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Shark Expert Dies & Questions Arise Over Dive Depth Record

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Till: info@sdhf.se

9 september 2020 13:30

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September 9, 2020



*Shark experts at Walker's Cay: Jeremy Stafford-Deitsch, Erich Ritter, & Gary Adkison
(photo by John Bantini)*

Controversial Shark Expert Dies. Swiss-born Erich Ritter (61) unexpectedly passed away in his sleep at his Florida home in late August. He gained degrees in zoology and paleontology at the University of Zurich, but it was his shark behavior theories that sometimes drew him into conflict with other shark experts. His approach tended to divide opinion between those who saw him as an insightful champion of sharks and others who regarded his theories as unscientific and his attitude reckless. He reckoned he could lower his heart rate so that the sharks did not recognize him as prey and some thought he took unnecessary risks, for example, denying a shark the bait by putting his body in the way. In 2002, he survived a severe shark attack during filming at Walker's Cay with Nigel Marven for Discovery Channel, during an attempt to prove to Florida shark attack victims of that year that sharks were not dangerous. As a pundit, Ritter came up with terms such

as 'angstination' – the combination of fear and fascination inspired in humans by sharks. www.divernet.com

Another Legend Passes. Pioneering Florida underwater photographer, author, and publisher Jerry Greenberg has passed. He began manufacturing underwater housings way back in 1953 and invented the first waterproof marine identification cards. He was among the first to sound the alarm that coral reefs were imperiled and was inducted into the International Scuba Diving Hall of Fame in 2004. Jerry was very helpful to *Undercurrent* in our early days.

Questions Arise Over World Depth Record. Not so relevant to the amateur scuba diver, in 2014, an Egyptian army colonel, Ahmed Gabr, broke the scuba depth Guinness World Record, formerly held by Nuno Gomes, by diving to 1090 feet deep. Now, insiders to the event are beginning to allege inconsistencies that reveal the attempt might have been faked. These deep-diving records are notoriously tricky to adjudicate, but if we find out more, we'll let you know. You can read Michael Menduno's comprehensive [interview with Gabr and the ramifications here](#).

Charges Loom for Conception Fire Deaths. Court documents say criminal charges are imminent after 34 people were killed aboard the dive boat *Conception* last year. A year after the tragedy Capt. Jerry Boylan was briefed on the evidence prosecutors have against him. Prosecutors would only need to prove simple negligence or misconduct on the part of the captain or crew. A conviction carries a penalty of up to 10 years in prison. Since the fire, the Coastguard has issued additional safety recommendations such as the unsupervised charging of lithium batteries and the use of extension cords and power strips. [Click here](#) to view the article.

Good News for Some. Travelers from New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, or Connecticut who can present a negative coronavirus test will be able to fly to Costa Rica starting September 1. Costa Rica is the jumping-off point for Cocos Island. [See here for details](#).

Odds Slimmer Than You Might Think. That's what some scientists are saying about your chances of catching Covid-19 on a flight. However, this doesn't account for risks you might encounter within the airport, and at the end of August, sixteen passengers on a flight from Zante to London tested positive after a small number of passengers refused to wear masks, and another 200 faced 14 days of quarantine. [You can read it here](#).

Indonesia Closed for This Year. Bali, the Indonesian island, popular with foreign tourists from all parts of the world, will not be open to visitors in 2020. The plan to reopen in September has been scrapped over concerns about Indonesia's mounting Covid-19 cases. The move has renewed worries about the impact on residents in an economy heavily dependent on tourism. Not only has Bali been popular with traveling divers but is also one of the ports of departure for some liveaboards operating in the Indonesian islands to the East.

Illegal Aquarium Trade Busy in Hawaii. A 47-year-old Naalehu man is another Big Island resident to be cited for the unlawful collection of fish for the aquarium trade. Jason Beevers was arrested when enforcement officers spotted his boat while patrolling in waters off South Point, Ka'u, and after they boarded it, they found 333 yellow tangs and three Achilles tangs. Meanwhile, another alleged offender Tyron T. Terazono awaits a Court hearing after his vessel was boarded back in February, and 550 live fish were successfully returned to the ocean. *West Hawaii Today*

Plastic Crisis Unabated. Scientists now calculate that the upper 600-feet of the ocean alone contains up to 21 million metric tons of plastic waste. The trash isn't vanishing; it's simply getting ground down and dispersed in the sea. Macro-plastics like bags and bottles are breaking into micro-plastics (defined as bits less than 5 millimeters long) that swirl around and sink eventually sink to the seafloor. They sampled 12 sites in the middle of the Atlantic between the UK and the Falkland

Islands, and in a single cubic meter of seawater, they found up to 7,000 plastic particles. *Nature Communications*

Stay Safe,

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