



The Newsletter of the Northern California Rainbow Divers (NCRD)

Buddy Line

December, 2006

“Swim with the Fishes” for Solstice!

by Peg Stone

Fin your way to the temporary residence of the Steinhart Aquarium on the evening of December 21, and you can enter the amazing world of the Northern California Rainbow Divers, complete with fish, anemones and coral! NCRD has reserved the upstairs meeting room at the Steinhart (see sidebar for directions and details) and arranged for an exclusive Rainbow Divers tour of the coral-growing efforts underway as the Steinhart heads towards its new, up-to-date facilities in Golden Gate Park, scheduled to open in late 2008.

As a bonus, you can tour the terrific special exhibit on dinosaurs, check out the exceedingly cool model of the gravitational pull of the solar system (which will spin down to the "sun" faster, a penny or a quarter?), and do all your last-minute shopping at the Aquarium store (penguin tie, anyone?). The skeleton of a Gray whale hangs in the lobby to welcome you, and we will have special signage and music for Rainbow Divers as you roam the exhibits.

After our tour of the coral tanks, we will hold our brief annual meeting and then party down! Beverages, salads and sandwiches are available for purchase (and we may supplement these as well). This event offers a fantastic way to visit your favorite warm-water friends and feel like you are drifting along in the sea, wafting past everything from clownfish to penguins; to visit your warm-blooded friends, both old and new, in the club; to get ready for that New Year's commitment to get in the water more in 2007; and to finish up your holiday shopping.

Afterward, catch the shopping at Union Square, catch a movie at the Metreon, or catch public transit home!

Don't miss out on free admission and great door prizes: check out the sidebar on the right to RSVP and reserve your place at the party! The Steinhart goes queer on the third Thursday in December.

See you there!



NCRD Holiday Party When, Where, How

The Steinhart Aquarium is at 875 Howard Street between 4th and 5th Street, less than a block from the Metreon Theatre and about two blocks from the Powell Street BART/Muni station. The 5th and Mission garage is a great place to park if you must drive.

The party is on Thursday, December 21, 2006. You may enter the aquarium anytime after 5 p.m.; the special tour of the coral growing facility will start around 6 p.m.; the party begins around 7:30 p.m.

If you're on the club's buddy e-list, you will receive an online Evite. The first 35 people to sign up will receive free entry to the Aquarium; others will have to pay \$5 (Cal Academy of Science members may enter for free). Signing up also makes you eligible for some amazing door prizes!

If you do not receive an email via the buddy e-list, please confirm your attendance by sending an email to pstone@csgadvisors.com and provide your name(s) and the number of guests you will be bringing.

Editor's Log: Members Respond to "Eco-Diving"

Dear Editor,

Thank you for your thought-provoking article "Is Eco-Diving an Uphill Battle?" I agree that divers shouldn't harass marine life, but interaction with animals is the main reason I dive. At what point does *interaction* with animals become *harassment*? It would be good to see a discussion on how these differ.

— J. R.

Dear Editor,

It was interesting to read that the advice columnist advocates taking lots of photos at different settings to compensate for manual flash controls, then throwing away the bad shots. I've seen underwater photographers flash an animal as many as 10 or 15 times or even more, to the point of blinding, dazing or obviously aggravating their subject, sometimes trapping it or crowding around it. Maybe we could think about what we do to get those perfect shots.

— name withheld

"An Adjacent View"

I think it all begins with respect — respect for marine life, the plants and creatures, other divers and people in the environment and ourselves. It really begins when we board the airplane or embark on a trip. I was reading the editorial "Is Eco-Diving an Uphill Battle?" and the "Updated Trip Policies" from the NCRD Board. That combined with unexpectedly seeing a photo that I had taken inside the Editor's Log brought me to contemplate a few things. The photo taken of the divemaster holding the trunkfish at St. Lucia was not meant to be "sensational" in nature. Having a background of many years as a radio news reporter, my inclination is to capture objectively the true reality around me, transcending "good" or "bad." When I was motioned to swim over to see it, personally I

found the scene kind of fascinating, magical and annoying all at the same time. I did politely question the activity with the DM, and my concerns were constructively addressed later by management: DM's were asked not to handle sea creatures in the future for divers. I was glad to be able to shoot the photo, however. My main concern was that the little fish was alright, and it did swim away. I have the same interest with all of the reefs, corals, fish and life underwater, yet I realize life is a "jungle of survival" down there.

