is particularly evocative for night dives or for training novice divers. The buoy is anchored at a depth of about 10 m on a sandy bottom, around you can see large patches of *Posidonia oceanica*. Heading east we meet the first mixed Posidonia rocky outcrops, at this point it is advisable to follow the course of the bottom which, keeping the rock to our left, will accompany us up to a maximum depth of about 18-20 m. When the meadow becomes more continuous we will go up slightly, crossing a stretch of mixed rock and vegetation, until we reach the base of the small rock wall that from 8-10 m down rises towards the surface. We will continue heading back towards the interior of **Cala delle Grotte** keeping the wall on our right. In this variety of environments we will observe the typical Posidonia forest population and the surface rocks and we will be accompanied by the typical fish that populate the rocky infralittoral such as **damsel fish, forkbeards, damsels, white seabream** and **moray eels**. A simple dive allows you to savour



the charm of night diving, when some fish can be observed in their sleep, while others are hunting and a myriad of molluscs such as **white-spotted octopus** (*Octopus macropus*) and above all crustaceans (crabs and shrimps), usually less visible during the day, will elevate our underwater itinerary with exciting encounters. On the sand not far from the mooring site, a particular **anemone** (*Alicia mirabilis*) will unfold its long tentacles after keeping them furled and invisible throughout the day.





PUNTA DI CALA ISCHIAIOLA

Type of dive: wall

Minimum certification required: basic

Depth: min 5 m, max 45 m

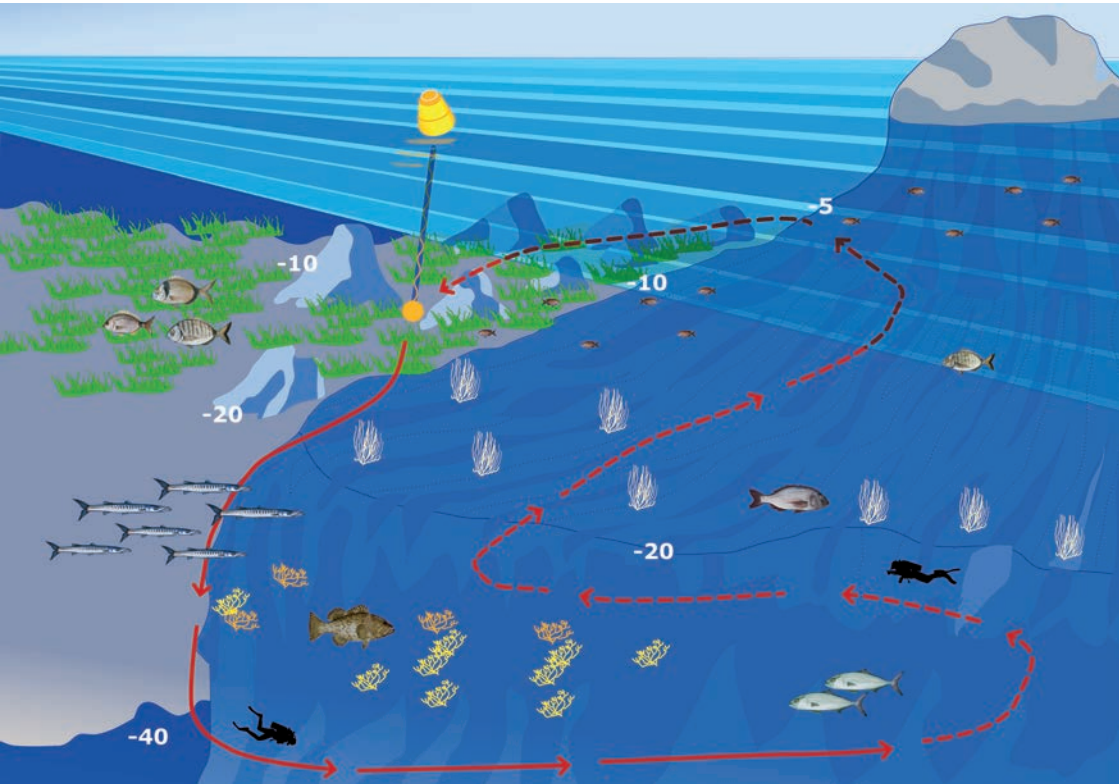
DESCRIPTION

Located at the extreme south of Cala Ischiaiola, we are right on the edge of **zone 1** of the park. Sheltered by the point towards the north you can see, at the beginning of the dive, a large ***Posidonia oceanica*** meadow. The dive continues following the course along the bottom that slopes towards the open sea until it reaches the beginning of the wall at a depth of about 20-25 metres. The rocky cliff hosts the typical coral-ligenous formation consisting of **encrusting red algae** and populated by **sponges**, **bryozoans**, several specimens of **yellow gorgonians** and also some branches of **red coral** (*Corallium rubrum*) well sheltered in the ravines of the bottom already around 30/40 metres deep. We revisit the wall at a more superficial depth and then return towards the coast having the opportunity to admire the numerous **white candelabra gorgonians** (*Eunicella singularis*) and the typical branches of the **sargasso** (*Sargassum vulgare*) that characterize the landscape along the slope that takes us back to the mooring. During the dive we will have encountered a great variety of fish including **white breams**, **groupers**, **forkbeards**



Yellow gorgonian (*Eunicella cavolinii*)

and often also some pelagic fish such as **yellow barracuda**, barracuda (*Sphyraena viridensis*) and **amberjack** (*Seriola dumerili*).





