

# REEF TEACH TIMES

Edition 8 December 2009

There's nothing quite like a warm summer's night to get us in the mood for love, is there?! Just ask John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John... oh, those summer nights! As the summer kicks in and the weather warms up, the inhabitants of the reef are getting ready for a bit of...

## Summer Lovin'!

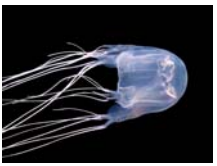
**Coral spawning** is the biggest orgy on the planet! On just a few nights of the year (usually 4-6 nights after the full moon in November) corals release huge clouds of eggs and sperm into the water. Chemical clues ensure the eggs only accept sperm from a different colony to prevent in-breeding. Mass spawning ensures there is better chance that at least a few of the **planula** (larva) will survive. Coral planula will swim for several days or weeks until they find somewhere to settle on, then they divide and clone themselves into multiple **polyps**, eventually forming a whole **colony**. Animals like sea stars, sea cucumbers, giant clams and some reef fish also spawn.



Other fish, like triggerfish, and Nemo's family, the anemonefish, are **nesters**, carefully guarding their eggs until they hatch. **Triggerfish** are highly aggressive during the nesting season, roughly November to February, and divers should give them a wide berth. Fortunately they don't know that your fins aren't part of your body, so if a triggerfish attacks you, just stick your fins between you and the fish!

**Sea turtles** also nest along the Great Barrier Reef between November and February. Females mate with several males over many weeks, storing sperm until they need it. It's a brutal affair – sometimes several males will pile on top of a single female, hanging on desperately with their flippers, sometimes even drowning the poor female in their frenzy to mate with her! Female **sharks** have a pretty rough time of it as well. The male shark bites onto the female's fins to hang on during mating. The skin of female sharks is much thicker than males - but you can often see the 'battle' scars around females fins!

One animal that isn't breeding yet is the **box jellyfish**. They have a roughly 12-month lifecycle, and the juveniles have been developing in the creeks for the last six months or so. **Stinger Season** officially starts on 1<sup>st</sup> November, but may begin earlier or later depending on when the first heavy rains of the wet season occur, which help to flush them out of the creeks and along the coast. In late summer, males will release sperm into the water to be absorbed by females to fertilise their eggs. The free-swimming **planula** develop into crawling **polyps** that attach themselves to rocks and roots in creeks. Like corals, they can divide and clone themselves into multiple polyps (but do not form colonies). As they mature they let go of the rocks and become free-swimming **medusa** (adult jellyfish) with up to 60 **tentacles** extending to 3-4m in length... covered in **nematocysts** (stinging cells) loaded with venom!



One animal that takes mating to a whole new level of weirdness is *Pseudobiceros hancockanus* - the penis-fencing **flatworm**! These tiny hermaphrodites use their two-headed penises to fight about who's going to be the male! The winner stabs the loser several times, transferring 'his' sperm into 'her' body before going off to fight someone else...!

Visit the **new Reef Teach website at [www.reefteach.com.au](http://www.reefteach.com.au)**

We're delighted to announce that Reef Teach has a **NEW interactive website**! There's loads of useful information for visitors to the Great Barrier Reef, including information about Reef Teach's presentations, classroom and bookshop, tips on Reef Etiquette and how to help the reef, links to visitor information and marine weather forecasts, updates on local events, and copies of recent newsletters. There's also links to conservation and research organisations, the GBR Marine Park Authority, marine education resources, and the latest news headlines from CORAL (the Coral Reef Alliance), AIMS, and loads more! Why not dive in for a surf?!

For all bookings/enquiries please contact (07) 4031 7794 or email [learn@reefteach.com.au](mailto:learn@reefteach.com.au)

**“With learning comes appreciation.”**

2nd Floor, Mainstreet Arcade, 85 Lake St Tel: (07) 4031 7794 [www.reefteach.com.au](http://www.reefteach.com.au)

# REEF TEACH

6:30-8:30pm

Tuesday - Saturday

\$15 adults \$8 under 14s

### Stinger Advice

During the Stinger Season, **swimmers should only swim in stinger nets** at patrolled swimming beaches. Box jellies are rarely found more than a few kilometres offshore, but the jellies causing **Irukandji-syndrome** are found around reefs and well out to sea, so **divers and snorkelers should wear Lycra stinger suits or Neoprene wetsuits for protection**. Box jelly stings are extremely and immediately painful, but rarely fatal with proper treatment. However, the pain caused by Irukandji stings may take longer (typically 5-40 minutes) to develop and consequently stings may not be taken seriously at first. It is vital that **all suspected stings should be treated immediately**.

### Treatment

Get the victim out of the water, **call for medical help** (dial 000 or 112 from mobiles), offer CPR and oxygen if needed, **flood the sting with vinegar ASAP**, and get the victim to hospital.

### Tour agent?

If you haven't been to see the Reef Teach show yet, call us to arrange a famil!

