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gifts

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Fun-christmas-ornaments.com

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Pendants and earrings by American artist Pippi Konstanski are created with sterling silver, gold and gemstones.

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Each year, billions of Christmas cards are sent and read and enjoyed and then tossed in the bin. Reduce paper waste and save thousands of trees by emailing your cards this year. Project aware has teamed up with artists Jo & Joe to create a colorful line of animated e-cards to send your ocean-loving friends and dive buddies. Enter the code 'AWARE' when you join and £1 (\$2) will be donated directly to Project AWARE. Joandjoe.com/projectaware



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Edited by
Peter Symes

Jellyfish having few and sparse predators their population explosion can be of serious ecological and economic consequence as is the case in the Black Sea.



NEMOPIEVA NOMURAI GFDL

Where do they come from?

From Japan to Europe, fishermen have seen their catches destroyed, and in the Mediterranean, several popular beaches had to be closed following massive invasions by huge swarms of jellyfish. While there are records of people dying from the noxious sting from the jellyfish, reports of serious human injury are fortunately quite rare.

The JELLYFISH cometh

Fishfarmers off the British Islands could only watch helplessly as their whole stock was killed in the matter of minutes by the non-native marauding stingers and in Japan massive Nomura's jellyfish the size of sumo wrestlers, more commonly found in Chinese and Korean waters, were proliferating off Japan's coast where they have grown a hundredfold in some areas turning into a pest for Japanese fishermen. During the recent years the massive sea creatures, which can grow two meters wide and weigh up to 220 kilograms, were clogging and ripping fishing nets, causing havoc for fishermen who have to spend hours hacking them out of their nets. The fishermen's catch were also being poisoned by the invertebrates' toxic stingers. At one point, the crisis prompted fishermen to come up with cooking recipes, although the jellyfish are rarely eaten in Japan.

Japanese scientists speculated that the jellyfish grow big along the coast of China and have been drifting from China's Yangtze River Delta, where unusually heavy rains may be pushing the jellyfish to Japan.

Then suddenly this year—to the great relief and puzzlement of fishermen and researchers alike—the Sea of Japan saw a drastic decline in swarms of the huge jellyfish. According to the Japan Fisheries Information Service Center, fishermen had reported about 6,300 sightings of Nomura's jellyfish as of November 20 last year, compared with only 128 this year. "This is a dramatic fall in numbers," said Katsuya Saito, an official at the Tokyo-based non-profit research center.

"Up to last year, 3,000 to 5,000 of the jellyfish would get tangled up in a single fixed net in some cases. But this year, only one or two were reported to have been caught," Saito said.

Saito said that until 2001, a heavy presence of the jellyfish occurred only once every several decades. But from 2002 to 2007, thousands were seen in fall and winter in the Sea of Japan and parts of the East China Sea, Saito said.

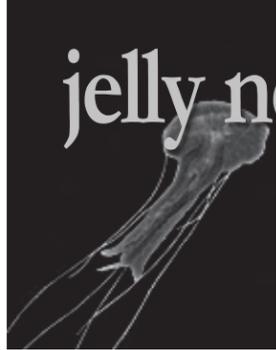
Out of Control?

Is Ocean Acidification to blame for Jellyfish invasions?

Hitoshi Iizumi, an official at Japan Sea National Fisheries Research Institute, a government-affiliated agency, said scientists have not

determined the cause of the sudden disappearance. Researchers believed three factors near China conspired to create the surge in jellyfish in the recent years: Eutrophic water coming to the sea from modern Chinese cities, global warming that has increased the sea temperatures, and increased fish catches resulting in more zooplankton. But researchers are not sure if those factors changed this year, Iizumi said. Yet another is that China has over-fished their waters and reduced the populations of the jellyfish's natural predators, which fed on the larvae while they are still zooplankton. Yet another cause may be China's new dam,

Japan Sea jellyfish menace eases



the Three Gorges Dam. On the Yangtze River, the Three Gorges Dam, the world's largest hydroelectric project, has increased the amount of phosphorus and nitrogen in the waters off China, creating an ideal breeding ground for Nomura's jellyfish. A final possibility is global warming, which would cause the heating up of the seawater and encourage jellyfish breeding. Jellyfish also have the ability to take in oxygen directly from their skin allowing the jellyfish to thrive in the oceans growing dead zones.

Global warming

In Malaysia

where dozens of people have been stung by jellyfish at popular beaches over a period of a few days, Dr Mohammed Rizman Idid of the University of Malaya said environmental changes caused by global warming had compounded the problem and made it more difficult to handle jellyfish blooms.

