

Wets Happening

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The Official Newsletter of the Newport Aquarium Volunteer Dive Program

by Jen Wolfe

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With Your Bare Hands

New BARE dive gloves are in

Sixteen pairs of new BARE 3mm gauntlet-style dive gloves were put into circulation this week. All gloves are organized according to size - at least I try to keep them that way. In case you haven't noticed, there are size markers next to each line on the right side of the equipment cage: smalls on the bottom, then medium, and on up to extra-larges at the top.

Please help us keep the gloves in good condition and easy for everyone to find the right pair.

Remember these simple rules when you put your gloves away at the end of a dive:

1. Thoroughly rinse your gloves and turn them rightside out.
2. Secure the gloves together with the wrist straps and place them on the line according to their size.



By taking a few extra moments at the end of your dive to put equipment back properly and in its proper place, it will make the dive day more efficient and enjoyable for everyone.

Equipment Maintenance

Do your part to make our equipment last

Diver Ed is in the process of replacing the valves on all of the tanks. To help make these new valves last longer, remember this rule: when opening or

closing a valve, never use your whole hand to turn the valve—only your first few fingers. You can't help but apply too much torque when using your entire hand. Using too much force when opening or closing a valve wears out the inner workings of the valve, making it tight to turn and ultimately fail. Please do your part to prolong the life of these new tank valves and remember to use a delicate touch.



Jeff Rehberger has recently overhauled many of the regulators. There are several ways you can help on a daily basis to keep this equipment in tip-top condition:

1. Never lift fully assembled gear solely by the first stage. Put your arm through the shoulder straps to assist the lift.
2. Always secure your alternate air source properly. Jeff shouldn't have to empty gravel out of second stages.

While it is the responsibility of the dive staff to repair and maintain equipment, your help on a day-to-day basis is greatly appreciated. Please treat the Aquarium's equipment like you would treat your own – because in many ways it is!

Tanks, everybody!

Upcoming Events

Diver Ed to speak at ScubaFest

On March 10-12, ScubaFest will take place at the Clarion Hotel in Dublin, Ohio (www.scubafest.org). The three-day event will include workshops, seminars, an auction, music, dancing and more. Keynote speakers include the renowned photographer Cathy Church and the even more famous Ed Evans!



Ed will be giving a seminar on aquarium diving on Sunday, March 12 at 2:30pm. Santa has even let him borrow his special suit for show and tell! Who better to represent Newport Aquarium divers at this super scuba weekend than Diver Ed? Knock ‘em dead, Eddie!

Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

Sunday, April 23

Mark your calendars for the biggest volunteer event of the year. Door prizes, awards, celebrity speakers, drinking, dining and fun. Don't miss it!

Party for Piaba

Wednesday, April 26th

“Buy a drink, save a fish. Buy a fish, save a tree!” Sound confusing? *Piaba* is an Amazonian word for ornamental fish. *Project Piaba* works with communities in the Rio Negro basin in Amazonas, Brazil to create sustainable fisheries. These fisheries allow local peoples to support their communities by harvesting ornamental fish (like cardinal tetras) in an environmentally responsible manner. If these communities can sustain themselves with these fisheries, then they are not forced to cut down neighboring rainforest to support their families.

Party for Piaba has been hosted by the Newport Aquarium for the past four years. Senior aquatic biologist Eileen Flynn travels to the Amazon to

assist with Project Piaba. While there, she buys many beautiful Amazonian artifacts, including jewelry and wooden carvings.

These unique items are then auctioned off at Party for Piaba, with the

proceeds benefiting the cause. You can also support Project Piaba by buying one of Eileen's famous bi-color jello shots, layered in red and blue like cardinal tetras!



So come join us at the Aquarium for fun and drinks in the name of conservation. Get there early before Ed buys all the wooden carvings and I eat all the jello shots.

Tunnel Talks

More opportunities for dry volunteering

Many of you remember the days when divers would spend time down in the tunnels talking to visitors about the dive program, answering questions, and even displaying a fully assembled and functional set-up complete with lightweight pony bottle.

During the last two Super Scrubs, several divers volunteered to come in and help out on the “dry side” doing just that, and the response from the public (and upper management) has been overwhelmingly positive.

I would like us to do more of these tunnel talks (which can sometimes take place in the front lobby). For those of you who have not done this before, I can tell you that it is very fun and personally rewarding. Adults and children alike are fascinated by the divers (who wouldn't be?). All you have to open with is, “I'm a scuba diver here at the Aquarium,” and they're rivited. Children love to try on the BCD, push the inflator and purge buttons, and pull the dump valve. It's a wonderful enhancement to the Aquarium experience.

