

Buddy Line



President's Log Entry

On behalf of the NCRD Board of Directors, I hope you've enjoyed the holidays and are looking forward to another year of great diving. We've had some amazing trips this past year including Saba, Alaska, the Sea of Cortez, the Channel Islands and the club's first excursion to the truly unforgettable Galapagos Islands. I was fortunate to be on three of those trips and while each one was a great experience, I

can't think of a better end to 2004 than our visits to the Galapagos.

May the new year bring great visibility, calm seas, flawless photos, and close encounters with unique and wonderful sea life!

Doug McGrath
President
Northern California Rainbow Divers

January 2005

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Galapagos Photos Throughout

St. Lucia — Great Diving and a Whole Lot More!

by Dennis Nix

[Repeated from last month's issue. Space on the trip is still available.]

When I think of a perfect dive trip, I think of warm water, great beaches, things to keep me interested when I'm not diving and of course, great people. That describes

many of the places I've been with NCRD, but I wanted something different. After talking to several divers, St. Lucia seemed to fit my idea of a perfect vacation. After doing some checking on my own, I got more and more excited about St. Lucia.

First, the resort is right on the water on our own beach on the bay where Dr. Doolittle was filmed. **(Wow!)** The only way to get there is by boat.

Then there's the diving with a great dive operator and we will be the only ones on the boat. Dives are all less than 20 minutes away. The reef is part of the Marine Sanctuary, which was established in 1984, and it looks spectacular.

There are several spectacular diving sites just off St Lucia, ranging from easy to challenging. Keyhole Pinnacles consists of four seamounts rising from incredible depths to within a few feet of the surface. Superman's Flight is a drift dive on a gentle wall, which drops to 1,600 feet. At the

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Calendar

- January 13 Board Meeting
- January 8 Pt. Lobos Diving
- January 15 St. Lucia Diving
- January 20 General meeting
- February 9 General Meeting
- February 12 Pt. Lobos Diving
- February 17 General meeting
- March 12 Pt. Lobos Diving
- April 11 General Meeting
- May 19 General Meeting



St. Lucia...beneath the surface.

A Darwinian Experience

by Doug McGrath

The Galapagos—probably enough said in those two words. The wildlife lovers among us have seen them in nature specials and tried to imagine what it might be like to walk among wild animals that have no fear...to study them while sitting on a rock a couple of feet away. The scientists among us learned of the Galapagos as the inspiration and source of supporting evidence for Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, which set the world on its ear with a radical new theory of humanity's existence. How much the Galapagos Islands themselves actually contributed to his theory is now in dispute thanks to relatively new research into his life and work, but the mystique of the islands remains. Regardless, they are historically and biologically significant. In visiting them, I realized a nearly life-long dream.

If what's above water is extraordinary and fascinating, what's below is nothing short of wondrous. I've always been nuts about wildlife, but I'm glad that I visited them as a diver and not just a passive tourist walking the paths on the islands. It's an entirely different world down there with any number of "firsts" for me, but more than on that later.

I wish I could say that getting there was half the fun, but to be honest, it was a long and tiring journey by modern standards. Nothing terrible happened, and compared to sailing there in the 1830's, it really wasn't so bad, but we did spend a great deal of time in airports and hauling luggage. If you go—and I highly recommend it—be prepared for travel difficulties. Fortunately, our intrepid leader, Mike Ford, had planned ahead, so airport delays didn't cause us to miss our boat, which could easily have happened.

The majority of us flew from San Francisco to Miami, and then to Quito, Ecuador, which is where we all intended to

meet for the final leg of the journey to the Galapagos Islands. Unfortunately, foggy weather closed the Quito airport the night that about half our group was to arrive. We were diverted to Guayaquil for the night, flew back to Quito early the next morning, and spent the day wandering Quito, a fascinating city with a great deal of beautiful architecture and history. None of us who'd been diverted had gotten enough sleep because of the flight times, and then several—including me—had altitude sickness in Quito (altitude over 9,000 feet), and one of the major symptoms is sleeplessness.

We had to be at the airport early the next morning for our flight to the Galapagos; fortunately, this went off without a hitch, although there was some confusion in the islands about which airport we were supposed to be going to. Fortune smiled on us, everything worked out, and a five-minute bus ride from the airport brought us to the dock where we were taken to the *Aggressor* via zodiac.

