



# Buddy Line

October, 2006

## NCRD at Gerstle Cove: Diving with Raccoons

by *Tim Shannon*

Last August, the Northern California Rainbow Divers had an excellent weekend of diving and a phenomenal outdoor coastline experience at Salt Point State Park. Salt Point is 45 minutes north of Jenner, west of the Russian River Recreation Area. The coastal wonders within the Salt Point State Park include rocky promontories, panoramic views, kelp-dotted coves, dramatic sounds of pounding surf; open grasslands, forested hills, pristine prairies, and pygmy forests. With 20 miles of hiking trails, over six miles of rugged coastline and an underwater park, you can enjoy a variety of picnicking, hiking, horseback riding, fishing, skin and SCUBA diving, and camping. The weather can be changeable along the rugged Northern California Coast. Even summertime can be cool as fog hugs the coastline and ocean winds chill the air. Gerstle Cove is a Marine Preserve located within the state park.

### Accommodations

Our group of divers stayed in two different locations for the weekend. Sharon and her non-diving partner stayed at the Salt Point Lodge just outside the state park. The lodge has hot tubs and a sauna. The SP Bar and Grill is currently closed, however. As Sharon and Glenda had an engagement to attend inland on Saturday night and did not return coast-side until late, the rest of us did not have a chance to visit them in their luxurious accommodations and did not get to see the hot tub.

Chris, Gabriel, and I stayed in campsite 51 of the Woodside Campground at SP State Park. The campsite is now known

as Area 51. Nestled within redwoods, pines, and bay trees, the camp configured itself perfectly to the needs of divers. There were plenty of places to hang drippy wetsuits and dive gear. The fire pit was surrounded with pre-positioned logs, creating a nice seating arrangement around the warm campfire. This was quite nice as SP State Park has only cold showers. Brrrrr!



Chris, Tim, Sharon, Gabe Photo by Glenda Humiston

Raccoons at Salt Point provided a bit of unwelcome excitement. Just as campers hit the tents, the enormous monsters descended amass from the trees. It was like Night of the Living Dead. The first night, the zombies pilfered through all of Chris' food and made off with most of the stash. The second night, they broke into the ice chests and took our sausages, potato salad, and tuna fish. They would have stolen even more of our provisions, but my trusty dog Samantha came to the rescue, chasing the evil thugs back from whence they came.

### The Menu

Area 51's Friday night menu:

*Salad*  
*Artichoke*  
*Cheesy pasta dish*  
*BBQ beef ribs*

Saturday morning breakfast in Area 51:

*Sausages*  
*Pancakes*  
*Fruit salad*  
*Coffee*

Lunch at Gerstle Cove:

*Fried chicken*  
*Potato salad*  
*Water*

Saturday night dinner:

*Cheese appetizers*  
*Chips and nuts*  
*Cheesy pasta & tortellini*  
*BBQ chicken*  
*Breaded fried abalone*

Sunday morning breakfast:

*Scrambled eggs*  
*Granola*  
*Fruit*  
*Coffee*

We would have had more to eat, but the raccoons kept stealing our food. Boo! to horrid, fetid, detestable raccoons. We should have taken more extreme precautions to protect our food.

Luckily, we hit the jackpot with the abalone. I was going to take one for dinner outside Gerstle Cove, but conditions were beyond my capabilities.

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## Editor's Log: Is Eco-Diving an Uphill Battle?

by Karen Doby

The death of Steve Irwin, Australia's self-proclaimed naturalist and popular TV personality who unexpectedly fell prey to the whip of a stingray's tail, sent surprisingly countless ripples of shock and sadness across the globe to devoted fans. Yet, many questions remain about the circumstances in which he died. The dive community, by and large, has responded in defense of stingrays, citing that a ray's first line of defense is flight, not fight. Perhaps the animal in question felt spooked or trapped by cameramen and their equipment as Irwin swam overhead in only three feet of water, "attacking" as its only viable protection mechanism. In any case, this unfortunate incident is a good reminder to us all that wild animals are unpredictable and must be respected.

