

MARIN SCUBA CLUB NEWSLETTER

Volume 17 Number 9 September, 2009



El Niño Is Here

by Larry Clinton

Warming waters in the tropical Pacific have led researchers at NOAA's Climate Prediction Center to declare an official El Niño in early July. The agency said recently that conditions appear to be strengthening, increasing the likelihood of at least a moderate El Niño through winter, following a three-year hiatus.

South American fishermen who recognized the arrival of a warmer Pacific around Christmas gave the phenomenon the name El Niño, which means "little boy" or "Christ child" in Spanish. During a strong El Niño, Pacific temperatures can spike 8 degrees, shifting the jet stream from a rollercoaster shape to a straight line. Powerful storms slam into the West Coast, as in 1997-98. That winter brought 47 inches of rain to San Francisco, more than twice normal, causing destructive storms, flooding, mudslides and power outages.

Fluctuations in ocean temperatures are accompanied by even larger-scale fluctuations in air pressure known as the Southern Oscillation. El Niño episodes bring abnormally high air pressure. The positive phase occurs during La Niña episodes, with abnormally low air pressure. A low pressure front in January, 2005 caused San Francisco Bay to rise nearly a foot above predicted high tides. La Niña occurrences don't necessarily follow El Niño years.

Some side effects of El Niño are already being felt. Fire warnings are at high levels, because the shift in ocean temperature patterns could increase lightning strikes. Northern California's woods are drier than normal — even though this year was wetter than last year. Fire fuels have been drying out, dying back and increasing the potential for fires to spread.

"Northern California is basically under extreme fire risk," said Ron Neilson, a bioclimatologist for the U.S. Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Research Station and a botany professor at Oregon State University.

Foresters, farmers and ski resort operators are hoping that El Niño will bring an end to three years of drought. But El

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Islands of San Francisco Bay at September 16 Meeting

by Larry Clinton

They may not be celebrated dive sites, but San Francisco Bay's 48 islands offer dramatic scenery while supporting an amazing array of birds, animals and plants.

Author-photographer James A. Martin has recently self-published a coffee-table-sized color book that has gathered in one place more information about all "The Islands of San Francisco Bay," in text and photos, than any other. It focuses on island ecology and topography with over 400 striking images.

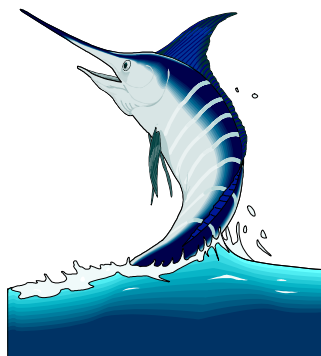
On the 16th, James will share over 200 images from the book and from his website, www.islandsofsfbay.com. Jane and I have seen this presentation and highly recommend it.

Invasive Aquatic Species Workshop 9/24

The California Department of Boating and Waterways and several other agencies are presenting a free Invasive Aquatic Species Workshop on Thursday, September 24 (8:45 am – 2:30 p.m.) at Sausalito's Bay Model

Participants will learn how to: protect the quality of recreation and aquatic ecosystems, identify aquatic invasive species, and understand their economic costs and operational impacts. The workshop will cover both saltwater and freshwater aquatic invasive species including Quagga and Zebra Mussels as well as the new San Francisco Bay Area invader, the Asian Kelp – and how watercraft and fishing gear inspections can reduce the spread of invasive species.

Registration deadline is September 21. For more information, or to register, go to www.coastal.ca.gov/ccbn/InvasiveSpeciesMarin_09.pdf. Thanks to Dyane Mohr for sharing this information.



Niño conditions affect fish, whales, birds, sea lions and other species. Warm water from the equator moves north along California in the Davidson Current. With it come fish normally found only in warmer areas.

“In the last big El Niño, they were seeing striped marlin off San Francisco, and tuna species that you might find out of San Diego were being caught off Monterey,” said Jim Covel, a biologist with the Monterey Bay Aquarium. In July, the Marin IJ reported that albacore were already schooling off the shelf. At Fort Baker, anglers were catching mackerel. White sea bass were hitting off Marin, thresher sharks were leaping just outside the Golden Gate, and “a triggerfish on holiday from Baja was caught . . . near Santa Cruz.”