PUNTA SCALETTA

Type of dive: wall

Minimum certification required: basic

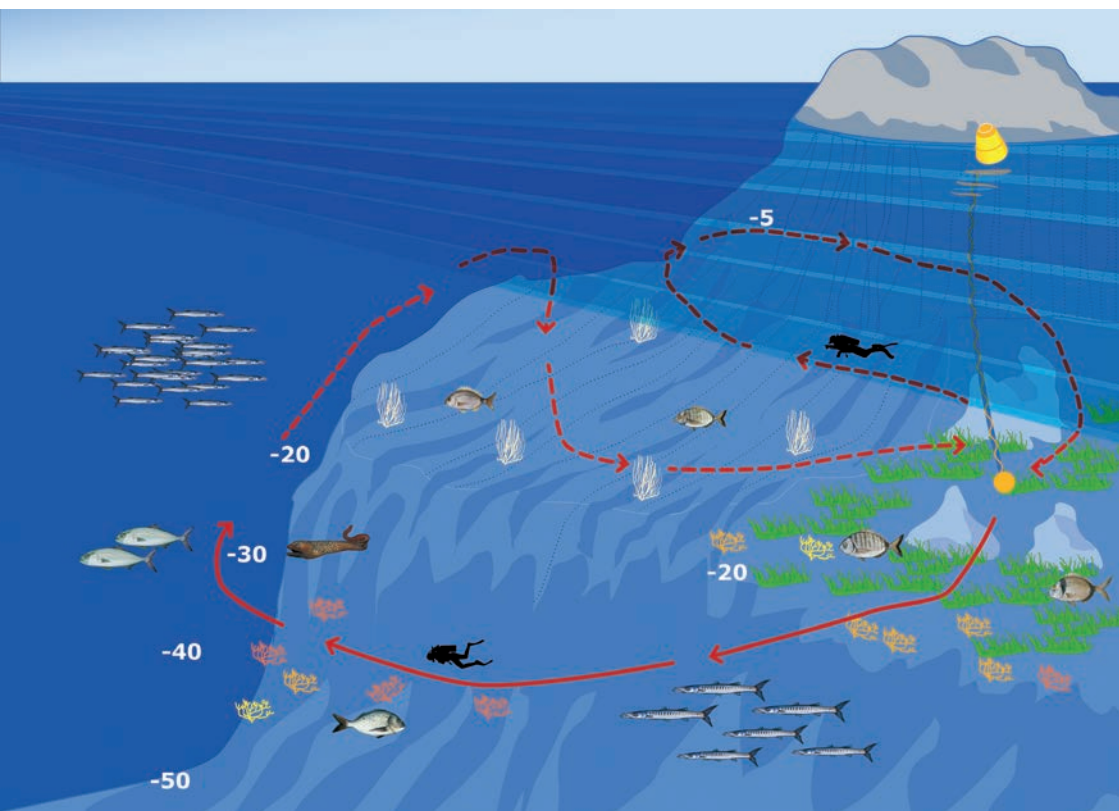
Depth: min 5 m, max 55 m

DESCRIPTION

The bottom is about 15 m deep and appears to be characterized by *Posidonia oceanica* mixed with large rocky outcrops. We follow the course of the slope and, soon, we reach an obvious step that leads to the sandy bottom; continuing northwards we will meet an imposing wall that rises vertically from about -55 m for at least 30 m, we will cover a stretch of it staying between -30 and -40 m until we spot the red gorgonians. The wall is covered with all the typical coralligenous organisms and being very rich in more or less large crevices and cavities, it hosts forkbeards, scorpion fish, moray eels and numerous lobsters. Clouds of **red damselfish** (*Anthias anthias*) surround us, but also pelagic fish such as **snapper**, **amberjack** and **barracuda**, hunting or heading for the more protected areas of the park, are not rare. We go up along the most superficial part of the wall to find ourselves on the plateau of rock mixed with Posidonia where we will have fun among the clouds of fish typical of this environment: **forkbeards** (*Symphodus spp.*), **damsels** (*Coris julis* and *Thalassoma pavo*), **white bream**



(*Diplodus spp.*), **black seabream** (*Spondyllosoma cantharus*) and, in mid-water, **spicara** (*Spicara spp.*) and damselfish. In spring there is the possibility of meeting some **common monkfish** (*Lophius piscatorius*). The dive is suitable for all levels of experience as it is possible to choose the maximum depth to be reached along the wall or to limit oneself to the shallowest part which is certainly not lacking in interesting ideas.