This timely reminder to respect the underwater environment comes in other ways as well. A diver on our recent club trip to Wakatobi was often observed engaging in behavior deemed disrespectful to the reef. Pulling himself along in strong currents by grasping onto soft corals, breaking away hard corals that precluded the placement of his camera, bumping other divers and turning animals upside down to get photos of their undersides were high-impact offenses that appreciably disturbed not only the reef and its inhabitants but also his diving companions. His defense when confronted was, "I've been diving in places where divemasters themselves have done worse. I've had divemasters in the Philippines bring me animals in their hands so I could take pictures of them."

As distressing as it may be, I too, have seen this type of divemaster behavior firsthand. As recently as our Komodo trip last August, a *Kararu* divemaster broke away huge chunks of coral to reveal a harlequin shrimp cowering deep inside as his home was violently smashed apart. When this behavior was escalated to the ship's owner, he replied, "People come from all over the world to dive with this divemaster. He finds the animals. He was just trying to show you something." In September, DFL divers in St. Lucia brought back photos of divemasters holding garden eels in their hands and trapping baby trunkfish in their fingers. Sure, these DM's believe they're enhancing our dive experience by showing us the unusual, but at what cost?

So many once-beautiful reefs are now overfished, polluted, and/or bleached. The world's healthy reef systems are diminishing. When we find a reef as pristine as Wakatobi or Komodo, the continued health of that reef is fragile and in everyone's hands to protect as a valued, irreplaceable ecosystem. Divemasters from dive operations are obvious candidates for serving as stewards of their local environments, but all who enjoy the underwater world carry this responsibility as well. When divemasters cannot always be counted on to protect the earth's precious reefs, the rest of us must step up to the task.

When people defend bad behavior by saying, "it could have been worse," they make the mistake of turning acknowledged, undesired behavior into a standard against which questionable behavior is compared. This fairly well guarantees that all but the most egregious behavior will



St. Lucia Divemaster Photo by Joe Kaminski

be seen as acceptable. Instead, we must use the best possible scenario as our standard for gauging the impact of our actions.

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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.

## Upcoming Club Meetings

by Peg Stone

### Date: **October 10**

7 PM (schmooze)

7:30 PM (program)

Location: 501 Castro Street, in the Castro Community Room, 2nd floor (up the stairs or elevator to the right as you enter the bank lobby)

Program: *Marine Mammal Center*

A speaker from the SF Bay Area's own marine mammal rescue center will come speak to the membership and present slides and much more. How will the new Pacific coast marine reserves affect our warm-blooded ocean buddies? Will otters do better now that they are allowed to migrate farther down the coast? What does it mean when a sea lion blows bubbles at you? Or when a harbor seal tugs at your fins? A fascinating session for divers old and new, and diver wannabes! Find out how to protect our frisky ocean buddies and how to help the Marine Mammal Center protect and rescue these cool creatures who can do all the underwater things we wish *we* could do! Plus: door prizes! 

### Date: **November 14**

7 PM (schmooze)

7:30 PM (program)

Location: 501 Castro Street, in the Castro Community Room, 2nd floor (up the stairs or elevator to the right as you enter the bank lobby)

Program: *Farallones Marine Sanctuary Association*

Those remote and mysterious islands off the Northern California coast beckon every diver yet send chills through our bones at the same time. Huge packs of mature sharks roam through their waters in the fall. Marine mammals abound; wonderful birds, both locals and "exotics", soar overhead, and the underwater environment is current-swept and pristine. Come hear a presentation on the Farallones, the Sanctuary formed to protect this fabulous natural resource, and the creatures that prowl the deep and shallow waters around the islands. Special door prize! Also: come hear tales of the just-completed club trip to the Northern Channel Islands. Don't miss this one! 

*Gerstle Cove (cont. from p. 1)*

I talked to some of the other ab divers, who stated they had gone further north to get their abs because of the bad conditions at Salt Point. These two guys took pity on us and gave us one of theirs. Thanks a lot you guys, whoever you were.

### Gabriel's Secret

Saturday night, Gabriel revealed to us that he has been living a lie and has been hiding a deep inner secret. Gabe came out to us around the campfire. Gabriel is married to a woman, and he is straight. We should all support Gabe's courageous endeavor during this trying time. He is no longer living the lie, he has thrown open that door, and has come out of the closet.

