

# AQUANEWS

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**Rescue Devices For Saving Your Bacon**  
*the role that flags, flashlights, etc. play if you're lost at sea*  
from the September, 2008 issue of *Undercurrent*

By now you have heard recent stories of divers accidentally separated from their boats and being left to drift helplessly at sea. I'm aware of nine such incidents involving 28 divers in the first half of 2008 alone. Many years ago, six Japanese divers were lost in the waters near Palau and their bodies were found too late, but not before one of them had written on her slate, "We can see you searching for us but you can't see us." That encapsulates the problem. You may surface to easily see your boat, but can the people in the boat see you?

I had my own uncomfortable experience as a dive guide in Sudanese waters back in 1992, when technical problems with the boat meant that my group had to be abandoned for a few hours after surfacing from a dive. It certainly gives one time to think out a better strategy. Many sport divers dive without any form of surface signaling device. Some liveboard operations hand out simple safety sausages that can be inflated at the surface. Provided the diver keeps the open end closed and under the water, one will stand upright, but how easily can it be seen?

### **Some Devices Are Dependent on the Time of Day**

After a boatload of British divers were lost and left to drift until dark, when their dive lights could be spotted by searchers, it became a rule within Egypt's marine parks in the Red Sea that all divers must carry a surface marker and a dive light for such eventuality. Another group of day-boat divers that got separated on the surface from their boat at the Elphinstone Reef (not part of the marine parks) were less lucky and only one survived after he made the long swim to the shore.

A reliable light held in reserve with fully charged batteries can be a life-saver once darkness falls. An emergency strobe beacon of the type that is rated to as much depth as you are ever likely to take it will give a piercing flash of light in all directions regularly and for many hours. But wouldn't it be nicer to be found before nightfall?

In May this year, an American and British diver on the Great Barrier Reef were rescued after 19 hours at sea. Soon after that, another group of five divers made the news when they were 'swept away on a strong current' at Komodo Island in Indonesia. Strong currents are often a feature of the world's most notable dive sites.

Surface marker buoys come in all shapes and sizes and vary in their ability to be seen. Standard ones are only good over a distance of, say, half a mile. Some divers carry an old CD with them that can be used to flash a reflection of the sun - - if there is sunlight. You don't just flash at will. You must create a visible and consistent reflection of light toward the direction of your potential rescuer. Years ago it was possible to buy a heliograph mirror for divers. It was simple to aim it by means of a sighting device so at least you knew that it was doing its best to tell people you were there. It didn't prove popular in the marketplace.

Very loud whistles like the Dive Alert siren (approximately \$40; [www.divealert.com](http://www.divealert.com)) can be attached to the direct-feed inflator of your BCD or on a stand-alone hose and make use of compressed air from your tank. They emit an ear-piercing screech that can

*(Continued on page 3)*

## AQUANEWS

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION  
OF THE ROCKLAND  
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WRITTEN CONTRIBUTIONS &  
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## THINGS DIVERS SHOULD KNOW:

### Those Curious Catfish

Compiled by Lada Simek

Catfish are everywhere, salt and fresh water. South America has the largest selection of the twelve families and about 1000 species. All are edible. They use their barbells to find food in zero visibility. Many have unique talents which can be rather nasty and which I am going to describe.

Besides the African electric catfish, (*Malopterus electricus*), which can give a severe shock to a man, there is a tadpole catfish of North America that has poison glands at the base of its pectoral spines that can sting more severely than a bee. A small catfish of South America, (*Cyclopium*), has a sucking disc surrounding its mouth that enables it to hold on in a current and even climb out of the water up a vertical surface.

Many catfish guard their eggs; some carry their offspring in their mouth until they are hatched. Others can taste with their tails and a few swim upside down all their lives- flipping over on their backs as soon as they are hatched. The armored catfish of South America- which squeaks like a mouse when brought to the surface- actually has a bone helmet in the form of a tough bony growth protecting its head. Another African species crawls over land every night in search of food.

