

THE REEF SEEKER



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CHAMBER DAY 2018 - \$116,057

We are pleased to report that we had another successful fund-raiser for our Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber this year, with a net of \$116,057 being raised. This total is after the major expense of the food for Chamber Evening is deducted, so that's all money that will be used to keep our Chamber open and available for another year.

We tried a few new things this year - different raffle format and VGD VIP area at Chamber Eve, plus Early Bird pricing for Chamber Day - and we'll make some tweaks for next year. But hopefully everyone had a good time and - more importantly - we raised much-needed funds for our Chamber.

Here's how the numbers break down by segment of the event:

- Chamber Day (boat, raffles, merchandise) - \$13,369
- Flying Dutchman - \$7,600
- Chamber Eve (dinners, VGD, raffle tix, merchandise) - \$26,872
- Challenge - \$66,186

- Web merchandise - \$2,030

Chamber Day is very important to our Chamber (and by extension to you) because it provides roughly 50% of the funds needed to keep the place running all year. This allows us not only to maintain staff and volunteers, but also to train, teach, and do all the other things we've come to expect over the years from our Chamber.

So thank you all very much for your generous support and please remember that while this buys us another year, we'll be starting the process again next for spring for Chamber Day & Eve 2019, which will be held on May 1.

GEAR NEED SERVICING?

Even though we can dive in SoCal all year round, a lot of people still think of Memorial Day to Labor Day as the prime diving season. And if that's you and it's been a while since your gear got wet (let alone you as well), you might want to have it serviced or at least bench-checked before you take your first plunge of the season. And Reef Seekers can help.

We still maintain a full-service repair department in the form of our repair guru Robert Stark. When we closed the store at the end of

2006, we literally took our repair room in the back of the store and moved it into Robert's garage in Westchester (near Lincoln/Manchester). And that's where it has thrived ever since.

Another advantage of this arrangement is that Robert's able to be a lot more flexible with available hours at his home than we were at the store. If he won't be home at a time that's convenient for you, there's a secure place for you to leave the gear for him.

On top of that, we offer what we call Concierge Service. For a small extra fee, you don't have to go to Robert but he comes to you to pick up the gear and then returns it when the work is done. No one else in town offers anything like that and the only limitation is that this is limited to the greater Los Angeles area. (So if you live in San Francisco or Bakersfield or San Diego, Robert's not driving there. But you might be able to talk him into parts of Orange County.)

We've also got a dedicated repair phone that's separate from our main number. It's 310/947-8523 and rings directly through to Robert or his voicemail.

So make sure your gear is in tiptop shape to go diving this summer. Just get in touch with Robert and he'll get you all squared away.



THE BOYS ARE BACK IN TOWN

Probably some girls too . . .

But we're talking about the Black Sea Bass who were residing in the Avalon Underwater Park last summer and who now seem to be making their way back for another summer of fabulous encounters.

We were out with a group on May 19 and saw these gentle giants on every dive. Our estimation was that at the time there were probably five different individuals that we were seeing. (But we got word from Dr. Bill Bushing that it seems now there might be ten of them hanging around.) And assuming they behave as they did last year, it looks like we'll have them around for most of the summer.

The kelp is back and thick as well, and that may be part of the reasons the BSBs like to hang in the Park. You wouldn't think that an animal that can grow to be as much as seven feet long and weigh in at 800 pounds would be able to hide very well, but it's amazing how many times you're swimming around and suddenly realize you're right next to one hanging in the kelp that you didn't spot until you were upon him.

For the record, the largest one ever reported landed - back in the day when they were hunted - was 563 pounds caught in 1968. The ones we're seeing in the Park are in the

4-6' range, and I'd estimate their weight at anywhere from 200-400 pounds. There's one that's especially big and another who has a hook in his mouth with a long stringer dangling from it.

Obviously the fish can go anywhere they want but we generally were finding them straight out from the stairs in roughly 60 feet of water. They key when you spot them is to contain your excitement as best you can and even come to a full stop if possible. Let the animal get comfortable with your presence and there's a good chance it will hang around or even approach you for a closer look. (I had one that actually "kissed" me on the mask.) But if you make a quick move towards them, it's pretty much a sure bet that the animal will take off and there's no way you're going to catch it.

Encounters with Black Sea Bass used to be rare but are getting more common now, especially since the creation of MPAs (of which the Avalon Underwater Park is one) up and down the coast. Even though Black Sea Bass have been on a protected species list since 1982, it seems sightings of them have increased in the last few

years since the MPAs went into effect. That could be a coincidence or it could be a by-product.

You can certainly go look for them on your own or, if you'd like to have some most seasoned help, think about joining us for our next foray to the Underwater Park on Saturday, June 30. \$150 will cover you for boat ride, taxi, tank & airfills, and all the Black Sea Bass we can find. Call us at 310/652-4990 to get signed up. And be sure to take a look at the back page of this newsletter for some of what we'll hope to see.

STRAP CHECK

One of the most aggravating things to have happen is to break a strap just as you're ready to take the plunge. But there's an easy way to check them to avoid calamity.

Just stretch them. If you see a lot of little cracks and separations, that's probably a good indication that they should be replaced. And if you REALLY want to play it safe, just carry a spare mask strap and a spare fin strap (or two) with you. It's cheap insurance to make sure you don't miss a dive.

2018 DIVING VACATIONS

June 8-20 • Yap Immersion

August 18-25 • Isla Mujeres

Sept. interest in Indonesia??