Many jellyfish species were capable of congregating in huge swarms, which consisted of hundreds or even thousands of individuals, said Rizman. "It is a complex process and is dependent on various factors, including the concentration of nutrients, water temperature, and oxygen content."

In a more serious scenario, he said, jellyfish would mass breed during blooms and could cause serious ecological

problems. It was impossible to determine the exact time when jellyfish outbreaks, or blooms, occurred but they often seemed to occur during the dry season when the sea water was warmer, said Rizman.

Ballast water to blame?

Another concern was the possible spread of invasive foreign species, which could be more dangerous than local jellyfish species, said Rizman. "In Europe, they have found many invasive species and similar cases could also happen here."

Globalisation had made it easier for foreign species to breed in Malaysian waters. Ballast water in the hulls of seagoing ships was the best medium for such species to be transported unintentionally to foreign regions.

"Just imagine what will happen if a deadlier jellyfish from Australia invades our waters. It will definitely affect our tourism and fishery industries." Rizman said information on the matter was scarce, and he would begin a comprehensive study on jellyfish distribution soon.

Acidification?

Since the start of the Industrial Revolution, there has been a drop of 0.1 pH unit in the global ocean. Such acidification of the ocean may make calcification more difficult for

calcareous organisms, resulting in the opening of ecological space for non-calcifying species. It has therefore been speculated that jellyfish simply have taken advantage of the vacant niches made available by the negative effects of acidification on calcifying plankton.

There is some evidence for this effect in the west-central North Sea over the period 1971-1995. Working with data from a larger portion of the North Sea, as well as throughout most of the much vaster Northeast Atlantic Ocean, two researchers, Richardson and Gibbons, compared jellyfish records and pH data for the period 1946-2003 to explore the possibility of a relationship between jellyfish abundance and acidic ocean conditions. This work revealed that there were, as they describe it, "no significant relationships between jellyfish abundance and acidic conditions in any of the regions investigated."

The study does not rule out a relationship between acidification and jellyfish populations on local scales, but concludes if low pH has any effect on natural populations, this may be negated by the much more important effect of warmer water temperatures.

