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## Why Turtles Eat Plastic & More COVID News

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The Independent, Nonprofit Guide for Serious Divers Since 1975



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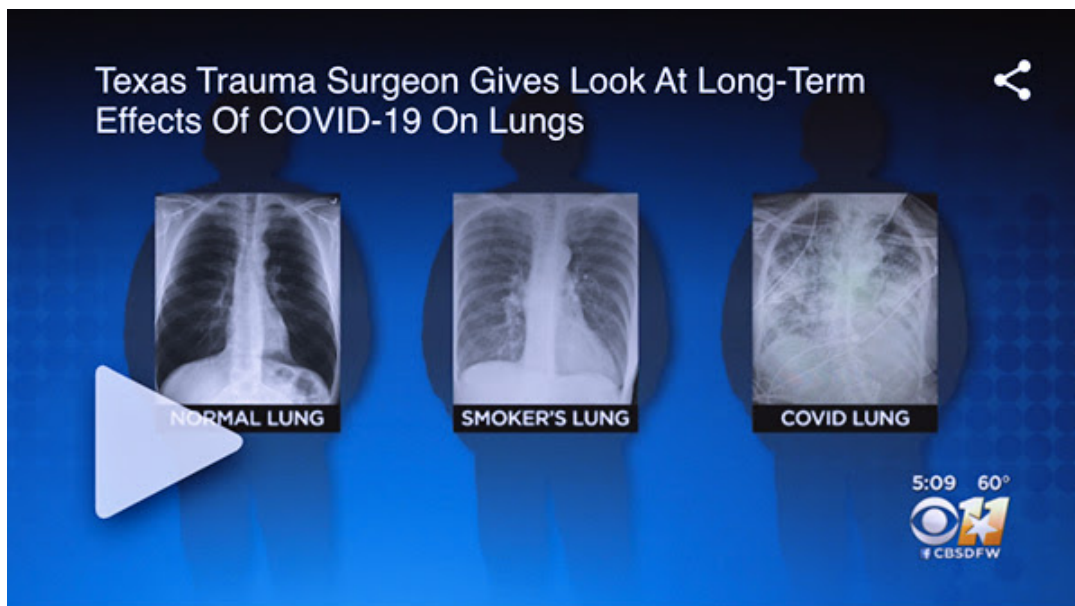
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January 20, 2021



**Why Do Turtles Like to Eat Plastic?** It's been assumed that turtles visually mistake plastic for jellyfish, a natural food source, but new research published in *Current Biology* provides startling new evidence that they are attracted by its smell. When plastic drifts in the sea, it develops a community of bacteria, algae, and small animals on its surface that gives off odors that turtles seem to like. You can read the full study [here](https://news.clas.ufl.edu). [news.clas.ufl.edu](https://news.clas.ufl.edu)



**Why a COVID Infection, Even Without Symptoms, May End Your Diving Career.** In May 2020, we reported a statement by an Innsbruck University physician and diving doctor (COVID-19 “Bad News for Divers,” Undercurrent May 2020) who found serious lung damage in COVID patients, and he warned how it might affect any diver who contracted the virus. Now, in an interview released by CBS News, an assistant professor of surgery at Texas Tech University, who has treated thousands of patients since March, says that every patient who has suffered COVID-19 symptoms shows severe problems in a chest X-ray. Even those who were asymptomatic show severe chest problems most of the time. Dr. Brittany Bankhead-Kendall says that post-COVID lungs look worse than any type of terrible smoker’s lungs they’ve ever seen. [Here is that story.](#)

We contacted Doug Ebersole, an interventional cardiologist in Lakeland, FL, and a technical dive instructor who consults for Divers Alert Network (DAN) and who, himself, suffered a bout of COVID-19, knows of the lung problem. However, he hasn’t seen it so widespread. “There’s nothing new here . . . We have known for many months that a small percentage of patients will develop severe lung abnormalities with COVID-19 -- a lot of them improve over time, but some do not. Also, a small proportion of patients continue to have symptoms for months after the illness. In fact, one of the internal medicine doctors in our clinic has set up a special ‘Post COVID-19 Clinic’ for these patients.”

A study published in *EClinicalMedicine* from a team in Henan Province, China, led by Aiguo Xu (The First Affiliated Hospital of Zhengzhou University), et al., found that in 55 people recovering from COVID-19 in China, even those with a mild-to-moderate infection may have the effects persist in the lungs for months. In fact, three months after leaving the hospital, about 70 percent of those in the study continued to have abnormal lung scans, an indication that the lungs are still damaged and trying to heal.