The *Aggressor* is nicely appointed with double-occupancy staterooms, each with private bath. The boat has four decks and a very nice dive platform with individual storage bays for each diver. Nearly all of our diving was done from zodiacs, though; due to currents and surge, the *Aggressor* generally anchored away from shore.

Mostly, I'll let the pictures speak for the diving, which was generally fantastic, but some technical information is useful if you're interested in diving there. At this time of year, the water tends toward the warmer side, but we did experience temperatures as low as the high 60's. Most of us dove with 5 mm wet suits, which generally seemed to be about right for the conditions. I don't have a 5 mm, but took my 3 mm and my dry suit. I tended to get a little cold at the end of dives, but gener-

ally, I was OK in the 3 mm. Toward the end of the trip, we had a couple of dives in colder water, and I borrowed a vest and hood, which was just about perfect with my 3 mm. The dry suit stayed packed away for the whole trip. We had two divers wearing dry suits; one of them found it to be too warm but the other tends to be cold and found it to be OK. If I were to go again, I'd probably want to buy a 5 mm and just leave the dry suit at home.

Because of the confluence of seven different ocean currents in the Galapagos, the area is generally considered to be advanced diving. I did my hundredth dive on the trip, but I don't consider myself to be all that advanced, and I found the diving to generally be nothing unusual. The biggest issues are the currents and surge, but there was only one dive—the washing machine—where I felt that I was taking any significant risks. I'm sure others might have differing feelings, but with such good visibility and no real difficulty maintaining visual contact with the group, I was very comfortable diving there.

One challenge to be aware of is that at the end of the dive, you have to get back in the zodiac to return to the boat. We removed our BCs in the

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[left] This has to be one of my favorite pictures—ever—of me. The location is The Theater, below Darwin's Arch at Darwin Island (where I dove my hundredth dive).

I'm always on the lookout for moray eels, but they were so plentiful on most of our dives in the Galapagos that we stopped paying attention to them...except to make sure that we weren't about to sit on one, of course. Many of these fine-spotted morays were quite large and were often out and about in daylight hours.

In addition to the fine-spotted morays, I saw one zebra moray. Other divers came across both green morays and jewel morays.

Photo by David Zippin.

[right] Green sea turtles were a real treat on many of our dives. Green turtles are the only sea turtles that lay eggs in the Galapagos; Ridley's and leatherbacks are seen in the area, but don't go on land. This photo is from Darwin's Arch, where we often saw one or two turtles, and once, I counted as many as six.

On that same dive, I also saw hammerheads and Galapagos sharks. The water clarity was truly astounding; on one dive, the surface was clearly visible from 100'.

Photo by Doug McGrath



[above] We were often so absorbed with the underwater scenery that we'd forget to look above. The same hammerheads that circled in and out of visibility were often circling above us, and I happened to roll over and look just in time to snap this shot. These were six to seven feet long and tended to be a bit shy. Photo by Doug McGrath.

A Darwinian Experience (continued from page 3)

water, the zodiac driver hauled them in for us, and then while kicking strongly, we pulled ourselves into the zodiac with help from the driver. Upper body strength definitely helps for this little operation, and people with physical challenges will almost certainly find it much more difficult.

The food on the *Aggressor* was generally excellent, and the staff was very attentive and helpful. At the end of each dive, we were met with a snack and/or some of the best hot chocolate I've ever had. One of the real treats of the boat's design is that they have a towel closet that's heated. Wrapping up in big, fluffy, warm towels after a dive was the perfect end to these beautiful dives.

On our return trip to Quito, we had equipment problems on our plane, stretching a three-hour journey into nearly ten hours. I had obligations the day after returning, and fortunately, I made it home on time, which was not the case with everyone else. Allowing an extra day or two at each end of the trip is definitely a good idea. I would not make this trip again with a commitment to be back on a particular day.

Other than the travel glitches, I had a great time in what is easily the most special place I've ever visited. It's an experience that I'll carry with me forever.

Local Diving

by Bob Sommer

I love diving. If you're like me, you just can't wait for those warm water trips a couple of times each year to get wet. Luckily, we have world-class diving right here in our own backyard.

