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Problems in Paradise & Quarantine Hell

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Octopus Selfie Wins the Competition. Gaetano Dario Gargiulo took the best of show award in the wide-angle category of the Ocean Art Underwater Photo Competition,

organized by the *Underwater Photography Guide*, with a picture that an octopus took of itself in the tidal pool of Kamay Botany Bay National Park in New South Wales, Australia. Photographers from 80 different countries submitted work, but the octopus beat them all to win the prize. We assumed Gaetano shared the proceeds with it, but it's not clear how the animal did it. *CNet*

Thinking of Diving the Maldives? Think Again. Swiss national and UK resident Kathrin Schuler tells a harrowing tale of her enforced quarantine after two passengers on her 10-day December diving trip tested positive for COVID-19. It's not a tale of lounging on a typically luxurious Maldivian island, but more an insight into how resorts get run down quickly in the tropics if they fall out of use, as did *Fun Island*, their Maldivian Health Protection Agency-designated home for 17 extra days. It was derelict and anything but fun. Be aware that things can easily go wrong in the time of COVID. We also wonder how many tropical resorts elsewhere will survive without regular maintenance. You can read her full story [here](#).

Keeping Resorts in Good Condition Needs Staff, but the staff needs to be paid. There's no other work for those at dive centers in the north of Bali, and they keep busy doing conservation work, preserving their reefs for when you return. The staff at the Bali Diving Academy in Pemuteran thank those who kindly donated money to their ongoing survival in 2020, but the problem hasn't gone away. All your favorite resorts may still need help, so contact them. Karin Van Beeke, the manager of the Bali Diving dive center, suggests those who wish to contribute again, send to PayPal: mister_dray@yahoo.com

Raja Ampat Mantas Going Missing? A story in the *Jakarta Post* tells that as the waters of Raja Ampat grow warmer due to climate change, the manta rays' food source migrates to cooler regions. Zooplanktons favor cool waters and tend to move toward the polar regions in both the northern and southern hemispheres when the temperature of equatorial seas rise. The scarcity of food, claims the *Post*, will thus soon prompt oceanic manta rays to leave the equatorial region of Raja Ampat to head north and south, following their staple food. Ichthyologist Mark Erdman takes issue with this and says, "Oceanics have actually been more prevalent in Raja Ampat during La Nina warmer years. We really don't know much about predicting how climate change will affect them. And, most importantly, the currents in Raja Ampat drive upwellings with thick plankton, which means Raja's mantas are amongst the healthiest and most reproductive of any known populations."

Australian Night Dive Goes Wrong. A mother-of-two, Oksana Samkova, 45, set out for a dive from the Port Noarlunga jetty in South Australia, in early January, with six other divers, but quickly found herself battling strong swells and currents. She was swept out to sea and had to endure three hours in the darkness before she was located and rescued. Her flashlight was low on batteries before she was rescued. That's why *Undercurrent* always recommends taking a fully charged light that is kept purely for emergencies. *Daily Mail*

Underwater World Admits Safety Lapses. Veteran diver Philip Chan was killed by the 9-inch barb of a leopard whiptail stingray at the Singapore aquarium in 2016, while attempting to move the animal to a different tank. In 2017, a Coroner ruled it was a tragic death by misadventure, but a defendant of the now-closed facility admitted, among a long list of rule breaches, they did not provide adequate recovery procedures in an emergency during diving operations. Underwater World Singapore could be fined up to US\$375,000 under the Workplace Safety and Health Act. *Today Singapore*

Undercurrent could use an investor -- a buyer, in fact. While the current crew of Ben Davison, John Bantin, and Dave Eagleray will be pleased to stick around, it's time for another diver with time to travel to run the show. Interested? Contact BenDDavison@undercurrent.org

Coral Conservation Work in Bali. Since January 2020, tourism to Bali has declined dramatically. A survey of 152 marine tourism businesses by the Indonesian Diving Business Association also found around one-third had ceased operations, but 250 people laid off from the tourist industry have joined in Indonesia's largest reef restoration program. At Penimbangan Beach, over a thousand specially built concrete structures, designed for coral to grow on, were submerged around 300-400 yards east of the beach. *Jakarta Post*