PLANOVA



BUOY SPZ

Type of dive: shoal, wall

Minimum certification required:
experienced

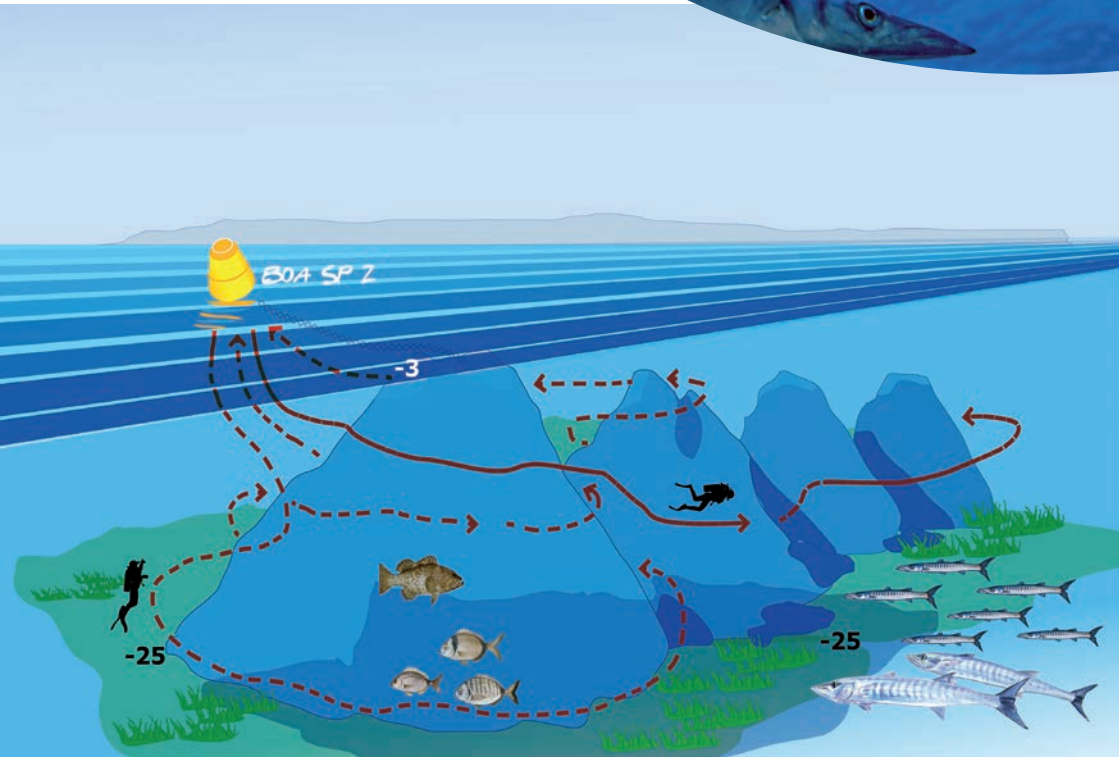
Depth: min 3 m, max 25 m

DESCRIPTION

The dive develops around a series of rock pinnacles that, starting from a few metres, descend deeply until they rest on the bottom at about -25 metres and completely covered by a dense *Posidonia oceanica* meadow. The shallowest part of the shoal that is more exposed to light has the typical population of the superficial rocky bottoms: photophilic algae dominate such as different species of **brown algae** belonging to the *Cystoseira* genus and the characteristic fronds of the **sargasso** (*Sargassum vulgare*) recognizable by the vesicles filled with gas that allow it to stand upright. The presence of numerous sub-pyramidal rock spurs allows you to create underwater itineraries and routes that are different each time depending on the direction of the current which, however, is generally never particularly strong. Heading along the submerged reef in a South-West direction, at a depth of about 14 m, there is a cave with a horizontal development of a few metres, with typical coralligenous population. **Bar-racudas** constantly patrol this dive site as well as numerous **groupers**, **brown meagre**, **white bream** and **dreamfish**. It is not uncommon to spot **amberjack** and **tuna** hunting.



A group of barracudas
(*Sphyrna viridensis*)