Tucked along picturesque Highway 1 in Carmel, just a few minutes south of Monterey is Pt. Lobos State Reserve. A visit to the park's web site at <http://pt-lobos.parks.state.ca.us> gives visitors all the information they need. "Deriving its name from the offshore rocks at Punta de los Lobos Marinos, Point of the Sea Wolves, where the sound of the sea lions carries inland, the reserve has often been called 'the crown jewel of the State Park System.' Point Lobos has offered many things to millions of people who have visited it over the years. Point Lobos State Reserve has outstanding passive recreation values, such as sightseeing, photography, painting, nature study, picnicking, SCUBA diving, and jogging. In addition to the spectacular beauty, nearly every aspect of its resources is of scientific interest. There are rare plant communities, endangered archeological sites, unique geological formations, and incredibly rich flora and fauna of both land and sea."

The entire park is a protected marine reserve and only 15 two-person dive teams are allowed in each day. As a result it's never crowded and the marine environment is intact. "This is one of the richest marine habitats in California. Its animals and plants are fully protected by state law from any disturbance".

Once a month, NCRD members head down to Pt Lobos for a day of relaxing diving. We typically meet at the park at 9AM, when the reserve opens. I generally stop in Carmel to grab a muffin and some coffee. You can pack a lunch or stop at the supermarket in Carmel and grab something there.

SCUBA diving at Pt Lobos is truly awesome and is permitted in Whalers Cove and Bluefish Cove. Bluefish Cove is accessible only via boat so we do our diving in Whalers Cove. There are several dives you can do. A map of dive sites can be found here:

<http://pt-lobos.parks.state.ca.us/scuba/divespots.html>

After we get in the park we gear up in the parking lot and use the concrete boat ramp to walk right into the water. No sand to trudge through! There are no "dive facilities" other than a rinse hose, restrooms to change and picnic tables, so you need to bring all your gear.

What can you expect once in the water? Divers explore a realm of beauty that until this century was inaccessible except to a handful of pioneers. In the subdued light of the 70 foot-high kelp forests, animals without backbones and plants without roots create a world of vibrant color. Lingcod, cabezone and rockfish swim in and out of view. Seals, sea otters and leopard sharks (at the right time of year) provide an extra treat.

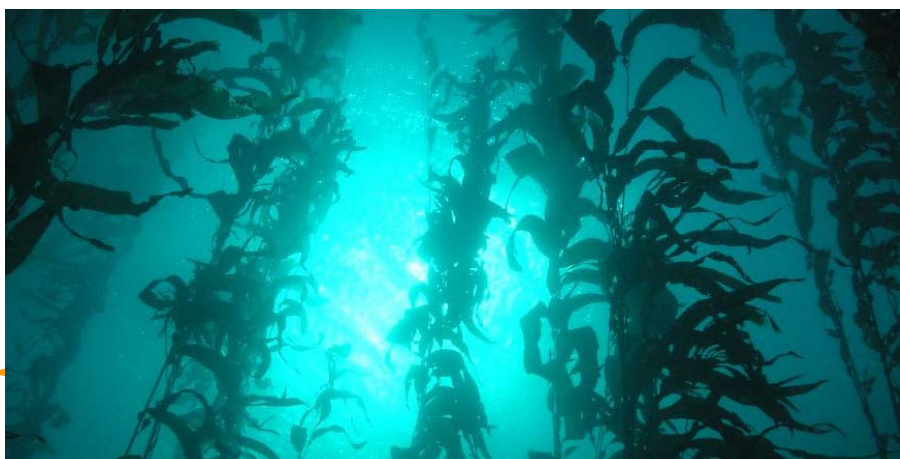
This is cold water diving and the water temperature typically ranges from 50F to 65F, depending on season and conditions. A dry suit is a great way to go, but a 7mm

wetsuit with hood and gloves is fine. I dive Pt Lobos wet year round. In Whalers Cove, expect visibility between 15 and 30 feet, with occasional highs of 60 to 70 feet at the mouth.

Bluefish Cove normally has 30- to 40-foot visibility, with peaks of 80 feet or more. Depths range from 20 to 100 feet.

This year we'll be diving at Pt Lobos on the following dates:

- January 8—only 4 spots left
- February 20—confirmed (11 spots left)
- March 19
- April 16
- May 14
- June 11
- July 16
- August 20
- September 17
- October 15
- November 19



A beautiful day at Pt. Lobos. Photo by Ralph Wolf

Upcoming Meetings

General Meeting

Thursday, January 20, 7:00—9:00

The LGBT Center

Our first general meeting of 2005 will be at the LGBT Center in San Francisco on Thursday, January 20 from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM. The room number will be posted in the lobby.