I asked Gabe, "If you are straight, how did you get mixed up with the Rainbow Divers?" Gabe replied, "I tried joining other clubs, but the members were all old and boring." He likes the Rainbow Divers. Gabriel is an avid, competent diver with experience to boot. He looks forward to joining us on future dives, and we welcome him wholeheartedly.

### The Diving

The diving in Gerstle Cove was spectacular. The creatures and geology are subtly different from Monterey. We were visited by a group of river otters – a momma and 4 babies. There are no known sea otters on

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## *Annual NCRD Holiday Party: December 21, 6-9pm*

The Northern California Rainbow Divers' annual meeting and holiday party will be held **December 21** in San Francisco. In the tradition of past fabulous celebrations, come join the Rainbow Divers at the **Steinhart Aquarium**, 875 Howard Street, between 4th and 5th Streets. Free admission for Rainbow Divers and a special tour, followed by a party and the "annual meeting" in a room reserved exclusively for us! This promises to be a terrific venue and a fun time for all! Reserve the date now!

## Wakatobi Trip Report

by Kathi Doster

For an incredible week this past July and August, 24 Northern California Rainbow Divers were joined by 22 LGBT divers from Undersea Expeditions to take over the Wakatobi Dive Resort, a premier dive destination in the islands of eastern Indonesia, where we enjoyed spectacular diving, gourmet cuisine and an impressive attention to service.

Wakatobi Dive Resort is located on the island of Onemobaa in the remote Wakatobi archipelago in southeast Sulawesi, founded by Lorenz Mäder. For the first few years, getting there required a 20-hour boat trip to a place so remote, it was once the destination of a National Geographic expedition. Recently, Lorenz constructed a small airstrip on the neighboring island of Tomia, so getting there is no longer quite so arduous. To protect the reef, he leased the fishing rights around the island and created a marine sanctuary that has now expanded to over 12 miles of protected reef. The resort provides electricity for the islanders, who in turn police the reef and protect it from destructive fishing practices. Their environmental protection efforts have received awards from PADI and *Scuba Diving* magazine.

Our adventures began in Bali, where some people arrived early for an extended pre-trip exploration of the temples and the sacred monkey forest, beaches, shopping and spas. Many of us stayed at the Hotel Sofitel on the beach in the gay quarter, where local

bars flew rainbow flags and shops sold sailboat kites in rainbow-striped fabrics. Wakatobi staff met our planes at the Bali airport and escorted us through customs with our pre-printed visas. When we convened back at the airport later, we were taken to the VIP lounge to munch on local appetizers while we awaited our charter flight to Sulawesi, an aerial tour of Bali's volcanoes and the coral reefs of Sulawesi.

From the tiny airstrip on Tomia, small water taxis ferried us to one of the unique, canopied, 70-foot wooden dive boats, which took us to Wakatobi. We knew it was a special place when we walked down the dock past the resident lionfish, who was there every day to greet us. After checking into our thatched roof bungalows on the beach, equipped with electricity, air conditioning, fridges, hot showers (from desalinated sea water) and internet access via satellite link, it was time for checkout dives. The house reef consisted of a steep wall in front of our bungalows, populated with crocodilefish, eels, sea snakes, scorpionfish of many varieties (leaf, paddle flap, false stone), endless nudibranchs, and pygmy seahorses — a thoroughly impressive tour for a checkout dive!

Our days started with breakfast in the new restaurant, a large thatched-roof structure with open walls looking over the beach, and home to their 6 gourmet chefs (two of them are pastry chefs), while the crew loaded our gear onto the boats. Each 70-foot boat carried only 12

divers, with two divemasters and several boat crew, making for spacious, comfortable trips. We had two boat dives in the morning, returned to the resort for lunch, then a single-tank trip after lunch. Late afternoons at the resort could be spent enjoying happy hour at the bar on the end of the jetty or having a massage on the beach in front of our bungalow (\$15 for a one-hour massage, such a deal!), followed by gourmet dinners (did I mention the two pastry chefs?). After dinner, we could watch movies in the longhouse or look up our numerous fish sightings in the extensive reference library.