The crucifix fish (*Sciadeichthys proops*) is still another fascinating member of the catfish family. The skull bears an extraordinary resemblance to Christ on the Cross and devout South American and West Indies natives have been obtaining their crucifixes from this fish. The obverse side of the crucifix is what seems to be the image of a monk with vestments over outspread arms blessing his people. The rattle produced by a loose bone inside the skull is supposed to represent the sound of the dice cast by Roman soldiers at the foot of the cross.

The Asiatic catfish (*Ompok bimaculattus*) of eastern India and Thailand grows to about one and a half feet and it takes its name from the fact that it is almost completely transparent when young and only has a slight coloring when mature.

THE NASTIEST catfish is the South American *candiru* (*Vandellia*). It is only two inches long, but his little monster is feared more than a Jaguar or piranha. Normally it lives inside the gill cavity of other fish, subsisting on their blood, but it likes to enter into the anus or penis of a male bather through the urethra (or other orifices), erect its spines and is impossible to remove without surgery, which may have fatal results. Anyone for a swim?

Rockland Aquanauts Organization Inc.

Mission Statement:

**To provide, promote, and advance environmental protection, care, and voluntary clean-up of waterways by any and all lawful means; to promote the importance and care in every manner possible by environmental awareness and otherwise; to purchase, print, publish, and circulate literature to promote the importance and care of the waterways and the work of the Corporation. To perform all acts the Corporation may deem appropriate or advisable in such operation; to establish, provide, and voluntary clean-up waterways, to encourage, support and subsidize the cleaning and protection from pollution.**

## Rescue Devices

(continued from page 1)

attract the attention of your pick-up boat driver if he is inattentive when you surface. Don't expect anyone to hear that screech over the sound of a boat engine at full throttle, though. And if a boat crew does hear an unexpected whistle, it still leaves the problem of identifying where it comes from. Visual indicators are always important.

**What About Flares and Beacons?**

Flares come in numerous shapes and sizes. Some produce a colored smoke that will make a diver into a larger subject for a searching aircrew while an emergency plastic streamer does the same thing but for longer. A parachute flare gives boat crew an idea of the general direction they should be looking in for a lost diver but they represent a one-hit-wonder. It is not worth sending up a flare, unless you know that someone relevant can see it. That seems to be the crux of all attention-grabbing surface devices. Someone must know that you will need rescuing.

Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) were originally missold as Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRBs) until the Coast Guard rightly pointed out that they are not sufficiently powerful, nor do they use the now-current 404-Mhz frequency, so no Thunderbirds get launched. Neither are EPIRBs really suitable for the quick response needed by divers, because it can take up to 90 minutes for rescue services to be alerted this way. However, using a different radio wavelength (121.5-Mhz), PLB devices can be very effective over surface distances of three miles if the search vessel is equipped with a suitable tracking device, and longer when the beacon is sought from the air.

In the UK, lifeboats are also so equipped but there is little point in buying a lone transmitter for use anywhere else if there is no tracking device available. And you're still left with the possible unreliability of batteries and electronics that have been taken underwater. Some PLBs now use both frequencies but usually need a waterproof case for diving. The *Undersea Hunter* boats at remote Cocos Island in the Pacific equip every diver with an emergency-only PLB transmitter, and crews are well trained in the use of the tracking device. A good way to ensure a strong outgoing signal is to combine the unit's flexible aerial with an inflated SMB. McMurdo makes PLBs with and without GPS (prices start at \$300; [www.mcmurdo.co.uk](http://www.mcmurdo.co.uk)).

**My Favorite Rescue Device**

I prefer a low-tech answer because I always know if it is going to function properly. Since that fateful day in the Sudan, I have always carried a big fluorescent yellow flag on a long extending pole. I attach it to my tank by means of two elastic straps. The biggest problem seems to be getting your signal marker high above cresting waves. The flag can be raised on its extending pole above the swell and forms a horizontal shape with an attention grabbing flutter on a sea breeze.

On one occasion when I was using mine to signal my arrival at the surface to my cover boat after a dive with a closed-circuit rebreather, divers on another cover boat returning to the *Sea Hunter* noticed my flag from a distance of several miles. I have used my surface flag in earnest in the waters of the Mergui Islands, in the Maldives, in the Galapagos, after the quick drift dives of Aldabra, and almost every time after a high-voltage dive at Cocos or Malpelo.