We'll have a social time starting at 7:00 PM, and the program will begin at 7:30. This meeting is all about the Galapagos—photos and fabulous underwater videos.

Location

The Center

1800 Market Street (at Octavia)

www.sfgaycenter.org

Transportation

The Muni metro lines J,K,L,M,N, the F streetcar, or Muni bus lines 6, 7, 9, 10, 14, 21, 26, 47, 49, 66 and 71 all run within five blocks of the Center; many run within one block. Also, take BART to SF Civic Center, then transfer to Muni Metro or F lines.

Board Meetings

The next board meeting will be Thursday, January 13 at Jack Johnson's home at 7:30 PM. Please e-mail him at membership@rainbowdivers.org for address and directions.

Future General Meetings

Mike Ford is our programs director and also works at Wallins Dive Center in San Carlos; he has recently become Wallins' coordinator for the shop's dive club, the Kelptomaniacs. To avoid duplication of effort, Mike has invited NCRD to hold some joint meetings with Kelptomaniacs, and the NCRD board has decided to try it experimentally for the February, April, and June meetings.

Please note that NCRD is not endorsing Wallins' over any other dive shop; this is simply a practical way to solve the very significant problem of finding interesting speakers and topics for monthly meetings. For our often-neglected members outside San Francisco, the joint meetings at Wallins are significantly closer to home, and we hope to see more faces from the

South and East Bay communities.

The joint meeting dates do not fall on our regular third-Thursday evenings; the dates and programs are as follows:

- Wednesday, February 9
Geoff Baehr, San Mateo County Sheriff's Office Volunteer Dive Team Coordinator
- Monday, April 11
New Gear Night
Joe Geiss of ScubaPro
- Thursday, June 9
Kathy Brandt
Mystery Writer

Wallins is in San Carlos next to Hwy. 101:

1119 Industrial Rd. #7
San Carlos, CA 94070
www.wallins.com

See the Wallins web site for maps and directions.



More Galapagos photos.

[clockwise from right] 1. Galapagos Aggressor I. 2. Part of the gang on top of Bartholomew Island. 3. Sally Lightfoot crabs were a colorful addition to the trip. 4. One of Darwin's famous finches. 5. Any doubt about the volcanic origin of these islands? Photos by David Zippin.



Women’s Week in the Galapagos!

by Sharon Ponder

From Darwin’s Arch back to San Christobol we were treated like royalty! The *Galapagos Aggressor I* crew were incredible. After every dive they were all on deck making sure we had hot buns to eat, hot chocolate to drink, a hanger ready for our wet suits, and a warm towel to wrap around each of us! This was the best live-aboard service I’ve ever experienced. The food was great and the limited number of divers (13 in our case) made for a spacious and relaxing journey.

Now the diving—hammerheads, mantas, spotted eagle rays, white tips, sea horses, frog fish, nudibranchs, etc. There was something for everyone! The currents were strong but not too bad, the water was warm (mostly 78 and up), some were in 3 mls, I had my 5 ml and skin, and others chose dry suits.

The dolphins also blessed us with daily sightings, and one befriended Kelly and me on two or three dives—always hanging out to say hi! And, I never



Hammerheads are a common sight, especially at Darwin’s Arch (right)

thought I would see a sea lion chasing a white tip shark—the poor shark was scared to death!



Galapagos shark

Many of us also added on some touring around Quito and Ecuador. Some went to the official Equator site [insert Sharon & Alison pic], some to the market in Ottovala and

spent mucho \$\$, and others went to Sacha Lodge and the rainforest. I personally want to thank all the women—Allison, Ann, Dean, Deanna, Feney, Gail, Karen, Kelly and Peg—for making this trip a great one for me. Whether we were diving, hanging out on deck, touring the country side, or meeting for dinner in Quito, everyone was great!

Thanks,
Sharon



The bottlenose dolphins are curious and social below the water and **very** acrobatic above!



A sea lion on the tail of a white tip shark!

All photos on this page by Sharon Ponder.