I think most of us have accidentally brushed up against a reef, object or diver at some point in our scuba diving experience. I try to avoid touching anything because it can hurt! If it happens, we can only hope we didn't damage sea life or disrupt a fellow buddy's safety in a detrimental way. I can't imagine *purposely* removing coral to uncover an animal to see it better or leaning on it or crushing it to provide a better platform for a camera. What happened at Wakatobi with the diver sounds like an act of carelessness that really should have been halted. Hopefully, an NCRD diver would never be barred from diving on a trip but rather practice their buoyancy, accept that marine life must not be moved to take the "perfect photo", or receive the technical skill training necessary.

Refusal to respect reef life by crushing it for others is another matter. We should avoid harming anything, and we are the ones who can control what we do the most. In the big picture, I personally must admit that I'm most greatly concerned about huge nets of waste washing up in places like the NW Hawaiian Islands, global warming, and illegal fishing and dumping. I also recognize an asteroid could possibly hit planet Earth and kill much of life, requiring regeneration over thousands of years. That of course is the darker picture.

Back to the lighter side, given all of this, while we are respecting marine life and each other as divers, let's not forget to have fun, which is why I came to the field of diving. To be able to swim with the turtles, play with the dolphins, and tag along the big schools of fish as well as view the colorful theatrical life is great fun! I don't know about you, but when I'm down there "joining in" with some of these creatures, I feel like I'm a part of them and they seem to relate to me. And you know what else, sometimes I think they're having as much fun with me as I am with them!

— Joseph Kaminski 

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

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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 a newsletter-only subscription to addresses >150 miles from the SF Bay area.

Advertising is available for \$7/month to club members for a business card-size ad, or for \$10/month for non-club members. If you are interested in advertising, please contact the editor. NCRD does not warrant, recommend or guarantee the products or services contained in advertisements in this newsletter.

Unless otherwise noted, all monies paid for club-sponsored events are non-refundable.

NCRD's Monthly Photo Contest Winners Announced

For September and November, 2006

In September, **Sharon Ponder** was diving the reefs at Anse Chastanet Resort in St. Lucia with Diving for Life when she spotted this distinctive flying gurnard. Of this shot taken on automatic settings with an Olympus 5060 camera inside a Light & Motion Tetra housing with one strobe, Sharon says, "I've never seen one of these anywhere else. They are so strange looking!"

November's prize goes to **Ralph Wolf** for his photo of a horn shark, taken while diving with the Northern California Rainbow Divers off the *Vision* liveaboard in southern California's northern channel islands. "I had two very different images of the shark, and it was difficult to choose between the two. In the end, my gut instinct was to go with this one. I'm glad the judges liked it." To capture this winning image, Ralph used an Olympus 7070 with a WCON 0.8 wide angle adapter in an Olympus housing, dual Sea&Sea YS-90DX strobes on Ultralight arms and a Heinrichs Weikamp TTL converter.

For their winning images, Sharon and Ralph receive a \$10 credit toward any NCRD event of their choice.

January 5 is the deadline for submitting December photo contest entries. Full details are available online at the NCRD website: www.rainbowdivers.org/photocontest.php



SEPTEMBER WINNER: Flying Gurnard

Photo by Sharon Ponder



NOVEMBER WINNER: Horn Shark

Photo by Ralph Wolf

Member Advertisement

Roommate Wanted

*Great house in inner Sunset, 3BR, 2.5 bath, laundry, fp, garage, amazing space.
\$1500 plus 1/2 utilities.*

See <http://www.goug.org/roommate.html> for full details.

Diving Club Lobster: Onboard the *Vision* at Santa Cruz Island

by *Tim Shannon*

On last month's liveaboard dive trip to the northern Channel Islands, approximately 25 Northern California Rainbow Divers boarded Truth Aquatics' flagship, the *Vision*. Most people made the long trip down to southern California via carpool with other club members. On a crisp November evening, Santa Barbara Harbor was invaded by a hoard of homo-aquaticas who mingled perfectly with the local SoCal-ians.

We got our dive gear onboard along with other necessities required for liveaboard diving. We found our bunk assignments, signed liability waivers, and went below deck to settle into our luxurious accommodations. Oh, those divine green privacy drapes closing off our foam-padded slumber chambers were heavenly. The *Vision* was as charming as ever and is aging gracefully like the rest of us. It was gratifying to

see that in the tumultuous times of this new century, some things just stay the same. Most of us hit the bunks around 11 p.m., boys on the left, girls on the right. The *Vision* departed some time in the wee hours of the morning while everyone was sleeping.

