

Two-banded clownfish, *Amphiprion bicinctus*, in Ras Al Hadd, Oman (right and below)

Text and photos by Mohamed Mohsen

The clownfish is one of the underwater world's most beloved creatures. Underwater photographer Mohamed Mohsen shares his images and impressions of this guardian of the reef and its dedication to the rearing of its young.



Guardians of the Reef:

Clownfish

The Parental Duty of Nemo

At 15 metres below the tranquil surface of Ras al Hadd, I watched a scene that stilled time itself—a single clownfish fanning the eggs that held its next generation. Among the waving tentacles of a grey anemone, the orange glow of the fish pulsed like a heartbeat in the reef.

A father's watchful care

Similar to the Disney/Pixar character "Nemo", it was a two-banded clownfish, *Amphiprion bicinctus*, and it was relentless. [Ed. – The male is smaller than the female and is the primary caretaker of the eggs, cleaning, fan-

ning and guarding them ([Wikipedia](#)).] He darted back and forth over his clutch, fanning fresh water over the eggs with his fins, inspecting every egg, clearing debris, even removing the few eggs that would not hatch. The eggs shimmered like tiny glass

beads, each one revealing a pair of silver eyes staring back from within.

Nearby, his mate patrolled the anemone's edge, ready to defend their territory against intruders many times her size. Together, they formed one of the ocean's most tender part-

In its anemone home, the two-banded clownfish, *Amphiprion bicinctus*, remains a vigilant guardian.

The male clownfish inspects the eggs, cleans away debris and aerates the eggs by fanning his fins.



nerships—proof that parenthood and courage thrive, even in miniature worlds.

The underwater dance of life

Photographing this behaviour demanded patience and respect. I slowed my breathing, adjusted my strobes to a soft glow and let the moment unfold. Every flick of the fish's fins, every quick glance towards me, spoke of instinctive devotion.

Ras Al Hadd's reefs are alive with these hidden stories. Here, clownfish and sea anemones live in perfect symbiosis. The anemone's stinging tentacles protect the fish, while the clownfish keeps its host clean and aerat-



TECHNICAL NOTES

CAMERA SETUP: Sony A7 III camera, Sony 90mm f/2.8 Macro G OSS lens, Inon UCL-165 M67 wet lens
LIGHTING: Backscatter MF-2 strobes, OrcaTorch focus light
DEPTH: 15-20m
CONDITIONS: Calm, clear, moderate current
DIVE CENTRE: Arabian Sea Adventures, Ras al Hadd, Sur, Oman
DATE: August 2025
DIVE BUDDIES: Captain Fayeze and Captain Adel



ed. It is a fragile balance, a small miracle repeated endlessly across the Indian Ocean.

Respecting the ocean's families

As divers, we are guests in this world. My goal was not to interfere but to document a moment of life most will

never see. When I surfaced, I carried with me a deeper respect for these tiny guardians and the invisible web of care that sustains our reefs. ■

Mohamed Mohsen is an architect, diver and underwater photographer based in the United Arab Emirates

and Oman. His macro photography reveals the quiet beauty and behaviour of marine life that often escapes the casual eye, from the vigilant guardianship of clownfish to the ethereal drift of nudibranchs. See his Instagram page: [@m.mohsen.uwp](https://www.instagram.com/m.mohsen.uwp).

Fascinating Clownfish Facts

Clownfish (anemonefish) are found on coral reefs across the tropical Indo-Pacific. They live in a mutually beneficial partnership with sea anemones. The anemones offer protection with their stinging tentacles, which deter predators, while clownfish defend the anemones from species that feed on them. Clownfish help maintain the anemones by cleaning debris, fanning water to improve circulation and producing waste that supports helpful microorganisms. A mucus layer prevents clownfish from being harmed by the anemone's stings.

Clownfish feed on plankton and live in structured social groups comprising a breeding female and male, and several non-breeding individuals. The dominant female is the largest member. If she disappears, the breeding male changes sex to become the new female.

Reproduction occurs year-round in tropical regions, during a full moon, but is seasonal in cooler waters. Courtship behaviour precedes spawning, after which the fish prepare a nesting site on a nearby rock. The female may lay up to 1,000 eggs, which the male fertilises and carefully tends by cleaning and aerating them. The eggs hatch at night after about a week. After hatching, larvae drift in the open ocean before settling on the seabed and finding a host anemone as juveniles.

Clownfish species differ in size, ranging from about 80mm to 160mm. They have colour and ultraviolet vision, acute smell for navigation and sensitivity to low-frequency sounds. Communication occurs through clicks and other sounds generated by their jaws and amplified by the swim bladder.

Their populations face pressures from overfishing, aquarium trade collection, ocean warming and acidification, as well as sedimentation from coastal development. Clownfish numbers tend to be greater in marine protected areas, where collection is not permitted. ■

SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA.ORG