



**Report about the project:
the sustainable octopus fishery of Ancon**

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Report 1 of 3



Report 1

Our field work started on March 25th, into the local fish market and port that receives all commodities from the islands around Ancon bay. The local fishers were unloading some products like the jumbo squid or humboldt squid (*Dosidicus gigas*), some fishes and the octopus (*Octopus mimus*).



Image 01: Products in the Ancon fish market.

I noticed that the animal was still alive from the fishery until the transportation in trucks to the factories. We observed the movement and talked with some people, like a local reseller, and we had our first interview. With him, we discovered that the octopus has been sold to some factories, to be prepared to go to big markets in cities like Lima. Those resellers are buying the product for a small price and selling to the factories at higher prices. After that, we got back to the ship and started to work on the script and the planning for the 3 days of field.

The next day we got to Isla Grande with the “Marisqueros”, to understand the techniques of fishing and the dive with air compressor, also known as hookah diving. We discovered that is a very traditional practice in this community, even being aware of the danger of that activity. They use the air compressor connected at the engine of the boat, usually a small one, with 2-3 passengers at least. One of them is the diver, the other one is responsible for managing the hose (with the risk of getting tangled in the engine) and the other one, for managing the proper engine (that stays running during all the procedure), and also the boat, which is constantly hitten by the waves.



Image 02: Los buzos (the divers).

The diver himself takes a lot of risks, including decompressive disease, nitrogen poisoning, running out of air, tangling of the hose in the engine and hitting himself in the turbine on his way to the surface. He also used the hose as a guide, a way to communicate with the sailor on the boat. When the engine runs out of gas and the air is over, the hose is brought back and pulls the diver up, since it is connected to his weight belt. The main in-depth was around 5–8 meters, sometimes more. The equipment is very primitive, with no regulator and no mouth support, obligating the diver to bite the tip of the tube to hold it, inhaling the air with one side and exhaling with the other side of the mouth. About the air, we believe that it is fully contaminated with carbon monoxide and other harmful chemicals, since the gas of the engine is burning along the process.

Also, it was possible to notice huge amounts of debris on the water (mostly plastic materials), and a big biodiversity, including echinodermata (sea urchins and starfishes), mollusks, crustaceans and fishes.

After following the diving from the boat, I got underwater, using freediving techniques, to understand his techniques of search and capture of the animal. I noticed that the diver had a nonfunctional leg, swimming with the other only. He swam horizontally in the bentonic area, checking all the holes and possible dens. With a hook, not too sharp, he pulls out the animal super quickly and throws it in the water column, then catches it again and puts it in the bag. In total, he spent around three hours underwater, going up three times, two of them with his bag full of specimens. The majority of them were big, probably adults, with only two or three close to 1 kg, the minimum size permitted. In total, they got 120 kg of octopus (30 kg more than the permitted amount per vessel). After the diving, we had the interview with him, contemplating the questions below:

Do you fish for consumption, sale, or both? For who do you sell the octopus to?

How many years have you been fishing? At that time, was the fishing changing or has it already changed?

How do you fish for octopus (method, gear, technique) and how do you kill it?

Where do you usually fish for octopus? At what depth do you catch it?

Do you find danger in the compressor fishing? Has someone died or gotten hurt doing this?

Briefly, Rogelio is a 69-year-old diver, ex-marine, with SCUBA training and certification, with more than 40 years of diving. He sells his production for the factories in the port and to some restaurants in the bay.



Image 03: Rogelio, the diver, been interviewed by Veronica in the boat.

On land, we interviewed the man controlling the hose, Mr. Segundo Napoleon. He is an old diver too, father of the chef of the “Pepe Cangrejo” restaurant.

How much do you pay for the octopus? How many kilos per day?

What is the main dish using octopus? How is it cooked?

Have you noticed a difference in the price or availability of this product in the last few years?



Image 04: Segundo and you famous motobike.

In the sequence, we interviewed Percy, the fishery engineer in the Conciencia Marina NGO, who explained to us about the associations and the partnership between science and the people, also, the fishery itself in the area.

Early on the next day, we followed the “pulmoneros”, another association of freedivers that hunt octopus without the air compressor. They use only breath-holding abilities to harvest their prey. At the first moment, we had a more informal conversation with them, to understand what are their goals and what they think about sustainability and the issues that permeate the octopus fishery. Then, we made some images of the divers getting ready and going into the water. After more or less 1 hour, they returned from the water with one octopus, and we asked some questions about how they distinguish males and females, also the juveniles. In the end, we interviewed Carol, the marine biologist in Conciencia Marina NGO, asking about ecological aspects of *O. mimus*.

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