Clownfish Photo by Mark Showalter

The dives were mostly along walls, sea mounts or ridges, with overhangs and crevasses, sometimes with current, and lasted

75 minutes. Water temperature was 79 to 81 degrees Fahrenheit, and visibility was around 60 feet, less clear than the Caribbean, but the extra nutrients support a very rich ecosystem. The reefs were in excellent condition with a wide variety of soft and hard corals, fields of leather corals and cabbage corals. On one dive, we removed a shredded remnant of fishing net on the reef (the only flotsam we found), and rescued a half dozen Sargassum frogfish that were trapped in it.

I saw something I had never seen before on every dive of the trip. There were batfish and albino frogfish, lizardfish and crocodilefish, giant pufferfish, pipefish, filefish, cuttlefish, turtles and blue-spotted rays. There were sea snakes and scorpionfish on most dives. Wakatobi's divemasters excelled at finding the tiny things, shrimps and gobies, seahorses and nudibranchs. An early morning shore dive on our last day produced two blue-ringed octopi, sitting in holes in the wall.



Translucent Shrimp

Photo by Feney Matthews



Pygmy Seahorse

Photo by Dean Bradley

The boat crew were very solicitous. As we climbed the ladder onto the boat, they pulled our gear off us and placed it back under our wide wooden seat, then handed us cups of water and hot chocolate, along with a dry towel. Cameras were handled with exquisite care and stored in a separate, very clean gear room in the longhouse. If we did a shore dive on the house reef, the staff would watch us from the beach and wade in to help us take our gear off.

One of the few disappointments of the trip was the absence of sharks and other large critters. The divemasters told us there had been large numbers of sharks in the area until 1994, when a mysterious fleet of fishing vessels moved through the islands of Sulawesi, harvesting thousands of tons of sharks for the Asian shark fin market. For many years after the fleet moved on, no sharks were seen at all, and they are only now starting to reappear. Another small disappointment was the lack of Nitrox. The resort's Nitrox compressor broke down, and flying in spare parts takes a long time.

All in all, it was a spectacular trip, and I for one can't wait to come back.



Rescued Sargassum Frogfish Photo by David Zippin

## Meet Your Dive Buddy: Terry Campbell

by Dennis Nix

Photo supplied by Terry Campbell

**Buddy Line:** Terry, you're one of our newest members. How long have you been diving and what got you started?

**Terry:** I got certified in Thailand in 2001, though I dove several times before that. The first time was when I was in Junior High School.

**Buddy Line:** That's an unusual place to get certified. Thailand must have been beautiful. Did it spoil you for diving?

**Terry:** It wasn't beautiful Thai diving. It was in Pattaya, which isn't nearly as nice as the waters near Phuket.

**Buddy Line:** Where else have you dove?

**Terry:** Philippines, Grand Bahamas, Roatan, Hawaii, Belize, and Curaçao.

**Buddy Line:** Philippines, another exotic place! Was it beautiful?

**Terry:** It was in Cebu. I wasn't too impressed, not much to see and low visibility.

**Buddy Line:** So, where is your favorite place to dive?

**Terry:** I really like Curacao, great vis, lots to see, and nice, easy, warm-water diving.

**Buddy Line:** How'd you find out about DFL?

**Terry:** I met some of the guys from the Dallas club skiing, and they mentioned they do this every year. I thought it was a great way to have a good time with people I like, dive and help charity all at one time.

**Buddy Line:** If you've been diving with the Dallas guys, tell us how you came to NCRD?

**Terry:** I'd gone to DFL last year with some ski buddies from Dallas. They were raving about Roatan, and I saw how much fun it was to dive with a group of LGBT divers. I decided to join Ralph Wolf and Larry Chow's NCRD trip to Roatan and became a member. And of course NCRD is my local dive club.

**Buddy Line:** Do you have a special dive buddy?

**Terry:** Well, if you mean in the water, it's the guys from Dallas -- I dive in their pod.

**Buddy Line:** And the other kind of dive buddy?

**Terry:** Ken and I have been together for 15 years. He's a non-diver but loves coming to DFL.

**Buddy Line:** Tell us a little about your background -- where you're from, etc?

**Terry:** I grew up in Huntington Beach in Southern California. I lived in Japan for six years where I met a man in the US Air Force. When he was transferred to the Bay Area, I moved to San Francisco with him. I've been in the Bay Area for 19 years.



