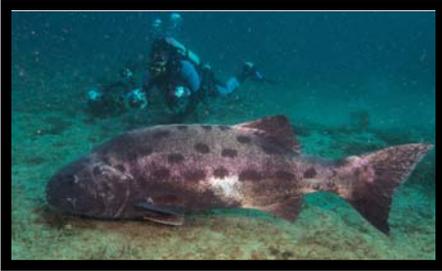


THE REEF SEEKER



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November - 2017



BLACK SEA BASS STILL IN THE PARK

We made another trip to the Avalon Underwater Park and were again rewarded with magical encounters with the gentle giants of the sea, Black Sea Bass (aka Giant Sea Bass, but I'm an old guy now and I prefer the original/old name). This was pretty much a repeat of the experience we had back in September with them.

The most we saw at one time on this trip was four. But on the first dive, we split into two groups, one group going right and the other left, and one group had two animals and the other group had four, so perhaps there are as many as six. And there are reports from other divers of as many as 20, but I'm hard-pressed to believe that that's 20 in one place at one time. Sizes were roughly 3-4 feet each for us but there was one we estimate at 6 feet long and my guess would be around 400 pounds. Big fish.

But the point is that they're there. For how much longer is a good

question. Our experience with the BSBs over the years has been that they start showing up around June (and usually a little further north of Avalon around Italian Gardens and Goat Harbor) and stay until mid-December-ish when they disappear to who-knows-where. So it'll be interesting to see if they remain in Avalon through the winter. (As a side note, we've got another Avalon day trip planned for December 9.)

If you want to find them on your own, it's not that difficult. Simply enter at the stairs, drop down, and head pretty much straight out until you're at a depth of about 60-70 feet. This is also where you may see some small wrecks. This is generally the center of the range where we've been seeing them. In September, they were a bit to the left of the wrecks. But in October, they were a bit to the right. You'll just need to take a look.

And you've got to manage your excitement. The instinctive reaction when you spot one is to swim quickly towards it so you can get a look or a photo "... before it swims away." Yet quick movement is exactly what spooks the animal.

A better approach once you spot one is to simply stop and settle to the bottom. Let the animal see you. He/she may decide to come check

YOU out. But once you've settled down, you can s-l-o-w-l-y make your way towards the critter. Be especially alert if it starts moving or turning from you, because those will be signs that it's about to flee. If that's happening, just stop and wait. The whole goal of the initial contact is to build up some trust between you and the fish so it doesn't see you as a threat.

This is also a good time to remind you (and we saw one of these) that Cal State Long Beach researchers have tagged 34 of the BSBs around Catalina. If you see a fish with something stuck below its dorsal fin that looks like a dangling battery, don't touch it or try to remove it from the animal. That's the tag and the transmitter for the researchers.

One sad thing we saw on this trip was one animal who had part of its left gill cover torn away, exposing the gills. That being said, it didn't seem to slow the big guy down at all as he (or she) moved comfortably amongst the other fish. And we saw something with this fish I'd never noticed before.

Especially when they were hanging still and around kelp, a number of the animals had numerous (4-6 perhaps) juvy Kelp Bass surrounding them. These animals look like a full-grown Kelp Bass, but instead of being 12 inches long,

they're about 2 inches long. And they seemed to be cleaning the BSBs, as we'd see them dart in and take a nip, and then back up a foot or so. The big fish didn't seem to mind as they didn't flinch or move or anything like that.

One of the questions we've had all summer is why the BSBs have been hanging around the Park and after seeing this, I'm wondering if the answer is as simply as they now know that the Park is a stable cleaning station for them and they're simply coming in to get cleaned, maybe socialize a little bit, and then they'll go on their merry way until the need for another cleaning arises. If that's the case - and it could be a big "IF" - then perhaps we'll be seeing them throughout the winter too.

Regardless of how long they stay, an encounter with a BSB is truly a wonderful and magical experience and one we hope you'll be able to take advantage of, whether with us or on your own.



GREAT WHITE SHARKS OF GUADALUPE IN 2018

We've now had four very successful trips with the Nautilus Explorer & Belle Amie folks out to Guadalupe Island to see the Great White Sharks up close and personal. And I've had some people

ask about the possibility of going in 2018. I'm all for it with a slight caveat.

Because of the expense of the trip (around \$3,500/person) and the distance involved to get there (210 miles offshore so you get three dive days on a six-day trip), this is not always an easy sell. And just from a business standpoint, the last thing I need is to have a \$3,500 spot go unsold.

So what I'm doing for 2018 is rather than choosing a week and booking that specific trip, I'm suggesting that if you're interested in doing this trip, you contact me and we'll start to build a list of people interested and dates available. The good news in all of this is that I've already had a few people ask me about this. And the other good news is that the magic number is five to make a trip go. And a further piece of good news is that if there's a time you're interested in going but we don't have five, since I'm a booking agent for Nautilus, I can still put you on the trip and get you into the best stateroom available.

So let me know if you're interested. Great White season is gen-

erally from the end of July to the middle of November. Most of the trips are six days but there are a few that are a day or two longer. And Nautilus now has THREE boats from which to choose: Nautilus Explorer, Nautilus Belle Amie, and Nautilus Undersea.

PARTIAL LOBSTER CLOSURE

Just a reminder that DF&W has instituted an immediate lobster closure for the waters around Anacapa and the east end of Santa Cruz due to the discovery of problematic levels of domoic acid. Although the closure is confined to commercial fisherman and technically doesn't affect the recreational take, I would tend to think that if you're working those areas, a bad lobster is a bad lobster regardless of who captures it so the safest measure would be to avoid taking and eating lobsters from the affected areas until the closure is lifted. More info can be found on the DF&W website.