Darwin’s Arch



Manta ray



Spotted eagle ray

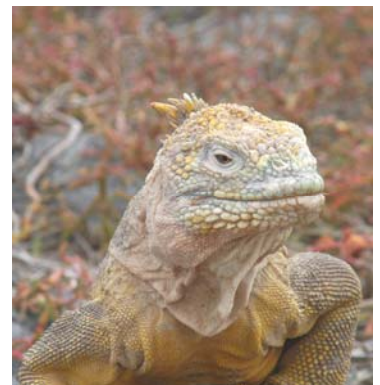


Sharon and Alison, each with a foot on opposite sides of the world here at the Equator Line.



Galapagos—A Great End to 2004

[left top] Vince snorkeling with a marine iguana.¹ [left middle] Lynn enjoying the wildlife. [left bottom] Marine iguanas spit salt, which blows back and crystallizes on their heads.² [right top] The sea lions were very playful! We spent our last dive of the trip cavorting with and entertaining them. (If you don't stay active, they get bored and leave.)² [center] A land iguana foot showing the beautiful scale patterns. Macro photography is very easy with these animals; you can get close and they very still.² [middle right] Galapagos penguin, the only species to life north of the equator.¹ [above right] Our naturalist, Nicolas, with a giant tortoise.¹ [right] A very photogenic land iguana. These guys were quite approachable and seemed to enjoy posing.¹ Photos by David Zippin¹ and Doug McGrath².





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Club Policies

Board meetings are held once a month and are open to any member in good standing. If interested in attending, please contact any of the board members listed above for location. Membership dues are \$35/year, \$55/year for domestic partners at the same address, and \$20/year for newsletter only subscription (available to addresses more than 150 miles from San Francisco Bay Area). Advertising is available. Rates are \$7/month to club members for a business card-size non-changing ad. It is \$10/month for non-club members to advertise. If you are interested in advertising, please contact the editor. Club policy regarding money paid for club sponsored dives: unless otherwise noted, all monies are non-refundable. NCRD does not warrant, recommend or guarantee the products or services contained in advertisements in this newsletter.

Northern California Rainbow Divers, Inc. is a California non-profit mutual benefit corporation.

St. Lucia — Great Diving and a Whole Lot More!

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base of Gros Piton, the Coral Gardens rise from a depth of 15 to 50 feet, and Anse La Raye, midway up the west coast, is a superb wall and drift dive where huge boulders cover a shallower slope, creating fascinating formations to explore. On the point of Anse Chastenet, a plateau slopes gently from 40 to 60 feet.

The reefs fall away to a depth of 140 feet in a unique coral chain, meandering out from the Bay. A number of shipwrecks provide adventure and exploration for divers. For the experienced only, off the southern part of the island, the Waiwinette freighter lies 90 feet below. The currents here make this dive extremely challenging whereas further up the coast off Castries, there is a pleasant wreck dive in 20 feet of water for those less experienced.

On our off days, we'll have a chance to get to know our fellow divers while we explore the island or just hang on the beach. St. Lucia is also a delight for those interested in ecotourism. Its dramatic twin coastal peaks, the Pitons, rise up 2,000 feet up from the sea. They shelter magnificent rain forests where wild orchids, giant ferns, and birds of paradise flourish.

Brilliantly-plumed tropical birds abound, including endangered species like the indigenous St. Lucia parrot. The rainforest is broken only by verdant fields and orchards of banana, coconut, mango, and papaya trees. St. Lucia is also a major destination for windsurfers, so I imagine we'll



be doing some of that as well.

We have a few spots left, so if you're interested, see the details (below).

January 17 is Martin Luther King's Birthday. For those who have the day off, it means only missing four days of work. American has non-stops from San Juan and Miami, US AIR from Philadelphia. So that means you can use American or United (for US AIR) miles. The trip is \$895, which includes accommodations, airport transfers (but not airfare), breakfast every morning and lunch on our dive days. Deposit of \$500 is due now, with final payment December 1st. Call Dennis at 415-509-1386 or stlucia@rainbowdivers.org.

St. Lucia Trip Details:

- January 15–22, 2005
- Five days of two tank dives
- Total cost: \$895 (not including airfare)
- Full payment due immediately
- Trip Coordinator:
Dennis Nix, 415-509-1386
stlucia@rainbowdivers.org
- <http://www.stlucia.org>