

PARADISE in Fiji

Paddy Ryan

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Patrick Alan Ryan asserts his moral right to be identified as the author of this book.

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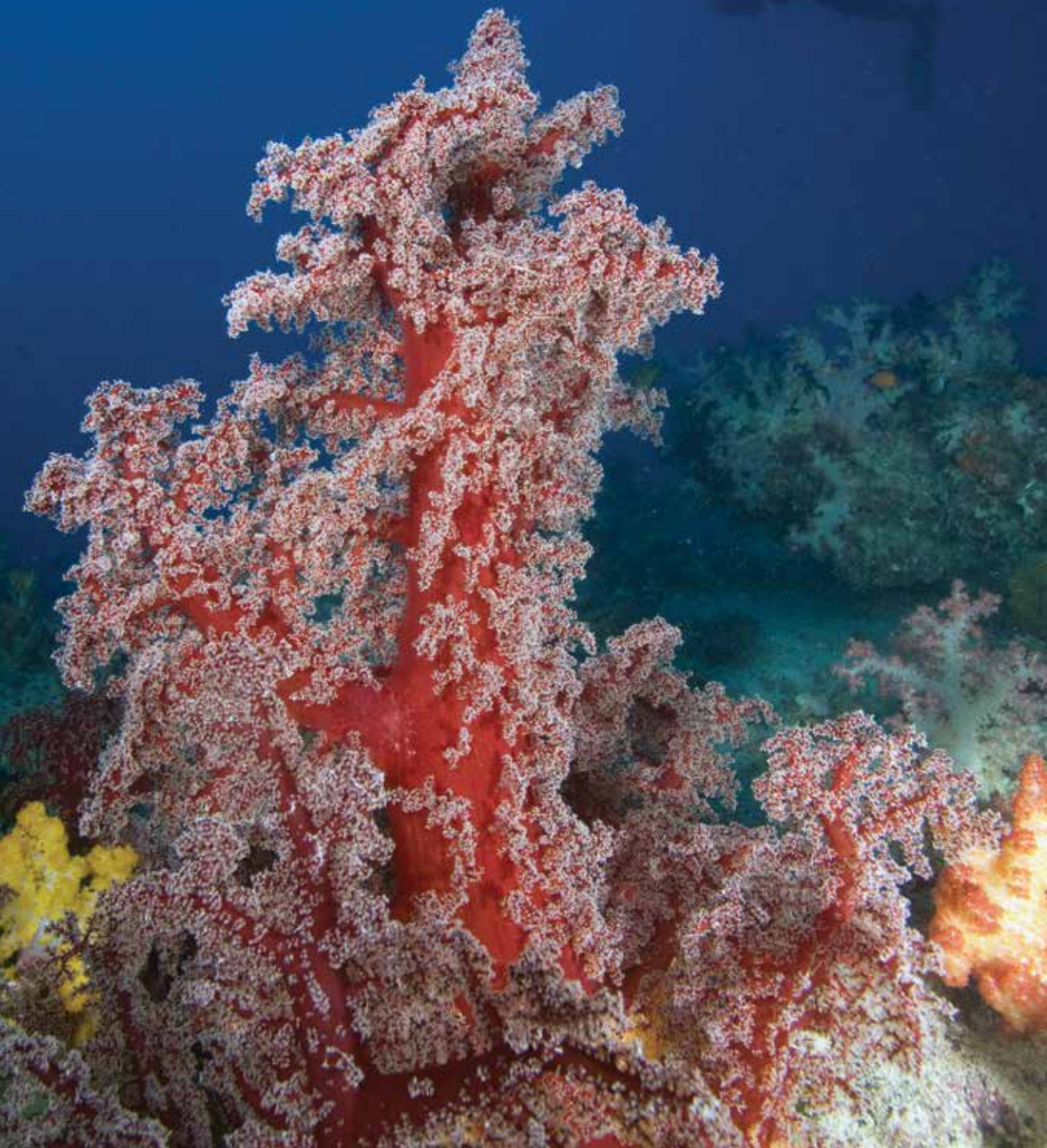
Frangipani, *Plumeria rubra*

