

Acknowledgements We dedicate this study to Mario Pasquini, great friend, best diver, and our very important advisor and collaborator, who left us on June 19, 2005. We also wish to thank E. Manzardo, S. Arnone, L. Tomesani, M. Longagnani, L. Podda, O. Panaro, for their valuable scuba assistance in collecting monthly samples. R. Falconi gave assistance in defining laboratory guidelines. G. Marconi provided significant help in preparing histological samples. J. P. Gilmour (Australian Institute of Marine Science) revised and significantly improved this paper. We also thank two anonymous reviewers for their valuable revision. The Marine Science Group (www.marinesciencegroup.org) provided scientific, technical and logistical support. Bologna Scuba Team gave assistance for the dives. Our research was supported by the Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca (MIUR), by the Associazione dei Tour Operator Italiani (ASTOI) and by Scuba Schools International Italy (SSI). The experiments complied with the current laws of Italy.