

TURNING PASSI PURE



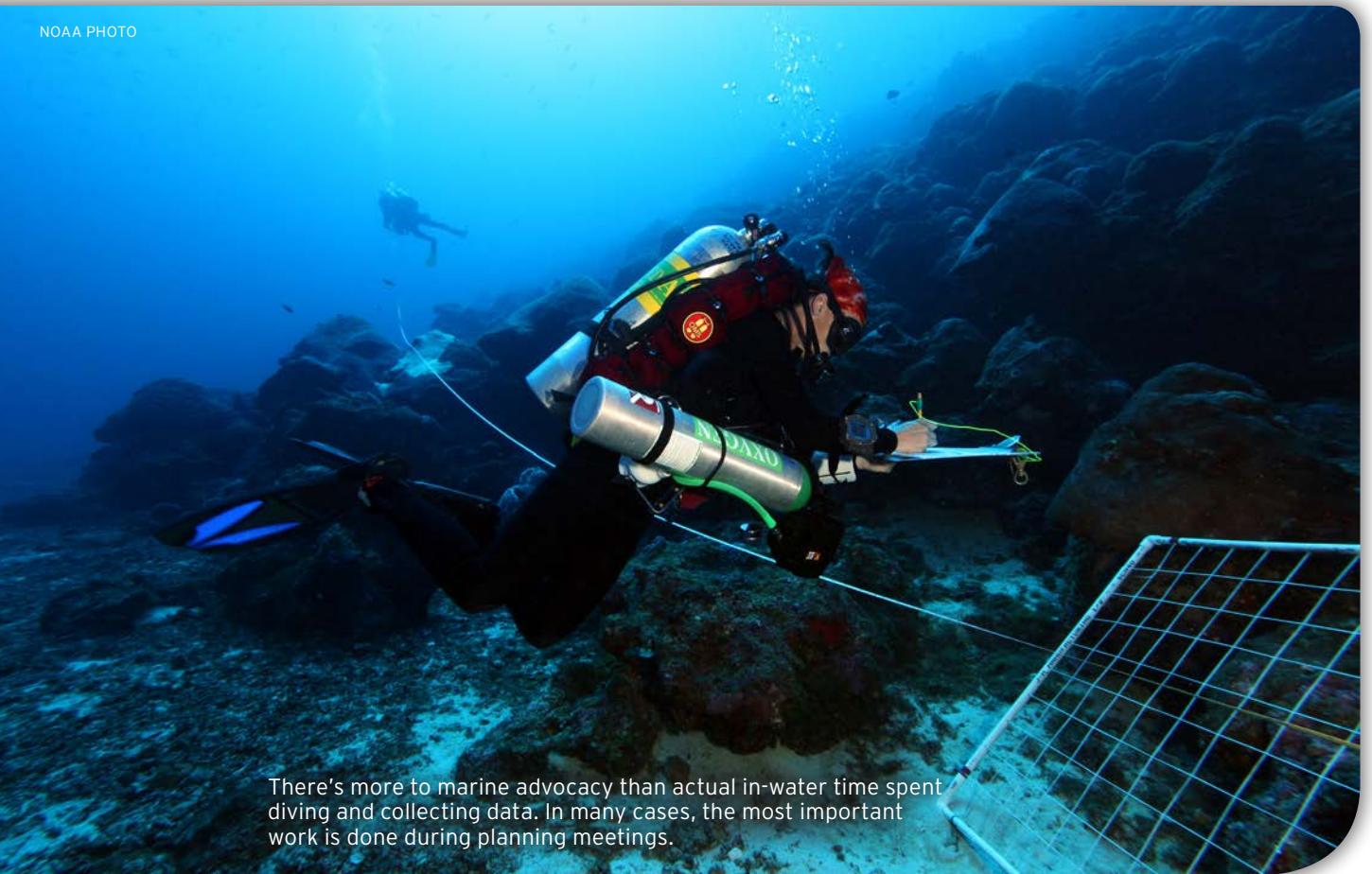
ON INTO DOOSE

By Jesse Cancelmo

One Person's Story of Transforming From Diving Enthusiast to Ocean Advocate

I'VE BEEN CAPTIVATED BY THE OCEAN SINCE EARLY ADOLESCENT YEARS.