Oct. 27 - Nov. 3 • Roatan

NITROX CLASS RE-SCHEDULED FOR JUNE 28

Due to a change in my personal schedule, we've pushed the NAUI Nitrox class back to end of June. And we full well realize the irony of this, since many of you recall our adamant and public opposition to nitrox when it was first introduced as a recreational gas back in the mid-90s.

Our concerns back then (and to some degree now) were both in the way it was being marketed to the diving industry as well as with some inherent limitations the gas imposes on your diving.

In simplest form, nitrox is a blend that has more oxygen and less nitrogen in it than standard air. Because of the lessened amount of nitrogen, you absorb less over the course of a dive which means you either come up with less residual nitrogen than you would have on the same dive on air, or you can dive longer and come up with the same amount that a shorter air dive would have produced. So nitrox can make your dive longer - but with the same relative risk of the bends as a dive on air that produces the same nitrogen load - or you can come up with less residual nitrogen on nitrox than the same dive on air which in theory should make you less susceptible to a bends hit, aka safer. But it's not both and it was being market as "Dive Longer, Dive Safer" and that's simply not true.

Especially not when you factor in the chances of an oxygen toxicity hit (aka "oxtox"), which is possible because the nitrox you're breathing has a higher percentage of oxygen than the air and that

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Sat.	June 2	Redondo	Beach dive (single tank)	\$25
Thu.	28	- CLASS -	NAUI Nitrox	\$25
Sat.	30	Catalina Express	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$150
Thu.	July 12	- CLASS -	- Fish ID -	\$25
Sat.	Aug. 4	Catalina Express	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$150
Sat.	11	Redondo	Navigation dive (single tank)	\$25
Thu.	Sept. 6	Redondo	••• Night Dive •••	FREE!!!

produces a depth limit that's well within recreational diving ranges.

Most people don't realize that oxtox is factor in air dives as well. The basic assumption is that beyond a certain partial pressure, oxygen, which is normally a life-sustaining gas, actually becomes toxic to us. When I got certified in 1978, that partial pressure was accepted as 2atm. Nowadays, we've gotten more conservative and frequently use a partial pressure of 1.4atm as our limit.

On air, that means you can dive to 187 feet - well beyond recreational (let alone reasonable) depths - so that's why oxtox really isn't an issue when diving on air. But on a 32% nitrox mix, that depth limit then becomes 111' and that's certainly in the recreational range. Boost the mix to 36% and the depth limit is 95 feet, and boost it to 40% and the depth limit now is 82 feet.

And to circle back to where we started without teaching the entire class in these pages, if you're interested in getting certified in nitrox or maybe you're already certified but you didn't understand the math and physics as well as you'd like to, wouldn't you rather learn it all from a True Skeptic than from a True Believer? And if you see the wisdom and logic in that, then plan to join us (we already have a few people confirmed) on June 28. Give us a call at 310/652-4990 to get signed up.



WHY DIVERS DIE

For those who have asked, we will again be giving our annual "Why Divers Die" seminar at the Scuba Show in Long Beach on Saturday, June 23, starting at 4PM. (You'll need a seminar ticket or pass to attend.) This is the annual review of all scuba fatalities that fell under the jurisdiction of the L.A. County Department of Medical Examiner-Coroner for calendar year 2017. The panel will consists of Capt. John Kades from the Coroner who will describe the facts of the accident, Karl Huggins from the Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber who will go over what the Chamber was able (or not able) to do, and Ken Kurtis (me) who will give the teachable details to walk away with.

This is usually one of the better-attended seminars at the Scuba Show and we've got a big room with plenty of seats. Because we are the last seminar of the day, we're pretty much open-ended time-wise and are happy to take questions.

Hope to see you there.

CLEARED YOUR MASK LATELY???

Was your initial thought, "I hated that! Why would I do it voluntarily?" Then you're the one I need to talk to.

Mask clearing isn't hard. But it's never a task that student divers seem to enjoy. No question that people don't like getting water up their nose when they do it wrong. And many people struggle to get through it in their basic class and then say to themselves, "Well, I'm not doing THAT again."

So they merrily go along with life, diving here and there, and maybe it's ten years later, they haven't cleared their mask again since that basic class, but now they're out in some wonderful tropical location,

and some yahoo comes along and rams into them and floods their mask. What happens next?

The ideal answer would be, "They simply and easily put their mask back in place and clear it." But many times, when you haven't practiced a skill like this in a loooooong time, it's not right at your fingertips. And what should be a simple inconvenience can now turn tragic. I investigated an accident years ago when a newly-certified diver had his mask flood on descent, couldn't clear it, panicked, bolted from about 20 feet, embolised, and died.

Before you say, "That wouldn't happen to ME," just give some thought to the notion that maybe your skills aren't as spot-on as they should be. So, especially if

you haven't been diving in a while &/or haven't practiced these skills in a while, when you go out on your next dive, before you get going, submerge a few feet and do these things: (1) Flood and clear your mask, (2) Take the reg out of your mouth and replace it while clearing it of water, (3) Then do the same thing but use your octopus or alternate air source.

These are simple skills that you can easily do in a minute that will either put these skills back at your fingertips or point to some things to work on and fix before your dive. In either case, you will be a safer diver because of it.



PICTURE PAGE - Black Sea Bass 2018

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2018)



What are you looking at???



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One of the bigger ones



Peaceful co-existence



Hook in mouth, stringer trailing



Parasites all over the head