The voyage out to Santa Cruz Island was a bit rough. Due to extreme early birdness, I was up before the crew. The boat was rocking and rolling all the way



NCRD aboard the *Vision* in November

Photo courtesy of Sharon Ponder

out to the islands — it was like trying to wake up on the Big Dipper roller coaster at the Santa Cruz Boardwalk up in the Monterey area. Excessive heave-ho motions prevented even the simplest of activities from being completed successfully. I could not read my book. The crew came out into the galley area demanding that I not move from my spot. The galley girls could not even make coffee properly. Once things calmed down, I went below and saw personal items strewn all about the floor. During a discussion later that morning, **Colin** stated that he'd had to hold on for dear life in order to prevent himself from being thrown from his lavish bunk.

We found safe harbor on a protected side of Santa Cruz Island. After a delicious breakfast of pancakes, bacon, fruit, and muddy, unpalatable coffee, we started diving at Ruby Rock. We met the crew — **Curley** was cute, and **John** had the Channel Islands tattooed on his torso. It was fabulous! All the diving was

spectacularly sublime inside the majestic kelp forests of Santa Cruz. That night, the captain tried to maneuver the boat to either Santa Rosa or San Miguel islands, but again the sea was just too choppy. So, after a brief layover off a protected area of Santa Rosa Island, we returned to Santa Cruz Island.

The next day, we started our dives at a place named Gull Island just off Santa Cruz Island. This place should be called

“Club Lobster.” I do not think I have ever seen so many lobsters just hanging out of every crack, crevasse, or gully. There was one lobster as big as my dog, Samantha.

The kelp canopy was teeming with life. Spanish Shawl nudibranchs got boring; lobsters were everywhere. On one dive, my buddy and I were followed by a large male sheephead with several females in tow. Then, several other species joined in the pursuit. This gaggle of fish kept following us everywhere. When air got low and we headed back to the boat, so did all the sheephead, along with all the rest of the fish. It was creepy.

(continued on page 5)



Snail on Kelp Photo by Ed Bierman



Giant Kelpfish

Photo by David Zippin

New! NCRD Dive Trips for 2007 and 2008

by Karen Doby

Got the winter doldrums? Forget this cold, windy, rainy weather and start dreaming of sunny beaches, good friends and warm, clear waters. To help with your trip planning, NCRD is announcing two fantastic new dive trips that are sure to satisfy your yearning for spectacular diving, all in the company of an incredible group of LGBT divers and friends. Check them out on the web: <http://www.rainbowdivers.org/trips.php>

July 30-August 6, 2007

Galapagos Islands, Ecuador

Galapagos Eco Explorer I

7-day Liveboard, 16 divers total


Yes, this is the Galapagos Islands in whale shark season! This place is legendary for sparking Charles Darwin's imagination, leading eventually to his theories of evolution. The islands teem with creatures whose prehistoric features have seemingly remained untouched by evolution: marine iguanas, giant tortoises, penguins, and many others. Galapagos is a marine paradise most celebrated for frequent sightings of large schools of hammerheads, giant mantas, eagle rays, whale sharks, silkies, tuna, sea lions, porpoise and occasionally, even black and blue marlin, orcas, and tiger sharks. There's plenty of reef life too, including seahorses. We'll even have time to snorkel with penguins.

March 20-31, 2008

Cocos Island, Costa Rica

Undersea Hunter


11-day Liveboard, 14 divers total

This is the ship that launched a thousand faces, via films, that is! The choice of IMAX photographers as well as the set of the James Bond movie, "License to Kill," the *Undersea Hunter* has carried scores of professional and recreational divers to commune with big animals. The clear, blue waters of Cocos Island are breathtaking, thriving with white tips and hammerhead sharks, marbled stingrays approaching 6' in diameter, manta rays up to 12' across, bottlenose dolphins, jacks, tuna, giant moray eels and the occasional whale shark. These are some of the best big animal dives on the planet. We can also go ashore to search for pirate loot. 

(continued from page 4)

The third day of diving was not so hot from too much surge, current, and poor visibility. Of course, Curley and John were nice to look at. Lobsters were still crouching beneath every rock and protruding from every hole. The evenings on the boat were great. Several people did night dives, which were reportedly quite fantastic.