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Introduction



This book contains a selection of images from a dive trip to Taveuni in the Republic of Fiji. It is a celebration of life, friendship and the warmth of the Fijian people. It couldn't have happened without the folk who accompanied me on this trip. A vinaka vaka levu to Nancy Bale, Ken Brandt, Joni Bruegel, Robin Ekholm, Dave and Helen Hassall, Dave Herrick, Andris Lapins, Shannon Mayes, Gena Meyer, Peter and Kirstin Rawlins, Dawn Riccoboni and Kathy Ryan.

LEFT: Soft coral and diver

OPPOSITE: Fringing reef and coconuts - a typical Taveuni landscape



Taveuni



Taveuni is Fiji's third largest island. Because the mongoose was never introduced here, Taveuni has managed to retain most of its original fauna and the rugged nature of much of the island has discouraged major logging operations.

Taveuni has around 150 volcanic cones and although evidently none of them remain active, there were major volcanic eruptions in the south of the island during the early years of human occupation and there was a lava flow as recently as 1550. I have been fortunate to traverse the island on the 180 degree meridian so can attest to the ruggedness of the terrain.

Lake Tagimaucia is a volcanic crater in the central mountain chain. Although long reputed to be bottomless, the lake gave up its secret when we sounded its dark waters and discovered a maximum depth of less than 30 feet (9 metres).

The mountains surrounding the crater include Uluigalau, Fiji's second-highest peak at just over 4000 feet (1219m), and Des Voeux Peak, the third tallest at a tad below this height. This mountain chain intercepts the trade winds so the island is very wet on the eastern side and a little drier on the west, where it is protected from the trades.

Taveuni boasts an endemic fruit bat, the Fiji fruit bat, also known by its less glamorous name the Fijian monkey-faced fruit bat. It has been seen on only a few occasions and therefore not much is known about its biology.

Other spectacular creatures include the orange dove, the silktail, and the Fiji ground frog. The orange dove is also found on nearby Qamea. The silktail (a bird) is also known from the Natewa peninsula on Vanua Levu and may be endangered there, while the ground frog is known from several other Fijian islands, although Taveuni seems to be its stronghold.

The Taveuni shining parrot or red-breasted musk parrot is often seen, or at least heard. Its raucous calls are characteristic of forest and plantation areas. Rarely seen is a giant longhorn beetle, the Taveuni beetle, *Xixuthrus terribilis*. This is one of the world's largest insects with a body length of up to nearly six inches (15.24cm). Thanks to the absence of the mongoose, land crabs do well here too.

LEFT: The Taveuni collared kingfisher, *Halcyon chloris*

OPPOSITE: You are never far from unspoiled natural beauty at Paradise



Amongst the plants, the tagimaucia, *Medinilla waterhousei*, is probably the most famous. Although reputed to grow only around the crater lake, the species is also found on Vanua Levu (but don't tell anyone in Taveuni this...). There are also several endemic palms on Taveuni and almost certainly a number of plants yet to be discovered. Fijians, or their predecessors, probably colonized Taveuni around 2000 years ago. The island first came to European notice with the advent of Abel Tasman who sailed past its shores under misty conditions in 1643.

In recent years, Taveuni has become recognized as an extraordinary ecotourism destination with a spectacular coastal walk on the east coast, as well as rich and relatively undisturbed forest and superb diving. Sites such as the Great White Wall and the Rainbow Reef are world famous. The Great White Wall typically features on lists of the world's top ten dive sites. It's certainly amongst my top ten.

Paradise Taveuni is a relatively new resort, but it has already helped put Taveuni and Taveuni diving on the map. Paradise has infiltrated our brains – most of us want to return to the delights it has to offer and to enjoy the spectacular diving. Pro Dive Taveuni runs an efficient operation. The house reef is arguably the best in Fiji and the diving on Vuna and Rainbow is not to be missed.

