



NOAA Teacher at Sea
Thomas Nassif
Onboard NOAA Ship NANCY FOSTER
July 15 – 30, 2005

Log 9

Final Days: Weekend of July 23-24, 2005
Latitude: 34°10'N
Longitude: 76°39'W
Visibility: 10 nautical miles (nm)
Wind direction: 34°
Wind speed: 13 kts
Sea wave height: 2'
Swell wave height: 2-3'
Sea water temperature: 30°C (86°F)
Sea level pressure: 1016.5 mb
Cloud cover: 2/8, cumulus, cirrus

Daily Log

The last dive of the research cruise couldn't have been more exhilarating. Unfazed by the gusty winds, choppy seas, and ripping ocean currents, the divers explored one last shipwreck on the ocean floor. The Naeco was a U.S. tanker that was destroyed by a Nazi U-boat during WWII. The torpedo shattered the Naeco's bow and stern into two pieces, sinking them to the ocean bottom nearly 7 miles apart. The divers returned to the surface with stories about the stern (back) of the Naeco and thrilling reports of lionfish of every size and number.



The more I think about my experiences aboard the Invasive Lionfish Cruise, the more I begin to see two parallel themes here: the deep-sea diver and the lionfish. Human action led to the introduction of lionfish into a foreign habitat, but at the same time, one person invented the SCUBA, which introduced humans to the mysteries of the deep-sea.

Lionfish can only swim so far north of their tropical paradise in the southeastern Atlantic

before the temperature becomes too cold, whereas humans can only dive so deep before the pressure of the sea becomes too great. Lionfish have scales for protection, fins for locomotion, gills for respiration, and swim bladders for buoyancy. SCUBA gear makes it possible for humans to be like fish, even if it adds 200 lbs to your body! They include a BCD (buoyancy compensator device) to control buoyancy, wet suits for protection and insulation, fins for underwater movement, and regulators attached to tanks for respiration. But lionfish are different from most fish because of their venomous spines that make them the “ultimate survivors” in their new habitat. Similarly, SCUBA divers are equipped with high-tech gear that may not be familiar to most people, yet it helps humans to survive and explore the underwater environment.

Yet there is one difference between lionfish and humans that became most apparent over the course of my cruise. Whereas lionfish may harm the local ecosystem by lowering the number and diversity of native fish in the Atlantic, deep-sea divers are in a unique position to help our society by increasing our knowledge and creating a better understanding of the importance of preserving native habitats.

Reflections...

On the final morning of the cruise my eyes met a resplendent sunrise that shot stars across the shimmering waters of an endless sea. As we headed to the east I grew quiet within... the bow of the ship almost seemed to leave traces of beautiful pigments on the sky’s canvas, an eternal embrace between the first ember of light and a lucid sky. Land is but hours away, but the memories of this journey will never leave my mind.

Who could forget such a fascinating, diverse group of personalities; Paula the lionfish enthusiast, Doug underwater photographer extraordinaire, Jay and the underwater hunt, Casey and the underwater flex, Christine the lion queen, Roldan king of transect, and last but certainly not least, Joe and the quest for Choco-tacos.



PICTURE CAPTIONS

HUMAN AND LIONFISH: The SCUBA invention has extended the reaches of human exploration from land to the deep-sea. Photo taken by Doug Kesling.

DIVE DECK INTERVIEW: Thomas Nassif interviews Casey Coy on the dive deck for his video documentary on lionfish and deep-sea divers.

SUNRISE AT THE BOW: “The bow of the ship left traces of beautiful pigments on the sky’s canvas, an eternal embrace between the first ember of light and a lucid sky.” Photo taken by Thomas Nassif.