We had a full moon and warm breezes on the last night. I was glad to see adult beverages onboard this trip. I got to

discuss the good old days with **Feney, Ralph and Jim. Joseph** and I talked about *The Incredible Mr. Limpet*. **Marcos, Jack** and I talked about Curley and John. **Gabriel** is pregnant. It was nice to see **Sharron and Lisa. Charles** may be getting a zodiac. **Peg, Claudia** and I watched one of the most brilliant sunrises ever seen. **Graham** is probably on his boat in Australia by now. I was too shy to talk with the new faces sitting near **Maureen** throughout the trip; I hope they do not think we were stuck up. This was really a great voyage. When do we go again? 



Pelicans

Photo by Ed Bierman



Crab

Photo by Ralph Wolf



Octopus

Photo by David Zippin



Female Sheepshead

Photo by Catherine Murty

Trip Report: Diving for Life in St. Lucia

by Kelly Thiemann, NCRD's DFL Liaison

The 15th annual Diving For Life was held one lively week from September 16-23 at the Anse Chastanet resort in beautiful St. Lucia.



The Pitons Photo by Kelly Thiemann

Divers from LGBT dive clubs around the world gather once a year to dive, party and raise funds for local health-related charities.

Anse Chastanet is located in the heart of St. Lucia's marine reserves. The reef starts just 10 yards beyond the water's edge. There is a plateau area that has depths from 5-25 feet; it is here where "The Thing" lurks. The Thing, spotted only at night, looks like a millipede on steroids: it's about 15 feet long, very sensitive to light, and extremely fast in both forward and reverse. Whenever it senses light on its body, it moves very quickly to avoid the light. With over 50 divers participating on the night dives (spread out over two hours), it was easy to miss



"The Thing" Used with permission from DFL

due to the number of spiny lobster, crabs, shrimp and eels that were out and about.

Once outside of this plateau, the current starts to pick up. Drift diving took place on about 75% of the dives. A chorus line of divers could be seen on the current lines at the beginning or end of any dive. The shallows were also home to flying gurnards, who preferred grassy areas with sandy surrounds to "walk" on their pectoral fins. You can see an example of this unusual, distinctive fish in NCRD's September 2006 Photo Contest (see p.3).

I was also able to solve one of diving's mysteries – what does the end of a garden eel look like? Answer: the same as all other eels! One of the divemasters (yes,



Garden Eel Photo by Kelly Thiemann

it's a marine park with "no touch" rules, so I shouldn't encourage this kind of behavior) had a trick of waiting patiently for a garden eel to emerge part way out of its hole, slipping his hand under the eel and lifting up a portion of sand along with the eel.

On the island, International Pirates Day was celebrated with a pirate-themed party... arrgg matey! The Oak Lawn Ski and Scuba Club from Dallas also hosted a Texas Ho Down. The final night always culminates in a live auction and raffle.

This year, we received dive gear donations for raffle prizes from Pinnacles Dive Center (Novato), Captain Aquas (Dublin) and Wallin's Dive Center (San Carlos – Thanks, **Maureen!**). Please say thank you next time you are in one of these dive shops. This year, DFL raised \$60,000. It is anticipated that NCRD will



Green moray eel Photo by Joseph Kaminski

receive \$8,500 of the 2006 proceeds to distribute to local health-related charities based on a pro-rata share of the number of our club members attending DFL.

In January, we will be asking NCRD members to nominate local charities for presentations at the February meeting, with voting also taking place at the February meeting. Please consider



Reef Lobster Photo by Sharon Ponder

sharing your favorite health-related local non-profit with your fellow members – and possibly garnering DFL funds for that worthy cause.

Where will DFL be going in 2007? Somewhere cheap in the Caribbean; in 2008, somewhere not so cheap in the Pacific... stay tuned!



St. Lucia Sunscape Photo by Kelly Thiemann

'Tis the Season — For Whales!

Text and photos by Maureen McEvoy

December kicks off the season for the California Gray whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*) to be paying their annual migratory visit to the northern California coast. The migration is led by pregnant females, followed by non-pregnant females, males and finally juveniles as they journey from the Bering and Chukchi seas down to their breeding grounds in Baja California, passing us between early December and late January. This migration is the longest by any mammal – the round trip averages about 13,000 miles. And you thought *your* commute was bad!

A migrating Gray whale has a predictable breathing pattern, generally blowing 3-5 times in 15-30 second intervals before raising its fluke and submerging for 3-5 minutes. A Gray whale can stay submerged up to 15 minutes and travel at 3-6 miles per hour. The average length for a male Gray whale is between 36 and 50 feet, weighing in at about 30 metric tons.



