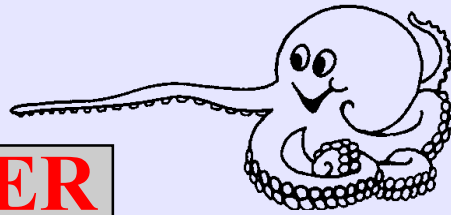


THE REEF SEEKER



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October - 2023



CHANGES FOR LOBSTER SEASON

And . . . they're off!!!

Lobster season official started Friday night, September 29, at 6:00PM and runs until 11:59:59PM on Wednesday, March 20, 2024. If you're hunting lobsters this season, there are some changes of which you need to be aware.

The first one has happened already, and that's that the opening of lobster season was moved ahead by 12 hours, starting at 6PM this past Friday. Traditionally, lobster season began on a Saturday at 12:01AM. A few years ago, Fish & Wildlife moved the start time later by six hours, to 6:00AM on Saturday. The reason was that there were a number of accidents and a few fatalities on opening night from divers who had already been up or working all day Friday, stayed up until the midnight opener, and the dove through the night. Fatigue likely caught up with some of them. By moving the time to 6AM, it discouraged divers from staying up all night that first night, gave them a brief early-morning window, and then they could resume hunting Saturday evening as

the sun went down and the lobsters came out of their hiding places.

I'm not sure what prompted the change this year. It certainly doesn't set up the same situation as previously. Lobsters generally become active after the sun goes down, and that's why nighttime is considered to be the most productive. So with the new rule, divers will still have ample opportunity to do some dives while it's dark. They could still certainly choose to stay up all night as well but hopefully with the 6PM start time, some hunting success and some sleepy-eye will combine to encourage them to get some rest before venturing out again.

The other general reminders are:

- Daily possession limit is 7 (technically, this includes ones already in your freezer)
- Measure lobsters when you catch them and before they go into your bag
- Unless you're free-diving, you're not allowed to bring them to the surface or boat for measurement
- Short lobsters must be returned immediately to the same place from where they were taken
- You must have a lobster card with you and log EACH dive, successful or not
- As always, watch your air supply and end the dive with plenty of gas to surface safely

The other thing to note, especially

for those hunting in Southern California, is that there's a temporary restriction in place for areas around Palos Verdes and extending down the coastline to just beyond the Bolsa Chica SMCA. This is all because of Domoic acid that's been found in lobsters in these areas. The restriction will take place until levels of Domoic acid in samples have gone down.

From Redondo down to the Point Vicente MPA, there's a "health advisory" as opposed to an outright prohibition, aka "You take your chances." In the Point Vicente MPA and including the Abalone Cove SMCA, no lobster can be taken regardless. The key one is that from the eastern side of the Abalone Cove SMCA to the eastern side of Middle Gate in the breakwater, no bugs can be taken. This covers much of the L.A. breakwater where some of you go. From the eastern side of Middle Gate down through the Bolsa Chica SMCA and a bit further south, it's a health advisory again. (The southern boundary is basically the corner of Goldenwest Boulevard and PCH in Huntington Beach.)

There's a lot to unpack but remember that if you're lobster-hunting, it's your responsibility to know the regulations and follow them. Good luck out there and dive safely. As we always say, no lobster is worth your life.

LOBSTER UPDATE: SO FAR . . .

So far, so good. (Yahoo!!!) As of this writing – 6PM Saturday evening, 24 hours after lobster season opened – I haven't heard of any reports of accidents requiring chamber treatment or fatalities. Good work!!! But let's not rest on our laurels.

A few years ago, we ended up with five fatalities in the first five days of lobster season. So it's important to remember that while you might be excited about the prospects of a bug hunt, you still need to remember that it's a dive in a hostile environment where when something goes wrong – especially something like loss of air supply – you may only have a few seconds to craft a solution. As we've said before, dive safely. No lobster is worth your life.

