

THE
REEF
SEEKER



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January - 2022



HAPPY NEW YEAR???

I was tempted to start off with, "Well, it can't get any worse . . ." but that's what we said last year.

Hopefully 2021 was better for you than 2020 (it was for me and for Reef Seekers) and that 2022 will show more improvement. COVID certainly once again was dominating our thinking and our actions all year and is rearing its ugly little spike-protein head again, but I'm sure we'll muddle through. And hopefully at some point this year, there really WILL be light at the end of the pandemic tunnel.

So here's to better things ahead.

NEW GIANT SEA BASS

I don't think I get any parental rights but I was just notified that one of the Giant Sea Bass that I photo'd over the summer in Avalon is a new visitor to the Underwater Park.

We've mentioned before about the Spotting Giant Sea Bass project,

which asks for your photos and videos of GSBs in the wild, and then attempts to match them to previous photos in their database (spot pattern is usually the key indicator). My new guy/gal (sex unknown) is GSB510. You can view the video here: <https://youtu.be/YiLNFKW860>.

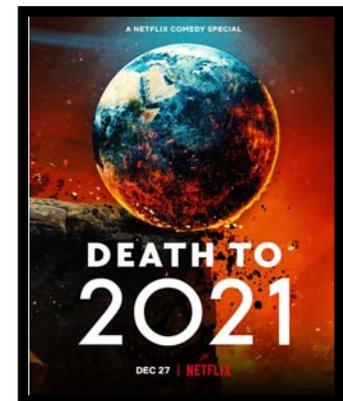
The interesting thing for me is wondering why this is the first time this fish has been spotted. GSBs have a lifespan of 60-70 years and this one is big enough that it's probably 40 years old or so. It certainly isn't a newbie. Where's it been? Has it been touring other Channel Islands and is just now discovering Catalina? Has it been living deeper and is only now coming to shallower depths where it can be seen? We had the same questions in the mid-to-late 90s when we started seeing GSBs again. At Catalina, this was generally at Italian Gardens, north of Avalon near Long Point.

If you don't know the history, GSBs were legally hunted up until 1982 when the state of California gave them protected status. But it was thought at the time that they had possibly been hunted to extinction. And in the 80s, you simply didn't see any GSBs. But then that started to change.

As I mentioned above, it seems like we started seeing them with

some regularity around 1995, thirteen years after the ban took place. But we weren't seeing 13-year-old-fish. What we were seeing were much larger individuals who, like GSB510, were probably 30-40 years old. Where had they gone? Did they "know" it was getting dangerous and stayed deep to avoid predation by humans? If that was the case, how did they "know" that it was safe to come shallower?

Lots of questions with little answers but, especially for those of us who have been diving California for a long time, this back-story is why we get so excited when we see a Giant Sea Bass.



MOVIE RECOMMENDATION

If you've got Netflix, check out "Death to 2021." It's a mockumentary featuring real news footage interspersed with actors doing satire about the events. Well done IMHO.

COVID OUTBREAK ON A LIVEABORD

What you're about to read is true and on-going as I'm writing this. The information comes from one of our regular divers but I'm going to keep his name and that of the dive company out of this. However, I can tell you the company is NOT one that Reef Seekers has ever done business with.

The short version of this is that our diver signed up for a weeklong Caribbean liveaboard. Standard Saturday-Saturday itinerary. There are 22 passengers and 13 crew onboard. And, despite everyone having to produce negative tests to enter the country, there has been a COVID outbreak on the boat. As I'm writing this, 19 passengers and 9 crew have tested positive. That's an 80% positivity/infection rate.

They cancelled the last two days of diving and are now back in their home port. A government doctor came on board to re-test everyone. Those who test positive should be sent to a government-approved hotel to isolate but there are so many infections in the country that there aren't hotel rooms available. However, they may end up in an Airbnb for 10 days.

The good news in all of this is that the symptoms for my diver (and the others) are very mild. He says it's like having a cold, which is typical of what the Omicron symptoms have been described as. And he says he even feels a bit better today than yesterday.

But this whole episode brings up all kinds of questions.

The first thing I asked is what the COVID protocols were once on

the boat. He said, "It was loosey goosey on the boat. No one wore masks and it was buffet-style meals with everyone eating at two large tables. Elbow-to-elbow." That would seem to be the first problem. You can certainly make an argument that if you're convinced that no one getting on the boat is infected, do you really need to do mitigation measures since there's no way to get infected unless someone gives it to you. And at this point, he doesn't know if someone faked a test, or if there was a false negative, or what.