The bottom line

We still don't know. ■



Nomura's Jellyfish

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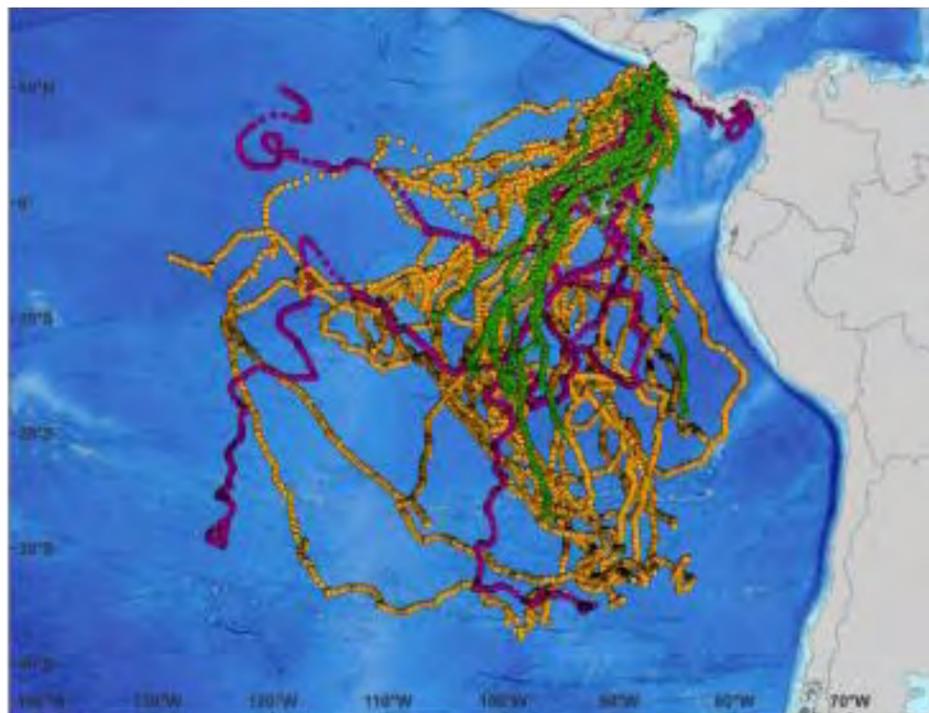
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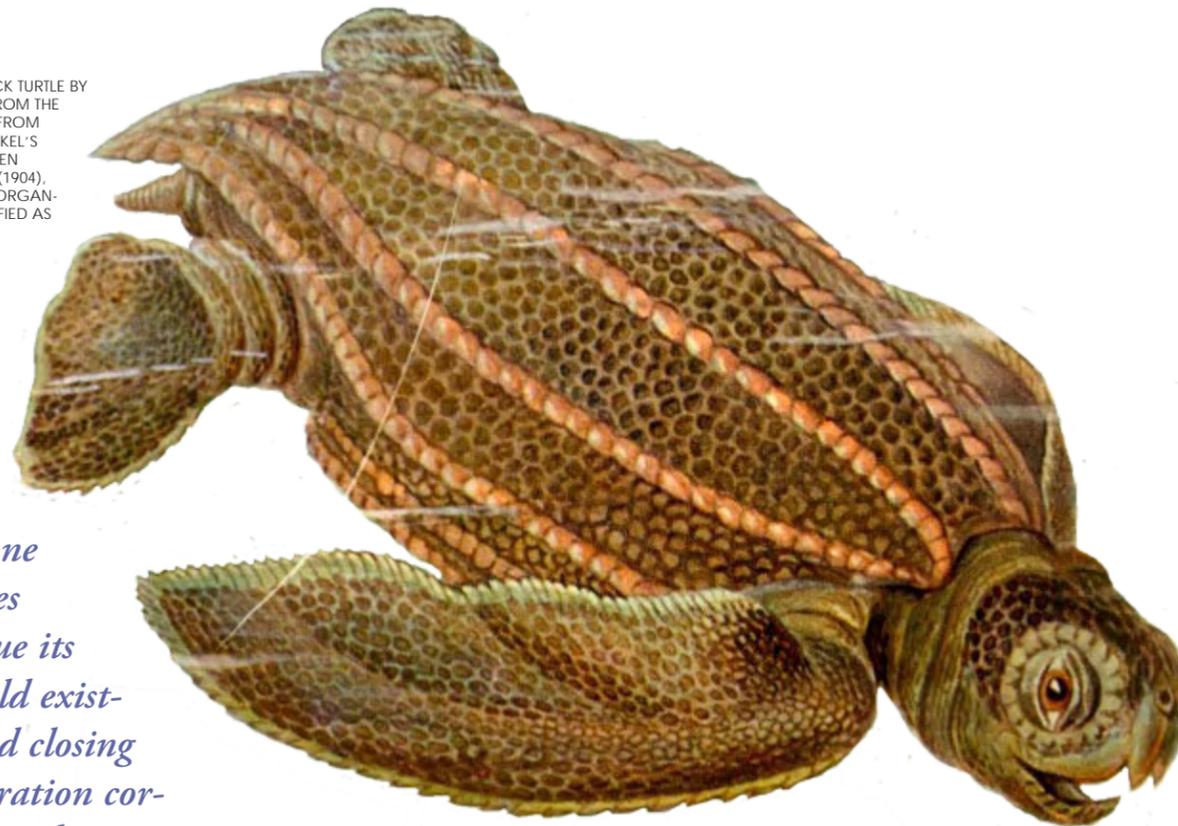


Edited by
Peter Symes



Leatherback sea turtles satellite tracks as recorded by Stanford researchers

LEATHERBACK TURTLE BY HAECKEL. FROM THE 89TH PLATE FROM ERNST HAECKEL'S KUNSTFORMEN DER NATUR (1904), DEPICTING ORGANISMS CLASSIFIED AS CHELONIA.



“Our plan allows one of the largest reptiles on Earth to continue its 100-million-year-old existence by opening and closing portions of the migration corridor to fishing as turtles enter and exit the area. We believe this corridor is also used by other endangered species, such as hammerhead sharks and would benefit many other threatened marine species.”

RANDALL ARAUZ, PRESIDENT OF COSTA RICAN-BASED PRETOMA

Leatherback sea turtles in the Pacific Ocean have declined by more than 90 percent over the past three decades as a result of drowning in industrial longline and gillnet fisheries targeting swordfish, sharks, and tunas. Egg harvesting, marine plastic debris and loss of nesting beaches due to global warming-induced sea level rise also threaten the leatherback. If current trends continue, Pacific leatherbacks are predicted to go extinct within the next few decades.