PLANOSSA



BUOY SP3

Type of dive: shoal, wall

Minimum certification required:
experienced

Depth: min 4 m, max 40 m

DESCRIPTION

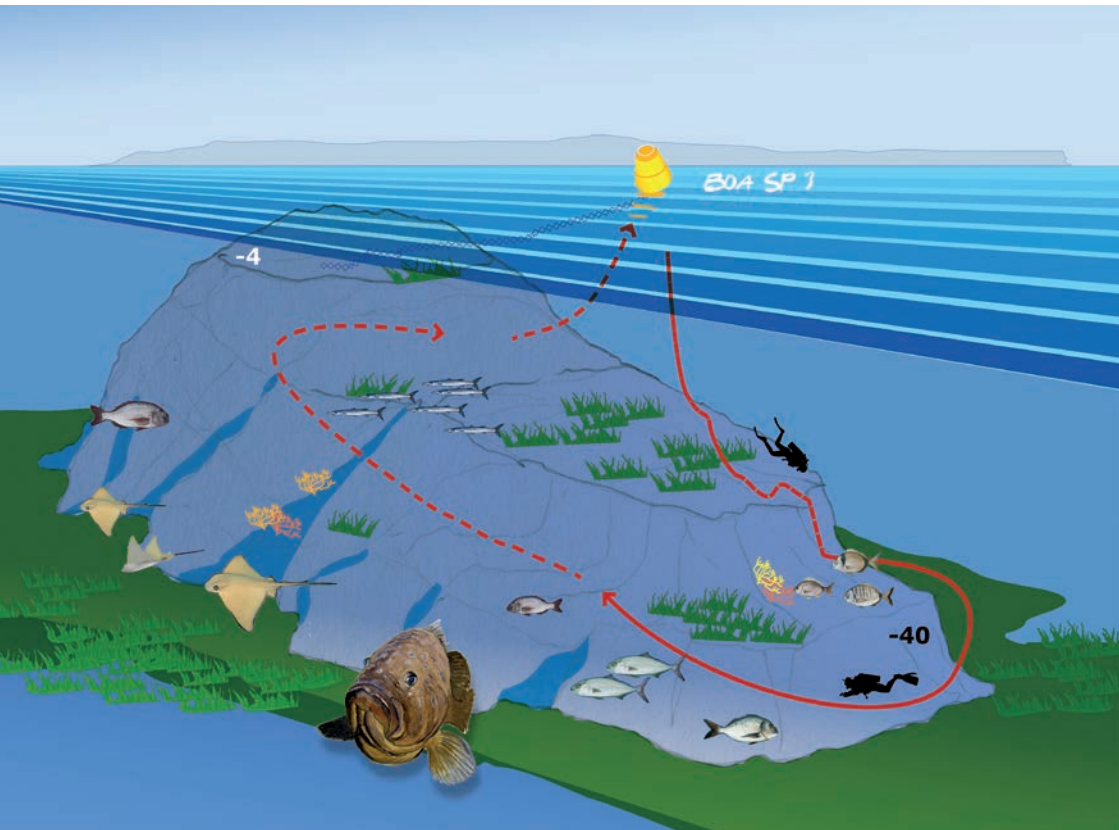
The dive begins at about 4 metres deep on the cap of an extensive rock formation about 100 m long and entirely colonized by the typical surface rock biocenosis dominated by photophilic algae.

In particular, several species of **brown algae** abound such as *Dictyota spp.*, *Cystoseira spp.* and the **sargasso** (*Sargassum vulgare*). The western side of the shoal rests at a depth of about 18 m on a substrate entirely colonized by the seagrass ***Posidonia oceanica***. On the eastern side, the depth drops rapidly with a cliff that reaches -32 m. Along the walls there is a more sciophilous algae population dominated by the **green algae** *Halimeda tuna* and *Flabellia petiolata*. Descending, starting from -16 m of depth, the first **yellow gorgonians** (*Eunicella cavolinii*) are observed, while in the cracks of the rock there are associations of the Coralligenous with **encrusting red algae** and others of the *Peyssonnelia* genus, the **hexacorallia** *Leptopsammia pruvoti* and both arborescent and encrusting **bryozoans**. Heading south, the shoal slopes less steeply due to the alternation of steps and terraces until it reaches the base of the rock formation that rests on a sandy bottom at a depth of about 40 m.



Along the ascent route, in the crevices of the rocks and going up to -18 m, you can see conspicuous blooms of **yellow cluster anemone** (*Parazoanthus axinellae*). There is an impressive presence of fish: hundreds of **barracudas** surround the shoal, majestic **groupers** come near without fear and there is no shortage of **snappers** and **amberjacks** (*Seriola dumeril*) hunting. Moreover, during the summer period this site is famous for the presence of **common**

eagle rays (*Myliobatis aquila*) which can also be admired in formations of numerous specimens.



