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Elusive: The sighting of the blue marlin at the park — Photo from Swann's FB account

Sighting of rare blue marlin at TAR Marine Park thrills divers

By STEPHANIE LEE
stephanielee@thestar.com.my

KOTA KINABALU: Divers were ecstatic to see an elusive blue marlin at the Tunku Abdul Rahman (TAR) Marine Park recently. Richard Swann, who has been diving in the area for over 25 years, said he has never seen this species up close before here.

He had been shark-spotting for weeks and was thrilled when the two-metre-long fish swam close by before swimming away. "I selected the dive site as we have been witnessing lots of fish life in the location recently, so I spent all my bottom time in the area, hoping something special would happen," he said in his Facebook post on April 19.

"We have all been going whale shark crazy due to the amazing season," Swann said, adding that he had the shock of a lifetime when the blue marlin came to hunt on the reef.

He said the usually elusive fish circled him twice before disappearing into the blue.

"It's my first filming experience with one of these super fast predators, and I have no doubt it's a first for the TAR Marine Park. I was very fortunate to be able to get so close and to have a camera in hand," he said.

Named one of the fastest fish in the ocean, these strong and agile blue marlin were once abundant in the waters off Kota Kinabalu, which is why a sculpture of the fish is placed in the middle of a roundabout in the city.

Their numbers have, however, dwindled over the years and are now classified as threatened due to overfishing and bycatch. Sabah Fisheries director Aznar Kassim said the deep-sea fish are often caught in Sabah's Lahad Datu, Kunak and Semporna waters.