The ruggedness of the terrain and relatively low population density have kept much of the island forested. Unfortunately threats still remain. Recently the American green iguana was deliberately released on Qamea island and specimens either swam to Taveuni or were deliberately released here. It is unknown what impact this will have on the native banded iguana. Every effort must be made to ensure that the mongoose never gets here.

I have long argued that most of Taveuni should be a World Heritage Site and have been lobbying for National Park status for much of the east coast since I first arrived in Fiji in 1978. I am excited to report that NatureFiji-MareqetiViti (www.naturefiji.org), in conjunction with a number of government bodies and other organizations, is pushing for this. I also understand that the current government (2014) is receptive to the idea of a part of Taveuni becoming a World Heritage Site. I hope this book will strengthen these worthy initiatives.

LEFT: Taveuni. Satellite imagery courtesy Google Earth © 2011 Google, Imagery © 2010 Google, Map data © 2011 Google



RIGHT: Wainibau Falls, Wainisairi River, east coast
OVERLEAF: Swimming pool at Paradise Taveuni





ABOVE: Palm plantation

PREVIOUS PAGE: Sunset at Paradise Taveuni

OPPOSITE: Lavena Point. This *Pandanus* tree has since been lost in a storm.



RIGHT: Lavena coast
OPPOSITE: East coast sunset and Bouma Falls





ABOVE: The view from Des Voeux Peak looking across the Somosomo Strait at sunrise