Cayman Lockdown and a Record-Breaking Turtle Season. The 2020 turtle-nesting season came to an end with a record confirmed 557 nests on Grand Cayman. The deserted beaches have given the turtles the opportunity to lay their eggs unhindered. The Department of Environment relocated 53 nests to protect them from storm surges on Grand Cayman, and eight of these were relocated on Cayman Brac. Last year on Grand Cayman, the DoE recorded 345 green turtles, 156 loggerhead turtles, and five confirmed hawksbill turtle nests. *Cayman Compass*

Shark fins Smuggled in a Consignment of Fish. The Maldives declared a total ban on shark fishing in the country's exclusive economic zone in 2010, following a decline in shark population in the region. Despite this, Maldivian customs authorities seized 21 boxes earlier this month containing 429 kg of shark fins that were about to be illegally exported from Velana International Airport. The shark fins were found hidden in a cargo declared as salt fish. www.haveero.com.mv



While You Were Away -- Problems in Paradise. One of our contacts in the Maldives reports that the island of Maafushi, famous for local tourism, has been inundated with garbage during the decline in tourism caused by the pandemic. He says a lot of the islands are becoming like this, having no proper garbage disposal plan. So, they are simply dumping their rubbish, plastic and all, into the once-pristine sea. Tourists are charged a Green Tax, but little of that money appears to be directed to solving the problem. It's a crisis that's destroying the environment.

British Brexit Irony. On January 24, Robert Rowland, 54, a former British Member of the European Parliament and keen supporter of Britain's exit from the European Union, died in a scuba diving accident in the Bahamas where he lived. One might question his political standing since he didn't even live in the UK, and it seems his diving skills may have been similarly questionable. No details of the diving accident were available at the time of writing. *BBC*

The Lonergans Were Lost 23 Years Ago. For Thomas Lonergan, 33, and his 28-year-old wife, Eileen, a January outing was a one-way trip to St. Crispin Reef, 38 nautical miles north-east of Port Douglas. If they ever came up from their last dive during the afternoon, they would have surfaced in an empty world of exotic blues. There were two threads to the investigation that tripled police numbers in normally sleepy Port Douglas. Most of the effort went into examining the conduct of the crew on the *MV Outer Edge*. Although this high-profile case changed operating procedures of dive boats in Australia, being abandoned at the surface still represents the most common cause of fatalities in scuba diving, and *Undercurrent.org* has reported too many cases since. *Brisbane Times*

Good News for Atlantic National Monument. Environmental groups across the state are praising President Joe Biden's executive order to set in motion a process to review the Trump administration's rollbacks to three national monuments, including the Marine National Monument off the coast of New England, called the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts. The 5,000-square-mile protected area was established in 2016 under President Barack Obama and is the first national monument in Atlantic waters. It contains vulnerable species of marine life such as right whales and fragile deep-sea corals.

On Your Guard Beyond COVID. The poverty ensuing through a lack of tourists in developing countries means that more locals might turn to crime. Reader Julie G., a U.S. national and resident of Bali, enjoyed a trip on *Damai 2*. But it was spoiled when, during a one-day stop-over in Sorong, she was assaulted and mugged, losing her passport, purse, driving license, money, and phone. The police later arrested the mugger but found only her phone.

Full-face Snorkeling Masks Off the Hook. An interim report made in cooperation with the Hawaii State Department of Health, the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, and others, has unraveled the mystery of snorkeling drownings reported in the islands and concluded they were caused by Rapid Onset Pulmonary Edema (also known as IPE) and that full-face snorkel masks posed no advantage or disadvantage in terms of resistance to the inhalation of air compared to other devices.
www.snorkelsafetystudy.com

Maldives Liveaboard Catches Fire and Sinks. On January 25, the 100-foot liveaboard dive boat *Nautilus One*, en-route from Hulhumale to the northern island of Hanimaadhoo, caught fire and sank 13 miles from Kaashidhoo island. All six crew aboard escaped on an accompanying dhoni, used exclusively for diving, a standard practice in the Maldives. There were no passengers. The *Nautilus One* was a traditionally built wooden dhoni. The boats were popular with German divers.
mndf.gov.mv

Wear a Mask, but Not That Sort of Mask. Brothers Rob and William Joseph (Mahwah, NJ) were kicked off a flight to Florida on January 23 because they weren't wearing the prescribed surgical masks. Instead they wore Narwall masks; airtight face shields with inhale and exhale filtration systems, inspired by full-face scuba masks. United Airlines was unrepentant, saying that the masks they wore did not comply with the company's mask policy and could create certain impediments in a variety of emergency scenarios. *assorted news media*

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

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Undercurrent May 2020 Issue

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 - [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?](#)
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