Research done by Heriot-Watt University on behalf of the British government some years ago determined that a yellow flag was the most visible marker when it came to search by sea or from the air. It stated, "The folding flags were by far the most reliable and cost-effective location device we tested, particularly the day-glo yellow pennant, which was consistently spotted at more than one mile and up to two miles. Yellow was the most conspicuous color in all sea states, even with breaking wave crests, and could be located in deteriorating light when it was impossible to locate pennants of any other color."

I recommend every diver gets so equipped.

(Note: The only place we could find yellow diver flags easily for sale online was at Bowstone Diving in the United Kingdom at [www.bowstonediving.com](http://www.bowstonediving.com); \$33, plus \$27 shipping. But check with your local dive shop for options closer by.)

*John Bantin is the technical editor of DIVER magazine in the United Kingdom. For 20 years, he has used and received virtually every piece of equipment available in the UK (and the U.S.) and makes about 300 dives for that purpose, and he is also a professional underwater photographer.*

# Virgin Gorda—A Serene Island Vacation

By Melissa L. Bogen, ELS

With nearly deserted beaches, clear turquoise waters, idyllic scenery on land and underwater, and genuinely friendly people, the BVIs is a serene place to rest and relax. Of the 60 islands known as the BVIs, Virgin Gorda is my favorite, not only because it is host to spectacular scuba diving, but also because it is off the beaten path with a small island atmosphere and not much night life.

## Accommodations

For our 4th trip there, in early November 2008, we were repeat guests at Guavaberry Spring Bay Vacation Homes, in an area of the island known as Spanish Town. Guavaberry provides a wide selection of rentals, from budget-minded homes for 2 people (one of which we rented) to beautifully landscaped 5-bedroom villas. Each house is fully furnished and has private baths, a living room with kitchen/dining area, and a covered deck. We never needed to use the air conditioning, because the homes are up on stilts to capture the ever-present trade winds. The view of the Caribbean from our deck was breathtaking.

Guavaberry has a private beach, known as Spring Bay, which boasts shady tamarind trees, clean sand, picnic benches, and the beautiful blue 82°F water just steps away. We brought our snorkel gear, but Guavaberry has equipment available for rent so anyone can check out the colorful sea life.

## What to Do on Virgin Gorda

Virgin Gorda is dotted with beautiful, uncrowded beaches. Be sure to bring a towel, fresh water, and sunscreen, because most do not have concession stands.

The day we stopped at Savannah Bay we had forgotten sunscreen, so instead we went for lunch at The Mine Shaft Café, where we enjoyed West Indian jerk wings, along with a 360-degree view of the Caribbean. Then we stopped briefly at Coppermine Point, the site of a 400-year-old copper mine, where you can still see copper veins in the surrounding rocks.

No trip to Virgin Gorda is complete without visiting the giant volcanic boulders of The Baths, adjacent to Spring Bay. To avoid a crowd at this landmark, go on a day when the cruise ships won't be visiting (they usually visit on Tuesdays or Wednesdays). We snorkeled over from Guavaberry's beach to enjoy the swirling pools and all the fish darting in and out among the rocks. When we got hungry, we walked up the rock path for a salad at Top of the Baths, which has great views and a very relaxed dress code.

One of the wildest walking adventures I've gone on was to Devil's Bay, reachable by water or a very interesting trail through The Baths that would never be legal in the United States because of the potential liability of the rickety ladders and slippery rope supports. Once you finish rock climbing and wading through shallow pools, the trail opens up to a secluded cove where you can sunbathe and swim in peace.

## Diving

Dive BVI has been our faithful dive operation for all our trips to Virgin Gorda. We dived with Captain Johan and divemaster Belinda aboard the *Sea Monkey*, one of Dive BVI's 6 well-equipped dive boats. November is the tail end of hurricane season and is a slow time for tourism, which meant we had the boat almost to ourselves. Luckily, the weather cooperated and we got in 13 dives, including one at night.

Our first dive was to the famous wreck of the *Rhone*. Johan dived with us and pointed out parts of the wreck, such as the ship's condenser and signal cannon and the rope Jacqueline Bisset pulled on while filming *The Deep*.