OPPOSITE: Mushroom rocks viewed from Lavena Coastal Walk





Dendrobium orchid species



Ruella brittoniana, Mexican petunia

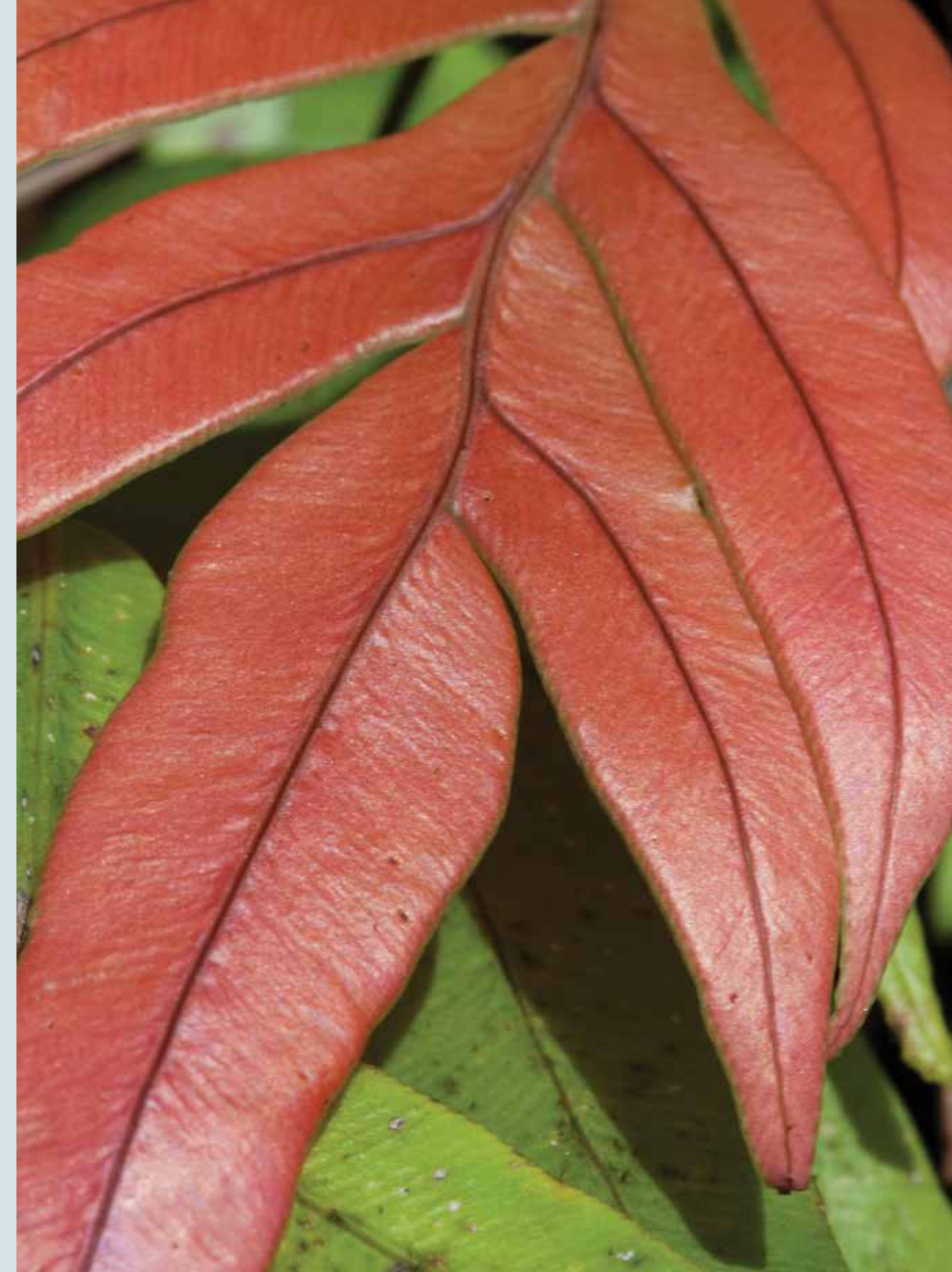


Hibiscus rosa-sinensis, red hibiscus



Thunbergia alata, Black-eyed Susan

RIGHT: Red fern fronds on the slopes of Des Voeux Peak





LEFT: Red torch ginger *Alpinia purpurata*



RIGHT: Fig tree, *Ficus* species. These berries have been formed from flowers that grow directly from the branches of the tree, a phenomenon called cauliflory.



ABOVE and RIGHT: *Medinilla waterhousei* or tagimaucia. The brilliant red colour comes from bracts surrounding the bright petals. Tagimaucia is an epiphyte that grows high on the branches of forest trees and flowers only during the wet season.





There are some interesting critters at Naibogiono.
ABOVE: Caterpillar of the moth *Elygaea fullonia*
RIGHT: *Hermarchus apollonius*, giant Fijian stick insects mating



ABOVE: Salticid spider. These cute little jumping spiders seem to have more personality than regular spiders. They will typically look at you when you approach. Males 'semaphore' the females in a species-specific pattern that usually lets them avoid being eaten when they get close enough to mate.

RIGHT: *Trypetisoma caniventre*, the red-eye fly
OPPOSITE: *Diplacodes bipunctata*, the red percher dragonfly. Although this species is common to the region, Fiji has many species of the closely related damselflies which are found only on Taveuni.



RIGHT: *Oriens augustula*, a skipper butterfly. Skippers are highly proficient fliers and this ability has enabled them to colonize many of the islands in the Fiji group.





ABOVE: Large weevil

OPPOSITE: *Sesarma impressum*, purple land crab. Female with eggs.



RIGHT: Unidentified orange-clawed land crab
OPPOSITE: *Platymantis vitiana*, Fiji ground frog



RIGHT: *Labuanium rotundatum*, golden tree crab at Naibogiono





ABOVE: *Brachylophus bulabula*, a Fijian iguana female. Sadly, the Central American iguana has been deliberately introduced to Taveuni and several neighboring islands. Its impact on this beautiful native is currently unknown.

OPPOSITE: *Candoia bibroni*, Pacific Islands boa, one of the top terrestrial predators on Taveuni.



