

Exploring Aquatic New Jersey

By Herb Segars

It was one of those magical moments – unexpected and short lived. I was lying face-to-face with a goosefish (monkish), *Lophius americanus* and felt grateful the anglerfish tolerated my presence. In the blink of an eye, the goosefish lurched forward and settled down with its prey – a startled black sea bass, *Centropristis striata*. This happened in the days before digital, and I had about a dozen frames of unexposed film. As I focused and pulled the trigger, the goosefish devoured the black sea bass. With a full belly pushing the remainder of its body off the bottom, I prepared to shoot my last frame. As I squeezed the trigger, the goosefish belched; spewing fish scales into the water column. I started laughing so hard that I almost lost my regulator. The entire encounter lasted less than three minutes. The wait for processed film took the better part of a week and I prayed that all my settings were correct, as there wouldn't be a redo.

Underwater photography is just one of the many aspects of New Jersey diving and until the digital revolution, one with the least number of participants. Digital has created a rebirth in underwater photography in New Jersey as it has everywhere. Instant image feedback, high ISO with low noise and no 36-shot per dive restrictions are just a few of the things that feed this growth. It is wonderful to see photographers accomplishing underwater tasks that were unheard of in the film



The opening left by a porthole on the wreckage on the shipwreck of the Mohawk, a 387' long x 54' wide Clyde-Mallory Lines passenger liner (sailing under the Ward Lines) that sunk off the coast of New Jersey, USA, on January 25, 1935 after colliding with the Norwegian freighter Talisman. There were 45 casualties. Canon F-1, Aquatica housing, Ikelite 225 strobe, Canon 20mm lens, f8 @ 1/8 second, ISO 100

years.

The bottom terrain of the coast of New Jersey is flat and sandy – very much like a desert. Yet we have a cornucopia of marine life that satisfies the needs of scuba divers and fishermen. Our success is due to the thousands of shipwrecks, artificial reefs and rock piles that create oases which provide structures for marine growth and habitats for marine fish and invertebrates.

Artifact hunting is one of the more popular aspects of New Jersey diving. Winter storms change the bottom terrain and reveal lost artifacts. Divers use scooters, dredges and their gloved hands to find their own part of history. It isn't necessary to dive deep as some inshore wrecks have been giving



The Smoke II was a part of the Fire Department of New York for 50 years. The Smoke II was built in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1958. It was 52 feet in length, pumped 2,000 gallons per minute and was equipped with two monitors (water nozzles). The Smoke II was sunk on August 8, 2008 on the Sea Girt Artificial Reef off New Jersey and is dedicated as a memorial to Ed Bogaert, a retired policeman and charter dive boat Captain. The site will be called the Ed Bogaert Memorial Reef. Nikon D200, Subal housing, (2) Ikelite 125 strobes, Nikon 12-24mm lens @ 12mm, f8 @ 1/4 second, ISO 200

up their treasures for years. One is the shipwreck, Delaware, a Clyde Lines steamer, which sank on July 9, 1898. It caught fire and burned to the waterline. The next day, while being towed north along the coast, it sank just off Bay Head, New Jersey. The Delaware is one of the most popular artifact wrecks in New Jersey. In 1989, 91 years after its demise, the ship's bell was found by Pennsylvania diver Bill Davis. Then on October 23, 2010, 102 years after sinking, Harry Maisch IV found the ship's fog bell. The Delaware continues

to give - on May 6, 2012, divers from the Gypsy Blood dive boat brought up brass spikes and brass oil lamp parts.

The Mohawk is another one of those sites that keeps on giving. It was a 387-foot long Clyde-Mallory Lines passenger liner that sank on January 25, 1935 after colliding with the Norwegian freighter Talisman with a loss of 45 lives. In 1996, divers from the Sea Lion collected 1,000 plates that were uncovered by storms during the winter months. Again in 2004, the Mohawk gave up many more plates to the divers from the Diversion 2. The Mohawk was dynamited and wire-dragged to ensure it was not a hindrance to surface vessels. It hardly resembles a ship anymore and it is very easy to get lost in the maze of twisted deck plates and bulk heads. All these nooks and crannies are perfect homes for a favorite of New Jersey divers, the North American lobster, *Homarus americanus*.

Most of the shipwrecks, artificial reefs and rock piles along the coast provide suitable abodes for lobsters. How well they provide for divers depends on how frequently they are dived. Commercial dive boat captains sneak out to their “secret spots” to allow their customers the best chances of bringing home dinner. New Jersey underwater scuba hunters also bring home black sea bass, tautog (blackfish), *Tautoga onitis*, red hake, *Urophycis chuss*, summer flounder (fluke), *Paralichthys dentatus*, winter flounder, *Pseudopleuronectes americanus* and goosefish (monkfish).