How the turtle's shell evolved

A newly discovered turtle fossil, found near Guangling in south-west China has shed light on how the turtle's shell evolved. The find shows that the turtle's breast plate developed earlier than the rest of its shell.

Researchers say the development of the shell to first protect the underside points to a mainly aquatic lifestyle. Other marine species were found with the turtle fossil.

The 220 million-year-old fossil is thought to be the ancestor of all modern turtles, although it differs markedly. The shell only covers its underside. The breast plate of this fossil was an extension of its ribs while only hardened skin covered its back. It also has teeth rather than a bony plate, and it has a long tail.

The researchers say this idea is supported by evidence from the way modern turtle embryos develop. The breast plate grows before the shell covering their backs.

The fossilised turtle ancestor, which has been named *Odontochelys semitestacea*, meaning half-shelled turtle with teeth, probably inhabited the river deltas or coastal shallows of China's Nanpanjiang trough basin—the area where the fossil was unearthed. ■

Protecting the turtles' migratory routes

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature's World Conservation Congress adopted a resolution urging nations to protect the leatherback sea turtle and sharks from the world's industrial fisheries by identifying and creating marine protected areas along the Pacific leatherback's migratory routes.

More than 8,000 scientists, government officials and environmental organizations from over 250 nations overwhelmingly supported the resolution, which includes the “Cocos Ridge Marine Wildlife Corridor,” designed to shield the critically endangered Pacific leatherback and the hammerhead shark from longline and gillnet fisheries. Recent satellite tracking data from Stanford University researchers shows that after nesting on the beaches in

Playa Grande, Costa Rica, Pacific leatherbacks swim toward the Galapagos Islands.

Sea turtles are capable of diving more than half a mile deep, and migrate across the entire Ocean basins to feed in the jellyfish-rich waters off the west coast of North and South America. Leatherbacks swim over 6,000 miles within a single year—the largest geographic range of any living marine reptile, and one of the longest known migrations for

any marine species in the world.

In the recent study, Persistent Leatherback Turtle Migrations Present Opportunities for Conservation, Shillinger used satellite tracking and remote sensing to describe the effects of oceanography, such as ocean currents, phytoplankton distribution and sea-floor topography, on Pacific leatherbacks' distribution and movement; and then developed a model that could predict the presence or absence of the

sea turtles.

His work is part of the Census of Marine Life's (CoML) Tagging of Pacific Pelagics (TOPP) initiative, a multidisciplinary, international research program utilizing electronic tags to track the migrations of a variety of open ocean animals. Shillinger adds, “Now it's time to turn the high-tech science into political will and conservation action for critically endangered leatherbacks.” ■

Valerie and Ron.
A lifetime dedicated
to the preservation of
our oceans' marine life

Text by Mathias Carvalho
Photos courtesy of Ron and Valerie Taylor,
and *Blue Water, White Death*

Valerie Taylor, along with her husband Ron, are two of the true pioneers of underwater photo and video, since their debut in the 1960s. Their efforts brought the wonders of the blue oceans to our households, through footage acquired for several TV and film productions. Ron and Valerie are especially renowned worldwide for their specialization in getting images of the shark in its habitat. Always ahead of the latest technology, they adopted the use of DV cameras and decks, adding to their vast portfolio of professional film and analog video footage. Valerie was kind enough to offer me some insights, on this brief interview, after their return from a long expedition to Indonesia.



A talk with the **Taylors**

XRM: I am sure that you have both heard this question before, but for our readers' benefit, how did you two begin diving with sharks? And, why sharks, specifically?

Valery Taylor: We started out as spear fishing champions. In those days, there were plenty of sharks, and they were attracted to

our speared fish. Ron started filming them in 16mm because he found that the footage could be sold first to Movietone news for their news reels they used to screen before the main feature film, then to TV when it arrived in Australia in 1956. Shark footage sold, and we needed money.

XRM: You were the first to actually document sharks in their natural habitat. What was the general public's reaction to that?

Valery Taylor: Yes, we were. The public thought we were mad, but they loved our images. We learned a great deal about sharks in a very short time. This was back in





Hundreds of sharks gathering into a lagoon pass in French Polynesia

The Taylors

ting out of the cages among hundreds of large, dangerous Oceanic White Tips feeding on a harpooned whale. I truly believed that one or more of us could not survive. An odd thing, I felt no fear, just aggression.

XRM: How hard is it to photograph sharks underwater? They must be hard to find, let alone get close to.

