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Dispose of Your Facemasks Conscientiously

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The Independent, Nonprofit Guide for Serious Divers Since 1975



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Dispose of Your Face Mask Conscientiously. Hong Kong-based conservation group *Oceans Asia* reports that about 1.56 billion face masks entered the oceans since the pandemic began, but they are only a small part of the 5,000-6,000 tons of marine plastic pollution. Fifty-two billion single-use polypropylene surgical masks were manufactured in 2020. They take about 450 years to biodegrade, so if three percent find their way to the ocean, that's significant to the ecosystem and the animals living there.

The Caymans Take the Quarantine Seriously. During the Black Death of the 14th Century, ships arriving in Venice were required to wait 40 days before their occupants could come ashore. "Quarantine" comes from the Italian *quaranta giorni*, meaning "40 days." The Cayman Islands is taking the quarantine just as seriously, as one American couple visiting Grand Cayman discovered. Skylar Mack, 18, a Georgia college student, received a four-month prison sentence (later reduced to two months on appeal) after she arrived and was told to quarantine, but ignored the rules and went out to watch her boyfriend, Vanjae Ramgeet, in a jet ski race. Both were arrested. Ramgeet was convicted of aiding and abetting her. *CNN*

Dane Sets a New Ocean Underwater Swimming Record. On November 26, Danish freediver Stig Ávall Severinsen smashed the existing Guinness World Record,

previously held by Venezuelan Carlos Coste, by swimming more than 662 feet underwater on a single breath in the Sea of Cortez, off Balandra Beach, 85 north of Cabo San Lucas. He held his breath for 2 minutes and 42 seconds. The record for doing so in a swimming pool is 984 feet. You can see a video of Severinsen's effort [here](#).

Octopuses Are Sometimes Pugilists. According to research published in *Ecology*, octopuses can throw a mean and deliberate sucker punch without apparent reason, other than the fish might be annoying them. A researcher from the Marine and Environmental Sciences Centre in Lisbon, Eduardo Sampaio, witnessed this phenomenon -- the whole arm of the octopus curls up and uncurls afterwards, like the motion of a boxer throwing a punch . . . By the way, the plural of octopus is octopuses, not octopi. [Click here](#) to view the article.

The Chinese Threat to Fish Stocks Worldwide. When a Chinese fishing fleet of more than 350 vessels arrived off the Galapagos Marine Reserve earlier this year, Ecuador's government sounded the alarm and enlisted help from U.S. Coast Guard to keep them at bay. Armed with huge Chinese Government subsidies, this massive fleet is now being deployed in nearly every ocean -- including a new planned Chinese-funded fisheries development near Papua New Guinea's Daru Island in the Torres Strait. China has a distant-water fishing fleet of 2,500 vessels and an insatiable appetite for seafood. Now, that is a real China threat. *ABC News (Australia)*

Nadia Aly of Vancouver B.C. -- Ocean Photographer of the Year. Winners of the 2020 *Ocean Photography Awards* have been announced by *Oceanographic Magazine* and include breath-taking photos of the underwater world we don't often see. Six categories are open to everyone, both amateur and professional. You can see the winning pictures [here](#). And see Nadia's work at www.nadiaaly.com

Aggressor Disappointment? A reader based in Thailand, Sylvia Brunner, wrote to *Undercurrent* complaining that she had booked a trip at the end of November on the *Thailand Aggressor*, departing in January 2021. Two weeks after the booking was confirmed, the trip was canceled because entry to Thailand was closed to visitors. She reckons Aggressor Adventures must have known that was the case at the time of her booking when they collected payment, but then handed out vouchers for a future trip instead. When she contacted Aggressor, they refused to refund her, saying it was in accordance with their cancellation policy -- but it was Aggressor that canceled, not the passenger. (She was already in Thailand.) Luckily, she had paid by credit card, and the credit card company took up her case and refunded her money.

Mexico Welcomes American Divers, While COVID Surges. While the borders of many countries are closed to visitors, some intrepid travelers are getting good diving in Cozumel, though the Yucatan Peninsula remains a hotspot. Glen Madsen (Santa Clara, UT) was one of the first allowed back on the island of Cozumel in July and enjoyed an empty ocean with "Dive with Cristina." Health worker and solo diver Giorgio Bonmassar (Lexington, MA) enjoyed a stay at the Iberostar in November, dived with Dressel Divers in Cozumel and added a Reader's Report to the *Undercurrent* database, as did David S. Locker (New York, NY), who enjoyed his stay at the Rosewood Mayakoba, Riviera Maya, in September, although he thought the cost of diving with Mayakoba Dive eye-poppingly expensive.

Reports of Serious Issues and Poor Organization. The *Nautilus Explorer* liveaboard has a very good reputation with our subscribers, but Sherry M. Wren (Palo Alto, CA) was disappointed in November. In her reader report, she tells of a litany of issues that took the edge off her experience. The trip was listed as one to Cabo Pulmo, in western Mexico, but in fact, the vessel spent only one day there, since the park evidently requires reservations and use of their guides, and this appears not to have been properly pre-arranged. She later received an apology from Nautilus.

Mammoth Find by Florida Divers. You never know what you might stumble across during a dive, but divers from Aquanutz Scuba Diver Charters in Venice, Florida, specialize in finding underwater fossils, with rich pickings once a storm has passed through and churned up the seabed. During the last days of 2020, they came across an eight-foot-long Columbian mammoth tusk at an undisclosed site off the Florida coast that might be more than 11,000 years old. It's the second one they've salvaged from the seabed. Members of the Aquanutz crew belong to a group called iHUNTdeadThings. Columbian mammoth tusks fetch up to \$10,000. *ABC WWSB*

Brainier Than We Thought, Those Cuttlefish. In fact, they appear to be able to perform calculations that are more complicated than simply "more food is better," says Chuan-Chin Chiao, a biologist at National Tsing Hua University in Taiwan. Presented with a choice between one shrimp or two, they will prefer the single shrimp when they have learned through experience that they are later rewarded for this choice. Also, they hunt fewer crabs during the day if they know there are more of their favorite shrimps available at night, indicating they can think ahead. *Royal Society Open Science Journal*

Until January 8, See Amos' Movie Free: If you would like to see Amos Nachoum's *Picture of His Life*, you can use the password POHL22 to log on to the [Vimeo channel](#).

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

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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.](#)
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