Terry at New Year's 2004

**Buddy Line:** How do you spend your time when you're not diving?

**Terry:** Skiing is my primary sport as I mentioned before, and I picked up snowboarding last season. I travel a lot as well. I live part time in Incline Village.

**Buddy Line:** That sounds exciting. I also understand you have a daughter.

**Terry:** I have a seven-year-old daughter. She lives with her two moms in Friday Harbor on San Juan Island in Washington. I try to spend as much time as possible with her.

**Buddy Line:** What about your plans for diving?

**Terry:** Definitely DFL for next year. I really enjoy DFL, not only the diving but the strong social aspect. I'd like to do some more club dive trips, maybe to Saba or Baja.



## Message from the NCRD Board: Updated Trip Policies

by Feney Matthews, NCRD President

**Members:** Please check our updated trip policies!

The NCRD Board recently revised the club's policies to ensure that our trips run smoothly and, most importantly, that our trips are not only safe for divers but also minimize impact to the reefs we visit throughout the world. NCRD has wonderful dive trips in beautiful locations, and we want to continue to be known as a dive club that values diver safety as well as healthy reefs.

It is important that everyone take part in protecting the reefs and maintaining safety. All trip participants are asked to discuss any unsafe diving practices or bad reef etiquette observed on trips with the NCRD trip leader. Trip leaders have the authority to address any problems with divers and, if necessary, to restrict or even ban future

diving on club trips. While we hope never to have to deal with these kinds of problems, it is important that the policies are clear and that trip leaders can quickly deal with issues so that we can have safe trips and leave the reefs as we found them.

We know that problems are rare — after all, we have a great community of divers in NCRD — but here are a couple of examples of the kinds of problems that could come up:

1) Most underwater photographers are aware that no shot is worth damaging the reef or unduly disturbing reef animals. NCRD does not want to see anyone grabbing coral for balance or in any way damaging the reef to get that prize-winning shot. For example, if we see a photographer lying on coral to frame that special macro shot, it's likely they won't be doing any more club diving that day, with or without the camera.

2) Divers need good buoyancy skills so they are not crashing into the reef. If we see someone having problems with buoyancy and damaging the reef and/or putting himself or other divers at risk, NCRD trip leaders will provide options for this diver's contin-

ued dive activities during the club trip. These options may include, as examples, working with the diver to improve his skills, suggesting the diver hire a private divemaster at his own expense, or sitting out dives that exceed the diver's skill / training levels.

We clarified our policies to make sure everyone knows that the trip leader has the authority to address these problems on NCRD trips and to warn trip participants if their diving skills need work. Once warned, divers will need to change their diving practices, else they could lose their diving privileges for the remainder of the trip and not be allowed to participate in future club trips.

Many of us have been in the situation of not knowing what to do about bad reef etiquette or unsafe diving that we observe. We hope that this updated policy will make everyone on our trips feel more safe and comfortable. If members have any questions or concerns, we ask that you discuss them with the trip leader or any NCRD Board member.

The full text of NCRD's trip policies may be found on the club website: <http://www.rainbowdivers.org/trips.php> 

*Gerstle Cove (cont. from p. 3)*

the north coast due to excessive hunting throughout the last century. Sea urchins and abalone are excessively abundant. The fish are so friendly, they let you pet them. The anemones are enormous and vibrantly colored. The starfish are amazement unto themselves.

Sharon chronicled our dives with many excellent photos.

On our first dive, we found the infamous anchor just outside the protected sanctuary of Gerstle Cove. There is supposed to be a wreck out there, but I have yet to find the blasted thing. We discovered many fantastic rock formations covered with a plethora of marine life. The critters' colors are almost psychedelic. Chris stated that everything had a "tie-dyed" appearance. During the last dive

on Sunday, we came upon a majestic swim-through in about forty feet of water that really made the day.

The entries and exits at Gerstle Cove are quite tricky. You get used to the long walk down the hill, the balancing act over all the rocks, and the long climb back up the hill. I think an air lift for divers is something the State of California should consider. Well, I cannot wait to get back up there. Hopefully, we will be back at Salt Point before Halloween. 