Valery Taylor: Because of over harvesting, they are getting hard to find. For many species, we use baits to attract

the late 1950s and early 1960s.

“Blue Water, White Death was the greatest adventure of our lives.”

XRM: “Blue Water White Death”—was it what actually put the Taylors in the limelight, with your first hit? What was it like?

Valery Taylor: BWWD was the

greatest adventure of our lives. It not only made us famous as divers, it also was very instrumental in teaching other divers that it was possible to work with potentially dangerous sharks in their natural environment.

XRM: Any memorable moments in that expedition?

Valery Taylor: The whole expedition was memorable, but I think the biggest adrenalin hit was get-



them to our cameras, otherwise they would either swim over for a quick look or simply swim past ignoring us. A hunk of tuna tied to the reef will keep them interested as long as it lasts, which is generally not long. To overcome this, we would have the tuna frozen hard. The sharks take much longer to eat a frozen fish.

XRM: So, your next major role in movie making

Valerie arm-wrestling with a shark—“Thank God for those gauntlets”—still the most successful protection outside a metal cage against dangerous sharks

FAR LEFT: Blacktip sharks—they rarely will attack divers—a media boosted myth



The Taylors

phy and videography play a key role in the preservation effort today? How?

Valery Taylor: Of all the hundreds of shark species found world wide, there are only six or seven species potentially danger-

water housings with special ports for wide angle lenses. It is important when filming sharks to have equipment that works well every time.

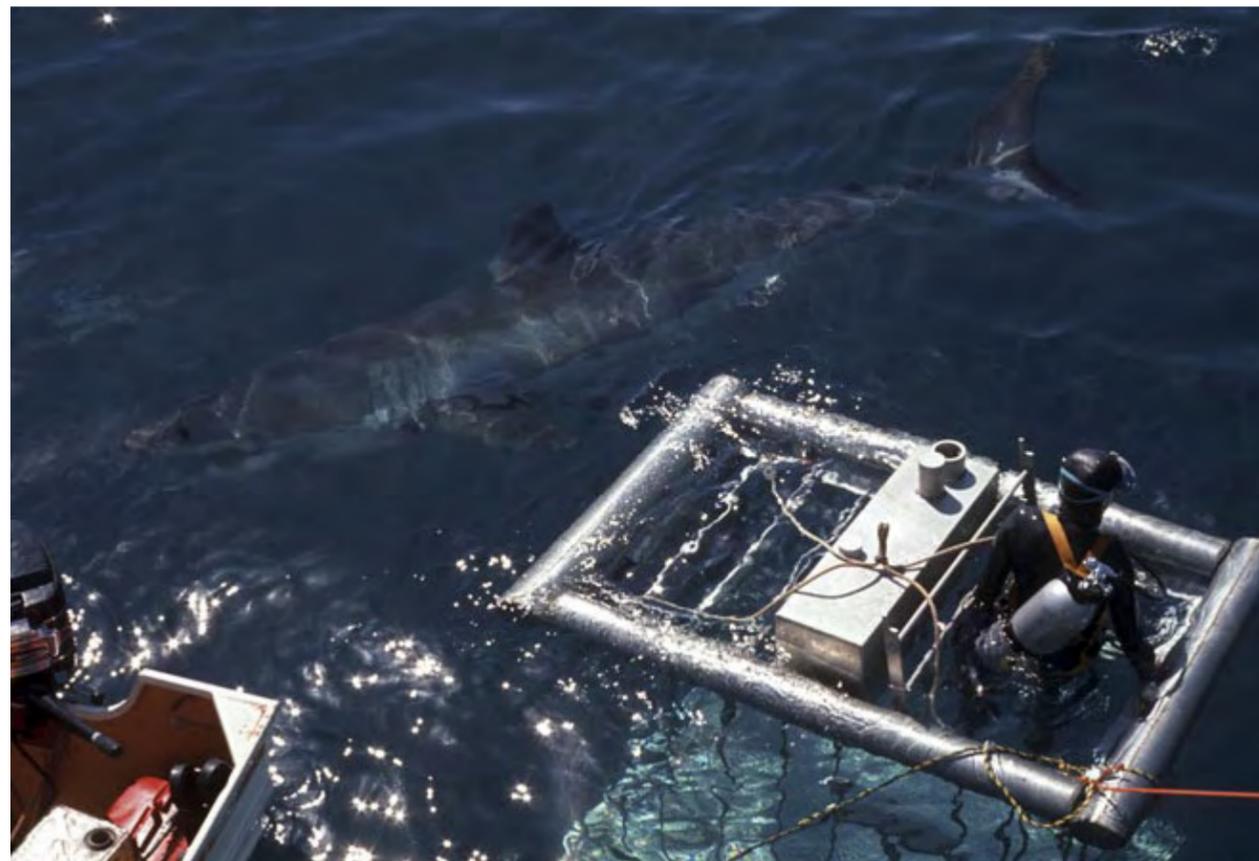
“Children are always asking us questions about sharks. Never about corals or fish.”