(Continued on page 5)

Among the many fish we saw were spotted drum, cardinal fish, glass eye snapper, Queen triggerfish, and whitespot filefish. The next day it was off to the Ledges at West Dog Island and Joe's Cave, where we saw the resident glassy sweepers riding the surge in and out of the cave.

A highlight of the week was finding the rare "fingerprint cyphoma," a brightly colored sea snail, at the dive site known as Ginger Steps off Ginger Island. At other terrific dives (Alice's Backside, Wall-to-Wall, Chimney, and the Visibles), we were treated to sights of hawksbill turtles, spotted eagle rays, porcupine fish, nurse sharks, spiny lobsters, reef squid, and a big octopus swimming freely. The reef is healthy and the critters abundant in the BVIs.

After diving, we chowed down good burgers and fried chicken at The New Dixies, a tiny joint frequented by locals, before heading back for a nap and more snorkeling.

### Conclusion

As usual, we made the right choice by going to Virgin Gorda, because the underwater sites and quiet atmosphere can't be beat. Check it out if you want to spend time in and around the water without a lot of tourists.

### Getting There

We flew American Airlines from JFK Airport in New York to San Juan (about \$500-700 round trip for 2 people), then caught a puddle jumper (Air Sunshine; <http://airsunshine.com/>) from San Juan to Virgin Gorda (about \$540 round trip for 2 people). You can also take a ferry from Beef Island, Tortola, or St. Thomas (<http://www.speedysbvi.com/>).

### More Info

Currency: US dollar

Average year-round temperature: 80°-90°F

High season: December 15-April 14; low season: April 15-December 14

Guavaberry Spring Bay Vacation Homes: <http://www.guavaberryspringbay.com>

Dive BVI: <http://divebvi.com/>

The Mine Shaft Café: <http://min shaftbvi.com/>

Top of the Baths: <http://www.topofthebaths.com/>

Rental vehicles (about \$300 for the week): <http://mahoganyrentals.puzzlepiece.net>

The British Virgin Islands Tourist Board: <http://www.bvitourism.com/>



## Follow up on last month's article "Operation Freezer Burn"

By ADAM LINHARDT Citizen Staff

A jury of six men and six women deliberated a little more than five hours Wednesday before finding Michael Delph guilty of one count of felony conspiracy to illegally harvest lobster.

Delph, of the well-established Delph charter fishing family in Key West and a firefighter, was scheduled to be sentenced on June 10.

Gasps were heard in the courtroom packed with family, friends and fellow firefighters as the verdict was read at 5:10 p.m.

Delph's conviction brings to a close a federal and state investigation called Operation Freezer Burn, one of the largest lobster poaching cases in Keys history. Investigators say it involved 1,700 lobsters and tens of thousands of dollars in profits. Delph was one of six co-defendants in the case and the only defendant to plead not guilty.

Delph declined to comment leaving the courtroom.

He faces a maximum of five years in prison and fines up to \$250,000, according to his indictment.

But in a bizarre finale to the two-day trial, Miami defense attorney Kenneth Kukec made a motion before Judge Jose E. Martinez after the verdict was read that challenges the indictment on a legal technicality, arguing that Delph was actually guilty of a misdemeanor, not a felony. That would mean a maximum sentence of just one year in jail and no more than \$10,000 in fines.

The technicality involves legal jargon written into the Lacey Act -- the federal law that protects wildlife and under which federal and state wildlife agents prosecuted the case.

Under federal conspiracy statutes, the government must outline in its indictment that the wildlife allegedly poached was worth more than \$350 to constitute a felony, and the jury must be made aware of that, Kukec said outside of court.

"I'm 100 percent confident that this is a misdemeanor," Kukec said.

Should the technical argument fall flat, Delph could still appeal the verdict.

"There has been no serious discussion of that yet," Kukec said.

Federal prosecutor Thomas Watts-Fitzgerald declined to comment on Kukec's post-verdict legal wrangling, saying only that the indictment states Delph was charged with a felony.

"I am pleased with the verdict," he added.

Kukec argued in closing, quoting co-defendants' testimony, that Delph was never part of a conspiracy. The attorney did say Delph was guilty of harvesting lobster illegally on Aug. 6, the first day of commercial lobster season.

