

THE REEF SEEKER



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PEEVED AT PETA

As you likely know if you read my Rant #1, PETA had initiated a "Sea Kittens" campaign where they're trying to equate fish with kittens so people won't eat them. ("You wouldn't harm a kitten, would you?") PETA actually sent me a reply to my initial rant within about two hours of my e-mailing them. At first I thought this was an actual reply but I came to learn later it's a form letter.

However, the fact that this letter even exists indicates they must be catching a lot of flack because they have a need to have a canned response. So - once again - I urge you to write them if you agree that the whole "Sea Kittens" thing is insipid.

Anyhow, for those interested, here's my reply to their reply, aka Rant #2:

Dear PETA staff,

Thanks for your anonymous response to my note. (Well, seriously, thanks for a prompt response.) But at least I put my name on what I write. It would be nice to know who's speaking for PETA.

< Thank you for contacting PETA about our lighthearted campaign to get people to think of fish as "sea kittens." >

You're way over the line on this one. I'm beginning to think PETA stands for "People for the Eradication of Thoughtful Analysis".

< The goal of this campaign is to help people of all ages recognize that fish are living beings capable of feeling pain and distress—just as kittens are—and that it is no more acceptable to inflict pain and suffering on fish than it is to hurt a kitten or any other animal. >

Why can't you just love an animal for being that animal? I happen to really like fish - and not to eat. I swim with them all

the time. I don't eat fish mainly because I just never developed a taste for it, and only partly because I might feel like I was eating my pets. (But just for the record, I am a carnivore.) Fish are cute, adorable, interesting, and definitely deserve consideration.

But they don't need to be made into kittens. And certainly not when you think of what a kitten (or cat's) favorite food is likely to be: FISH!!!

< PETA's purpose is to stop animal suffering, and we use all available opportunities to reach millions of people with powerful messages. >

Really? Let's stay with the fish theme here. One of the most brutal things humans do to fish is done to sharks. It's known as shark finning. Are you aware of what that is? That's when a shark is caught, hauled on to the deck of a boat, and - while the shark is alive - it's fins are sliced off and saved to be made into soup. The still-living shark is then tossed overboard, left to drown now that it lacks the ability to swim.

I would contend that this is a hell of a lot more brutal and a more traumatic death for the animal than anything you're talking about. Yet, when I just did a search on the PETA website, I can't find that you have taken any stance on this atrocity being committed daily against these top predators. How can you be so hypocritical? How can you decry fish consumption - no matter how lighthearted you claim it to be - and yet ignore this very real problem worldwide, that's contributed to a 90% eradication in shark species by some estimates. There are a couple of mentions in your blogs but where's the official outrage from PETA?

< The situation is critical for billions of animals, and our goal is to make the

public think about the issues. >

Then address the issues. Let's continue just with the sharks.

Anytime you support the wholesale slaughter of apex predators (and I'm sure you'd agree - using your own rhetorical standards - that by your silence, your inaction supports this barbaric practice) you upset the entire balance of the ecosystem. Species that were held in check by the sharks are now able to survive in greater numbers and the balance shifts considerably.

But as long as you can get people to eat their vegetables, I guess you can turn a blind eye to this critical issue.

< We cannot dismiss the fact that it's wrong to hurt fish simply because we perceive them to be less intelligent than humans. >

Who ever said that fish are less intelligent than humans? I read a LOT of stuff about fish and I've never seen that anywhere. Can you quote me a source? I believe your prejudice is showing. I've run into some very clever fish over the years. In fact, one of the things I do every week is serve as a volunteer at the Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific and I describe my job there as to be constantly outwitted by the fish. It's very humbling, actually. Fish are a lot smarter than you're giving them credit for. That's wrong on your part.

< Superior intelligence does not entitle humans to abuse other humans . . . >

Humans do some pretty stupid things ("Sea Kittens" not even being my prime example) so I wouldn't exactly hang my hat on that "superior intelligence" theme.

< . . . so why should it entitle humans to abuse beings other than humans? >

Besides, you at PETA do seem to feel entitled to abuse humans when - as I

pointed out previously - your position absolutely denigrates the work of those of us who take marine conservation seriously and realize it involves more than just saying "Don't eat fish." You feel it's wrong to put a hook through the mouth of a fish yet you feel it's absolutely fine to drive a stake through the heart of those of us who love the ocean and fight to protect it on a daily basis. Shame on you.

< No one would consider doing to other animals what some so casually do to fish—trick them into impaling themselves in the mouth . . . >

But tricking CHILDREN into thinking of fish as kittens . . . that's OK????? What is wrong with you? Where is your sense of ethics? Don't you know it's harder to un-teach something than it is to teach it? If you feel so strongly about this (1) DON'T target children with your propaganda and (2) Teach them right the first time. Then you don't have to have the fish-aren't-really-kittens speech down the road.