RIGHT: A preserved specimen of the elusive Taveuni burrowing snake. Currently undescribed, it belongs to the genus *Ramphotylops*. It was originally reported to science in 1897 and two specimens were lodged with the Australian Museum. These were subsequently lost but the species was rediscovered recently close to Paradise Taveuni. While the Taveuni burrowing snake is harmless to humans, earthworms may be in fear for their lives.

OPPOSITE, LEFT: Polynesian starling, *Aplonus tabuensis*, scoffing an over-ripe papaya.

OPPOSITE, RIGHT: The common mynah bird *Acridotheres tristis*. It has been introduced to many countries where it has almost always thrived, unfortunately often at the expense of local species and agriculture.



RIGHT: You may see this lizard in your outdoor shower. It is the South Pacific black skink, *Emoia nigra*. Common around Paradise Taveuni, they are heavily predated by mongoose on Fiji's two main islands.





Myiagra vanikorensis, Vanikoro broadbill



Ptilinopus perousii, many-coloured fruit dove



Butorides striatus, mangrove heron. These may be relatively common but are rarely seen.



The kula or collared lory, *Phigys solitarius*



Ducula pacifica, the widespread Pacific pigeon in a papaya tree



ABOVE: Male orange dove *Ptilinopus victor* photographed at Naibogiono farms just up the road from Paradise Taveuni

OPPOSITE: Pacific flying fox *Pteropus tonganus* in flight



DIVING Taveuni



Taveuni offers arguably the best shore-based diving in Fiji and the house reef at Paradise is the best I've dived on. Pro Dive brings professionalism and enthusiasm and a willingness to fit in with the needs and desires of its dive clients. What more could you ask for?

The Rainbow Reef and the Great White Wall rank highly on many lists of the world's best dive sites.

Paradise Taveuni was so nice to come back to after a dive. We were welcomed on the jetty with towels and a glass of water. The rooms were sumptuous, the food wonderful and the piña colada just a little too tasty. By the time we had to leave, no one wanted to. The consensus was that the next time we go to Fiji we'll stay at Paradise Taveuni for two weeks. Sounds good to me.

Although the Somosomo Strait often has strong current, it is these currents that bring food for the spectacular soft corals of the Great White Wall and the Rainbow Reef. I lose patience when folk complain about currents while commenting on the beauty of the reef. You can't have one without the other. It's like complaining about it raining in a rainforest.

The Dive Masters are good at matching diver ability with conditions. If they think the current is too strong they will change the dive site. The shore dive is usually current-free and has some spectacular residents. There is a blue ribbon eel only 100 feet from the dock and there are also white-banded cleaner shrimp. The damsel fish amongst the volcanic rocks close to shore are not regularly seen on the reef and there are often schools of snapper close to the shore. These are all worth checking out.

LEFT: Rainbow Reef

OPPOSITE: Acropora coral and divers



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ABOVE: Divers at their safety stop
OPPOSITE: The Great White Wall in all its splendor



RIGHT: Rainbow Reef



LEFT: Sponges on Rainbow Reef





ABOVE: Sponge on the Rainbow Reef
OPPOSITE: Sponge detail



RIGHT: *Heteractis* anemone
OPPOSITE: Bulb anemone *Entacmaea quadricolor* tentacles



RIGHT: Swimming *Thysanozoon nigropapillosum* flatworm
OPPOSITE: *Spirobranchus giganteus*, Christmas tree worm gill detail



RIGHT: Redline flabellina *Flabellina rubrolineata*
OPPOSITE: Loch's chromodoris *Chromodoris lochii*