On the negative side, all that warm water has limited upwelling, the process by which cold ocean water filled with plankton and other nutrients is pushed to the surface, providing a smorgasbord for birds, fish and other marine life. We’re currently experiencing the lowest upwelling in 60 years of records, causing prey-fish to leave the area. Scientists think warmer El Niño waters could be sending fish farther out to sea in search of colder spots.

Cormorant numbers are down, leading biologists at Point Reyes Bird Observatory to call this the worst year in memory for breeding pairs in bay region nesting colonies. Common murre nesting on the Farallon Islands, the biggest breeding colony south of Alaska, are also in decline this year.

Hundreds of young sea lions that washed ashore malnourished and dying this summer may well be the victims of El Niño, said Dan Costa, a professor of ecology at the University of California-Santa Cruz. By August, the Marine Mammal Center had taken in more patients than in any other year; most were malnourished seal lion pups. In the severe 1998 El Niño, about 3,000 sea lions were stranded, twice the normal number. If this winter’s turns out to be as severe, a large number of marine animals could starve next year.

It’s still too early to gauge the severity of this year’s El Niño, with computer models ranging from relatively weak to strong intensity. But the stronger the conditions and the warmer the water, the greater likelihood, so it’s wise to keep attuned to ocean temperature reports.

So far the outlook is optimistic. “It looks very unlikely that this will be a real strong event,” said Mike Halpert, deputy director of the Climate Prediction Center in Camp Springs, MD. Halpert said this winter’s snow and rainfall will likely outpace that of the weak El Niño in 2006-07, which brought well below typical precipitation.

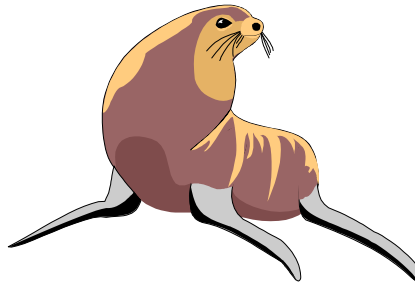
So let’s hope for the best, but prepare for the worst.

[compiled from various news sources]

Coastal Cleanup Day 9/19

California Coastal Cleanup Day, the premier volunteer event focused on the marine environment in the country, has been hailed by the Guinness Book of World Records as “the largest garbage collection.” Since the program started in 1985, over 800,000 Californians have removed more than 13 million pounds of debris from our shorelines and coast. When combined with the International Coastal Cleanup, organized by The Ocean Conservancy and taking place on the same day, California Coastal Cleanup Day becomes part of one of the largest volunteer events of the year. There are several local Cleanup Day events, including one sponsored by the Marine Mammal Center at Rodeo Beach in the Marin Headlands. It’s from 9am - 12 pm on the 19th, with all participants invited to a free barbeque after the cleanup hosted by the Bay Model in Sausalito. For more information, click on http://www.tmmc.org/get_involved/events.asp.

The 19th is also kickoff day for COASTWEEKS, a three-week celebration of our coastal resources. There are currently about 200 events happening throughout the state, including such varied activities as kayak tours, speakers, hiking trips, festivals, restoration events, and much more. Go to www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/coastweeks/coastweeks.html. To find a 2009 schedule of events. This calendar is growing, so check back often.



Reminder: Next Meeting 10/28

Due to the Catalina trip, we are rescheduling our October meeting to the fourth Wednesday in the month, the 28th.

Please join us October 28, at the same time (happy hour till 7:00 PM, socializing 7:00-7:30, meeting 7:30-9:15), same place (Flatiron, 2nd & B Sts., San Rafael). Our program will be presented by the Marine Mammal Center.



A Big, Big Show From Amos

Once again, renowned photographer Amos Nachoum dazzled a capacity crowd at our August meeting with his stunning photos of big animals. From polar bears to penquins, humpbacks to orcas, he took us on a virtual around-the-world expedition, sharing his passion for these wonders of nature. To see more of Amos’ artistry, check out www.biganimals.com.

BOTTOM TIMES

Sept. 16 (Wed.): Board Meeting, 6:00, *Club Meeting*, 7:30. James Martin, Islands of the Bay. Call Jeffrey (415- 898-7752).

Sept. 19 (Sat.): *California Coastal Cleanup Day*. Click on www.tmmc.org/get_involved/events.asp.

