

## U.R.G. NEWS, MAY 62

The Annual General Meeting of the Group will be held on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> July when the election for the Committee will take place. Consequently it is most important to the club that we have full attendance. This year we may be losing several old hands, who due to other commitments will not be standing for re-election. These places will be hard to fill and the Committee is in need of some new and keen members. Nominations for posts close on 8p.m. the night of the elections – so think it over.

After the conclusion of the General Business Edward Du Cros, time permitting, will screen some of his first rate underwater films. The Annual Fees, by the way, are due on July 1<sup>st</sup> and it would greatly facilitate the records etc. if all members could have them in before then.

Our next outing is at Newport, so don't forget to keep your eyes open for Port Jacksons. A news item from Clarrie Lawler reports that Dr. O'Gower and Bob McLaughlin were presented with a 4½ lb. Male "Crested Port Jackson" (*H. Galeatus*) with the compliments of Clarrie and Barry Messenger, after a search involving all morning and afternoon and about 400 cubic feet of air. This is the less common of the two species and consequently was taken for dissection. Observation sheets and information on the Port Jackson are available from Dr. O'Gower.

The boat trip to Maitland Bay, although a success for the few who attended, was marred by the fact that only 10 people (four of them visitors) out of the 25 odd who said they would be there, arrived. This left Geoff McKeown, who organized the trip, having to pay the remaining £15 owing on the boat. In view of this the club has decided to pay the excess. Any future outings of this nature will be run on a deposit basis. Any person who wishes to be included on the trips will be required to pay a portion of the cost involved in advance.

The Queensland U.R.G. has agreed to write an article on its activities for us, in return for one on ours, and should make interesting reading. Part of their diving course involves a section on practical standard dress (hard hat) diving, under the supervision of the Maritime Authorities. The group outings are usually held around the Tweed River Area, about 70 miles from Brisbane and the diving is mainly done from surf skis. Anyone going Brisbane way for their holidays has been invited to attend this group.

The sea sledge is in its finishing stages and Howard will have it operating as soon as possible.

News and articles are always required for this sheet so please send your contributions to 366 Maroubra Road, Maroubra. Clarrie Lawler has set a good example with his following highly informative paper.

### ABALONE

By C.J. Lawler

Most skindivers have seen and eaten, or tried to eat the shell fish called "abalone" or "mutton fish" which are being prised from the rocks of our undersea

landscape in greatly increasing numbers. This animal is a mollusc, close relative of the slugs and snails of our garden.

The marine members of the Mollusca group being the gastropods of univalves (single shelled animals such as periwinkles, and cowries), the pelecypods or bivalves (twin-shelled animals like the oyster and the pipi) and the cephalopods (the octopus, and cuttlefish). The abalone belongs to the class gastropoda; the single shelled group of marine molluscs and its family name within this group is Haliotis, in Latin “sea-ear” because of its fancied resemblance to the human ear. In fact sea-ear or ear shell is the preferred name in zoological circles for the Australian species of haliotis; the name “abalone” is borrowed from the American varieties.

As most skindivers will know, ear-shells are fairly plentiful off the southern half of the N.S.W. coast and they are equally abundant off the rocky portions of the coasts of the other States. In all there are over 16 species in Australian waters ranging in size from 1” up to 7” in length, the larger species being mostly confined to the more south-eastern waters of the continent.

There are two shallow water and two deepwater species off our N.S.W. coast. The biggest is the most common and of course the one eaten by those intrepid gastronomers, the steeljawed skindiver. It is called Haliotis ruber, “the red ear-shell”. The animal is black with a frilled lacy edge that protrudes slightly outside the margin of the shell. The gills are hidden between folds of the flesh on the left side of the body and the water is exhaled through the holes along one side of the shell. It has a definite head region containing two sets of tentacles, one set bearing eyes as in the land snails, and a mouth containing a set of fine scraping teeth for grazing on the algae and seaweeds upon which it lives. The exterior of the shell is a dull brick red colour, rough and wrinkled and usually overgrown, in the larger specimens, which averages about 6” long, with all manner of marine life, barnacles, sponges, tube worms and various sea-weeds. The inside, after the animal has been removed, has an iridescent pearly lustre, generally whitish with touches of green, blue and pink that makes the pearl shell seem drab in comparison. The other species from moderate depths is known as Haliotis coccoradiatum – “the banded ear-shell”. This is a smaller one that only grows to about 2” long and is rarely found alive although the dead shells can often be found on the bottom or being used as umbrellas by those small purple sea urchins. The animal inside is greenish but with the same general characteristics as H. ruber. If you collect all the small dead ear shells you can find (1” and under) you will be sure to have many more H. coccoradiatum than H. ruber, yet you can see dozens of live ruber on the rocks but will rarely find a live coccoradiatum anywhere. One of the small mysteries of our coast for someone to solve.

The two other representatives on the N.S.W. coast are both small, deepwater species, H. hargravesi and H. brazeri. These two shells grow to no more than 1” in length and are rarely seen except among dredged shells or occasionally washed up with beach flotsam. One is bright orange in colour with a very smooth shell, the other brown with deep spiral grooving on the shell.

Several more species occur in Victorian, Tasmanian and South Australian waters. One of these “the smooth ear-shell” grows to about 7”. Western Australia has a couple of species as does Queensland, but nowhere in these warmer waters are they as big or plentiful as their relatives down south. But Queensland takes the prize for the most unusual species of all, the “asses ear shell” which is quite common on the Barrier Reef. This species, H. asinine, is the only one of its family to have a smooth,

polished outer surface to the shell. This shell is very prettily patterned in green, brown and cream and elongated in form to resemble the asses ear after which it is named. The animal is green and is much larger than its shell and protrudes its frilly margin from under the 4" shell by as much as 2" all round.

There of course are but a few of the many species of Haliotis that are found at different parts of the world's shores. New Zealand has three types, one of which is the beautiful Paua which decorates much of the Maori carvings; a giant 12" species is found in Japan, several almost as large along the western sea board of north America centred about California, one from the English Channel Islands and others scattered about the islands of the south Pacific, the Philippines and South Africa.

B. JENTSCH. Hon. Editor.