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Marine Photobank Bulletin

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July 2009, Vol. 5, No. 2

Marine Photobank Bulletin

A publication of SeaWeb

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Don't Forget To Submit your Photos to the Photo Contest

The Marine Photobank, in partnership with the Project AWARE Foundation, has launched the second annual Ocean in Focus Conservation Photography Contest, aiming to illuminate ocean issues with images. A global community of divers, conservationists, educators, researchers, photographers and ocean enthusiasts are contributing to this one-of-a-kind contest that urges anyone with a camera to turn their lenses in a different direction this summer to expose the true issues facing our ocean as well as ways to improve the health of marine ecosystems. **The deadline for submissions is August 27, 2009.**

Grand Prize package includes:

Seven nights ocean-view accommodations at MATAVA, a premier eco-adventure resort in Fiji. Package includes five days two tank diving for two and six days unlimited shore diving for two as well as round-trip airport transfers.

Carbon offsets through NativeEnergy from your home and car for one year plus carbon offset for one round-trip air flight.

A DVD of A Sea Change, the journey of a man and his grandson to uncover the hard science of ocean acidification.

Other prize donors include: The Talbot Collection, Hannah Garrison's AZU Studios and SeaWeb's Too Precious To Wear Campaign

Learn more about the contest >>

Photo: © Save Our Seas Ltd./ Tom Campbell/Marine Photobank

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Q&A with John Weller, Photographer and Founder of the Last Ocean Project

What is the Last Ocean Project?

The Ross Sea has been identified as possibly the last pristine open-ocean marine ecosystem on earth. It is, in effect, the last undamaged marine laboratory. But a fast-expanding Antarctic toothfish fishery in the Ross Sea currently threatens the intricate balance.

First, The Last Ocean Project will publicize the Ross Sea story using a variety of different media: a Web site, book, film, major art installations, magazine articles, and public presentations. We are looking to bridge the gap between scientists and the public. Secondly, through these mediums, the project will build a broad-based community of well-informed, concerned people. Finally, the project will bring the combined voice of that community to bear on the political process by working closely with the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC), one of the only non-governmental participants in the various governing bodies that control the fate of the Ross Sea, in the effort to promote protection.

Ultimately, the Last Ocean Project will help to build a community that will come to the defense of one of the last [pristine] places, the Ross Sea, Antarctica. If enough of us speak up, we can make a real difference.

What drew you to the Ross Sea specifically, for this project?

In 2004, I read a paper by Antarctic scientist David Ainley. The paper, entitled "Acquiring A Base Datum of Normality For A Marine Ecosystem: The Ross Sea, Antarctica," lays out the story of the Ross Sea. The idea struck hard - I could barely comprehend that there was only one place left undamaged. As I dug deeper, I began to understand the seriousness of ocean problems. I also realized that very few people, even my highly educated friends, had any idea.

I started to believe that my skills could be used to help capture people's attention, illuminating some of these issues, and perhaps even helping to promote some solutions.

And to me, the Ross Sea is emblematic of the entire array of ocean issues. It is the last place. But the Ross Sea story is not just a story of fishing and its effects on an ocean ecosystem. There is ample reason to assert that the long-term benefits of studying an undamaged ecosystem far outweigh the short-term gains of the toothfish industry. We are inexorably tied to the health of our planet. Thus, the Ross Sea story is emblematic of our entire struggle, as a species, to become sustainable. The Ross Sea story is a human story.

Finally, the thought that sealed the deal, that made me dedicate my life to pursuing this project, was this: there is still hope. In the Ross Sea, unlike nearly anywhere else in the entire ocean, we can still turn back before it is too late.

What role does film and photography play in ocean conservation and in giving the Ross Sea a voice?

Images can capture the imagination in a way that words cannot. Of course, an image can never tell a complete story, a beautiful photograph of an Adélie penguin cannot describe the long-term effects of climate change on penguin colonies. But an image can inspire people to take the first step and learn more.

Further, images allow for quicker communication, and people's attention spans are getting shorter. Nicolas Carr's pithy comment in his 2008 Atlantic article says it well: "My mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles. Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski." Science communication must match this speed, or be left behind.

The textures, depths and colors of your photographs are incredible. Is the Ross Sea that photogenic or are you just that good? Did you find the place to be a perfect complement to your style?