The goal is to have “dry divers” for tunnel talks every weekend (but if you're here on a weekday and want to talk, please do!). You can do tunnel talks after you dive or choose to be “dry” the entire day (4-6 hours).

How to sign up: If you want to do a tunnel talk after your dive, put “& dry” after your name. If you are exclusively doing a tunnel talk, put “dry only” after your name.

Tunnel talks are easy, because scuba diving is cool, and once you tell people you're a scuba diver

you instantly become the coolest person they've ever met. I hope many of you will take an interest in tunnel talks and start signing up. And don't worry, if you're a little unsure as to how to go about a tunnel talk, I'll be happy to demonstrate! Tanks in advance, everybody!

Is There a Biologist In The House?

Expert advice from the experts

Many of us have home aquariums. Whether you have a 5-gallon desktop Eclipse or a 500-gallon reef aquarium, expert advice is always a valued resource. In talking with the biologists day to day, I hear many helpful suggestions that I'd like to share with you.

Quick tips from aquatic biologist Jen Ortlepp

- For optimum aquatic plant growth, change your lightbulbs every six months.
- Ghost shrimp are great for controlling unwanted algae without devouring your aquatic plants or overpopulating like snails. (As long as you don't think your fish would like a crunchy snack.)

The Nitrogen Cycle in a Nutshell by Husbandry Operations Manager Jeff Gibula (a.k.a. The Water God)

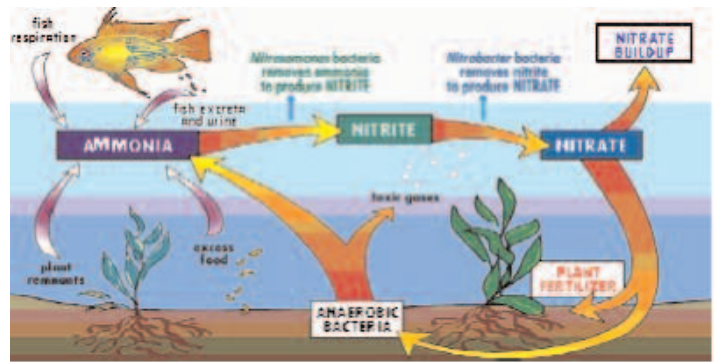
"Nitrification in closed aquatic systems whether it be [20 gallons] or [20,000 gallons] in volume, is one of, if not the most critical aspects of water quality management. Nitrification is determined as the 'oxidation of ammonia to nitrite, followed by the oxidation of nitrite to nitrate, by bacteria."

-Timothy Hovanec, Ph.D.

Fish waste, excess food, plant matter, and decaying organic matter break down into a toxic chemical compound, when above a pH of 7.00, ammonia (NH₃). Even in low levels, NH₃ will increase the breathing rate of fish by irritating their gill tissues. Damage to the body tissues of both fish and invertebrates will follow, causing disease and death.

Aerobic, or oxygen needing, bacteria convert NH₃ into nitrite (NO₂). NO₂ is also a toxic chemical compound, less toxic than NH₃ yet still harmful to aquatic life. NO₂ destroys the hemoglobin in the blood of fish thus disrupting oxygen transfer between gill surfaces and the water. This too can cause disease outbreak and ultimately death.

NO₂ is converted by a second aerobic bacteria



into a far less toxic chemical compound called nitrate (NO₃). Excessive NO₃ levels can cause stress, encourage disease, and could stunt animal growth. However, NO₃ can be removed by several simple means. Plants and algae naturally absorb small amounts of NO₃. The remaining NO₃ can be effectively eliminated with a good aquarium maintenance program. Regular water changes, changing of filter cartridges, vacuuming substrates, and removing detritus or debris will solve most NO₃ problems. *Note: Some home water supplies contain NO₃, thus lowering the effectiveness of a water change.

Diver Jen's Surface Interval

Looking for a good book? You'll find entertainment and education in Douglas Adams' *Last Chance to See*

Douglas Adams? Isn't that the guy who wrote *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*? Yes, the science fiction writer has turned to science fact in this wonderful book about some of the planet's most endangered species.

In the late 1980s, BBC Radio commissioned Adams to accompany zoologist Mark Carwardine on an expedition to the far corners of the world in search of rare and endangered species. Adams documents their travels and discoveries with an entertaining candor that is not at all preachy or doomful.

Check out this thoroughly enjoyable and informative book that will take you on a journey of laughter, adventure, and wonder. 