## NCRD's Monthly Photo Contest Winners Announced

### *For July and August, 2006*

In July, **Ralph Wolf** was diving the reefs at Wakatobi Dive Resort during NCRD week with Undersea Expeditions in Indonesia when he spotted this tiny bobtail squid. Of this wide-angle shot taken with an Olympus 7070 camera inside an Olympus housing with dual Sea&Sea YS-90DX strobes, Ralph says, "I was very fortunate to have come across this little critter when he was doing such a poor job of hiding! For me, the color contrast between the subject and the fan coral is what makes the image. The open polyps on the coral also serve to communicate the tiny size of the subject without distracting from it. This was really a case of being in the right place at the right time."

August's prize goes to **Mark Showalter** for his photo of a swimming Spanish Dancer nudibranch, taken during a night dive at Gili Lawa Darat inside the Komodo National Park, Indonesia, on August 7 while diving off the *Kararu* liveaboard with Undersea Expeditions and the Northern California Rainbow Divers. To capture this winning image, Mark used an Olympus C-8080 camera inside an Olympus PT-023 housing with an Inon D2000 strobe.

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

November 5 is the deadline for submitting October photo entries, and for the November competition, the deadline is December 5. Full details are available online at the NCRD website:

<http://www.rainbowdivers.org/photocontest.php>



JULY WINNER: Tiny bobtail squid

Photo by Ralph Wolf



AUGUST WINNER: Swimming Spanish Dancer

Photo by Mark Showalter

## Dear Dive Nerd



Ever had a dive-related question but didn't know whom to ask? One of our long-time, seasoned divers and divemasters extraordinaire is now available to help! No question is too silly or difficult for our dive nerd. Give it a try! All questions may be sent to [DiveNerd@rainbowdivers.org](mailto:DiveNerd@rainbowdivers.org)

***I just bought a marine housing for my camera. Should I test it before using it for the first time? If so, how?***

You should certainly read the manual before you use it. It's probably also a good idea to google the model number of your camera or housing and the word "flood". Stuff happens, and it's always nice to learn from other people's mistakes before trashing your own gear.

Every time I close my rig, I like to dunk it in the rinse tank *before* my next dive. I hold it there for a few seconds and look for bubbles. That way, if there is a leak, I can catch it early. Also, if water does get in, at least it will be fresh water, and there's a fighting chance of saving the camera. A salt water flood can be instant death for a digital camera.

As for testing it before the first dive, just play with it so you learn how to work the controls through the housing. Put on your mask, BC and gloves and "dive" your living room. Have fun with it! Take macro shots of the knobs on the stereo and wide-angle shots of the sofa.

Practice changing lenses or adjusting the strobe. Decide what you'll do with the camera on the ascent and safety stop. I clip mine to my BC, so I have both hands free. All this will help you get a routine figured out before you take the rig under water for the first time.

Finally, when you do take it diving, don't get so involved in your new camera that you forget the fundamentals — air supply, depth limits, bottom time, buddy contact, etc. Tell your buddy you have a new toy and might get distracted by it. Choose an easy, familiar dive site to experiment with your new camera.

***I just spent a small fortune on a new strobe but found that my macro shots are better using the camera's internal flash! All the strobed shots are over- or under-exposed! The strobe uses a fiber optic cord to cue off the internal flash, which is now blocked. What am I doing wrong?***

I hear you cry. You've just learned, the hard way, what those silly pre-flashes are for. It's called TTL (for Through The Lens) exposure control.

When the camera uses the internal strobe, it does a low-power test flash to find out how much light it needs. It then sets the brightness (actually the duration, but we're talking millionths of a second here) of the final flash. Some cameras might also adjust the aperture or sensor gain (often called "film speed or ASA") to make the light levels all come out right. It takes less than a 10<sup>th</sup> of a second, but the camera is *very* busy between those two flashes!

When you fiber-couple your external flash, it is smart enough to ignore the test flash, but it is most likely just dumping a fixed amount of light as soon as the main flash goes off. You get what you get, whether it's right or not! So what's a diver to do? Short of selling everything on EBay or yelling at the guy who sold you the strobe, there aren't any simple

answers. There are plenty of options, but they depend on the details of your equipment. Broadly speaking, you can find a way to live with manual exposure control, or you can try to get TTL to work. Your dive nerd has done both.

