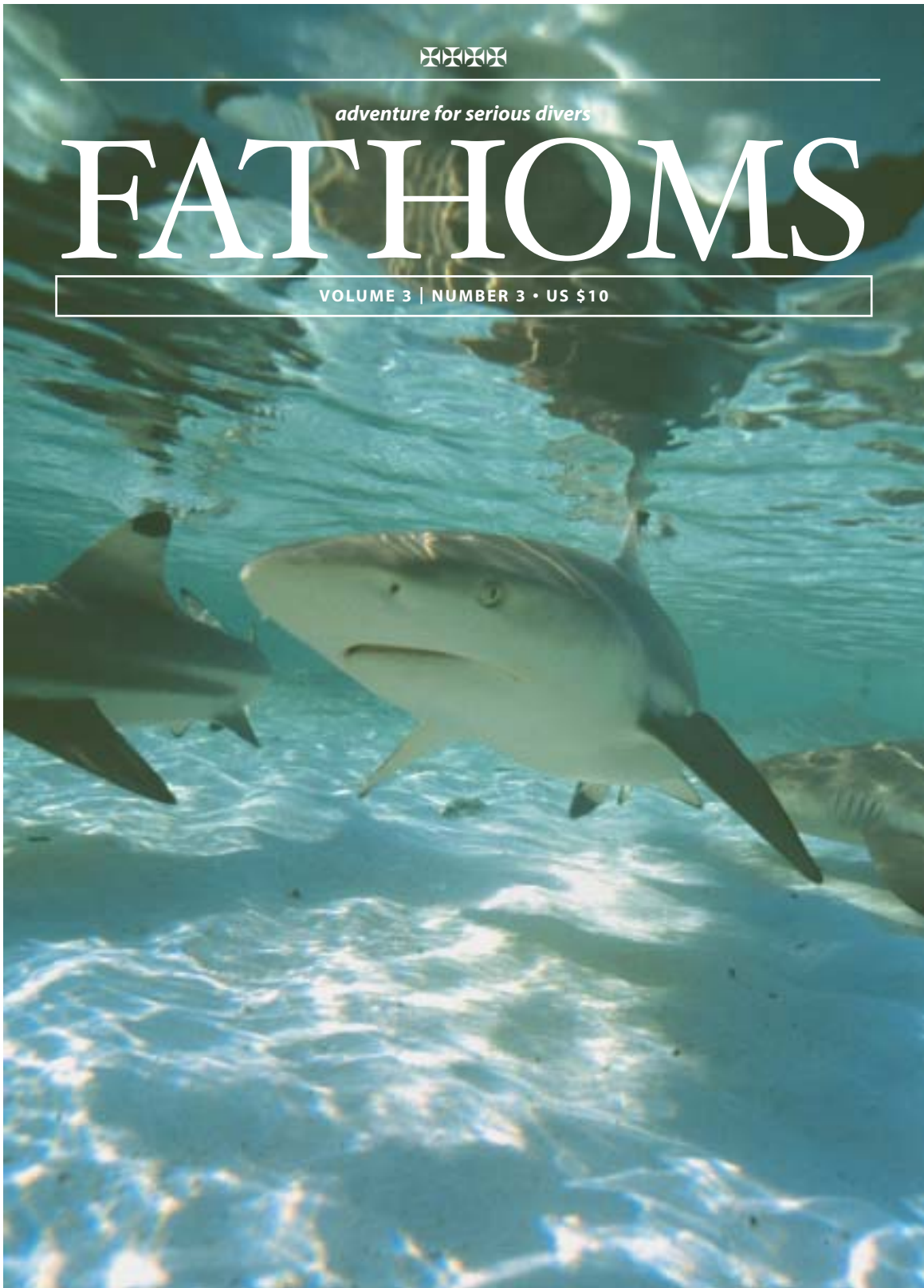




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SEACOLOGY

making a difference... now!

BY BRET GILLIAM

Rarely a week goes by without being approached by a non-profit organization looking to have a puff piece run in *Fathoms*. Because the ocean environment in general, and coral reefs in particular, have been in better shape and because *Fathoms* is concerned about improving these conditions, we were initially inclined to look into the possibility of running a few articles about the important work being done by nonprofit organizations trying to protect the health of our reefs. A little obstacle however, kept on getting in our way. It's called the truth.

While there are several well intentioned marine related non-profits out there, many seem to be more concerned with self-perpetuation than saving a reef here and there. When I donate my hard earned cash to a charity I want to make sure the money is put to good use. I'm not particularly interested in funding some more conferences or studies.