I can still remember sitting in our family den glued to the TV watching ex-Navy frogman Mike Nelson surfacing to the Argonaut after tangling with dangerous villains underwater. "Sea Hunt" was both inspirational and entertaining. Nelson's underwater adventures were nothing short of "otherworldly." Five or so years later my new weekly television highlight became "The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau." Never missing an episode, I dreamed of someday meeting Jacques Cousteau and going on the *Calypso*. The former I did; the latter, alas, I did not.



There's more to marine advocacy than actual in-water time spent diving and collecting data. In many cases, the most important work is done during planning meetings.

Growing up in southeastern Pennsylvania's Delaware Valley, we lived less than two hours from South Jersey where my father docked his 36-foot (10.9 m) sport fishing boat. His recreational passion was saltwater fishing and our family spent nearly every summer at the Atlantic shore. After completing a Coast Guard Auxiliary seamanship course in my early teens, I ran my dad's boat on a regular basis, trolling for bluefish and bonito. But I have to admit I didn't take to fishing the way my brothers did. Before long I added surfing to my ocean repertoire and I was consumed by my newfound passion and made trips to North Carolina, California and Baja, Mexico.

In the late '60s our family summer vacations took a tropical turn, from Cape May, New Jersey, to Southampton, Bermuda. It was there I traded in my surfboard for a mask and regulator and discovered my consummate ocean endeavor: scuba diving.



JESSE CANCELMO PHOTO

Bermuda's coral reefs and dazzling tropical fish had a profound effect on my being, and more than 40 years later I still remember my first resort course dive on Kevin's Reef off the South Shore. I was spellbound at my first sight of stoplight parrotfish, queen angelfish and a host of other tropical beauties.

Back at the University of Miami for my final year, I completed a scuba certification course. Then I made a push to become a certified "Research Diver" at Miami's Rosenstiel Marine Institute where I successfully completed a grueling training program. Not long afterward, my parents thoughtfully gave me a Nikonos II camera for my birthday. I couldn't wait to get back to the reefs in Bermuda. My newly discovered underwater world was captivating, yet I was so lost for words to ad-

equately describe to others what I saw. My camera became the device that would enable me to share my underwater adventures with family and friends.

After a taste of several elective ocean engineering courses at the Rosenstiel Marine Institute, I completed a bachelor's degree in

mechanical engineering, and decided I wanted to live in Bermuda. The ocean was calling me; I simply wasn't ready for a button-down-shirted, 9-to-5 office job. After landing a job as a diver for a small marine construction company, I spent an amazing year doing construction work in a wet suit instead of a busi-



JESSE CANCELMO PHOTO

GREAT volunteer diver Ted Wimprine drilling a mooring buoy anchor at the Flower Garden Banks.

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RESOURCES

To follow is a list of marine conservation organizations popular with divers and marine enthusiasts.

BLUE OCEAN SOCIETY FOR MARINE PRESERVATION

blueoceansociety.org/Jobs/volunteer.html

Their mission is to protect marine mammals in the Gulf of Maine through education, research and conservation. Major initiatives include protecting marine mammals through environmental cleanups (litter and debris), documenting important whale habitats and threats, and through various educational programs inspiring the public to protect marine life. They also offer an internship program to encourage the next generation of marine scientists and conservationists.

CORAL RESTORATION FOUNDATION

coralrestoration.org

The Coral Restoration Foundation (CRF) is dedicated to creating offshore nurseries and restoration programs for threatened coral species using new nursery and restoration techniques. Tens of thousands of corals are grown and maintained in multiple offshore nurseries. After a year in the nursery, corals are outplanted to a degraded reef. CRF also promotes awareness of coral reef health and survival, along with the environmental and social benefits of reef ecosystems.

GULF OF MEXICO FOUNDATION

gulfmex.org/archive/volunteer.htm

The mission of the Gulf of Mexico Foundation is to promote and facilitate conservation and the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico and its resources through education, public awareness, research and leadership programs. Also, the Gulf of Mexico Foundation coordinates and leads the Habitat Conservation and Restoration Team.

