

IT'S THE NIUSE FOR JULY, 2008 !!

MBULO CATHEDRALS, BEKA BEKA OPENING, A VERY BUSY WEEKEND, STRANGE CRITTER AWARD, NEVERENDING SURPRISES, TREE CLIMBING DOG, BIG SURF, BACK TO SCHOOL, DISAPPOINTMENT, WE BELIEVE IN MIRACLES, CUTTLEFISH LEAF, PAUL AND BOWEN, OFF TO HONIARA.

Hello Everyone,

And a happy, rainy Sabbath to all of you, as the sun struggles to peek its face through the clouds that have been replenishing our water supply through much of the day. I LOVE rainy Sabbath's- do not mind doing computer work on my one really quiet day of the week. My solar is charging with enough power to sit down and visit with all of you.

Ness and Jim, dubbed our explorers, stayed with us for 2 full weeks. It has been many years since I quit paying attention to the marine life on a dive and simply lost myself in the scenery. Every corner we turned at Mbulo Cathedrals provided a new spectrum of tunnels, arches, and caverns with the soul filling light shows they provide. To exit a cavern to massive cabbage corals, bommies covered with every hard coral imaginable, turn a corner into another shimmering panorama of light and dark was an enriching experience.

Beka Beka HS was holding the grand opening of their EU funded beautiful new classroom building. With Wilderness being full, we put all hands to work to make sleeping space and a huge feast for 8 additional people from the government and media, including the Honorable Steve Abana, Minister of Development, Planning and Aid Coordination. With Dellington's help, I took him underwater on an intro dive for a brief tour of our underwater treasures. I expressed my desire to take my entire A Team to Honiara for the upcoming Trade Show featuring a Tourism Village with SCUBA booth and the value of having Solomon Islanders do equipment demos, talk with people, and present marine programs, but my lack of funding to do so. They promised they would consider my request. The Beka Beka ceremony was a down-home affair with personal anecdotes from many of the speakers. Wayne and I were among the honored guests on the platform; I was doubly honored to be one of 6 to cut the ribbons officially opening the new building.

Checking around our little cove at the end of a night dive, I stared at an unfathomable array of sponges, tunicates and algae in a hole; I stared- and stared- until it moved. A kind of decorator crab-Camposia retusa is the closest I can come to an ID in the book- it definitely wins the strange critter of the year award. Some truly big surf limited our choices for Jim and Ness's last week, but sparked the finding of another definite "keeper", Never ending surprises. Ness and I spent much of the dive together, and kept looking at each other in awe and wondering "what next"? Sharks, turtles, yes, but schools of different parrots, unicorns, white-spotted surgeons, rare lyre-tail hogfish and Meyer's butterflies had us ever anticipating the next surprises. Jim and Nate, doing snorkeling surveys for Jim's bumphead parrot project, were accompanied by dolphins, tuna, Spanish mackerel, sharks, and yes, even a few bumpheads. Joined by Peter Stewart from the lodge, and spending our surface interval on the beach at Kio, we were snacking on the beach, looking up fish when we heard Viso laughing and turned to find our lizard chasing SCUBA pup, Midget- high up in the buni tree- a sloping

banyan that the kids swing from into the sea.

Ness shared some of the findings of her research with me; this was the only SCUBA business that had 100% support from our villagers; Peava was the only place where it was universally agreed that everyone was better off because of our project, and that people hoped it would flourish and expand. It was also the only place where people expressed a desire to SCUBA to enjoy looking at the marine life versus taking it. Needless to say, her findings were a balm to my spirit, and engendered long discussions on the components of sustainability in a project such as ours.

It was another tearful good-bye with my team trying to express the difficulty of sharing so much with and becoming so close to people in such a short time, and then having to say good-bye. I remember going through this when I first started with Dive Makai, and reassured them that they will reap the benefits of their giving and friendship- our people will return, and the friendships will grow and flourish.

And it was back to school, with the decision to tackle the 2 hardest parts of the divemaster course, plow through them and put them behind us so we can coast and enjoy the remainder of the course. I am overjoyed to report that the Exams on the tables and physics are successfully behind us. There were many days I called a halt to class for a break, claiming we could barbecue on the smoke and fire pouring from our brains. As I had not touched (or used) most of the material for the 26 years since I took my instructor's course, I was struggling right along with them.