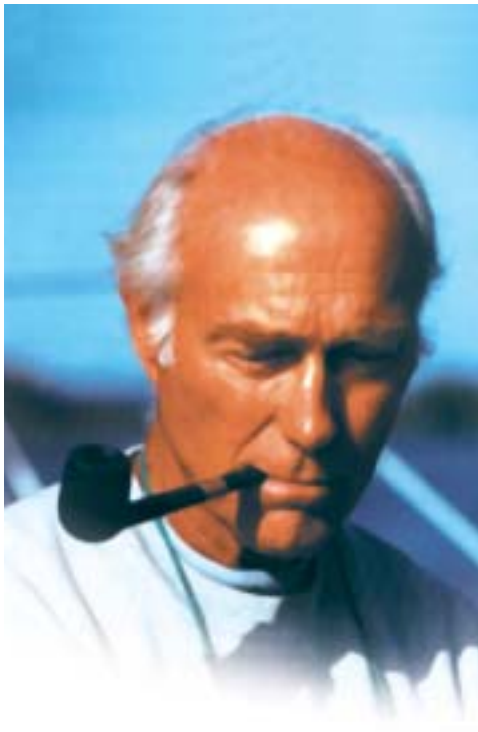
I want the reefs preserved now. Somehow I think our readers share this value. So every time we were about to run an article about one of the nonprofits even casual investigation showed that too much of my donation would go to fund a bloated bureaucracy.

A funny thing then happened to restore my faith. Stan Waterman and others started telling me about a new and unusual organization with a very small staff, little overhead and a focus on preserving the marine environment now. This organization, Seacology, works in a very unusual way. They make deals with local islanders whereby the islanders receive a critically needed tangible benefit such as a school room or a fresh water delivery system, in return for a specific sacrifice on behalf of the environment. Recently Seacology signed an agreement with Naikorokoro village in Fiji to construct a kindergarten in return for the establishment of a 17 square mile marine reserve. Sounds good, doesn't it? Wait, it gets better. Because of the relatively low cost of things in Fiji the kindergarten will be built for \$11,000. Your local school district probably couldn't get an architect to draw up plans for that amount of money. (In fact I think my first dive computer cost almost as much and as I recall was about the size of a kindergarten as well.) A school group in the Cayman Islands heard about this project and along with another school group in California raised enough money to go ahead with this project. Kids in the Caymans raising money to help kids in Fiji save their coral reefs makes for an incredible story. For \$11,000 Seacology has built a kindergarten, established a 17 square mile marine reserve and has created a model of international cooperation. That's what I call good value.

Then I found out that the director of Seacology, Duane Silverstein, was a former comedy writer. An environmentalist with a sense of



Duane with one of the locals



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humor? Now that's a story.

Silverstein is the executive director of Seacology, a non-profit organization with the sole focus of preserving island environments throughout the globe. For 20 years prior to heading Seacology, he was the executive director of the Goldman Fund, one of the west coast's largest philanthropic foundations. He also headed the Goldman Environmental Prize, which has been dubbed the "Nobel Prize of the Environment" by *National Geographic* and news media throughout the world. Silverstein has met with many presidents of the United States, secretaries-general of the United Nations and heads of state throughout the world. His work has been covered in newspapers and periodicals as diverse as *Time Magazine*, *The Bangkok Post*, *The San Francisco Chronicle* and *Asian Diver Magazine*. Silverstein is an avid diver and a former comedy writer for Joan Rivers.

FM: How did your love of islands develop?

DS: Perhaps it was because I was born and raised on an island, Long Island, New York. Then in 1975, through Columbia Law School, I was selected for a volunteer internship with an environmental organization in Hawaii called Life of the Land. I was not only exposed to the beauty of islands but to the beauty of island cultures as well. I was so moved by my experience that I dropped out of law school and devoted my life to preserving our natural heritage for future generations. I have now visited 73 islands throughout the world.

FM: Where did your interest in the marine environment come from?

DS: While working in Hawaii I went snorkeling for the first time in Hanama Bay. Growing up the only fish I ever saw were in a fish store and they were dead and gray. Seeing all those colorful fish in the water was a case of love at first sight.

Hard at work generating revenue for a worthy cause



FM: Enough about you, tell us about Seacology.

DS: Seacology is the world's premier organization with the sole purpose of preserving the environments – both marine and land based – of islands throughout the globe. We specialize in "win-win" situations where islanders receive a needed tangible benefit for preserving their environment.

FM: How was Seacology founded?