For those who want food and don't have the agility to catch lobsters or the tolerance to spear fish, there are blue mussels and deep-sea scallops. Blue mussels, *Mytilus edulis*, are the easiest to harvest. The only chore involved is finding a



*A goosefish, **Lophius americanus**, also known as a monkfish, headfish, and allmouth eats a black sea bass, **Centropristis striata**, on the Keel Wreck off the coast of New Jersey, USA. Canon F-1, Aquatica housing, Ikelite 225 strobe, Canon 50mm lens, f11-16 @ 1/60 second, ISO 100*

location that has them. Divers choose where their mussels come from and most choose a spot high up on a shipwreck or artificial reef. These provide sand-free mollusks. They are placed in mesh bags and taken to the surface with a lift bag. There they are pulled apart and dragged behind the boat in mesh bags. The mussels tumble in the boat's wake, cleaning the exterior of the shell.

Deep-sea scallops, *Placopecten magellanicus* usually require a deeper dive, and many of the commercial dive boats will take clients to the deeper offshore shipwrecks. Sometimes it is necessary to move away from the wreck to find scallops in the sand. Divers use a line reel tied off near the anchor to guide them back home. I tried this with a camera and although it gave an opportunity to photograph the mollusks, the return trip of winding



*(Top) Lion's mane jellyfish, **Cyanea capillata**, photographed in the water off New Jersey, USA.*

Nikon D100, Nexus housing, (2) Ikelite 125 strobes, Sigma 28-80 lens @ 80mm, f10 @ 1/125 second, ISO 200

*(Above) An Atlantic Corolla, **Carolla calceola**, a marine snail, in the water column in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of New Jersey, USA. Nikonos V, (2) Ikelite 50 strobes, 28mm lens with 1.28 extension tube, f16 @ 1/90 second, ISO 50*



line, photographing and swimming left me a tangled mess.

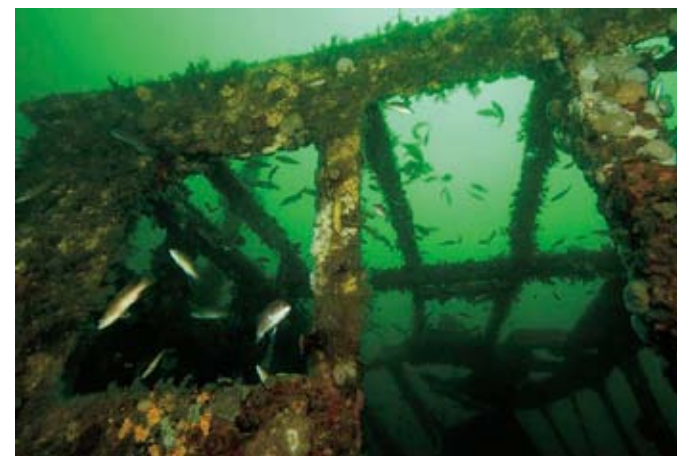
New Jersey has a large variety of marine species for divers that photograph or sightsee. My favorite location is about 15 feet down the anchor line. I often spend an hour or more photographing the parade of jellyfish and plankters as they float past. Lion's mane jellyfish, *Cyanea capillata*, are particularly beautiful but they are stingers and having the tentacles of the jelly brush your face proves the point. Often, tiny butterfish, *Peprilus triacanthus*, seek shelter in the jellyfish's tentacles. Schools of banded rudderfish, *Seriola zonata*, move from jelly to jelly hoping to catch a butterfish away from its shelter. Leidy's comb jellies, *Mnemiopsis leidyi*, and ovate comb jellies, *Beroe ovata* beat the cilia that run along their body to move through the water column while many-ribbed hydromedusae, *Aequorea aequorea*, hunt comb jellies. If you are lucky, a tiny lined seahorse, *Hippocampus erectus* may come galloping by or you might see the otherworldly looking marine snail, *Atlantic corolla*, *Carolla calceola*. Moving a little deeper in the water column brings you to the realm of the naked sea butterfly, *Clione limacina* – merely one-half inch long, where it flaps its wings to sail along.

Once on the bottom, there are many diverse types of dive sites to visit. New Jersey has 15 artificial reef sites that encompass 25 square miles. Individual reefs are made from tugboats, barges, fire boats, M-60 Army tanks, subway cars, reef balls, attack transport vessels, armored personnel carriers and a former Navy destroyer. Artificial reefs are great dive sites for new divers because they are recognizable and easy to navigate. My personal favorite is the Veronica M, a 110-foot-long tugboat, sunk on the Axel Carlson Artificial Reef