< . . . and pull them into an environment where they can't breathe.>

Uh, I hate to break this to you, but fish don't breathe. They extract oxygen from the water by passing it over their gills. A fish out of water can survive a heck of a lot longer than a human underwater. (I have this "thing" about trying to be factual and accurate. You should give it a try sometime.)

Of course this ignores totally the thought that not everyone agrees with PETA about fish feeling pain. Dr. James Rose of the University of Wyoming comes to mind. And it brings up another question.

Do you allow your real kittens to catch mice? Do you think the mouse feels pain when they are toyed with and then eaten by a cat? Is this fair to the mouse? Is PETA taking any steps to stop THIS barbaric practice???? Because if you're going to use the "feels pain" thing as a standard for behavior, shouldn't the behavior we expect of ourselves extend to our animals as well?

< We also want people to know that eating fish flesh can be hazardous to their health. Fish can accumulate extremely high levels of chemical residues—as much as 9 million times higher than the levels of the water in which they live. Fish flesh may store contaminants

such as PCBs, >

And where exactly do you think a lot of this unhealthy stuff comes from? It comes from runoff produced by . . . the agriculture industry. The very same folks who are producing the vegetables that you claim to be the savior of the fish if only more people would eat veggies instead of fish, could be the very thing that's helping to poison the fish.

How interesting when I once again search the PETA website, I can find no call from you to eliminate dangerous vegetable-growing practices that can be harming marine ecosystems through the runoffs they produce that contain chemicals used in agri-business.

Like I said earlier, it's not as simple as "Don't eat fish."

< Unfortunately, getting the message to the public is not always easy and straightforward. >

Actually, it is. People may not be as dumb as you think. What you may perceive as not hearing your message, may simply be people not agreeing with your message. It's like when someone asks, "Does God answers all prayers?" The correct response is, "Yes, but sometimes the answer is No."

< We often use stunts and controversial ad campaigns to get the word out about animal abuse, because sadly, the media usually do not consider the facts alone "interesting" enough to cover. >

Don't blame the media. That's a copout for those who fail to cogently frame their argument and present their case. Read Ken Weiss' Pulitzer Prize-winning "Altered Oceans" series and then tell me that facts aren't "interesting". Blaming the

media is the last refuge of those who seek a copout for the failure of their message.

I've got no problem with stunts and PR gimmicks. I have problems with lies, half-truths, and the like. I have a problem with you ignoring the larger problem and only focusing on part of it. By that I mean if everyone stopped eating fish worldwide right now, the health of our oceans would not improve. Marine conservation is not some one-trick-pony as you would have people believe. If you really want to do something for the fish, attack the entire problem. You do a disservice to marine conservation by giving the impression that if we stop eating fish, everything will be all right. It will not.

< Thanks again for writing and for sharing your thoughts with us. >

If you truly want to help improve the marine environment, let's talk about how that can be done and how PETA can be their resources to use to improve the health of the oceans, bearing in mind that water covers 75% of this planet and that when the oceans are healthy, the Earth is healthy.

But if all you want to do is posture and obfuscate, I've got an issue with that. Trying to convince the public (and let's face it- you've admitted you're really targeting impressionable children) with this Sea Kitten charade is somewhat akin to the attempt by the Reagan administration in the early 80s to reclassify ketchup as a vegetable to skirt around nutrition issues.

Ketchup's not a vegetable. Fish aren't kittens. Stop this campaign of misinformation.

- Ken Kurtis

DIVING VACATIONS

**February 8-14 • Florida
(Manatees & Caverns)**

May 15-24 • Bonaire (SOLD OUT)

October 11-18 • Sea of Cortez



AVALON U/W CLEANUP

We're only a couple of weeks away from going to attend the annual Avalon Underwater Cleanup, Saturday, February 21. We're going to try to turn in our initial list by the end of the day Monday (Feb. 2) so if you're going to join us, make sure we have you down. (We can still add you after this date, but we can't guarantee t-shirt sizes.) Cost of the day is \$120 which includes event registration, *Catalina Express* ferry, gear transport and storage, and all the fun you can handle.

Please note that this year we're leaving out of the *Catalina Express* Downtown Long Beach Terminal, which is off of the 710 freeway at Golden Shore. The boat time is 6:15AM so we'd like you there by around 5:30AM. Given the number of divers who attend this event (500) it's a hectic morning and we want to have as much time as possible to get you loaded.

The good side of this is that we should be in place in plenty of time for you to drop your gear and go have breakfast while we take care of all of the check-in paperwork. Then there's the briefing at 9AM, diving from 9:30-11AM, awards ceremony at 1PM, and your choice of continuing to dive the afternoon in the Park or having your gear stored until our 6PM boat back.