XRM: On the negative side, the JAWS series made everyone afraid of sharks everywhere. How harmful was its effect on the public opinion? Or has it had not much effect at all?

Valery Taylor: Peter Benchley, Universal Pictures, and us were all amazed at the public reaction to the film. It was a fictitious story about a fictitious shark. No one ever expected the bad and very unjust publicity regarding sharks that followed. You do not worry about King Kong when you visit New York, so

be regarded as true, which illustrates the incredible power of suggestion the media can have. Even today, people come up to us and say they will never swim in the ocean again because they saw JAWS.

XRM: Does shark photogra-



was as the technical underwater crew in JAWS 2. What can you tell us about that experience, moving from documentaries to a blockbuster?

Valery Taylor: We had already worked on several feature films. We thought *Jaws* would be a sort of B class movie, but it was good money, and the people we worked with were fabulous.

At the time, Ron shot enough footage for *Jaws 2* as well as the first one, which turned into the blockbuster. We were employed originally to shoot the live shark footage for *Jaws*, a story written by Peter Benchley. Although we were taken to Marthers Vinyard where the main unit was filming, Ron shot all the live shark footage off South Australia.

XRM: What filming techniques did you use, and what did you have to come up with?

Valery Taylor: Ron used a 35mm camera in an underwater housing he made himself. Ron is very clever at making things. He makes all our underwater housings, and they are far better than any we could buy. He is still making them, and my latest digital camera housing makes other underwater photographers envious.

XRM: Ron, you are a pioneer of underwater housing for cameras. Did you apply any of your inventions during the film?

Ron Taylor: I used two of my own self-designed and constructed 35mm under-

why worry about a fictitious shark off the local beach?

We feel the adverse reaction was caused by the human race having an instinctive fear of being eaten alive. Sharks do—on rare occasions—bite people, but we are not their natural prey. Unlike the monster in *JAWS*, sharks do not swim around looking for people to eat. If they did, no one could ever go into the ocean without serious risks.

XRM: Was the result a direct hit on the new discoveries about sharks that you and other professionals were making?

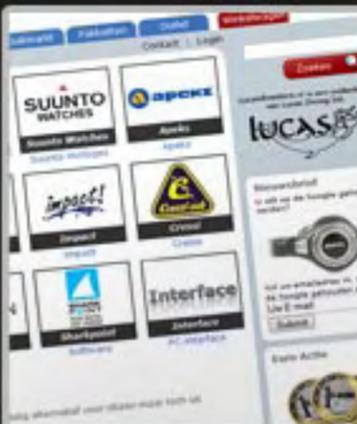
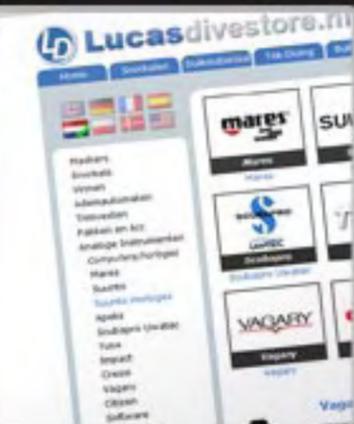
Valery Taylor: I do not think *Jaws* had anything to do with new discoveries about sharks. It had more to do with how a well-presented film can

A White Shark inspects the diver's cage in South Australia—size does matter. All photos this page courtesy of *Blue Water, White Death*



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The Taylors

ries like shark fin soup. Interestingly, this soup has no taste. It is more of a texture, as the flavor is added.

The sale of shark fin soup should be banned in all western countries, the same as with tigers claws and elephant tusks. The harvesting of sharks for their fins should be outlawed but, even as I write, the Queensland Government in Australia

is giving commercial fishermen permission to long line for sharks inside our Great Barrier Reef Marine Parks. It seems incredible that a fish that has survived for hundreds of millions of years can be hunted almost to extinction in a few decades.