SQUID???

Although we normally don't expect the squid to start showing up at Vets Park in Redondo until mid-December, a few years ago they started showing up in late August. So it's not too early to start looking for them.

Squid are a great example of the circle of life. They generally live for about a year and when they mate and lay eggs, they are at the end of their life cycle. By morning, they will all be dead. But that's when animals like crabs, shrimp, sea lions, bat rays, and others come in to feast on the carcasses. So nothing goes to waste.

What's also interesting with all of this are the egg clusters. Squid

eggs take 3-5 weeks to hatch and water temperature plays a large role in determining the gestation period. So when you start seeing egg clusters, make notes and take guesses as to the hatching time and plan to go back.

All of this also means it's a great excuse to go explore Redondo Canyon off of Vets Park. It's a generally easy shore dive (although be forewarned that the near-shore sand is very soft) and you don't have to go too far out to encounter the eggs, which are at generally found at depths of 60-100'.

While mating is a nighttime thing, the eggs can be seen day or night. And if you want an escort, check out our calendar for our Redondo Night and Squid dives coming up. Give us a call (310/652-4990) to get signed up if you're interested.

CONCEPTION TRIAL SCHEDULED FOR LATE OCTOBER

After many delays, dismissal of initial charges on technical grounds, and then refiling of charges against him, the trial of *Conception* captain Jerry Boylan

is now set to begin October 24. The trial will be held in L.A. in the U.S. Courthouse at 350 W. 1st Street, courtroom 9D (9th floor), with the Honorable George H. Wu presiding. I'm sure the courtroom and trial are open to the public – there may be COVID-mitigation measures in place – and there's even an indication that some trials can be observed through Zoom but it's unclear if that will be the case here.

Boylan lost a motion last Thursday to have the charges dismissed. His lawyers contend that federal agents coerced witnesses to alter their testimony. The judge rejected the motion and said those witnesses could be cross-examined during the trial.

Boylan is currently charged with "misconduct or neglect by a ship officer" which led to the 34 deaths on September 2, 2019. If convicted, Boylan, 69, could face as much as ten years in federal prison.

This will be a jury trial and even though this technically is not a scuba fatality case, attorneys usually try to exclude divers from these types of proceedings. We'll keep you posted of any further developments as we hear about them.

2023-24 DIVING VACATIONS

November 15-28 • Maldives

March 18-22 • San Ignacio

May TBA • Grand Cayman

July TBA • Indonesia (Murex)



CAYMAN AGGRESSOR IV RUNS AGROUND

The headline says it all. And while these things happen, this one happened at Stingray City which prompted someone on-line to opine, “They’ve been there plenty of times. Don’t they know where the sandbars are?”

But this story is not about a(nother) dive boat running aground, it’s about the aftermath. Because two of our regular Reef Seekers divers had independently booked themselves on this trip and were stunned to get a call only a few days before they were supposed to leave that their trip was cancelled because the boat now had to go into drydock for inspection and perhaps repair, then had to be re-certified, and the reality was that this was all going to take a while.

The first thing you’re probably thinking is: Did they have trip insurance? They did. But it may not be necessary to use it because they have been effusive in their praise of how the Aggressor Fleet handled all of this. When Aggressor let them know about the cancellation, they also let them know that their credit card had been refunded in full for the trip. On top of that, Aggressor gave each of them a \$1,000 voucher to apply for a future trip. The voucher’s good for two years and – best of all – can be used for ANY Aggressor adventure. So that includes all of their

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Sat.	Oct. 14	Redondo/Vets	Beach Diving	35
Wed.	18	Catalina Express	Avalon Underwater Park	175
Thu.	26	Redondo/Vets	••• Night Dive •••	35
Wed.	Nov. 1	--- CLASS ---	--- Photo Workshop ---	35
Wed.	8	Catalina Express	Avalon Underwater Park	175
Sat.	18	Redondo/Vets	Navigation Made Easy	35
Thu.	30	Redondo/Vets	••• Night Dive •••	35
Wed.	Dec. 6	--- CLASS ---	--- NAUI Nitrox ---	95

boats as well as their land-based expeditions.