When you have only one strobe, manual exposure is not so bad. Flash memory is cheap, so just keep shooting! Take a test picture. If it looks bad on the little LCD, turn the strobe up or down and try again. Then, sort your pictures in private and only show people the good ones!

Sometimes you'll surprise yourself and find that unusual lighting, typically under-exposure, gives the picture a whole different mood and makes you look at the same scene in an entirely new way. Photographers have long since agreed to refer to this as "maintaining creative control" rather than "getting lucky".

Okay, how do you turn the light up or down? Depending on your strobe, there might be a knob which adjusts the relative or absolute brightness of the flash. The simplest strobes have a choice of only full or ½ power. The Sea and Sea YS-90DX can go from full power down to -7 stops, or 1/128<sup>th</sup> power.

The so-called auto strobes have a light sensor and will adjust the strobe brightness, so instead of *producing* a constant amount of light, a constant amount of light *comes back* from the subject to the sensor on the flash. They might still have a knob you can turn, but it adjusts the amount of light coming back to the strobe. If you move from a light to a dark subject, you won't have to readjust the knob.

I shot for years with one strobe and manual strobe control. You'll get pretty good at guessing the light level to within a stop or two on the first shot. Having 7 stops of power on the strobe let me use the aperture for depth of field and the shutter speed for background light levels.

If your strobe doesn't have enough (or perhaps any) adjustment range, you can still control the amount of light reaching the CCD in the camera by adding a diffuser to the strobe, changing the aperture or just positioning the strobe differently.

If the strobe has no knobs, the next best thing is to set the camera for aperture-preferred auto-exposure. Set the exposure level +/- an EV or two until the background light is how you want it. Then, you can twiddle the aperture to control the amount of strobe light, and the camera will automatically change shutter speed to keep the background light constant. You lose depth of field control, but it's better than having to buy a new strobe.

If that's too complicated, you could try to make the TTL work for your camera, but that can get hairy. Once you get it working though, your external strobe will be a breeze to use.

The first step is to check your camera for a hot shoe or some other kind of external flash connector. If you find one, look for strobes recommended for use with your camera on land and see if they do TTL. If you can't find one, stop here; the camera doesn't support external TTL.

Once you know your camera can do TTL on land, you have to figure out how to do it under water! The first step is getting the signal out of your housing. See if your housing has any kind of hot-shoe connection that goes to a waterproof connector. If not, you might look to see if ILM or Ikelite offer a housing for your camera that exports the TTL signal. (*Warning:* Expensive new housings for old cameras may be a bad investment!)

If you happen to have an Olympus C-5060, C-7070 or C-8080 camera, a German named Mathias Heinrich sells TTL adapters for inexpensive Olympus housings. He used to offer one for C-5050 and earlier models, which I bought last year and am very happy with, but it seems to be discontinued now. You might find it used. The part # was OLY-TTL-N. Then again, you could try flattery, begging or bribery via email. Maybe he'll still make you one? [www.heinrichsweikamp.net/blitz/indexe.htm](http://www.heinrichsweikamp.net/blitz/indexe.htm)

The genius of Mathias's adaptors is that they not only export the signal but also translate from Olympus's proprietary new TTL interface to the old Nikonos interface that is the de facto standard for underwater strobes.

Once TTL control is translated, you can choose from a wide range of underwater strobes and cables, often available for cheap on the used market. Adding a second strobe is easy with a Nikonos Y-adapter cable.

If the TTL signal must remain in the manufacturer's proprietary format, you are forced to use their land strobes, placed in waterproof housings.

If you do manage to get TTL working, it will pretty much work the same as the internal strobe did, just with less backscatter, more available



light, and greater creative control over lighting and shadows. For macro subjects with one or two large external strobes, you can use the lowest ASA/ISO value to minimize sensor noise and close the aperture down to get good depth of field. With auto exposure and auto focus working, just shoot anything that looks interesting and the photos will come out properly exposed.

Then all you have to worry about is composition, strobe placement, and getting the fish to smile for the camera.