*A North American lobster, **Homarus americanus**, photographed on the Emerald Wreck off New Jersey, USA. Nikon D100, Nexus housing, (2) Ikelite 125 strobes, Sigma 28-80 lens @ 46mm, f11 @ 1/160 second, ISO 200*

off Mantoloking, New Jersey. The Veronica M is named after my wife, Veronica. It was a gift for her 50th birthday. Of all the things in the world that a person could want, my wife wanted a tugboat sunk and named after her. There are plenty of reef sites that have been dedicated to individuals. The Smoke II was a New York City fireboat that was used to pump water on the twin towers after the attack on September 11, 2001. It was sunk on the Sea Girt Artificial Reef site off Sea Girt, New Jersey and dedicated to the memory of Ed Bogaert, a former police officer and charter dive boat captain. New Jersey's largest artificial reef is the USS Radford, a 583-foot former Navy destroyer that was sunk on the Del-Jersey-Land Reef on August 10, 2010 between the states of New Jersey and Delaware. The site is 28 miles northeast of Ocean City Inlet and about equidistant from Indian River Inlet and



The Coney Island, a 250' long x 40' wide sludge tanker, sunk on the Shark River Artificial Reef in approximately 125' of water off New Jersey. Nikon D100, Nexus housing, (2) Ikelite 125 strobes, Nikon 12-24mm lens @ 12mm, f7.1 @ 1/15 second, ISO 200

Cape May. Nearly three weeks after her sinking, Hurricane Irene tore the ship into two pieces and moved the larger section more than 200 feet. Prior to the USS Radford, the USS Algol (AKA-54) was our largest artificial reef at 459-feet. It was an Andromeda class attack transport that was sunk in 130 feet of water on the Shark River Artificial Reef, about 20 miles offshore of Shark River Inlet. The Shark River Reef is also the home of the Coney Island, a former sludge tanker, and the former Navy tankers, Sam Berman, Alan Martin, and Captain Bart. Nearby is the shipwreck Stolt Dagali, a 583-foot tanker that was cut in half in a collision with the Israeli passenger liner, Shalom, on Thanksgiving 1964. This offshore area is very popular with dive boats from New Jersey and New York. Its distance offshore often brings good visibility.

The average visibility in New Jersey is about



*A winter flounder, **Pleuronectes americanus**, photographed on the Keel Wreck, approx. 7.5 miles out of Manasquan Inlet, New Jersey in 83' of water. Nikon D100, Nexus housing, (2) Ikelite 125 strobes, Sigma 28-80 lens @ 80mm, f22 @ 1/60 second, ISO 100*



*A many-ribbed hydromedusa, **Aequorea aequorea**, eats an ovate comb jelly, **Beroe ovata** in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of New Jersey, USA. Nikon D200, Subal housing, (2) Ikelite 125 strobes, Sigma 28-80 lens @ 48mm, f11 @ 1/125 second, ISO 100*

15-20 feet but I have experienced days when visibility was in excess of 50 feet. On days when there is a bottom surge, I like to visit sites that come up higher in the water column. A favorite is the Lana Carol, a 71-foot scallop dredge that sunk on October 31, 1976 in a nasty Halloween storm. It lies in 90-feet of water about 8 miles off Lavallette, New Jersey. The ship is covered with blue mussels, and frilled and lined anemones. Another favorite which is also an excellent site for blue mussels is the Dykes (Steel Schooner), a 308-foot schooner barge that was sunk on the Sea Girt Artificial Reef in July 1983. The bow section sticks high off the bottom, and visibility is often better when bottom

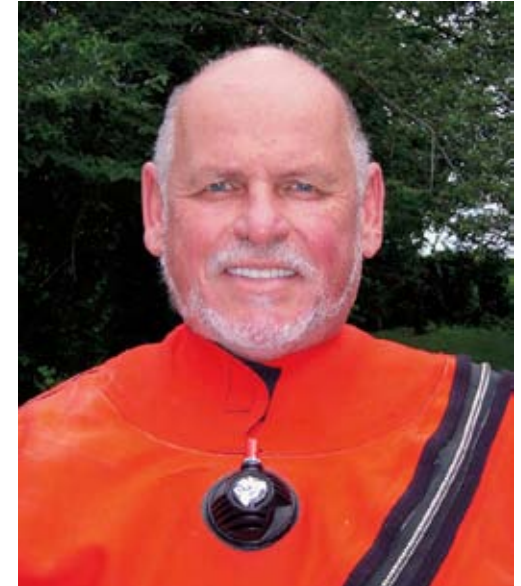
conditions are less-than-ideal.

One of our oddest dive sites is off Long Branch, New Jersey. Two very old steam locomotives lie on the bottom, upright and 15 feet apart. They are believed to have been manufactured in the 1850s, and it is not known how they got there. I found them to be one of the most beautiful sites I have dived in New Jersey. They are covered with frilled anemones and black sea bass swim in and around the pre-Civil War engines. These locomotives have been arrested in Federal Court by two amateur railroad and diving enthusiast groups. The arrest means there can be no tampering or poaching of the engines. It also means that dive boats

cannot grapple into the site, a standard method of dive boat anchoring. The site is now a buoy dive.

With over 2,000 shipwrecks, 15 artificial reef sites, inlets and numerous rock piles, New Jersey has something to offer all scuba divers. To get additional information about scuba diving clubs, charter dive boats and scuba diving shops, visit the New Jersey Council of Diving Clubs web site.

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