That all seems very generous and very fair to me. I personally know of some companies that, when they cancel a trip, their first question is whether you have travel insurance. If you do, they have you file a claim against your policy. They keep the money for the trip that they canceled and the insurance company takes the financial hit. That seems a little sleazy to me. Not the case here.

This trip also involved hotel nights that were not booked by Aggressor. Fortunately, the divers were able to cancel those as they booked on points and those points were returned to their hotel account.

The one sticking point is airfare, also not booked through Aggressor. They had decided to fly business class so their two tickets were a little over \$3,200 total. Not an insignificant sum. Because they called the airline ahead of time and asked to cancel their non-refundable tickets – if you call after the first flight segment has taken off you’re most likely out of luck – the airline offered them a voucher good for a year. The caveat was that the clock started ticking on the voucher expiration NOT based on the date of the first flight but based on the date that they purchased the tickets, which was back in February. So their “year” really

becomes only five months long. That aspect might be one where they have to get the travel insurance involved in case they can’t use the airline vouchers in time. So what they’re doing now is trying to figure where they might want to go in the next few months so they can get full value out of the airline voucher.

Theirs is an example of the difficulties you can run into when travel plans go awry. I always recommend travel insurance for any trips you book on your own as well as Reef Seekers trips. In fact, we had one of our divers on the recent Isla Mujeres trip cancel a week before we were to leave due to a medical issue. But he had travel insurance. We made sure he had all the receipts he needed and he got a 100% refund on what he spent.

So while you may never need it, the one time you do, you’ll be glad you had it. Travel insurance generally runs anywhere from 5-15% of the total trip cost. A great place to go shopping and compare plans is www.insuremytrip.com. They act as a clearing house for many policy providers.

So lots of things to consider any time you travel whether on your own or as part of a group with an organization like Reef Seekers. And if things go belly-up, hopefully you can work it all out with no or minimal financial loss.



MORE ON 2024 TRAVEL

As you may have noticed in the bottom corner of page 2, I'm starting to hone in on our travel destinations for 2024. So here's what our thinking is:

SAN IGNACIO LAGOON IN MARCH – We've already got nine people confirmed for this plus six more pondering, so it looks like our group will end up with two pangas for each foray out to the whales. Since this is not a diving

trip, it's also great if there's someone in your orbit who's not a diver but is interested in close whale encounters.

GRAND CAYMAN IN MAY – I have to wait until we're done with Chamber Day (May 1) and most likely this would be a Saturday-Saturday trip. So May 11-18 or 18-25 seem to be the choices. This will be land-based with 2-3 boat dives daily and shore diving options as well. We've already got seven people on the interested list so it's just a question nailing down the exact dates.

INDONESIA IN JULY – We'll dive with our buddies at Murex in Manado with single-day forays each to Banka and Lembeh. We usually do nine days at the resort (12 days overall) with three boat

dives each day and shore diving options (which few people do even though the house reef is decent). I haven't firmed up dates yet but am looking at either July 8-19 or 15-26. As of now, nine folks have expressed interest.

I still don't have a plan for September – it needs to dovetail with a trip where I have to be in Manila at the end of the month – but am thinking possibly Yap. And I haven't come up with any bright ideas for November yet. So definitely willing to entertain suggestions. (Tubbataha and Raja Ampat, which I've mentioned previously, won't work for 2024.)

If you're interested or have questions or suggestions, feel free to give me a call at 310/652-4990 or shoot me an e-mail.

PICTURE PAGE - Oh, the places we've been . . .

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2023)



**Easter Island
2011**



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**Australia
2012**



**Red Sea (Egypt)
2015**



**Isla Mujeres
2016**



**Roatan
2018**