***Most of my dive buddies are into underwater photography, and I'd like to give it a try. How do I go about choosing a camera? Can I use a land camera I already have?***

Check the manufacturer's website for your current camera. Look under accessories to see if they offer a housing. Most consumer electronics stores will *not* carry housings for the cameras they sell. They may not even know that the manufacturer offers them, so check the website and be prepared to mail order your housing

It's good to start small, just a camera and case, and take some underwater snapshots. Beware of buying gear that doesn't have a growth path. If you want to take really nice underwater pictures, you'll want to get an external strobe fairly

quickly. You'll also want a camera where you can add a wide-angle adaptor later.

Look for a setup that lets you use TTL strobe control. With TTL, you can save money by buying a strobe that doesn't have as wide a range of manual control.

Auto exposure on the camera is usually a good thing, but you'll want the option of setting the shutter speed and aperture manually. The smallest point-and-shoot cameras may not have this option, so take a look at a "prosumer" camera for underwater photography.

Unless you plan to print blow-ups larger than 8x10, you don't need more than about 4 megapixels of resolution. It's nice, especially if you want to crop your pictures later, but I'd recommend putting the megapixels near the bottom of your priority list.

Look for a camera with good optics. Generally, digital cameras made by old film camera companies will have better optics, less image noise, and more sensible controls than those made by old calculator companies. The worst camera I ever bought (and returned) was made by Sharp. The spec sheet was great, but the pictures were awful.

My first underwater camera was "auto" everything, and I outgrew it fairly quickly. I currently shoot an Olympus C-7070 in the Olympus housing. I've added a wide-angle adaptor lens, dual Sea&Sea YS-90DX strobes and Ultralight™ strobe arms.



## General Meetings

**Oct. 10**

**Nov. 14**

**Dec. 21:** Holiday Party

### ***New Location!***

Castro Community  
Meeting Room, 2nd Floor  
501 Castro Street, SF.  
@ 18th Street

### *Getting There*

The Muni Metro lines J, K, L, and M, the F streetcar, and Muni bus lines 24, 33, 35, and 37 all serve the Castro neighborhood. Also, take BART to SF Civic Center, then transfer to Muni Metro or the F streetcar.

## Calendar

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

San Francisco Bay	Monterey Bay	Far Away
<p><b>Oct. 10 <i>General Meeting</i></b> Presenting: <i>Marine Mammal Rescue Center</i> 501 Castro Street, SF Castro Community Meeting Room, 2nd Floor</p> <p><b>Oct. 10 &amp; 12 <i>AOW Class</i></b> Wallins Dive Center San Carlos, CA.</p> <p><b>Nov. 14 <i>General Meeting</i></b> Presenting: <i>Farallones Marine Sanctuary Association</i> 501 Castro Street, SF Castro Community Meeting Room, 2nd Floor</p> <p><b>Dec. 21 <i>General Meeting &amp; Holiday Party</i></b> @ Steinhart Aquarium 875 Howard Street, SF between 4th &amp; 5th Streets</p>	<p><b>Oct. 7 <i>Boat Dive, 8:30am</i></b> <i>Sanctuary Full Charter</i> Monterey, CA.</p> <p><b>Oct. 8 <i>Boat Dive, 7am</i></b> <i>Cypress Sea Partial Charter</i> Monterey, CA.</p> <p><b>Oct. 14, 15, 21 <i>AOW Class</i></b> Class Shore Dives Monterey, CA.</p> <p><b>Oct. 28 <i>Boat Dive, 8:30am</i></b> Monastery Beach, CA</p> <p><b>Oct. 28 <i>Shore Dive, 6pm</i></b> <i>Halloween Night Dive</i> Breakwater, Monterey, CA</p> <p><b>Oct. 29 <i>Shore Dive, 8:30am</i></b> Coral Street, Monterey, CA</p>	<p><b>November 3-5, 2006</b> Annual <i>Vision Liveaboard</i> No. Channel Islands, CA. includes Wreck Diving</p> <p><b>February 16-23, 2007</b> <i>Molokini Crater &amp; Kihei Coast</i> with <i>Mike Severns Diving</i> Maui, Hawaii</p> <p><b>March 23 to April 2, 2007</b> <i>Ocean Rover Liveaboard</i> Thailand and Myanmar</p>



Northern California Rainbow Divers

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