Gray whales feed on small crustaceans such as amphipods and tube worms found in bottom sediments. They feed primarily during the summer months of long daylight hours in the cold Arctic waters of the Bering and Chukchi seas. A baleen whale, it has a series of 130-180 fringed overlapping plates hanging from each side of the upper jaw, where teeth might otherwise be located. These plates consist of keratin, a fingernail-like material that frays out into fine hairs on the ends inside the mouth next to the tongue. The plates are off-white and about 2-10 inches in length. To feed, a whale dives to the bottom, rolls

on its side and draws bottom sediments and water into its mouth. As it closes its mouth, water and sediments are expelled through the baleen plates, which trap the food on the inside near the tongue to be swallowed.


Gray whales reach sexual maturity at 5-11 years of age, or when they reach 36-39 feet in length and can live to be 50 years old or more. Gestation is 12-13 months. The calf weighs 1,100-1,500 pounds at roughly 15 feet at birth and nurses 7-8 months on milk that is 53% fat (human milk is 2% fat). Females bear a single calf at intervals of 2 or more years. Courtship and mating behavior are complex and frequently involve 3 or more whales of mixed sexes. Mating and calving both occur primarily in the lagoons of Baja California, Mexico, although both have been observed during the migration as seen in these photos from Monterey Bay (*at right*). These demonstrate two males working together to mate with a female – one balancing the female at the surface while the other mates with her.

Because of their slow movement and wintering in shallow, warm-water lagoons, these magnificent beasts were easy prey for the early American whalers. There was once a time, before petroleum wars, when whale oil was the only option for lighting street lamps, heating, cooking, eating. With the means to catch them evolving rapidly, whale numbers were dropping rapidly. After one species was thought to be wiped out, whalers would start on another one. Today, most countries have signed an agreement with the IWC (International Whaling Commission) to not hunt or harm whales.

Hunted almost to extinction in the 1800's, the Gray whale has made an amazing comeback – the current count is somewhere between 19,000 and 24,000 whales. Part of their comeback is due to complete protection by the federal government in 1947 and to the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (thank



you, Richard Nixon), which makes it illegal and has a fine of \$10,000 for any harassment or killing of marine mammals.

Now is a great time to be going on NCRD boat dive trips. It's not unusual to spot Gray whales and Humpbacks this time of year. Other good whale spotting areas are in Davenport (south of Half Moon Bay) and Pt. Lobos down in Carmel. Watch for the telltale "puff" of spray and then the magnificent fluke showing itself before our friends take yet another dive on their long journey to their warm-water vacation! 



General Meetings

Dec. 21: Holiday Party

The Steinhart Aquarium is at 875 Howard Street between 4th and 5th Street, less than a block from the Metreon Theatre and about two blocks from the Powell Street BART / Muni station. Parking is available at the 5th and Mission garage.

Calendar

Please see details at
<http://www.rainbowdivers.org/calendar.php>

San Francisco Bay	Monterey Bay	Far Away
<p>Dec. 21 <i>General Meeting & Annual Holiday Party</i> @ Steinhart Aquarium 875 Howard Street, SF between 4th & 5th Streets</p>	<p>Dec. 16 Boat Dives, 6:30am <i>Cypress Sea</i> charter Monterey, CA</p> <p>Dec. 17 Shore Dives, 9:00am <i>Copper Roof & Stewart's Point</i> Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA</p> <p>Jan. 6 Shore Dives <i>Lover's Point</i> Pacific Grove, CA</p> <p>Jan. 7 Shore Dives <i>Point Lobos</i> Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA</p> <p>Feb. 3 Shore Dives <i>McAbee Beach</i> Monterey, CA</p> <p>Feb. 3 Night / Shore Dive <i>Pipeline (Breakwater)</i> Monterey, CA</p> <p>Feb. 4 Boat Dives <i>Sanctuary</i> charter Monterey, CA</p>	<p>February 16-23, 2007 <i>Molokini Crater & Kihei Coast</i> with <i>Mike Severns Diving</i> Maui, Hawaii</p> <p>March 23 to April 2, 2007 <i>Ocean Rover</i> Liveaboard Thailand and Myanmar</p> <p>July 30 to August 6, 2007 NEW! <i>Galapagos Eco Explorer I</i> Liveaboard Galapagos Islands, Ecuador</p> <p>March 20-31, 2008 NEW! <i>Undersea Hunter</i> Liveaboard Cocos Island, Costa Rica</p>



Northern California Rainbow Divers

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