

IN THE BLUE WITH THE BLUE SHARK

FEATURE AND PHOTOGRAPHY **PHILIPPE LECOMTE**

As soon as we had jumped into the water, I started to search for the sharks. And then I saw one. Swimming motionless, its beautiful color making it seem almost invisible against the blue backdrop.





This summer I realized one of my dream dives, the Azores in Portugal, 1500kms west of Lisbon. The Azores, is a group of 9 islands found in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. They were discovered during 1427 by Diogo de Silves. This group of islands is volcanic and has a very rich aquatic life. The Azores is the best place on earth to see and dive with the Blue shark, an amazing and graceful species. Our destination was to Faial Island, one of the 9 islands of the archipelago.

In order to see Blue sharks, my brother and I decided to contact Norberto, the best man

recommended on the island that knows when and where to see them. The place with the best chance to see these sharks is the Azores Bank, 25 miles offshore of Horta, further south. So we booked our dates and were scheduled aboard a catamaran with 6 free divers and 4 other divers for this new adventure.

Two cool boxes were prepped for bait, full of blood and frozen mackerel. On the way to the bank, dolphins, petrels and other sea birds crossed our way along the journey. An hour and a half later, the boat stopped in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and the crew began to

prepare the bait by pouring some blood into the water and throwing a plastic tank full of mackerel in also. Less than 3 minutes after, 3 Blue sharks started turning around our boat. Everybody on board was hooked and the crew shouted out, "let's go for some fun".

My brother and I did our last equipment check, grabbed the GoPro and camera with the wide angle lens and jumped into the blue.

We had 200 meters below us. This is where the Blue shark gets its name. They live far from the coast, deep in the depths of the blue,

hunting and eating calamari and other small fish. We and the six free divers were the first group in the water; following by the 4 divers a few minutes later.

As soon as we had jumped into the water, I started to search for the sharks. And then I saw one. Swimming motionless, its beautiful color making it seem almost invisible against the blue backdrop. It came in from the left then turned 180 degrees within a second and then descended 10 metres. Coming back up by the right and brushing past our legs. This shark showed no aggression toward the divers

and freedivers. My camera did not get a break during the first two hours. After that, my memory card was full and I was forced to get out and change it over to a new one.

After carefully opening up the housing and changing the memory card, I was quickly back in the water with 3 Blue sharks swimming around us. Freediving with Blue sharks is the best way to approach them when in the best conditions. Doing a dive at 5 meters also means that you get the best chance to see them turn around you without scaring them off with the bubbles from the regulator.

During this dance, 2 other smaller Blue sharks curiously came over from time to time, but quickly disappeared into the blue. It may have been because the other 3 were larger males.

My brother, one of the freedivers and I had stayed in the water swimming with them for up to 4 hours before we'd noticed the time and then decided it was time to get out. This has been one of the best days I've had with any shark. We were so happy and so amazed to have done this. The Blue shark is very beautiful and should be protected against the shark finning industry.