As there seemed to be no way we were going to be able to afford it, I sadly informed my team that it looked like none of us would be able to go to Honiara for the Trade show, My joy was boundless when I opened my E mail to find good news from Barney Sivoro, Director of Tourism, that the permanent Secretary had approved our request and was granting us the funds to travel to Honiara for a week. It was GREAT fun confronting my team as if we had something terribly wrong and a huge problem to deal with, and then showing them the E mail and watching the joy light their faces. We are all excitedly preparing - Viso already has his gear repair tools packed. We will be there from the 29th through July 6. My good friend, Mia Rimon, has offered us her house for the week- I am beyond amazed at how all this is coming together.

Supervising my divemasters helping to teach Morgan Jimmy his confined water work in the "pool", I signaled to "let's go and play for the rest of our air. Dellington gave the cuttlefish sign- I looked, but could only see a large brown leaf. Dell kept pointing, and I finally picked out a juvenile cuttlefish trying desperately and with great success to look exactly like a leaf. Fooled me!

P. S. July 4: We have returned from, and survived the TradeShow. Hot, dusty, but an awesome experience all the way around. Check us out at www.solomonstarnews.com . More next month.

Lisa

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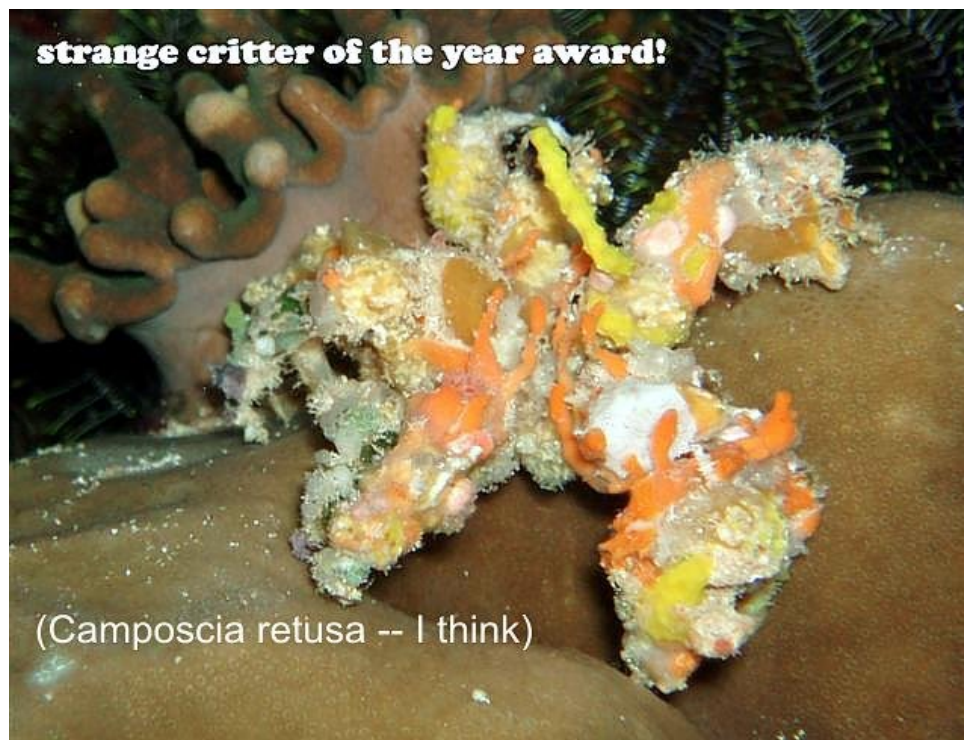
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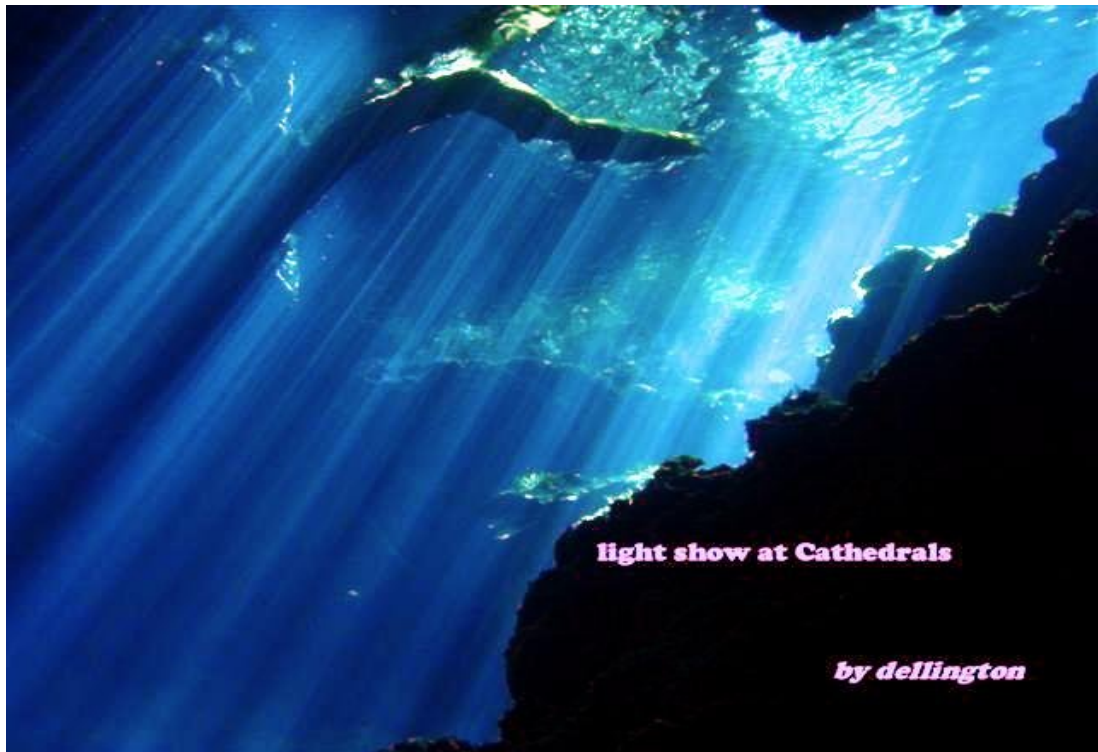