A study at Oxford University (UK), using a novel scanning technique highlighting areas where inhaled air is not flowing easily into the blood, studied eight patients who reported breathlessness. They found that their lung damage might be why some victims feel unwell months after infection. The British NHS describes the condition as Long COVID, with symptoms including extreme fatigue, shortness of breath, and chest pain, among many others. You can read it [here](#). *CBS News/BBC*

**Who’s the Idiot Who Scraped “Trump” into a live Manatee’s Back?** It was a mindless act of vandalism. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is leading the

investigation after the animal was spotted swimming in Homosassa Springs over the January 10 weekend. The Center for Biological Diversity offered a \$5,000 reward for information leading to a conviction of the person responsible. That was followed by \$20,000 from Dave Bautista, star of *Guardians of the Galaxy*. Slow-moving manatees often gather a layer of algae on their skin. In this case, someone had carved the ex-President's name into that layer. You can see video evidence [here](#). FOX13

**St. Kitts & Nevis Shark Bite.** In a twist of perspective, a reported shark attack on a kayaker of the Caribbean island of Nevis has been attributed to the absence of cruise liners, implying the giant ships keep sharks at bay. We think that the pre-COVID visits of numerous cruise liners to Nevis were obviously damaging the underwater environment. The renewed presence of sharks indicates an underwater world that's become healthier since the cruise industry was hit by the global pandemic. The kayaker needed emergency surgery to save her leg.

**Horror in Thailand's Koh Tao.** It may be old news from last summer, but it highlights a continuing crime problem on this Thai island. It is alleged that PADI diving instructor Santi Khokpool was assaulting a female tourist in Koh Tao's Fishbowl Bar when a Scottish tourist attempted to intercede. Santi attacked him with a broken bottle, and only life-saving surgery on the neighboring island of Koh Samui stopped it from being another case of murder. PADI expelled Santi in December, but otherwise, characteristically, local officials covered up the event and even denied it happened. [youtu.be/aVdUWHgwULM](https://youtu.be/aVdUWHgwULM)

**More Bad News for Manatees.** In 2020, boat strikes (90 deaths) once again topped manatee deaths caused by humans, but many were killed by floodgates and locks. Since the 1990s, Florida's vast network of gates that regulate water flows has been equipped with sensors that are activated if manatees are near. But because 2020 was an exceptionally wet year in Florida, water managers activated the flood control systems more frequently, leading to increased incidents. *Miami Herald*

**COVID Disappointment on *MV AquaCat*.** It's very disappointing when your expensive liveaboard trip is spoiled by bad weather, but that's nature. What makes it worse is when some passengers board who are suffering from COVID-19. That's what John Miller (Lubbock, TX) discovered when two infected passengers boarded, despite having Bahamas Health Dept. Visas for COVID. Within days, he reported, at least six divers and two crew had become infected. He says, rightly so, that, "Social distancing on a boat is impossible, with no-one but food service staff wearing masks. Travel during COVID is a gamble as there are absolutely no procedures that will adequately protect you in crowded airports, hotels, or dive boats."

**Tarpon Populations Disappearing in Florida.** Tarpon can live to the age of 80, and they've been around on this planet for 50 million years. In Florida, huge numbers used to return each year to the Homosassa Bay because that's what their forbearers did for eons. Pollution from urban development and farming has changed that, killing off the food the tarpons sought. Now, Homosassa is an example of what's happened all over Florida, both inland and on the coasts, from the nitrate-based toxic algae in Lake Okeechobee that is periodically and disastrously flushed out to both coasts to the freshwater-starved Everglades and Florida Bay where crabs, the tarpon's favorite food, breed.

**Records Are There to be Broken.** On January 7, in Siberia's freezing Lake Baikal, Ekaterina Nekrasova, a Russian woman wearing nothing but a swimsuit, a swimming cap, and a mask swam 279 feet under the ice, possibly setting a new Guinness World Record. According to the *Siberian Times*, her aides cut holes in the 10-inch-thick ice at regular intervals if she needed to abort the swim. No doubt, Alaskan and Canadian readers will soon be rushing to see if they can do better.



**Thanks to Human Activity, No Coral Reefs Will Survive This Century.** No coral reefs will survive this century if a UN environmental report is correct . . . unless there are drastic reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions. The last global bleaching event ran from 2014 well into 2017. Spreading across the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic oceans, it was the longest, most pervasive, and destructive coral bleaching incident ever recorded. UNEP's report 'Projections of Future Coral Bleaching Conditions' outlined the links between coral bleaching and climate change. It postulates two possible scenarios: a 'worst-case scenario:' if the world economy remains heavily driven by fossil fuels, all corals will be lost by 2034. In the 'middle-of-the-road' scenario, where countries exceed their current pledges to limit carbon emissions by 50 percent, severe bleaching could be delayed by 11 years to 2045. *UN Environment Programme*

**Last Chance to Tell us Your Future Dive Travel Plans.** If you haven't already responded to our survey about your future dive travel plans, you can still do so until Friday Jan 22 midnight EST to do so. [Just go here.](#)

*Stay Safe  
Wear a Mask, Socially Distance, Wash Your Hands  
Don't Share Your Air*

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### **Undercurrent May Issue**

- [St.Helena. Is it the most difficult-to-get-to diving destination?](#)
- [Tough times for members of the diving industry - How are they coping?](#)
- [Tales of woe from those who found their trips cancelled.](#)
- [Can you trust that dive guide?](#)
- [Afloat and lost at the surface of the ocean - and how to avoid it.](#)
- [Bad Covid-19 News for divers? Experts don't agree.](#)
- [and much, much, more](#)

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