PIANOSA



BUOY SP4

Type of dive: wall

Minimum certification required: basic

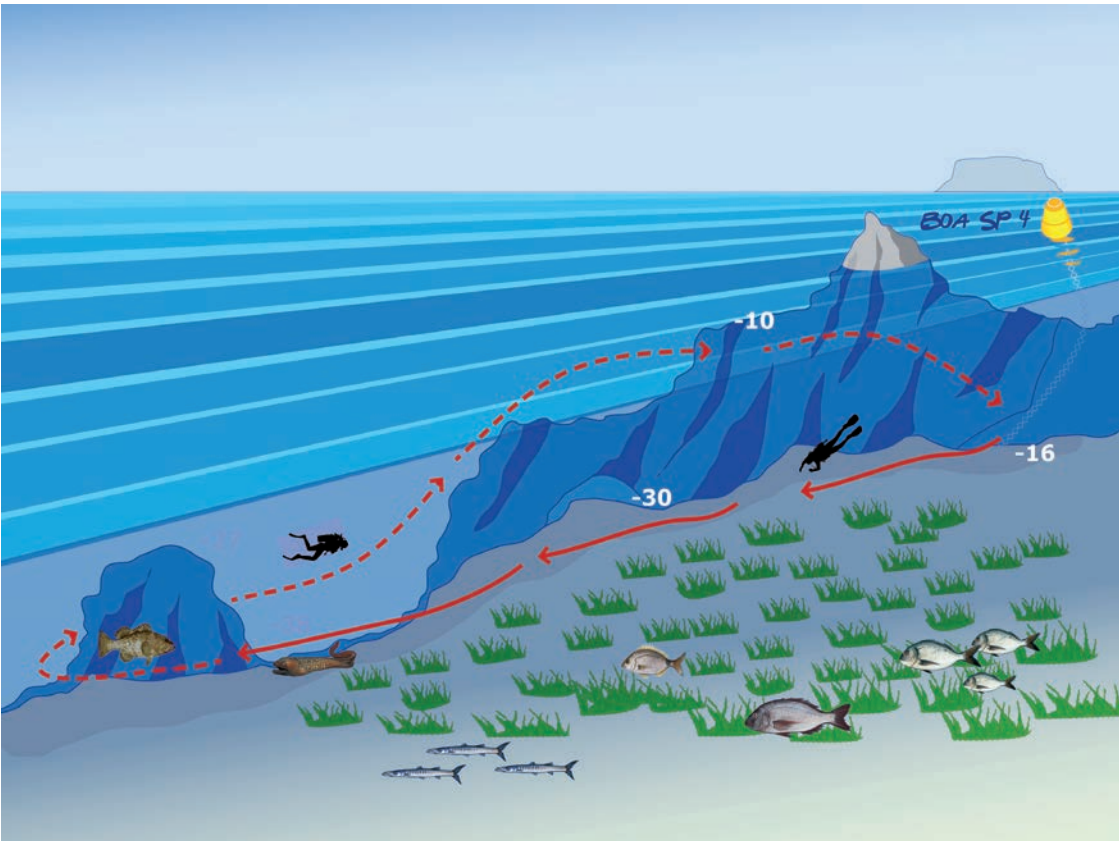
Depth: min 3 m, max 40 m

DESCRIPTION

The dive site is located near an outcropping rock not far from the **Isoletto della Scola**. We descend at the anchor point reaching the bottom, completely colonized by a luxuriant *Posidonia oceanica* meadow, at a depth of about 15 m. Keeping the wall on the right, you go down towards the east, the meadow accompanies us deteriorating around the rocky wall until it leaves room for the sand at a depth of over 35 m. Along the wall there is a small cavity that houses a rich population consisting mainly of sponges of all shapes and sizes, the depth gauge marks -30 m. The dive continues crossing the deepest offshoot of the **Posidonia** meadow in a north-easterly direction to reach a rocky outcrop which, like the wall we leave behind us, is colonized by the typical coralligenous population. The **encrusting red algae** *Lithophyllum stictaeforme*, *Mesophyllum alternans*, and the **green algae** *Flabellia petiolata* and *Halimeda tuna* abound and characterize the submerged landscape, but also the animal component is particularly rich above all for the presence of **sponges** and **bryozoans**, which cover every ravine, and of several fish including the inevitable **groupers** (*Epinephelus mar-*



ginatus). You return to the main wall and begin the ascent having already covered almost the entire submerged perimeter of the outcropping rock. At depths between -15 m and -5 m on the slope facing east, towards the open sea, spectacular carousels of **damselfish** (*Chromis chromis*) and **spicara** (*Spicara spp.*) await us, trying to escape from the attacks of predators such as **snapper** (*Dentex dentex*), **amberjack** (*Seriola dumerilli*) and **barracuda** (*Sphyraena viridensis*).