SAVE THE MANATEE CLUB

savethemanatee.org/vol.htm

Their mission is to protect endangered manatees and their aquatic habitat for future generations. Their objective is the recovery and protection of manatees and their aquatic ecosystems throughout the world. Their goals are to protect ample healthy habitats to support a stable or growing manatee population, to reduce manatee harassment, injuries and deaths from human activity, and to ensure that sufficient regulations have been adopted to accomplish these goals. The Save the Manatee Club is also dedicated to increasing public awareness and education; sponsoring research, rescue, rehabilitation and release efforts; advocating strong protection measures, such as boat speed zones and sanctuaries; and taking legal action when appropriate.

ness suit. While there I devoted every bit of my spare time familiarizing myself with the camera and totally immersed myself in every photography book and magazine I could get my hands on. One day I noticed an ad for Brooks Institute's Underwater Photography program. I applied, was accepted, and off I went from Bermuda to Santa Barbara, California. The phenomenal Brooks program, with its planned assignments, pool exercises and ocean dives, allowed me to rapidly advance my skills, helping me form a solid foundation for my underwater photography.

Heading back East, I discovered the thrills and challenges of Jersey wreck diving, entering photo contests and giving slide shows at dive and photography clubs. As the reality of making a living and paying rent set in, I decided to test my engineering degree and technical skills in the marketplace and landed a really good job that eventually took me to Texas and put me on a challenging career path. I still managed regular diving adventures in the Caribbean to further refine my photography skills. In 1977, *Skin Diver* magazine published my first article, "The Sleeping Sharks of Isla Mujeres." This boosted my confidence and whetted my appetite for more underwater explorations. My underwater photography had become much more than just documenting my journeys and marine life encounters. I saw the imagery as a way to help others better understand and appreciate the underwater realm.

I found myself publishing articles and photos in various national diving and wildlife magazines, giving seminars at diving expos, presenting at dive clubs and leading adventure trips to exotic destinations around the world. I was also fortunate to land numerous location assignments with scuba magazines. All the while I balanced this with a highly satisfying "day job" managing large industrial projects for a global engineering/construction

Continued on Page 46

company, and with my wife, raising two children. Living in Houston, I accumulated thousands of images from the northwestern Gulf of Mexico and the Flower Garden Banks.

In 1998, I completed a trimix certification course in Florida and immediately dived the USS *Monitor*. A few years later I added dives on the *Andrea Doria* to my logbook. My view of adventuresome assignments in the diving realm was wide-ranging and I was always open to new challenges. More recently I completed a full cave certification in order to safely enter and photograph a deep cave in Del Rio, Texas, for a magazine photo assignment. My passion for diving was like no other outdoor activity I ever experienced.

Through the years I occasionally used my photos to make ocean-related presentations at local schools. Much to my delight, most audiences were both enthusiastic and eager for



There are plenty of volunteer positions available to nondivers. Here, advocates assist a NMS researcher who is tagging and collecting data on seabirds.

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NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES

sanctuaries.noaa.gov/involved/volunteer_future.html

The National Marine Sanctuaries (NMS) seek to preserve the extraordinary scenic beauty, biodiversity, historical connections and economic productivity of 14 of our most precious underwater treasures in U.S. oceans and Great Lakes. By acting as responsible stewards of these special places, we strengthen our nation now and for future generations. The NMS are supported by a network of dedicated and diverse people working to protect our marine treasures. Across the nation, thousands of volunteers make sanctuary science and education programs possible and community advisory groups provide input to NMS management.

NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION

nwf.org/How-to-Help/Volunteer.aspx

The National Wildlife Federation is a voice for wildlife, dedicated to protecting wildlife and habitat and inspiring the future generation of conservationists. They believe that helping wildlife survive the challenges of the 21st century like climate change and habitat loss is best done by working with diverse groups to achieve their common conservation goals.

