



Portrait of a female squid ready to attach her egg case to the substrate

Text and photos by Brent Durand

Most years, Southern California on the US west coast is the site of a special marine life aggregation, treating locals to one of the most unique dives in the world. Hundreds of thousands of market squid (*Doryteuthis opalescens*) swim into recreational dive depths to mate and lay an expansive canvas of egg baskets (collections of eggs) across the sandy substrate. Because so many squid can be present, and because they are attracted to divers' torches, the dive is spent immersed in a cloud of these small, excited squid.



The excitement of the squid run is apparent in the frenzied mating behavior of the species, which is just one of the highlights of this night dive.



Southern California's Market Squid Run



The squid run is hard to predict but usually occurs in December. Avid divers surveying the canyons will see indicators of a pending squid run: a lone squid or two

spend most of their time at deep depths, migrating vertically at night to hunt. The eggs will hatch anywhere between two to four weeks after being laid. Since the

Scuba diving the market squid run is an incredibly unique dive experience.

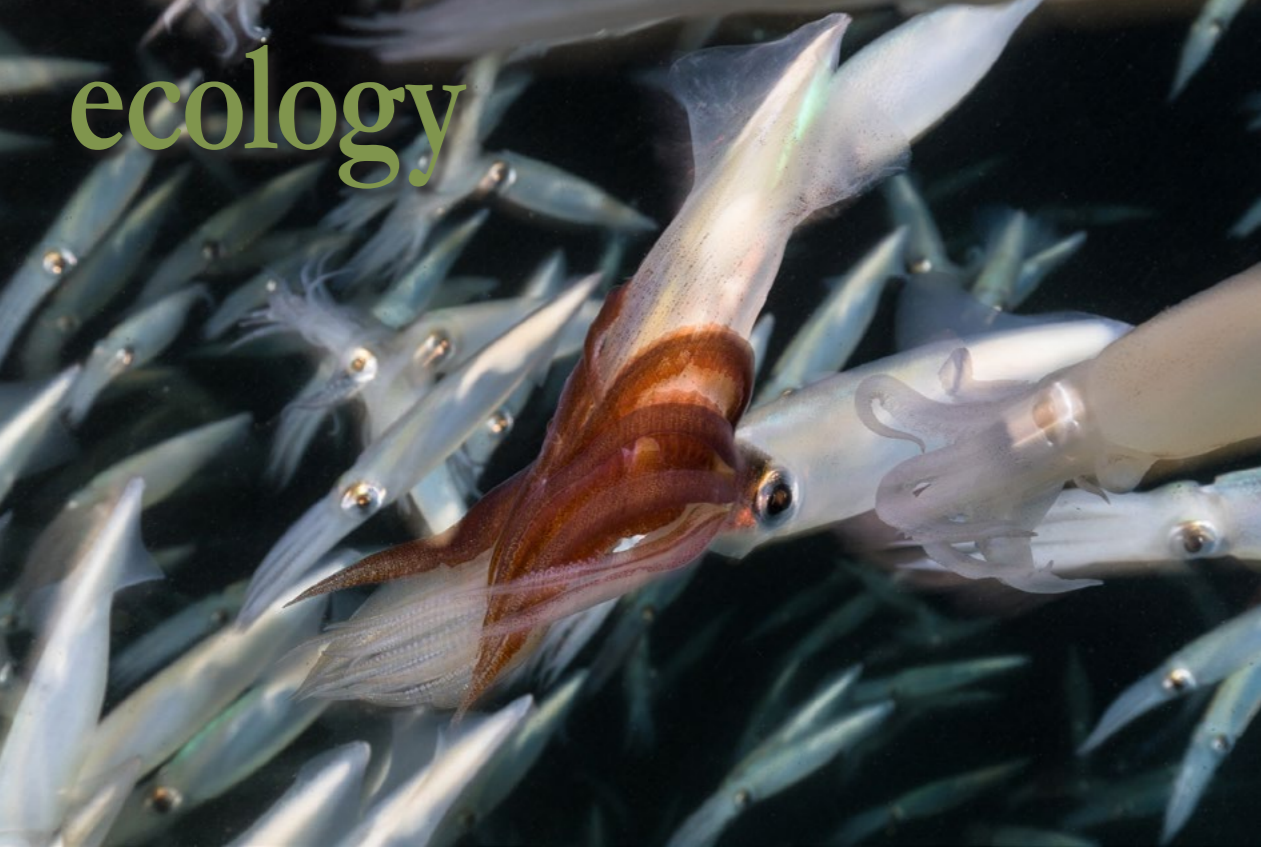
during a night dive, solitary egg cases attached to the substrate here and there, and moon phase clues. The most popular area for divers to experience the event is the submarine canyon of Redondo Beach in Los Angeles, as it is a very accessible night beach dive.

The market squid are a nearshore species that live six to nine months and

long cases are attached to the sand (in groups called baskets), the surge from ocean swell will oxygenate the eggs naturally.

Diving the squid run

A squid dive begins like any other night beach dive in Redondo—gearing up in a parking lot. The difference is that there is an electric excitement in the air, more divers are present, and you are sure to encounter friends preparing for their dive. Squid fishing boats sit offshore over 60m of water—beyond the reach of divers (market squid fishing is a major commercial fishery in California). Only a gentle staircase and 30m of sand separate divers from the ocean.



THIS PAGE: In the mating aggregation, male squid lunge after female squid—often three or four per female. The male's tentacles turn crimson red when it has successfully paired with a female, in order to warn other males to stay away. A stingray hunts squid in the swarm (right)

to warn other males to stay away.

This cloud of squid is the highlight of the dive, but there is so much more action during the squid run. Female squid streak low across the sand while trying to lay and place their egg cases into an egg basket. Shrimp, crabs, rays, and

even small sharks join the party, becoming so full of food they are lethargic. Divers who venture off the sand into more open water may even hear the sound of hunting dolphins, and with that, rapidly passing shoals of squid that dart one way and then the other. It is spectacular.

Photographing squid

Photographing the squid run is deceptively challenging. Strobes must be positioned to avoid thick backscatter, and oftentimes the density of squid bodies

blocks strobe light from reaching the subject. The fast movement of the squid and the layers of subjects make one want to point and shoot; however, this technique often renders the subject squid out of focus. Shooting macro views of the eggs also proves challenging, as the cases can sway back and forth by 10-20cm in the surge, making focus and composition a very fluid exercise.

Before long, it is time to ascend up the canyon slope into shallower water. The squid will follow dive torches to a point, but then turn around and go back to their business. Crabs run across the sand, rays watch carefully, and divers chimp through photos as they off-gas on the way to the surface and the lights of the Redondo Beach Pier. ■

Brent Durand is a freelance underwater adventure photographer and writer. His work is published in print worldwide, in advertising and across the web in a variety of outdoor industries. Durand presents regularly on photography technique and has a reputation for writing insightful yet



simple camera gear reviews. He leads several photo workshops every year and writes a newsletter containing underwater photo tips and tutorials. Durand is also the creator of We All Roam, an adven-

ture travel concierge providing expert advice and local knowledge to help you plan and book the perfect dive trip. See more of his work at: BrentDurand.com.