baby cuttlefish trying to be a leaf



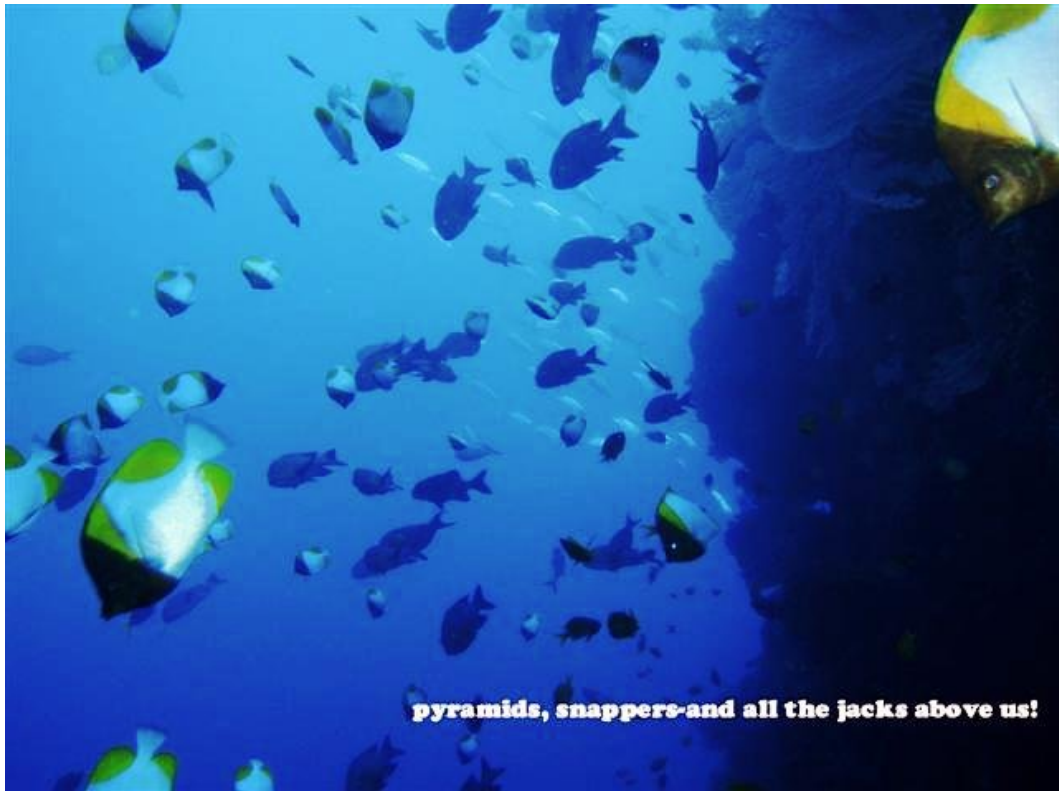
strange critter of the year award!

(Camposcia retusa -- I think)





a bird? a bat?? no-it's Midget!



pyramids, snappers-and all the jacks above us!