XRM: What else can be done, especially if one isn't a shark spe-

ous to humans.

Depicting sharks via the media as they really are has, over many years, given the public a different view of sharks in general and some, such as the Grey Nurse (Sand Tiger), in particular.

Sharks have always fascinated people, but because of television, much more is known about them. Children are always asking us questions about sharks. Never about corals or fish.

and the fins dried out for sale in Hong Kong and Singapore. The dried fin of say a Whale Shark is worth about \$1,000 US on the Hong Kong market. Wealthy Chinese buy these big fins to celebrate a wedding or a special event.

As the Chinese become more affluent, many more of them will be able to afford such luxu-

XRM: So, sharks have benefited from an increasing number of educational and protection campaigns all over the world. But we see that they are at the top of the list of oceanic endangered species. Why is that?

Valery Taylor: The Chinese lust for shark fin soup. Sharks are hunted world wide for their fins. The body is generally dumped,

THIS PAGE: Valerie inspects a dead victim of a whaling fleet still run by Norwegians—wailing still kills hundreds every year. All photos this page are courtesy of Blue Water, White Death





Ron filming some clever sea lions. U/W technology proven on the field

cialist? How can the rest of us contribute?

Valery Taylor: Not much really. Sharks are very much an endangered species and will be hunted until it is no longer viable, which means, there are too few left. Banning fining in the territorial waters off your coast would be a big help, but controlling poachers is very hard and convincing governments even harder.

XRM: What campaigns, projects or associations are you affiliated with?

Too many to name. I am the New South Wales patron of National Parks Marine Association in Australia. And we belong to many other organizations trying to protect sharks. If they all got together and formed a huge group, they could make a difference, but this is unlikely to happen.

You know the saying, "united we stand, separate we fall"? In a world where countries cannot even agree on a standard for power outlets, how can they ever come together on protecting sharks?

One good example is whaling. Whales are incredible animals.

"We now have a marine world as man has made it, not as nature intended it to be."

Everyone loves them, but there are dozens of countries where they hunt them without punishment and in the cruelest of fashions.

XRM: Can you tell us about your current projects?

Valery Taylor: About to write a book. We keep filming and taking photographs. Goodness, we just keep on doing what we have always done. Dive, eat, dive, eat, sleep...

