

My Shot 1

It seems it's all brains over brawn when it comes to cuttlefish love.

In the shallow waters of a small bay at Point Lowly in South Australia, the Australian giant cuttlefish (*Sepia apama*)—the largest of their kind, have abandoned their typically solitary lives to gather in their tens of thousands. They're here for one reason - to dance the dance of love at the only mass spawning aggregation of cuttlefish on planet earth.

It's not known why they choose this particular location, or where they even come from, but each year from late May to early August they arrive along this same small stretch of coastline.

As we descend into the icy shallow waters, thousands of intelligent aliens hover above the seagrass meadows, all in pursuit for the chance to perpetuate their species. With so many cuttlefish surrounding us, we don't really know where to point our cameras, so we decide to wait patiently by a female in the hope to capture the mating behaviour that continues to fascinate scientists and is witnessed by few divers.

It's not long before the tango commences, as a large bull male approaches and begins to muscle in close to the female - waiting for

a sign from her. He snuggles in close, guarding her with his arms outstretched, psychedelically strobing at her. His incredible display continues for 5 minutes or so and we begin to think, 'he's going to be the lucky guy'! As we scan the nearby area though, it appears she may have her eye on someone else. From left of centre, an underdog approaches, he is quite small and to be honest we can't even begin to work out what she sees in him.

Then right before our eyes, the small male uses the art of mimicry, attempting to disguise himself as female. Neurally organised cells under his skin put on a kaleidoscopic display of elaborate colours and patterns to the point that he now appears female. We can see that his male fourth arm (hectocotylus) is also no longer visible, and to our surprise he has manoeuvred himself into the prime mating arena. Then, just like that and before the large bull male realises, the pair meet head to head as he passes her his sperm package which she stores in a small opening under her mantle. We watch in awe. It appears the stealthy smaller male has been successful at stealing her heart—right out from under the bull male's nose!

Dumbfounded as to how he missed out, he looks on unimpressed!



Panasonic LUMIX GH5 in Nauticam Housing. Lumix G X Vario PZ 14-42mm f/3.5-5.6 Power O.I.S, plus Nauticam WWL - 1 Wet lens. Dual Sea and Sea YSD2J strobes. 1/125, f:8, ISO:200

Fact: while it's not yet known how many Giant cuttlefish visited the breeding grounds this year. Last year's record count of 247,146 suggests that this year may yet again set a new record.

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peter@uwpmag.com
and yours could be the next My Shot**