PLATANOSTA



BUOY SP5

Type of dive: shoal

Minimum certification required:
experienced

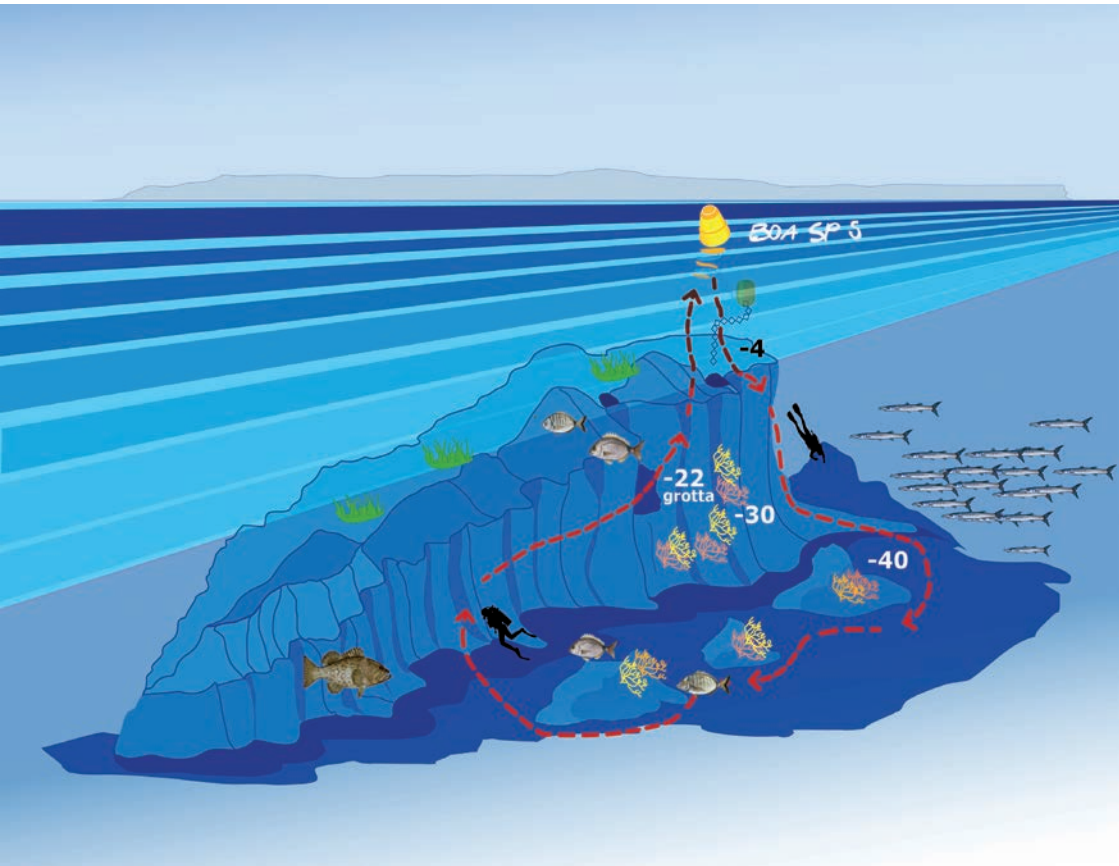
Depth: min 4 m, max 42 m

DESCRIPTION

From the top of the shoal located at a depth of 4 m, proceed eastwards to quickly reach the edge of the cliff which leads vertically to the base placed on a detrital bed at about -30 m. Starting from 10-12 m of depth, we pass from a **typically photophilic algal population** dominated by **brown algae** of the *Cystoseira* genus to more **sciaphilous algae** (e.g. *Halimeda tuna* and *Flabellia petiolata*) which are a prelude to the coralligenous that is encountered a little further down where **red encrusting algae** are dominant. The animal component is also particularly abundant, especially due to the presence of sponges and bryozoans that cover each ravine. The **yellow gorgonians** (*Eunicella cavolinii*) begin around -20 m. Once you reach the bottom of the cliff, you can see in the E-SE direction, other pyramidal rock formations some metres high colonized by large fans of **red gorgonians** (*Paramuricea clavata*). The maximum depth reached by the bases of these formations is approximately -42 m. Once the bottom time is over, you can choose to go up along the western side of the shoal characterized by a rocky plateau colonized by ***Posidonia oceanica***, or, with an eye to air consumption, you can look, without entering, into



a splendid cave carpeted with **sponges**, **bryozoans** and more internally with the intensely yellow **hexacorallia** *Leptosammia pruvoti*. **Barracudas** and **snappers** constantly patrol the shoal as well as numerous **groupers** and **brown meagre** (*Sciaena umbra*) of considerable size that remain calm even outside the cavities where they usually take refuge. Out in the blue it is not uncommon to spot **amberjacks** and **tuna** hunting.