And don't forget to concoct a great story for the trash you find so you can have a chance at winning the coveted "Ken Kurtis Silver-

UPCOMING BOAT DIVES

Sat	Feb. 7	<i>Sea Bass</i>	• Oil Rigs (limited load) •	\$145/160
Sat	21	<i>Cat. Express</i>	Avalon U/W Clean-Up	\$120
Sun	Mar. 8	<i>Cee Ray</i>	Santa Barbara Island	160/175
Sat	21	<i>Great Escape</i>	Catalina (Shp Rck/Egle Rf)	140/155
Sun	Apr. 5	<i>Great Escape</i>	San Clemente (NW Harbor)	165/180
Sat	18	<i>Sea Bass</i>	Palawan/Avalon/Dminatr	140/155
Sun	May 3	<i>Great Escape</i>	Farnsworth/Cat. backside	150/165
Wed	6	All boats	Chamber Day Benefit	\$90

Prices are listed as 14-day advanced purchase/regular. Food/air included all trips. All diving to be done on compressed air only - no nitrox. Fuel surcharge may apply.

Tongued Devil Award" for the best BS story behind your trash. Plus there's plenty of other great prizes, you're raising money for the Catalina Conservancy Divers and the Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber, and it's a lot of fun. (Plus we'll have our annual miniature golf tourney after the awards ceremony is concluded.)

It's a great day or we hope you'll be able to join us.

TRAVELING WITH US

Lots of news on the travel front. First is to tell you that our trip to Bonaire is sold out, as we've hit the max that we like to take, which is 16. (As a side note, the plane fares were up and down on almost a daily basis so if you're planning your own trip to Bonaire or anywhere else, it pays to pay attention.)

This means that our only other trip on the schedule for this year will be our Sea of Cortez trip in October. (Because of some personal travel scheduled for July and August, we won't have a summer trip this year.) That's another one that traditionally fills up so if that's something you're thinking of (and

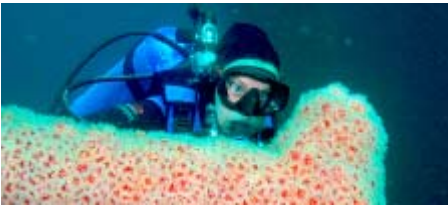
we already have three people committed) it never hurts to get your name on the list early in the game. As with most of our trips, \$500 deposit holds your spot.

But we can also pass along to you a non-Reef Seekers opportunity if you're interested in going to Palau.

One of the guys I used to teach with in Virginia, Jim McNeal, has the *Palau Aggressor 2* booked for April 26 - May 3 and they had some people drop off at the last minute. Along with other spots on this trip that are still unsold, I think this boat will run fairly light. And you know how much we love diving Palau, but just think how great it is when you can be on the *Aggressor* AND have the boat less-than-full?

The price for this trip with Jim is \$2885. You'll still need to provide your own airfare from LAX and that's been running around \$1600 (which is actually cheaper than we paid last year). If you're interested in this trip, just give me a call at 310/652-4990 and I'll help you work out the logistics.

But the bottom line is that you should (1) be traveling the world and (2) be diving in exotic places. And Reef Seekers is the place to get you hooked up.



BOAT DIVES IN WINTER

It's unusual, but we've had some spectacular weather to start off 2009. Who expects it to be 80° in January, even in SoCal? Who expects Santa Anas to blow this time of the year? As I sit here writing this (on 1/31), there's a swell out there that's all of 1-foot high. Amazing.

The point of this is that it's not unusual to have really good conditions this time of the year. (It's also not unusual to freeze your butt off, too.) So you never know.

But you definitely should be giving some thought to diving during the "winter" months.

That all being said, we'd got a trip to the Oil Rigs this coming Saturday, February 7. The trip's wide open right now and - if the conditions hold - the diving could be truly amazing. The Oil Rigs are one of those great unique marine ecosystems and we can get visibility upwards of 100 feet at times. (We can get 10-foot, too, but let's hope for good vis.) It's also not unusual this time of the year to see whales passing by the rigs. So, you never know.

Two weeks after that, as mentioned in a previous story, it's the annual Avalon Underwater Cleanup. Historically, with only one or two exceptions, the weather is always

good and we enjoy a sunny, warm day. Hopefully, this year will be no different.

Two weeks after that, we're heading out to Santa Barbara Island on the *Cee Ray*. For those of you who are game-takers, this will mark your last chance with us to go for lobster. And we chose Santa Barbara for this because it's been somewhat productive this year. But even if you're not after lobsters, SBI is a great place to dive and we've gotten great sea lion activity the last few times we've been there.

So join in on the fun for any or all of these dives by giving us a call at 310/652-4990. Going diving for a day on the weekend sure beats sitting around wishing you were diving . . .

PICTURE PAGE - Cute fish that aren't kittens

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2009)



**Kelp Bass
not a Kelp Kittenfish**



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**Scorpionfish
not a Skittenfish**



**Frogfish
not a Kittenfrog**



**Juvy Sheephead
not a Juvy Kittenhead**



**Pufferfish
not a Pufferkitten**