NATURE CONSERVANCY

nature.org

Their mission is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. It is achieved through the dedicated efforts of a diverse staff, including more than 600 scientists, located in all 50 U.S. states and more than 35 countries, and with the help of many partners, from individuals and governments to local nonprofits and corporations. The Nature Conservancy uses a nonconfrontational, collaborative approach and stays true to their core values.

OCEAN CONSERVANCY

oceanconservancy.org/our-work/marine-debris/

Ocean Conservancy educates and empowers citizens to take action on behalf of the ocean and brings people together to find solutions for our water planet. They educate and empower people to defend not only the ocean and its wildlife, but also the millions who earn their living from the ocean.

OCEANIC DEFENSE

oceanicdefense.org/donate/index.html

Oceanic Defense is an international education organization with members in more than 60 countries, spanning six continents with a single mission: healthy aquatic ecosystems free from human abuse and neglect. Oceanic Defense teaches people to protect our oceans by acting responsibly as consumers and by making smart decisions in our daily lives.

more. In the late 1980s and early '90s I volunteered time for the Gulf Reef Environmental Action Team (GREAT), a local environmental-focused organization. GREAT was founded with the purpose of protecting the Flower Garden Banks. In 1990 we placed the first mooring buoys at these reefs to protect them from anchor and chain damage. The first moorings were installed two years before the reefs became federally protected as our 10th national marine sanctuary.

In the early 2000s, I participated in the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary's Naturalist Program. As a volunteer on the live-aboard dive boats, I along with others gave presentations and interactive lectures to the diving guests on the why, the where and the how of the sanctuary; for example, the basics of coral biology, and how to be a more environmentally conscious and responsible scuba diver. The premise for the Naturalist Program, as it is for many others in the same genre is simple: To get people to care, dive responsibly and conserve, you must first educate them so they can understand and appreciate.

Diving and Serving

There are special people among us in the scuba diving community who think in terms of "giving back" right from the start, but for many of us, this concept evolves over time. I mean seriously, between family, friends, work, exercise and recreational dive trips, it can be difficult finding extra time to volunteer for anything. But for many of us, as we mature and achieve many of our important personal goals, we find that the door to volunteerism is open wider than before.

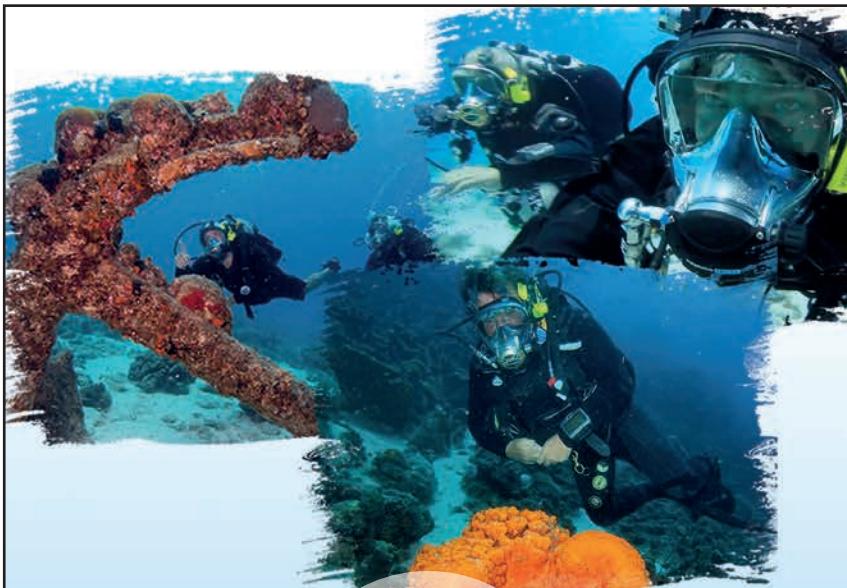
When preparing to retire from my corporate job a few years back, I planned on having more time to devote to volunteering. So, in 2011 I applied for and was accepted as a council member on the Flower

DO SOME RESEARCH, DO SOME GOOD

Let's say you're looking for a way to do some good but don't know how or where to get started. Here are a few tips. For starters, ask at your local dive center. Chances are they sponsor local cleanup dives or other events or can hook you up with a dive club or other organization in your area that sponsors some type of program that interests you.

