



Reflecting the Concerns of the Community

March 31 - April 6, 2004

Vol. 5, Issue 42

Daily
WeatherDaily
Traffic

7 Days



Classifieds

Contact
Us**Today is**

Wednesday, March 31, 2004

On the Beach: I

Marine Biologists Dramatize Oceans' Destruction

Kevin Allardice
Mirror contributing writer

Shifting Baselines' Hollywood Ocean Night brought marine biologists, celebrities and ocean lovers together Monday, March 22, for a discussion of the exponential destruction of our oceans, and the ways we can stop, and possibly reverse, the damage.

Ocean Night took place at Raleigh Studios in Hollywood, where a soundstage had been appropriately dressed for the evening. Wave-like patterns of light played on the freshly painted blue walls. Jellyfish wafted in illuminated tanks in the corners, and, on either side of the stage were long vertical banners that stretched up to the scaffolding, on which were listed fish that are in danger of being over-fished or losing their habitats. Each fish on the list was assigned a color, akin to the terrorist-alert spectrum, that indicated how dire its situation is.

Needless to say, the most popular fish were bright red.

Dr. Jeremy Jackson, who founded Shifting Baselines in 2002 with ocean conservationists and members of the Hollywood community, opened the discussion with a slide show that illustrated (in sometimes stomach-turning detail) the kind of damage that man has done to the oceans.

A coral reef biologist, Jackson showed how countless reefs that were once vital habitats for

Search **smmirror.com**:

Google Search

marine life have been destroyed. Slides of reefs now covered in green slime looked all too familiar.

His speech was punctuated with examples of the ways in which marine animals are quickly becoming extinct, but because, as he said, “Fortunately, I’m also a paleontologist,” he was able to find a bright side.

Jackson’s revelations were as fascinating as they were frightening. For example, in 1492, when Columbus sailed the ocean blue, “there were sea-monsters,” Jackson said. “Those people were not crazy.”

Indeed, in our (relatively) recent past, the ocean was home to animals of extraordinary size. But they have all gone the way of the dodo, killed off by the pollution generated by an industrialized society.

It was quite appropriate for Jackson, a pony-tailed professor at the Scripps Institute of Oceanography, to ally himself with ancient mariners who told tales about monsters in the sea. “Information,” he said, “has been labeled advocacy.” So, he explained, people have a tendency to discredit empirical data as alarmist hyperbole.

This point was illustrated by a short film by the Groundlings (one of three that were shown) that depicted a biologist showing data to a panel of politicians who said they didn’t believe in global warming because they found the ocean nice and cold.

Dr. Daniel Pauly followed, with a talk that focused on the problem of over-fishing. He, too, utilized slides, but warned, “I use metric units because I come from the land of freedom — freedom fries. I’m French.”

One of the more telling slides, however, needed only to be translated for the colorblind. It was a map of the western hemisphere, and the green areas represented parts of the ocean that are being protected from over-fishing. To no one’s surprise, all the oceans were red.

He then spoke of the natural reserves that for millions of years protected marine life. Fish could live far off-shore, or in deep waters, or near rocky

[Top Stories](#)
[Business News](#)
[Life & Arts](#)
[Star Gazing](#)
[Movie Showtimes](#)
[Seven Days /](#)
[Entertainment](#)
[Grooves / Music](#)
[Sports](#)
[Editorials](#)
[Starry Skies](#)
[Weekly Cartoon](#)
[Bargain CD of the Week](#)

[City of Santa Monica](#)
[City Council Agenda](#)
[Convention and Visitors Bureau](#)
[Getting Around Santa Monica](#)
[Santa Monica Pier Home](#)
[Santa Monica Pier Cam](#)
[Weather Cams - Nationwide](#)
[Emergency Information](#)

Yes
 No
 Undecided

beaches, where fishermen could not reach them. “Technology,” he said, “has removed those natural reserves.” Ironically (or perhaps fittingly), it is advanced technology that has been developed by the military and adapted and used by the fishing industry that has led to oceans being so drastically over-fished that entire ecosystems have been destroyed.

There are national parks where trees are protected, but “we don’t have any underwater parks,” Pauly said.

When Dr. Jackson and Dr. Pauly sat down with actress/moderators Sharon Lawrence and Wendy Malick for an open discussion with the audience, the talk turned more practical.

Actor Ben Stiller asked, “Do we really have to stop eating those fish? Because I love shrimp.” Indeed, a recurring topic of the night was which fish we should and should not eat. And shrimp were the third on the hot list — a dangerously bright red.

That led to a basic question: can enough people change their ways to make a difference? Perhaps, Jackson said, “if people like you yell and scream.”

But to assuage Stiller’s immediate hunger pangs, Pauly offered this piece of advice about shrimp: “Just look at them — they look like insects.”

In addition to certain fish being endangered, many popular fish that people eat every day are toxic because they are farmed in polluted waters.

The panel encouraged the audience to be more inquisitive about what they eat. But the dual issues of fish being both over-fished and toxic will perhaps work themselves out: “Maybe it’s adaptive,” Jackson said, only half-joking, “for fish to be poisonous.”

To wrap up the evening, celebrity moderator Amy Smart invited the audience to a seafood reception in the lobby. Even though she insisted that these were the “good fish” (not toxic or endangered — a healthy green on the list), people still approached the seafood with trepidation. Knowledge, after all, comes at a price.

Vote **View**

Submit Poll

[CNN.com](#)
[MSN Slate](#)
[Salon.com](#)
[Surf Report](#)
[Park Lands](#)
[Tenaya Lodge](#)
[Nature Pics](#)



Santa Monica Mountains
Conservancy

Ed. note: With this article, the Mirror begins an extended series of articles, "On the Beach," which will focus on life on the beach and in the ocean, because the beach and the ocean are the primary facts of Santa Monica, Venice and the Pacific Palisades.

Copyright © 2004 by Santa Monica Mirror. All rights reserved. Questions or comments?
publisher@smmirror.com