DS: Dr. Paul Cox, one of the worlds leading ethno botanists, was studying the pristine rainforests near the remote village of Falealupo, Samoa when logging equipment was brought in to cut down the trees. Dr. Cox found out that the government of Samoa told the village of Falealupo that they had to build a better school or all the teachers would be removed. With a per capita income of less than \$100 per person per year the village had no choice but to sell the logging rights to their rainforest to build the school and ensure the education of their children. On the spot, Dr. Cox said, "If we raise the money and build you the school would you sign an agreement protecting the 30,000 acre rainforest forever?" The village chiefs said yes, Seacology was formed, the money was raised (thanks to a generous gift from fellow diver Ken Murdock), the school was built and a 30,000-acre rainforest will now be around for eternity. Then Seacology came in and with the support of the Nu Skin Enterprises constructed an elevated rainforest canopy walkway as an ecotourism project. This walkway project has now raised more money than the village would have received for cutting down their rainforest!

FM: Any examples of other Seacology projects?

DS: In Fiji we have built several community centers, and installed critically needed water delivery systems in exchange for the establishment of large no-fishing marine reserves to give the reefs a chance to replenish. In Indonesia we built several fish aggregating devices to offer local villagers an alternative method of fishing instead of using dynamite and cyanide on their reefs. In Palau and Papua New Guinea we have funded the deployment of demarcation buoys and trained rangers to turn "paper parks" into effective marine reserves. In Belize we helped construct a ranger station, which almost immediately put a stop to illegal manatee poaching.

FM: How many projects has Seacology launched?

At the opening dedication



DS: In our brief four-year history as a staffed organization we have launched 65 projects, all of which lead to immediate tangible results. We have a counter on the homepage of our website (www.seacology.org) which indicates that to date we have preserved 38,310 acres of island terrestrial habitat and 804,475 acres of coral reef and other marine habitat. These figures are precise and we can document every one of these acres.

FM: To accomplish so much in such a short time you must have a large staff.

DS: On the contrary, we have one of the smallest staffs I know for an international environmental organization, with a grand total of four staff people. Contrary to popular myth you can often accomplish more with fewer people as you can eliminate red tape and bureaucracy and have everyone work on implementing projects instead of attending staff meetings and writing unnecessary internal memos.

FM: Speaking of bureaucracy, what percentage of the money you raise is devoted to program, administration and fundraising?

DS: According to our most recent audit 83% of our budget goes to programs, 11% to administration and 6% to fundraising. This is why noted marine biologist Dr. John McCosker said in a radio interview with Charles Osgood, "Dollar for dollar, pound for pound, Seacology gets more output than any conservation group that I've seen. They're not giving money away, they're not making grants, they're making deals."

FM: What are the keys to success for Seacology's cost efficiency?

DS: First, a little goes a long way in many of the islands we are working in. We are building a

kindergarten in Fiji for \$11,000 and we built a ranger station in the Philippines for \$7,000. Try doing that in the United States! Second, as mentioned we keep the staff and the red tape as small as possible. Third, we do not engage in wasteful mass mailing or telephone solicitation fundraising campaigns.

FM: How do you raise money for Seacology?

DS: Our core support is provided by our generous board of directors, many of whom joined the board after accompanying us on one of our trips to see how effective our projects are in the field. We also receive foundation funding, corporate funding (Nu Skin has been particularly generous) and contributions from individuals.

FM: If our readers want to support Seacology's efforts how could they make a donation?

DS: We would be pleased to receive tax deductible donations via credit card, our secure server website or by mail. Our address is

Seacology
2009 Hopkins St., Berkeley, CA 94707
Phone: 510-559-3505
Email: islands@seacology.org
Web: www.seacology.org

FM: Do you have any interesting trips planned in the coming year?

DS: We will be visiting our project in the Maldives in October aboard the new *Island Explorer* live aboard. We are going to Madagascar in April 2004 where we are helping to create a new national park. We will be returning to Fiji to open three new projects in July 2004.

FM: Any parting thoughts you'd like to convey?

DS: Over the last four hundred years most of the world's plant and animal extinctions have taken place on islands. Coral reefs and marine ecosystems have been particularly vulnerable. It is incumbent on every member of the diving community to do something about this so that our children's grandchildren and future generations can share our joy and awe of the underwater experience. Donations received by Seacology will not be used to attend conferences or workshops or study that which we already know- the ocean environment is in dire straights. If one is looking for a way to make a cost effective contribution to immediately have a tangible impact on preserving these environments, Seacology offers an ideal opportunity. 🌊