Phyllidia carlsonhoffi



Phyllidia species A



Phyllidia species B



Phyllidia ocellata, ocellated phyllidia



Reticulidia halgerda is relatively uncommon in Fiji

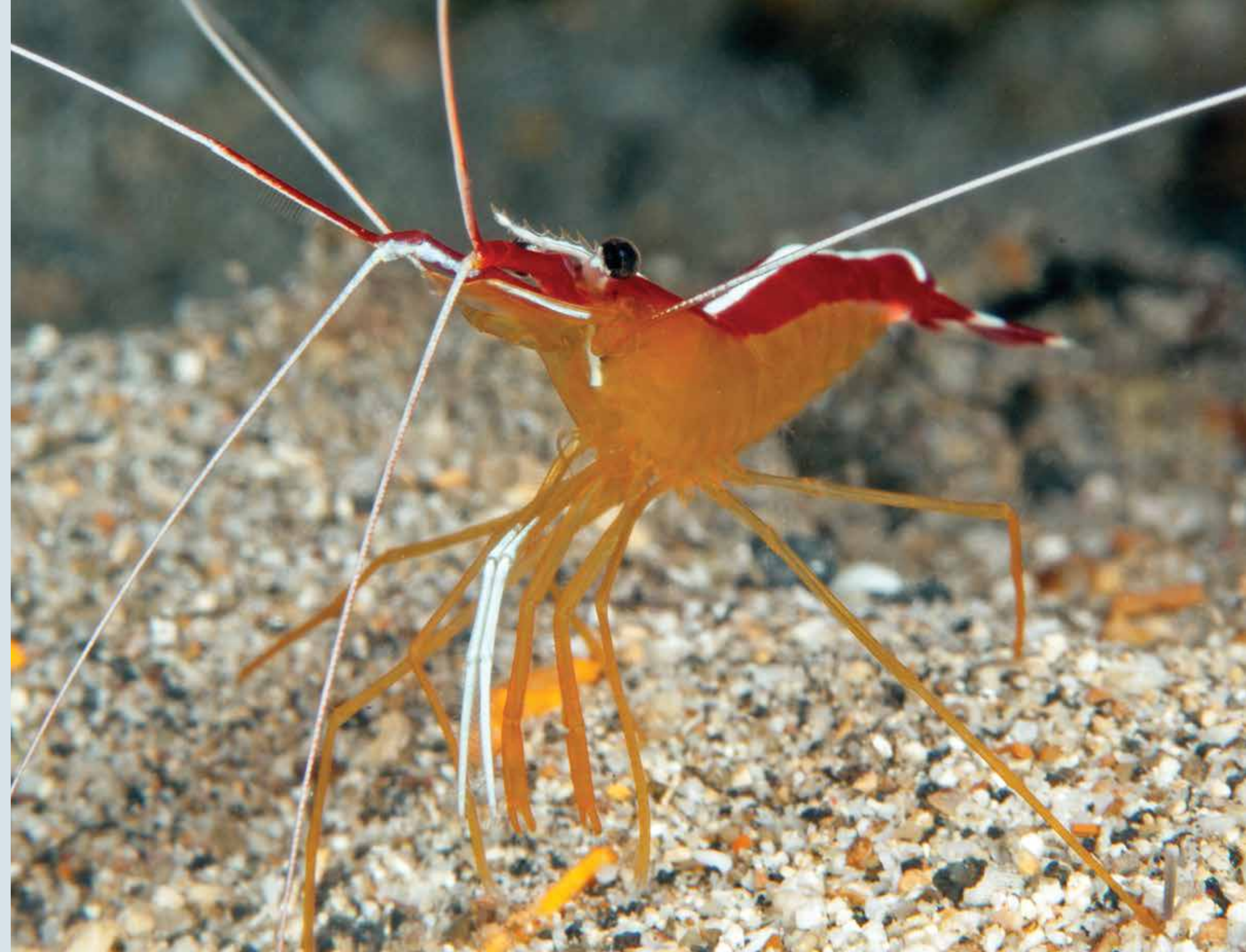


ABOVE: *Tridacna maxima*, giant clam
OPPOSITE: *Pontonides unciger* shrimp on sea whip





ABOVE: Sarasvati anemone shrimp *Periclimenes sarasvati* in burrowing anemone
OPPOSITE: White-banded cleaner shrimp *Lysmata amboinensis* on house reef





ABOVE: *Lysmata amboinensis* on house reef

OPPOSITE: *Dardanus guttatus*, blue-knee hermit crab