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Turtles in Trouble & American Underwater Photography Winner

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Texas Turtles in Trouble. Record-breaking cold temperatures in Texas caused a humanitarian crisis and also put the state's wildlife at risk. Many Texans rushed to the coast, where they rescued more than 4000 cold-stunned sea turtles. They were kept warm indoors at Sea Turtle Inc., thanks to a massive generator donated by SpaceX at the South Padre Island Convention Center. *Sky News*



American Underwater Photographer Wins Again. Originally from Southern California, Renee Capozzola beat out more than 4,500 competitors from 68 countries to win first place in the annual *Underwater Photographer of the Year* contest, based in the UK. Alex Mustard, chairman of the judges, said her photo served as "an image of hope; a glimpse of how the ocean can be when we give it a chance; thriving with spectacular life both below and above the surface." It's not her first win. She was "American Photographer of the Year" and was part of the winning American team in the *World Shootout 2019* and won \$1000 at the Boat Show in Düsseldorf in January 2020. You can see other winning entries [here](#).

Some Reef Conservation Projects are Struggling. And perhaps *Undercurrent* can help. If you know of any active projects such as removing ghost nets, stopping poachers, protecting nesting turtles, or similar activist programs that have been affected by the pandemic, tell us about them, and perhaps we can help raise some money. Contact BenDDavison@undercurrent.org

Diving After COVID-19. Nick Bailey from the diving section of Britain's Health & Safety Executive wrote to *Undercurrent* to give sage advice. He says, "Will the diver who is getting back into the water take any special precautions for those initial first dives? The point I'm trying to get across is that we should all be cautious in those early dives and not aim to reach to where we left off some months ago." Divers who have been infected by the coronavirus should talk to a medical specialist before diving.

Masks Mandated on U.S. Dive Boats. That's what Joe Biden's Executive Order for Safety in Domestic and International Travel does, DEMA reports. And it makes sense because we've heard from many subscribers that after the first dive, the anti-virus masks seem to be forgotten. Several readers have reported they were quite uncomfortable with the lack of enforcement on crowded boats. In Mexico and the few other countries open to divers, our readers say enforcement is really hit-and-miss.

GoPro Recovered After Six Years Underwater. And it still works. Rose Zhang, a volunteer with the nonprofit Ocean Defenders Alliance, was participating in a clean-up operation near the Spitting Caves on the South Side of Oahu when she came across a GoPro camera, still sealed in its waterproof case. She posted the last video from the

camera to Facebook in the hopes of finding its owner. It showed the camera's owner Nainoa Kamai, and some friends jumping into the water from the Spitting Caves rocks in 2014, when he was 18. The GoPro and owner were soon reunited. *UPI*

Time Is Running Out for Sharks and Rays. The number of sharks found in open oceans has plunged by 71 percent in the last half-century, mainly due to over-fishing, says research scientist Dr. Richard Sherley of the University of Exeter (UK). Of the 31 species studied, 24 are now threatened with extinction. Three shark species (the oceanic whitetip shark and the scalloped and great hammerhead sharks) have declined so sharply they are now classified as critically endangered -- the highest threat category (IUCN). *BBC*

Good News for Harbor Porpoises. Between 1987 and 2002, many California counties banned gillnet fishing along their coastlines after dead marine animals washed up on beaches entangled in nets. Outraged citizens pushed for the bans. Since then, harbor porpoises have rebounded, increasing by more than 8000 from Santa Barbara to San Francisco. *GoodNewsNetwork*

Conception Tragedy Update. Agreeing with seven recommendations suggested by the National Transportation Safety Board stemming from the 2019 liveaboard fire that killed 34 people off the coast of California, the U.S. Coast Guard will issue a series of safety reforms for commercial vessels, though it may take several years to enact them. They will require more comprehensive smoke detector systems, better safety management systems, upgraded emergency exits, and mandatory inspection checks on roving watches. *The Sacramento Bee*

Conception Captain Pleads Not Guilty. Jerry Boylan, the captain of the ill-fated liveaboard *Conception*, was arraigned in federal court in Los Angeles on 34 counts of seaman's manslaughter. Each count carries a possible 10-year prison term. The government alleges that Boylan failed to follow safety rules before the fire broke out on September 2, 2019, which led to one of the deadliest maritime disasters in recent U.S. history. The charges against Boylan were brought under a pre-Civil War law designed to hold steamboat captains and crew -- but not the owners -- responsible for such maritime disasters. Boylan pleaded Not Guilty. The families of 32 victims have filed claims against boat owners Glen and Dana Fritzler and their company, Truth Aquatics of Santa Barbara. *VC Star*

Australia Promotes Scuba: To stimulate tourism, the New South Wales government has provided \$100,000 to develop a scuba diving entry platform at Nelson Bay, a popular tourist area about 90 miles from Sydney. The new entry platform will provide a safe and unimpeded access point that will make diving easier, therefore supporting the area's appeal as a diving destination. Governments everywhere should take note. *Miragenews*

Bad News When It Goes Quiet. Underwater, Florida's Sarasota Bay usually is filled with a cacophony of sound reminiscent of frying bacon, clacking typewriters, and knocking wood. Fish produce sounds to attract mates, warn of danger, scare competitors and predators, and maintain social cohesion. Some also create sound as a distress call. Although people have known for a long time that certain fish can vocalize, scientists have only recently realized how widespread and intriguing this ability is. A new study published in *Nature*, which used passive acoustic listening stations and existing fish surveys, reports that catches of sound-producing fish plummeted by 99 percent during the Florida red tide, suggesting a significant marine life die-off. The culprit behind red tides is the alga *Karenia brevis*. Near-annual blooms release toxins that harm marine animals and linger in the air, causing people on the coast to wheeze and cough. *Hakai Magazine*

Bahamas COVID Regulations Have Not Changed. If you intend to visit, remember that you need a negative PCR test taken not more than five days before arrival, must

apply for a Bahamas Health Visa, and be prepared to cover the cost of a return test, medical expenses in the islands, and lodging if quarantine becomes necessary. *BTO*

Fewer Sharks, More Morays? Moray eels thrive on coral reefs in populated areas, but it doesn't appear to be an act of nature: overfishing of other predators, like sharks, may be the reason, suggests a new study by scientists from Florida International University's Institute of Environment. When the reef's balance is disrupted, growing populations of morays could lead to unknown consequences for the entire ecosystem. The FIU scientists say more study is needed. *Phys.org*

White Shark Mystery. For many years, Cape Town has been a destination for people curious about interacting with great white sharks. But something has changed. Much of the thriving shark population in the waters around Cape Town has vanished. A new report from the BBC explores the question of what exactly happened to Cape Town's sharks. Did they migrate somewhere else? Could they have died off? Are the sharks merely temporarily absent, or are they gone for good? See the short video [here](#).

Ocean Water is Rich. Don't think that seawater is clean. It's full of pathogens, zooplankton, and minute marine life. The prudent diver protects wounds, cuts, and skin abrasions from infection. A couple of weeks ago, this photo was going viral with the headline "A Single Drop of Seawater, Magnified 25 Times". According to writer Miriam Goldstein, it's probably not a single drop, but it's food for thought as well as food for fishes. *Deep Sea News*



*Stay Safe
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Undercurrent May 2020 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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