The other thing I found interesting was that this is the third COVID outbreak they've had. One early in the year, one in the summer, and now this. You would think that after two outbreaks (or even just one), they'd institute some on-board procedures to avoid another.

As an example of how to deal with this, Nautilus (which is who we're diving with in March) has had an on-board policy of masks when you're not in your cabin, split the group in half for dining so it's not elbow-to-elbow in the salon, no buffets and galley crew are the only ones to handle food, and lots of hand sanitizers on each deck.

Nothing's perfect but personally I'm a lot more comfortable with what Nautilus is doing. There's no such thing as "too safe."

The other concern is: Who pays for everything once you test positive? And this is where he's in good shape. Prior to leaving he had told me, "After getting my negative test," (in his home state), "I uploaded the results to country customs and they issue you a Health Visa (\$40). If I get Covid there, the Health Visa guarantees all medical and hotel expenses are paid until I'm out of quarantine. It's a nifty arrangement." I agree.

This also underscores a lot of things we've discussed over the past two years. Make sure the people you're dealing with take COVID as seriously (or not as seriously) as you do. In other words, choose operators who you feel are reasonable but not over-bearing. And have some sort of insurance in place in case you do get sick. It's bad enough to have your vacation ruined. Don't let it cost you and arm-and-a-leg as well. (Or with COVID, an arm-and-a-lung.)

Look to TWARS in the coming weeks for updates and to see how this all played out.

2022 DIVING VACATIONS

March 11-20 • Socorro

May 20-28 • Bonaire

July (??) • Indonesia

Fall (??) • Yap



**ZOOM SEEKERS
IN 2022**

As I've said previously, we were very happy with how well-accepted Zoom Seekers was in 2021. And we're happy to announce our full slate of speakers and topics for 2022. You'll find them as an additional, separate page in this newsletter, which can be printed out or saved on your computer for future reference. (It's actually the very next page.) You'll also find a more expansive list, along with speaker pix and bios, on our website. (That page also has a link to the archives of all previous talks from 2021.)

The format will remain the same. All the talks are on the second Tuesday of the respective month. Links will also be sent out in TWARS the Sunday before the talk and a reminder with the link at 3PM on the day of the talk. We'll let you out of the Zoom Waiting Room at 7:30PM (we'll also start the FaceBook live-stream at that time). We'll take a few minutes for stragglers as well as to mingle and chit-chat and I usually intro the speaker around 7:35. Presentations are around 45 minutes. Some are a little longer, some are a little shorter. Following the presentation, we'll open up for Q&A moderated by me. We're generally done by 9PM.

Dan Orr in January and Dr. Doug Ebersole in February (giving us an

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Wed.	Jan. 5	--- CLASS ---	--- Photo Workshop ---	\$30
Thu.	13	Redondo (Vets)	••• Squid Dive (night) •••	FREE
Wed.	19	Catalina Express	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$170
Sat.	29	Redondo (Vets)	Beach Diving (single tank)	\$30
Wed.	Feb. 2	--- CLASS ---	--- NAUI Nitrox ---	\$95
Sat.	12	Redondo (Vets)	Navigation (single dive)	\$30
Wed.	16	Catalina Express	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$170
Thu.	24	Redondo (Vets)	••• Squid Dive (night) •••	FREE

update on COVID and diving and what we've learned since last year) are the only two repeats from last year. And the topics really will run the gamut of diving interests from diving with Gray Whales to diving in an aquarium environment to the work of some 501(c)(3) groups to underwater geology to a history of our local diving industry from Dr. Sam Miller III, who was there for most of the events that he'll talk about.

Of special interest will be the September 13 talk. Our guest will be Adam Tucker who was the lead NTSB investigator for the Conception fire. That month will mark the third anniversary of the tragedy and Adam will talk about the process of the investigation and the various challenges it posed. To be clear, this is NOT a blame-assigning or finger-pointing chat. But I think Adam will be able to give you some valuable insight into what we know and what we don't know about all of his, and what changes in the way we use dive boats (and other commercial small passenger vessels) their findings may indicate.

So it looks to be an exciting year with lots of good stuff and I'm hoping we'll be having you join us for as many of these as you can. (If you miss them, they're all recorded and archived and up on our YouTube page.)