Next, try looking to the Internet for options. But how do you know if the group you're looking to support is legit? There are websites dedicated to rating the performance of nonprofit organizations. Leading sites include charitynavigator.org, charitywatch.org and guidestar.org. These independent rating sites grade the performance of nonprofits, giving you a good idea of the organization's accountability and transparency, which basically answers the question, are they using donated funds to do what their mission statement declares? By doing a little research you can feel good about donating money or time to organizations that are really making a difference.

Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) Advisory Council (SAC). SAC members act as liaisons between the community interest group they represent and the sanctuary management. The SAC consists of eight constituency groups and its purpose is to advise the sanctuary superintendent on matters of resource protection and the identification of and solutions for critical issues affecting



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OCEANIC SOCIETY

oceanicsociety.org

Their mission is to conserve marine wildlife and habitats by deepening the connections between people and nature through research, community engagement and firsthand experience. They pursue their mission through directed investments in conservation, applied marine research and innovative travel programs.

PROJECT AWARE

projectaware.org/search/node/volunteer

Project AWARE Foundation is a growing movement of scuba divers protecting the ocean planet one dive at a time. Their premise is that divers are true leaders in ocean protection. Project Aware believes together their actions will help rescue the ocean. They are focused on two major ocean issues: shark conservation and removing trash from the ocean.

REEF

www.reef.org/programs/volunteersurvey

REEF's vision is to conserve marine ecosystems for their recreational, commercial and intrinsic value by educating, enlisting and enabling divers and other marine enthusiasts to become active stewards and citizen scientists. REEF links the diving community with scientists, resource managers and conservationists through marine life data collection and related activities. REEF says divers and snorkelers are in a unique position to observe and document the many valuable and vulnerable living marine resources and they play an important role in bringing information to the surface.

SEE TURTLES

seeturtles.org/663/volunteer

Formed as part of Ocean Conservancy, SEE Turtles became a sponsored project of The Ocean Foundation in 2009. Their mission is to protect endangered turtles throughout Latin America and the world by supporting community-based conservation efforts through ecotourism, education, and fundraising through Billion Baby Turtles.

SHARK SAVERS

sharksavers.org

Shark Savers is dedicated to saving sharks and mantas through building awareness, education and action. Founded in 2007 by divers with a shared passion, their mission is to save the world's dwindling shark and manta populations. Today, more than 25,000 members from 99 nations share that passion. Shark Savers is a force to motivate people to stop consuming sharks and shark fin soup, and it works for the creation of shark sanctuaries and improved regulations.

the sanctuary. The volunteers that make up the FGBNMS advisory council represent recreational diving, diving operations, commercial fishing, recreational fishing, research, education, conservation and the oil and gas industry. Two examples of recent recommendations made to the sanctuary superintendent by the FGBNMS advisory council are the boundary expansion plan for the sanctuary and the disposition of the gas platform (HI-A389A) located inside the boundary at the East Flower Garden Bank. In May 2014, as current SAC chair, I participated in a three-day collaborative summit with sanctuary chairs at the other 12 sanctuaries and our national monument in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Participation in SAC has allowed me to not only be a stronger advocate for the northern Gulf of Mexico's only national marine sanctuary but to be a more effective champion for the ocean.

There are endless ways to become an advocate for the environment. Whether your passion is coral reef protection, sharks, dolphins, a favorite fresh or saltwater locale, or some other water-related issue, consider making a commitment and get involved. Donating even a small amount of money or time to your favorite cause will make a difference. Volunteer for an established marine or wildlife-focused organization or if you prefer to operate independently, use your photography, video or presentation skills to share your passion with others. Start with family and friends and then move along to dive clubs, civic and church groups and, of course, local schools. Impress our youth with what you know about the ocean and freshwater environs and you'll be amazed at their thirst for more information about our fascinating underwater world. Diving can be more than just a fun activity. It can be fundamental to making our world a better place.