Sept. 24 (Thurs.): *Free Invasive Aquatic Species Workshop* (8:45 am – 2:30), Sausalito's Bay Model. For more information, or to register, go to www.coastal.ca.gov/ccbn/InvasiveSpeciesMarin_09.pdf

Oct. 7 (Wed.): *Newsletter deadline*. See below.

October 10 (Sat.): *Cypress Sea boat dive* (3 Dives), Monterey. Call Pierre at SF Reef Divers (415-285-6293).

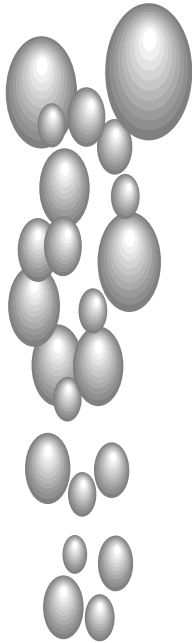
Oct. 18-21 (Sun.-Wed.): *Dive Trip to Catalina Isthmus*, Banning House, Two Harbors. Call Nathan (415-479-1777).

Oct. 28 (Fourth Wed.): Board Meeting, 6:00, *Club Meeting*, 7:30. Marine Mammal Center. Call Jeffrey (415- 898-7752).

Nov. 14 (Sat.): *Cypress Sea boat dive* (3 Dives), Monterey. Call Pierre at SF Reef Divers (415-285-6293).

Nov. 18 (Wed.): Board Meeting, 6:00, *Club Meeting*, 7:30. Gil Zeimer, Images from Kosrae, Micronesia. Call Jeffrey (415- 898-7752).

Dec. 12 (Sat.): *Holiday Potluck*. Barbara Wambach's home, 371 E Strawberry Dr., Mill Valley. Call Nathan (415-479-1777).



We Need Your Help!

We need articles, recipes, short notes, pictures, SCUBA funnies or whatever for future newsletters and for our website.

Website: E-mail photos with a caption and/or article and photo credits to John Brenneis (webmeister@marinscuba.org). If you do not have access to a scanner, mail photos along with captions and photo credits with a self-addressed stamped envelope if you want the photos back. Ric's address is 1 Issaquah Dock, Sausalito, CA 94965.

Newsletter: Deadline is usually the first Wednesday of the month - two weeks before the meeting.

Send materials for future articles in one of the following ways. Note that these are listed in priority order.

1. E-mail text to Larry at click@dipsymusic.com. It's best to just send the material in the body of the e-mail and not as an attachment.
2. Send a CD to the address below. MS Word - PC format is preferred, otherwise include a note as to what the format is.
3. Fax typed manuscripts to 415-339-1361.

Pictures and Graphics - E-mail JPEG files to click@dipsymusic.com or mail CDs or hard copy to Larry Clinton, 29 Gate 6-1/2, Sausalito, CA 94965.

Marin Scuba Club
78 Edward Ave.
San Rafael, CA 94903



Next Meeting

Wed., September 16

Program:

James Martin

Islands of the Bay

Happy Hour 6:00-7:00

Socializing: 7:00

Meeting: 7:30-9:15

**The Flatiron, 724 B St,
San Rafael**

**MARIN SCUBA
CLUB
NEWSLETTER**

The Club meets the
3rd Wednesday of each month
(except Oct. & December, 2009)

Marin Scuba Club

Board of Directors

www.marinclub.org

President

Nathan Cobert *ncobert@earthlink.net* (415) 479-1777

Vice President

Patrick Ritter *patrickritter@comcast.net* (415) 381-3345

Treasurer

Barbara Sebring *gandbsebring@msn.com* (415) 499-0799

Secretary

Arlene Rudy *arudy24@aol.com* (415) 927-2672

Membership Coordinator

Alberta Brown Buller *absea711@yahoo.com* (415) 453-9556

Newsletter Editor

Larry Clinton *click@dipsymusic.com* (415) 332-6196

Activities Coordinator

Jane Clinton *jkclinton@comcast.net* (415) 332-6196

Program Coordinator

Jeffrey Zankel *divedog@verizon.net* (415) 898-7752

Webmaster

John Brenneis *webmeister@marinclub.org* (415) 407-3161

Immediate Past President

Elliott Zalta *driftinez@comcast.net* (415) 461-6644