**ZOOM SEEKERS
IN JANUARY**

We are quite pleased to welcome back to the Zoom Seekers fold Dan Orr, past president of D.A.N. (Divers Alert Network), and a well-known and frequent lecturer on the dive circuit. Dan truly has a passion about dive safety (he spoke to us last January about that) and this time round, he's going to talk about the things we need to consider about how we dive as we get older.

Now for any of you young punks out there reading this and saying, "This doesn't apply to me because I'm not old yet," hold your horses. No matter what our age, as we get older – 20s to 30s, 30s to 40s, etc. – things simply don't work the way they used to. Maybe you're losing a little flexibility, maybe you've gained some non-pandemic weight, maybe you can't lift as much as you used to, maybe your stamina's not the same, and a whole host of other things that come with the aging process. Dan will address some of these changes and challenges and give you some things to look out for and ways you can adapt.

Dan's talk will be on Tuesday, January 11, starting at 7:30PM Pacific time. Once he's finished his talk, there will be time for a Q&A. Hope to "see" you there.

ZOOM SEEKERS 2022 - DATES • SPEAKERS • TOPICS (always a Tues @ 7:30PM)

JANUARY 11 • DAN ORR • “SAFETY ISSUES FOR DIVERS AS WE GROW OLDER”

Growing older is inevitable. In order to continue to safely enjoy the sport, it's important to understand how the normal aging process affects diver safety. Every diver should know how to recognize and reduce risks to improve safety and maximize enjoyment for divers as we age.

FEBRUARY 8 • DR. DOUG EBERSOLE • “DIVING & COVID UPDATE”

In 2021, Doug gave us some advice about COVID and diving. But in the ensuing year, we've learned more about this disease. Doug will not only give some practical advice, but also let us know what we know now that we didn't know a year ago, and what the diving angle to all of this is. He'll provide an overview of the disease, as well as discussing what has worked and what hasn't worked in terms of how the diving industry has dealt with this pandemic. Finally, Doug will provide an updated framework for divers who have contracted the virus to safely return to diving.

MARCH 8 • MIKE LEVER • “SECRETS OF GRAY WHALES”

Baja is the only place in the world where Gray Whales swim up to pangas to be stroked, petted, kissed, and even hugged. Mama whales even push their calves against the side of the boats to interact with the humans. Because of all of this and his frequent trips to San Ignacio Lagoon, Mike became aware of part of the marine environment that had not been on his radar previously. He's not only become fascinated with Gray Whales, but has also learned some of their secrets. And he'll share those with you in this lively talk.

APRIL 12 • SEAN ECKLEY • “DIVING AT THE CALIFORNIA SCIENCE CENTER”

The CA Science Center has both aquatic and terrestrial animals as a part of their Ecosystems Exhibits, specifically their 188,000 gallon Kelp Forest Exhibit featuring over 45 different species of fish, as well as live kelp growth. In order for them to maintain the exhibits and promote conservation and knowledge about our oceans, they have a dedicated team of volunteer divers who come in throughout the week to clean, feed, and give daily dive show presentations. CSC would like to get more volunteer divers in their program and this talk will tell you about the work they do as well as how you can apply to join.

MAY 10 • MARK GIBELLO, XS SCUBA • “DIVING FROM A MANUFACTURER'S POV”

It's one thing to see this industry as a diver, it's another to see it as an instructor, and yet another to see it as a dive shop. But it's a wholly different viewpoint when you're a manufacturer. For this talk Mark & Vernon will provide us with that perspective and deal with such things as finding new products and bringing them to market, supply chain issues, dealing with retailers, returns, and other aspects of this wonderful business that may sometimes escape the purview of the recreational diver.

JUNE 14 • NANCY CARUSO • “ABALONE & KELP RESTORATION”

In this talk, Nancy will explain how they're working to restore the kelp forest ecosystem (kelp, White Seabass, Green Abalone, and Pismo Clams) by getting the community involved in hands-on science and restoration. They've successfully restored Orange County's kelp forests which were gone for more than 20 years. Now, they're working to restore the species that once thrived in them. By involving the community in the restoration work, it ensures that the participants will have a stake in the health of the restored species and take ownership to conserve them in the future. Get Inspired currently has 5,000 growing abalone which will be out-planted starting in 2023.

JULY 12 • KURT LIEBER • “OCEAN DEFENDERS ALLIANCE”

Ocean Defenders Alliance works to clean and protect marine ecosystems through documentation, education, and meaningful action. Working with affected communities, they focus primarily on the reduction and removal of man-made debris which poses serious threats to ocean wildlife and habitats. ODA envisions a world in which they educate communities and involve them in solutions that help ensure marine ecosystems can exist free from harm caused by human debris. Without abandoned fishing gear, trash, and improperly sunken vessels damaging their habitat, marine flora and fauna will be able to thrive.