PLATONOSTA



BUOY SP6

Type of dive: shoal, wall

Minimum certification required:
experienced

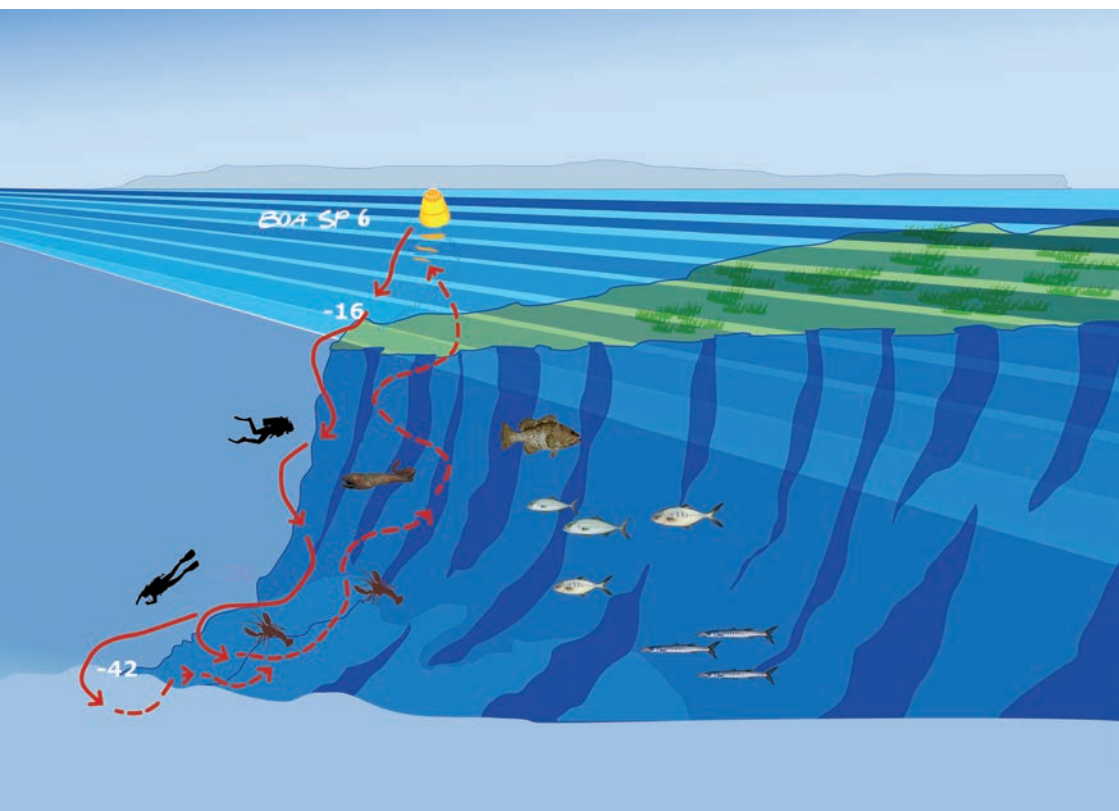
Depth: min 16 m, max 42 m

DESCRIPTION

The descent at the anchor point leads to a slightly inclined plateau located at a depth of about 16/17 m and covered by a luxuriant ***Posidonia oceanica*** meadow. Continuing the dive in the SE direction, you come across the edge of a ridge which, from a depth of about -19 metres, develops like a real vertical wall up to -36 metres. Once at this depth, only for more experienced divers, the wall continues more gently alternating steps and rocky plateaus, up to the base of the shoal located at -42 metres on a sandy bottom. The walls of the shoal are colonized by the typical **coralligenous population**, featuring **red algae** *Mesophyllum alternans*, *Lithophyllum stictaeforme*, *Peyssonnelia rubra* and *P. squamaria* or **sea rose**. The animal component is also particularly abundant, especially due to the presence of **sponges** and **bryozoans** that cover each ravine. It is advisable to have an artificial light source to appreciate this dive site characterized by the presence of canyons and caves covered with colourful fauna and flora. The irregularity of the bottom offers shelter to various species of crustaceans, which have become rare in other locations, such as **lobsters** (*Palinurus elephas*),



slipper lobsters (*Scyllarides latus*) and **homarus lobsters** (*Homarus gammarus*). Pelagic fish are ever present, as are **snappers**, **sea bream** and **groupers**, including large ones. The dive continues with a slow ascent following the slope to avoid long decompression stops for the diver. The possible presence of bottom currents should be noted, mainly with a NW-SE trend, which can increase the degree of difficulty of the underwater route.





