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Conception Manslaughter Charges & Pink Manta

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Pink Manta is 'Inspector Clouseau.' Free-diver Kristian Laine photographed this rare pink manta off Lady Elliot Island, off Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Known by local divers as Inspector Clouseau (from the *Pink Panther* movies) and first spotted in 2015, it has been encountered fewer than a dozen times. In these days of digital enhancement of photos, scientists with the Australian research group *Project Manta*, who study the rosy ray, have confirmed its color to be real. Solomon David, an aquatic ecologist at Louisiana's Nicholls State University, suspects the mutation is a condition

called erythrism, which causes an animal's skin pigmentation to be reddish, or in some cases, pink. *National Geographic*

Conception Captain Indicted for Manslaughter. Jerry Boylan, 67, of Santa Barbara, has been indicted by a federal grand jury on 34 counts of seaman's manslaughter for the passengers and one crew member who died in the 2019 fire that engulfed the liveaboard dive boat *Conception*. The indictment says that as the captain, Jerry Boylan, "was responsible for the safety and security of the vessel, its crew, and its passengers." Earlier this year, the National Transportation Safety Board pointed its finger at Truth Aquatics for failing to adhere to various safety practices. Fritzler and his Santa Barbara-based diving outfit have also faced a barrage of lawsuits from the dead passengers' relatives, but so far, no criminal charges. *Los Angeles Times*

DAN COVID-19 Diver Research. The Divers Alert Network is conducting a five-year study on the effects of the virus on divers' health and fitness to dive and is looking for divers and free-divers who have recovered from a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection. If you qualify, it's an opportunity to participate in a long-term research study about the infection and a return to diving. The initial survey will take 15-20 minutes to complete, and DAN will periodically follow up on your diving career and possible medical issues. www.research.net/r/DANcovidstudy

Beware of Fast Cozumel Boats: One December 9, Bradlee LaMontagne, a 21-year-old diver from Virginia Beach, jumped into Cozumel's water off his uncle's yacht for a quick dip. A fast-moving passing boat slammed into him, and while those on the boat tried to save him with CPR, La Montagne died. *The Virginian Pilot*

A Very Old Fish. An 81-year-old tropical fish caught off a West Australian reef has been identified as the oldest known to science. The octogenarian midnight snapper was found at the Rowley Shoals about 180 miles west of Broome and beat the previous record-holder by two decades. Researchers also caught a 79-year-old red bass in the same area. They were among 11 over the age of 60 caught as part of a study attempting to establish how warming oceans will affect the biology and lifespan of reef fish. *The Times*

Harming Whales and Dolphins: On December 9, nearly five weeks after the election, the Administration issued a rule to allow the oil and gas industry to use seismic and acoustic mapping, including air guns, to gather data on the Gulf of Mexico's ocean floor. Problem is, this can mean great harm to Atlantic spotted dolphins, pygmy whales, dwarf sperm whales, Bryde's whales and other marine mammals that pass through. And "pygmy and dwarf sperm whales are expected to be harassed to the point of potential injury, with a mean of 308 whales potentially harmed per year, according to the final rule." *E&E News*

Aggressor Disappointment. Reader Galina Moerdler (Fair Lawn, NJ) told us she booked a trip on the *Turks & Caicos Aggressor* beginning Thanksgiving week, but both she and her partner tested positive for COVID. She asked for the trip to be moved to a later date, but Aggressor Adventures refused and instead suggested that they file an insurance claim despite most insurance companies having now made COVID problems an exclusion to cover. We don't think it's too much to ask for the trip to be moved to a later date -- after all, they surely don't want COVID carriers aboard, and Moerdler was quite forthcoming with her diagnosis, it seems. So we wrote to Aggressor Adventures and Larry Speaker for their reasoning, hoping to give a little push to rebook Moerdler and her partner. They have not responded.

Paradise Lost? Aldabra Atoll, the largest atoll in the Indian Ocean and roughly 600 miles from inhabited islands in Seychelles, is now home to 550 metric tons of plastic waste that has washed up on its beaches. Researchers think it has more than any other island on the planet. It's especially tragic since it is home to more giant tortoises

than the Galapagos Islands. Volunteers from Oxford University and the Seychelles Island Foundation have so far managed to collect 25 metric tons. *The Independent*

Underwater Sculpture Park for Miami's Waters. Called Reefline, it's intended to be a seven-mile public underwater sculpture park, snorkel trail, and artificial reef off Miami's shoreline. The project will be completed in phases, with the first mile slated to open one year from now. Designers, collaborating with marine biologists, researchers, architects, and coastal engineers from Coral Morphologic, the BlueLab Preservation Society, and the University of Miami, will construct the reef using concrete and limestone, materials that are chemically akin to natural reef. *Lonely Planet*

Mexican Dive Centers Close Ranks over Fatality. There was an apparent information blackout regarding the death of a newly graduated British doctor, Olivia Byrom, 29, while diving in Mexico's Yucatan peninsula in June 2018. British journalists found Tulum dive centers to be tight-lipped when they contacted them for further information about the guide's actions, and they would not name the dive center involved. (We're not surprised. *Undercurrent* has been warned in the past when making similar inquiries about other fatalities in Mexico.) The deceased's buddy, Dr. Olivia Bird, told the Bristol Inquest (UK) last month that she only knew their dive guide as Peggy, and that they had ascended to within six feet of the surface when Byrom began descending again. (On reflection, she wondered if Byrom was unconscious at that time.) The Coroner concluded that "an inadequate safety process contributed" to the death. *Daily Mirror*

Stay Safe

Wear a Mask, Socially Distance, Wash Your Hands

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Undercurrent May Issue



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