



underwater mountain top retreat. Upon descending to this highly fractured ocean pinnacle rising from 85 feet, we became encircled by massive schools of spottail and blue-stripe grunts. At times the sun was completely eclipsed by schools estimated in the multithousands.

As we approached the next dive spot, Mario said "We don't have a name for this site, but there are always morays here." Reaching the bottom at 45 feet on this fragmented pinnacle, we immediately spotted our first chain moray. Knowing from past experience that one should make the most of each photo opportunity, I took several shots of this curious creature. Upon continuing our search we soon found another, and then two more, and in one location there were five. In summary we counted 34 morays in our 50-minute dive. Back on board our dive boat, we wasted little time in naming this spot Mario's Millions of Morays.

Visibility in Costa Rica can range from 20 to 120 feet

year-round, depending on the mood of the visibility gods.

We were fortunate to have the vis gods rule favorably the day we chose to visit the Catalina Islands. As we approached this group of islands several sailfish jumped, each within a stone's throw of our boat.

We chose to dive the ocean pinnacle named Widow Rock. Upon entering the water, it became clear how this site got its name. White tip sharks slid through the water at various depths and distances. We were to find out later that this pinnacle is a mecca for mating white tips. As we finned away from the pinnacle across a series of basaltic boulders, a giant hawkfish appeared with its marbled psychedelic markings. Next, gold rimmed surgeonfish came in close to check us out, followed by a school of Cortez angelfish which meandered past us. In Costa Rica when referring to a school, it's not seven or eight fish. We're talking 50 to 60 angelfish in a school. Farther along our underwater

trek was an undercut ledge encrusted with stony corals which shone a vivid orange to yellow upon illumination.

Preceding our next dive, I gazed out at the 20 or so pinnacles and rock formations that constitute the Catalina Islands. A distinctive double pinnacle formation caught my eye. Mario informed us that if we dove there we could be responsible for naming still another spot. With such an important task at hand, we headed to this set of dual volcanic chimneys. Divers unfamiliar with Costa Rica would expect this site, which was approximately one mile away from the last site, to have a similar bottom and sea life. Wrong!

We slid into the water amongst hundreds of tarpon and lady fish, with gaff-top sail pompano and blue spotted jacks off in the distance. Visibility here approached 100 feet. Upon reaching a gently sloping pile of rock and lava rubble at 50 to 60 feet, we were overwhelmed by the abundance of brilliantly colored starfish. While drifting along this submerged lava flow, we also noticed that most of these dayglow-hued invertebrates were in pairs. Hovering above these paired starfish were pods of Cortez wrasses, and, as always, the dominant blue heads were running the show. Ultimately, it was the entrancing paired starfish that led us to name this site Twin Starfish.

(Continued on page 40)



Above: Scores of blue-striped grunts make the cave at Submerged Rock a popular dive site. Photo by Wayne Hasson.

Left: A howler monkey silhouetted against a violet sky. Photo by D. Holden Bailey.

Below: While whale sharks are frequent summer visitors, this less common sighting in January takes clear advantage of winter's increased visibility. Photo by Wayne Hasson.

Opposite page: Rare blue-footed boobies nest along the rocky coastline of Costa Rica and surrounding islands. Photo by Wayne Hasson.