AUGUST 9 • SELENA McMILLAN • “REEF CHECK CALIFORNIA”

Founded in 1996, the Reef Check Foundation is an international non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of tropical coral reefs and temperate kelp forests. With offices in Los Angeles and Santa Cruz, California and volunteer teams in more than 40 countries and territories, Reef Check's mission is to lead citizen scientists who promote stewardship of sustainable reef communities around the globe. In 1997, Reef Check conducted the first-ever global survey of coral reef health. The survey provided scientific evidence of a worldwide crisis- caused by overfishing and pollution- in the condition of our coral reefs. In 2005, Reef Check launched its first temperate reef program in California. Reef Check California has grown to be the largest citizen science monitoring group collecting data on California's kelp forests and its statewide Marine Protected Area (MPA) network. In 2016, this program expanded into climate change monitoring and is now providing ocean temperature data from over 90 sites, and is monitoring ocean acidification at key sites in California's MPAs.

SEPTEMBER 13 • ADAM TUCKER • “THE CONCEPTION FIRE INVESTIGATION”

Adam was the lead investigator for the NTSB and will talk about the process of the investigation, what challenges were faced, and what was different about this investigation compared to other ones he has done. This is NOT intended to be a finger-pointing or blame-assigning chat. But Adam will tell you what was (and what was not) found, the significance of the NTSB's findings, and what changes their recommendations might produce in the overall small passenger vessel industry.

OCTOBER 11 • DR. MARK LEGG • “UNDERWATER GEOLOGY AROUND CATALINA”

We live in an earthquake-prone area and those fault lines also ruin out into the ocean and affect things both above and below the water. Dr. Legg will tell you about some of those, describe some fascinating underwater events that have happened in spots where we regularly dive, and will leave you with a slightly different impression of what's happening geologically in our ocean than you may currently think.

NOVEMBER 8 • DR. SAM MILER III • “IN THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENED”

Dr. Sam Miller III has been around diving for a loooooong time. When he talks about the history of the sport, he can do so not because he read about it in a book or magazine, but because he was likely there when it happened and knows first-hand. In this talk, he share some of those stories with you and give you a better idea of how this industry came to be created and evolved. Sam will use his personal knowledge as well as his extensive library to enlighten you on some of the history of this sport that we all love so much.

DECEMBER 13, 2022 • DOUG & LORENZA SLOSS • “TAKE BETTER PICTURES”

Everyone who has ever held a camera in their hand wants to take better pictures than they currently do. And for those who are on that quest to be the next underwater Ansel Adams, Doug & Lorenza can help point you there. In this talk, they'll go through some of the basics and will share with you how they got their son, Sam, interested and involved in underwater photography.



CLEANUP TIME

We're getting geared up for the resumption of the in-person Avalon Underwater Cleanup which will be held on Saturday, February 26. This year marks the 40th annual version of the event so you already know it's going to be special. Plus, since we had to go virtual last year, it'll be nice to do this all in-person again.

The traditional spot for the Reef Seekers crew is at the Green Pier

as we've always felt that's where some of the most interesting diving as well as the most interesting trash can be found. We'll take an early (6AM) boat over from Long Beach, check in, have breakfast (not included in our package), dive briefing at 9AM, diving from 9:30-11:00AM, your choice of transport to the park for more diving or gear storage, awards ceremony 1-3PM, and a late afternoon (3:45) boat back. Also note that there will be COVID protocols in place as determined by the City of Avalon and USC (the latter of which is the overall event sponsor).

This event is always a lot of fun plus it raises needed funds for both the Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber and the Catalina Conservation Divers, who operate out of the

Wrigley Marine Institute. Our package includes the boat, taxis, and event registration and is \$140. You can also register on your own on the Cleanup website and tag yourself as a member of the Reef Seekers group when you do so.

We will hope to see you on February 26!!!

NO ROSE PARADE FOR ME THIS YEAR

I love going to the Rose Parade and sharing the pix with you, especially of the floats that have underwater themes. But I've made the choice not to go this year, because of COVID concerns. So here are a few pix of past floats that I thought you might enjoy.

PICTURE PAGE - Fishy Floats

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2022)



**Singpoli
2018**



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**Western Assets
2019**



**Up a Creek
2016**



**City of Burbank
2013**



**LaCañada-Flintridge
2015**