



Zabu-Zabu at Mokumanamana Educator's Expedition to the N.W. H.I. - 2005

Sunday, August 14, 2005

7:00am

After an overnight transit we are awakened to a new island that once again is in the middle of the vast Pacific. Nihoa is no longer in view and there is no indication of how far the next body of dry land might be. I still marvel and wonder about the first human that visited these Northwestern Hawaiian Islands...why did they travel so far to such an isolated, barren island and how did they survive, was this a place of refuge or a place to spend the last days of their lives.

In modern times *Mokumanamana* has been visited by many researchers and fishermen. I have known the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands as a lobster fishery where commercial fishermen are able to fill



their boat with lobsters of gigantic proportions and set out on my first dive here in search of "zabu-zabu". *Zabu-Zabu* as it is known by the locals on the Big Island is a legendary lobster habitat where you could walk on the reef flats and if you were lucky you would not step on a lobster. The first dive on the south end of the island was not very productive because of surge and poor visibility and we quickly moved to the opposite end of the island. This end of the island was much deeper and dropped off quickly to about 55 feet. Many more preda-

tors were present in this area and the small prey species hugged the safety of the surge zone. I continued my search for the *zabu-zabu* as I dove into the depths searching under ledges and between the boulders of the ocean floor. With the presence of *ulua*, *uku* and *kabala* my hopes of seeing lobsters diminished as any lobster in view would surely be picked off by these predators. This second dive ended without any sightings of lobsters, and with one last dive to go my hopes of seeing the *zabu-zabu* waned.

The last dive was just a sort distance away on the northern side of the island. It was much shallower here and the reef fish seen much more relaxed as the current and surge was not as strong. This area was unlike any that I have seen before. The ocean floor was covered with a carpet of green algae that reminded me of the pastures of Waimea. It didn't really look like lobster habitat but I had a feeling of their presence and that I could find them if I just had enough time. I searched the edge of the algae covered reef but they were not to be found so I moved closer to the shoreline where I was distracted by a school of *ulua* and three monk seals sunning themselves on the rocky shoreline. As I decided to move away from the seals I noticed tiny cracks and shelves hidden by the algae and dove down to take a look. Under the carpet of algae and hidden in the darkness I made my first sighting of lobsters and I remember chanting *zabu-zabu....zabu-zabu* as I surfaced. I could see two lobsters sitting in the shadows of the ledge but knew that there had to be more sitting in the darkness waiting for the safety of the night before coming out to forage on the reef. My dive soon ended but not without finding more lobsters sitting in the safety of the algae covered reef.



It was not till later that I realized that this lobster fishery had crashed a few years back and this area is now being studied to monitor the population and recovery of spiny lobsters. Seeing the lobsters on *Mokumanamana* gives me hope that someday we will be able to return to see a healthy lobster fishery, till then I will continue to chant.....*zabu-zabu.... zabu-zabu.... zabu-zabu.....*