2018 DIVING VACATIONS

March 24-31 • Bonaire

June 8-20 • Yap Immersion

July 14-28 • Sulawesi, Indo

August 18-25 • Isla Mujeres



TRIPS WE HOPE TO MAKE IN 2018

I suppose that along with trips we may not make, it would actually be good business sense to remind you of the trips that we DO have on our calendar for 2018. So here's what we have planned:

MARCH 24-31

BUDDY DIVE - BONAIRE

We love Bonaire so much that we do it on an almost yearly basis. It's a great place to go if you're a newbie, or very experienced, or anything in between. Our general plan is for two boat dives each morning, and then we have optional shore diving - either the house reef at Buddy Dive or the numerous shore dives around Bonaire - during the afternoon. We also generally do a dusk dive each night on the Buddy Dive house reef where we'll see the nightly "River of Fish" which involve tens of thousands of Creole Wrasse on their nightly northern migration.

JUNE 8-20

MANTA RAY BAY - YAP

We will once again do our 10-day "Yap Immersion" program that was so popular this year. It not only allows us the opportunity to dive the major spots in Yap (manta, sharks Mandarinfish) but also lets us get in a manta ID class, photo workshop, half-day land tour of Yap and it's place in World War 2, fish ID class, and a few explor-

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES				
DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Sat.	Nov. 18	Veterans Park	Beach dive (single tank)	\$25
Tues.	28	Veterans Park	••• Night/Squid Dive •••	FREE!!!
Sat.	Dec. 9	Catalina Express	Avalon UW Park	\$150
Wed.	13	--- CLASS ---	--- Fish ID ---	\$25
Thu.	28	Veterans Park	••• Night/Squid Dive •••	FREE!!!

atory dives as well. Yap is a truly magical place to spend time and Manta Ray Bay has got to be the nicest dive-dedicated resort in the world.

JULY 14-28

MUREX - MANADO, INDON.

This is our other "most favorite place in the world." The diving around Murex (in northeastern Sulawesi, Indonesia) is fabulous, combining the marvelous pristine reefs of Bunaken Marine Park with the interesting and exotic muck-like shore sites around Manado Bay. Plus we'll do an overland trip to spend one day diving the muck capital of the world, Lembeh Straits, and will likely also get in a day at Bankga Island, which has some amazingly beautiful soft coral reefs. At the end of the this trip, you can also add on some optional days in Singapore.

AUGUST 18-25

WHALE SHARKS - ISLA MUJ.

Each summer, hundreds and hundreds of Whale Sharks - the largest fish in the oceans - gather around the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico for reasons still not fully understood. But their presence provides us with a fantastic opportunity to spend three separate days snorkeling with them in the clear waters off of Isla Mujeres (which is itself 10 miles off of Cancun). In addition, we'll spend a day diving the Cancun Underwater Museum, a day diving cenotes near Tulum, and a day exploring a small wreck

and reef off of Isla. It's an amazingly diverse trip because each day is something different. It's also a great trip for a non-diver because not only are we land-based, but since you're only allowed to snorkel with the Whale Sharks, it's a perfect water experience for someone not scuba-certified.

NOVEMBER (DATES TBD)

ANTHONY'S KEY - ROATAN

We made our first visit to Roatan in 2013, and it's high time we went back. We really enjoyed Anthony's Key because it's an all-inclusive turnkey operation. We stay in bungalows out on the key, come over to board our boats at the dock, take all meals there at the resort (all included in the price), and have a good time doing it all. Roatan is well-known for having a variety of good dive sites and a lot of different creatures, from big to small, to discover.

So that's the general plan. See what ones fit your schedule, budget, and interest, and then give us a call to reserve your spot.



BLACK SEA BASS DATA COLLECTION - YOU CAN HELP

Have you spotted a Black (Giant) Sea Bass lately? Even better, have you gotten some still or video shots of the animal? If you have, researchers at UCSB are collecting “citizen science” info on sightings. They’re trying to establish a fairly good database of sighting locations as well as animal identification. So if you run across any BSBs, and you have a camera in your hand, see if you can get a photo and then submit a report. It’s quick and easy to do and could prove very helpful, especially as more and more data is collected which will help them spots trends in population or even track individuals.

Photo guidelines from their website for the ideal image:

1. Be at right angles to the left or right hand flank (side) of the fish.
2. Be clear enough to show spots and markings on the skin of the giant sea bass.
3. Good exposures. Over-exposure makes the marks difficult to differentiate. The pattern-matching algorithm used to identify individual fish requires visible spots.
4. Be captured in the highest resolution for your camera type.
5. Be minimally edited (cropping is okay). **DO NOT HORIZONTALLY FLIP THE IMAGE.**
6. Be submitted as JPG or PNG, no larger than 2 Mb. Videos may be submitted as MP4 files.

The website is <http://spottinggiantseabass.msi.ucsb.edu/> and once you’re there, just follow the prompts. No pre-registration is necessary and you can upload multiple images within a single report. You’ll be asked for time and date, location (GPS co-ordinates if you have them), and depth, plus there’s a comment box for any additional info you want to share.

They’ve already positively ID’d 141 individuals through 256 encounters from 9 citizen-scientists. I think we can pump those numbers a lot higher for them so send them what you’ve got.

PICTURE PAGE - Black Sea Bass

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2017)



Our greeter



WWW.REEFSEEKERS.COM



This one has a tag



Gill cover is damaged



A closer look at the injury



Cloudy left eye