"The fact is, Michael Delph broke the law," Kukec said.

Kukec quoted Florida law banning anyone from taking lobster from man-made structures designed to lure lobsters, commonly called casitas or condos.

"Did Mr. Delph do that? Yes, he did," Kukec said. "And if he was charged with that, he would be over at the other courthouse ... but that's not what we're here about."

And that was the nut of the defense: That Delph admittedly did dive for the lobster, but didn't take part in a larger conspiracy.

And one point Kukec opined that the state took a "torturous path to make this a federal case" and referred to the Lacey Act as the "contraption" that prosecutors tried to use as their linchpin at trial.

Watts-Fitzgerald urged jurors to consider the video surveillance footage taken by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and U.S. Fish and Wildlife agents.

"Conspiracy law doesn't say a group has to sit down and write out what they are planning to do," Watts-Fitzgerald told jurors. "Actions speak louder than words."

Delph now joins David and Denise Dreifort of Cudjoe Key, John R. Niles of LaBelle, Robert Hammer of Key West and 25-year-old Sean Reyngoudt of Summerland Key as those guilty in the operation. Reyngoudt pleaded guilty and the Dreiforts, Hammer and Niles pleaded guilty as part of a plea agreement with prosecutors that called for them to testify against Delph.

Hammer and Niles did testify on behalf of the government against Delph, but neither David Dreifort nor his wife, Denise Dreifort, were called to the stand.

All are free on bond awaiting sentencing.

**ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE DUE**

Rockland Aquanauts Organization  
2009 Dues

I guess it is that time of the year again, Membership Dues are due. Last year all our members received much more than they gave out to the Organization. As usual you will be receiving a tax donation for the first \$25.00. All members who attended the Annual Dinner not only received money off their own dinner but they also received money off their guests dinner. Everyone whom attended also received prizes, some worth many times the cost of their Dues. Don't forget the Annual Picnic as well as all the BBQ lunch's after the Lake Dives.

So please send in your \$42 dues early to;

Rockland Aquanauts Organization  
c/o  
Paul Galeazzi Jr.  
4 Greensward Drive.  
Valley Cottage New York 10989

**BBQ Help Needed**

We have BBQs after every Hessian Lake dive, but next year, we don't want the chef tasks to fall on the same people all the time, so we are asking for your help. If you plan on coming to the Hessian Lake dives, please consider offering to set up, cook, or break down the BBQ gear.

**Setting up** might mean you set up before diving, get out of the water first, or forego diving that day. **Cooking** means you cook for everyone who shows up, not just yourself & your friends. **Breaking down the BBQ gear** means you stay until everyone has eaten and the grill is cool enough to put into your car to store until the next dive.

You don't have to be a Board Member to help. Everyone can pitch in. Any expenses, like buying food, are reimbursable. So please look at the dive dates and let us know when you can help out.

Thank you

Don't Forget to Visit EmbroidMe for your Rockland Aquanauts Apparel

**EmbroidMe-Nanuet**

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**Rockland Aquanauts  
Post Office Box 387  
New City, NY  
10956**

**May 2009**

Rescue Devices, Virgin Gorda, "Operation Freezer Burn", Things Divers Should Know, EmbroidMe, Dues

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**\*\*There Will be NO May Meeting \*\***

**Can Anyone Help Us Set Up Meetings?**

**Please contact [info@rocklandaquanauts.org](mailto:info@rocklandaquanauts.org)**

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## **Rockland Aquanauts Organization Inc.**

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### **Approved Lake Dives 2009**

Saturday June 13<sup>th</sup> 9:00 am Hessian Lake

Sunday July 12<sup>th</sup> 9:00 am Lake Welch (proposed)

Saturday August 8<sup>th</sup> 9:00 am Hessian Lake

Sunday Sept. 13<sup>th</sup> 10:00 am Hessian Lake

Saturday Sept. 26<sup>th</sup> 10:00 am Hessian Lake

Sunday Oct. 11<sup>th</sup> 10:00 am Hessian Lake

Saturday Oct. 24<sup>th</sup> 10:00 am Hessian Lake