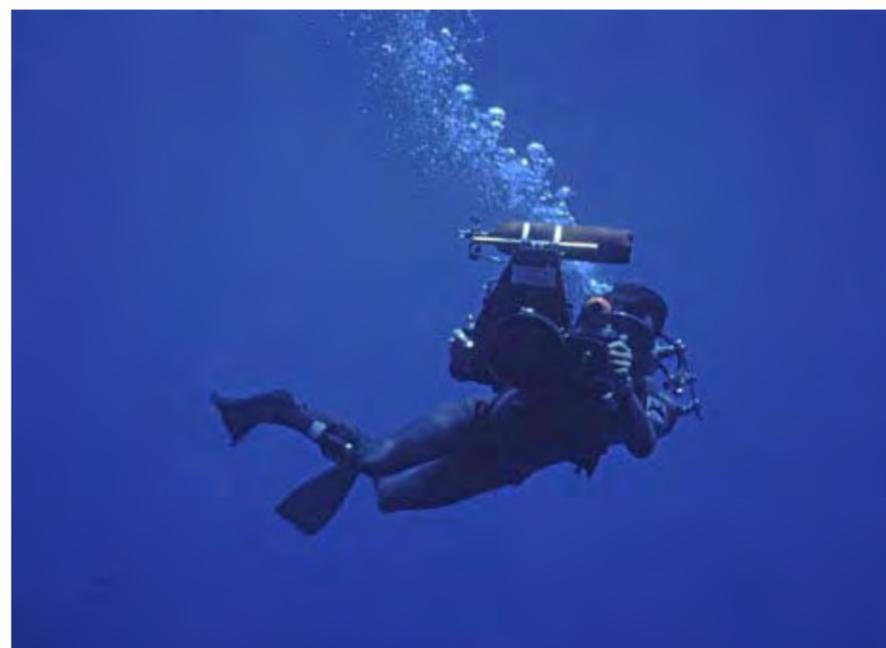
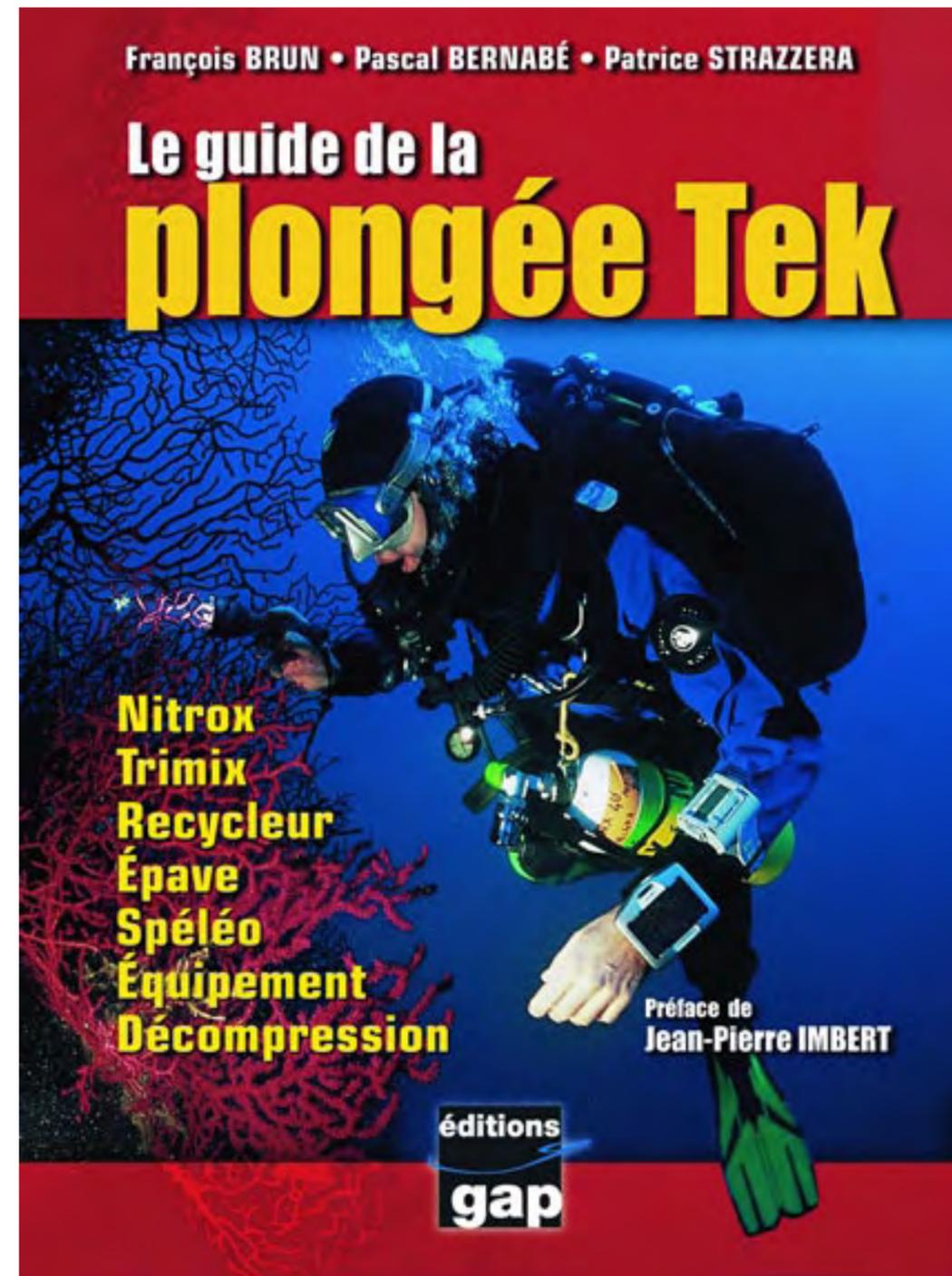
XRM: What does the future has in store for us, regarding the protection of the oceans?

Valery Taylor: In my option, it is doomed. Look what we, the so-called civilized countries, have done and knowingly continue to do with this most precious resource. When India and China catch up with us, and they already have, it will be the death knoll for the remaining eatable life in the ocean.

The biggest problem is that the marine animals

The Taylors

are free for the taking. They do not have to be farmed, just harvested. No one has to clear the land or grow the crops to feed the farm animals, nature has already done that. Fishermen take away and put nothing back. The ocean, as we knew it in our youth, has gone. We now have a marine world as man has made it, not as nature intended it to be. ■



RIGHT: Ron with one of his homemade camera housings— ahead of his time. Photo courtesy of *Blue Water, White Death*