First, thank you for the imbedded compliment. I do hope that I bring a unique eye, perhaps even a poetic eye at times, to the camera. And yes, the stark beauty of the place does fit me somehow. But these photographs are a truly pale reflection of reality. The Ross Sea is, without a doubt, the most magnificent and humbling place I have ever seen. The textures, colors and scenes are infinitely variable. Most of the time I couldn't believe that it was real.

If the Last Ocean Project is a complete success, what outcomes are you looking for in terms of the management of this pristine place?

The ultimate success for the Last Ocean Project would be the establishment of a Marine Protected Area encompassing the Ross Sea Shelf and Ross Sea Slope, the entire ecosystem.

But none of us can do this alone. We have started to build a powerful team of scientists, educators, NGO's, political and public figures. But we need all of you to help.

Read John Weller's Ocean Voice with Slideshow of the Ross Sea >>
The Last Ocean Project >>

Photos: © John Weller

John has been working closely with SeaWeb for the past five years on The Last Ocean Project. He is a 2009 Pew Fellow in Marine Conservation.

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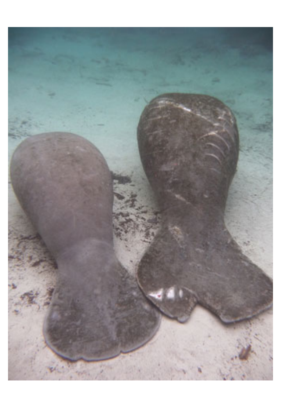
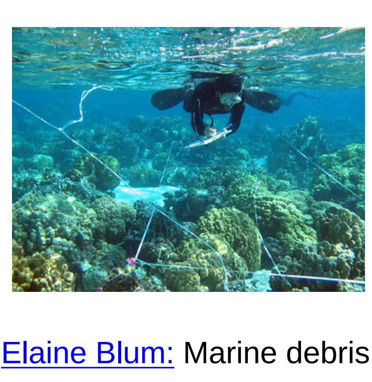
Photos Recently Added to Our Collection



Diane Lewis: Manatees are losing the battle with motorists in Florida's Crystal River.



Gerick Bergsma: Coral surveys, mussel harvests, algae research, ocean tourism, tsunami aftermath and much more.

Elaine Blum: Marine debris ensnares and kills fish and sharks. Removing the nets is no simple task either.

Melanie Siggs: Fishermen in the Bay of Bengal prepare their nets and ready their boats.

Tim Alexander: Massive sperm whale beaching off the coast of Tasmania, Australia.

William Rodriguez Schepis: Trash removal from mangroves in Sao Paolo, Brazil.

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Marine Photobank Statistics

*Most Downloaded Photos:
1. Sea Lion Drowned in Drift Net**
2. Sea Turtle Entanglement**
3. Shrimp and Bycatch
4. Gray Whale Entangled in Drift Net
5. Albatross Killed by Plastics 1**
6. Sea Turtle Freed of Plastic
7. Purse Seine Tuna Boat 1

Photo: Sea Turtle Entanglement
© Marco Carè/Marine Photobank
1st prize in Ecosystem Decline/Species of Concern category in the 2008 *Ocean in Focus* Conservation Photography Contest.

*Statistics apply to images downloaded from February 1, 2009, through June 2009.
**Prize-winning photos from the 2008 *Ocean in Focus* photography contest.

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Parting Shot: Mass Sperm Whale Beaching

In January 2009, 50 Sperm Whales were stranded in shallow water on Perkins Island off the coast of Tasmania, Australia, one of the world's hotbeds for whale stranding. Stephen McGowan, a seasoned Marine Photobanker, and his friend and fellow researcher, Tim Alexander, were there to capture the tragic incident.

McGowan: "We were on the Duck Estuary taking phytoplankton, zooplankton and nutrient samples for my Ph.D. and had heard of the stranding early in the week. As we made our way down the estuary we could see the whales on the sandbar at the mouth of the estuary from kilometers away and decided to shoot out and take a look at the whales. It was a surreal and tragic scene with the sheer size of the whales, the volume of blood in the water and the terrible smell. Its something I will always remember."

Top: Composite of multiple photos illustrates the breadth of the stranding. Bottom: McGowan stands beside a decaying sperm whale. *Tim Alexander/Marine Photobank*

See more photos of this story >>

Read more about this tragic stranding >>

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