BUOY SP7

Type of dive: shoal, wall

Minimum certification required:
experienced

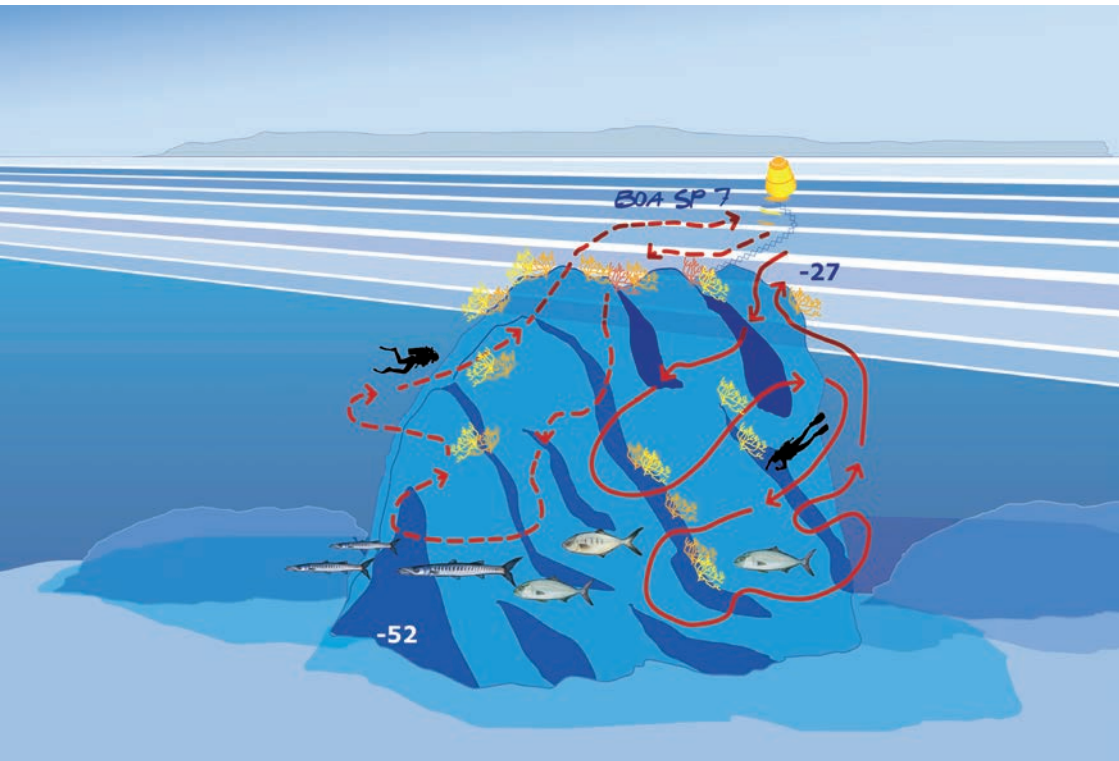
Depth: min 27 m, max 52 m

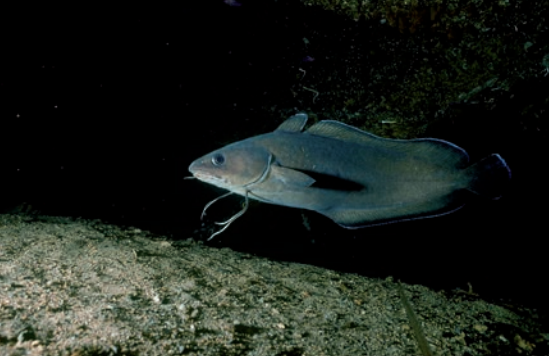
DESCRIPTION

This dive site is characterized by the presence of a rock formation that rests on a sandy bottom at a depth of about 52 metres. The summit of the shoal has a slightly inclined course and can be reached at depths varying between -27 and -32 metres. The vertical walls develop mainly in the N-S direction. The dive begins with a descent on the top of the shoal colonized by the typical coralligenous population characterized by **encrusting red algae**. Still on the shoal's summit, among the elements of immediate landscape impact, the spectacular yellow **gorgonians** (*Eunicella cavolinii*) and imposing **red gorgonian fans** (*Paramuricea clavata*) stand out, the real jewel in the crown of this dive site. The typical fronds of the **sargasso** (*Sargassum vulgare*), a brown alga that reaches considerable size and stays off the bottom thanks to the particular vesicles full of gas that allow it to float, push their way through among the gorgonians. The presence of the **light-bulb sea squirt** (*Clavelina lepadiformis*), a colonial species whose single individuals are connected to each other through a common base that remains crawling on the rocky bottom or on other organisms such as **gorgonians** and **sponges**, is also quite unusual. The light-bulb sea squirt is easily



recognizable by its whitish colour and the surface so transparent as to allow observation of the internal organs. Admiring the gorgonians we will certainly find numerous **nudibranchia** and other colourful organisms, but we must always keep an eye towards the open sea because the pelagic fish are often around and it is not uncommon to spot **amberjacks**, **tuna** and **barracudas** even of considerable size.

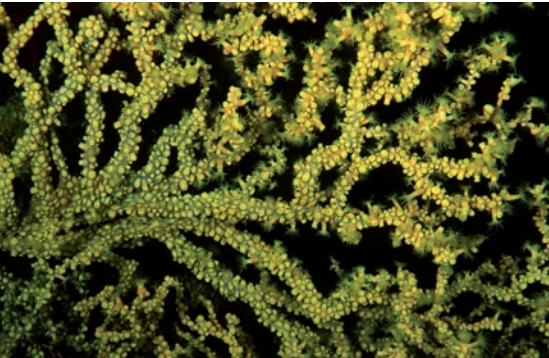




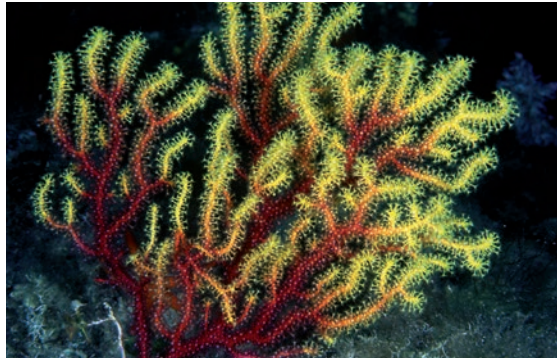
Forkbeard (*Phycis phycis*)



Ross coral (*Pentapora fascialis*)



Gold coral (*Savalia savaglia*)



Violet horny coral (*Paramuricea clavata*)

Melon sea urchin (*Echinus melo*)

Hermit crab (*Dardanus calidus*)



Cuckoo wrasse (*Labrus mixtus*)



Brown cowry (*Luria lurida*)





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COOPERATION AT THE HEART OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

