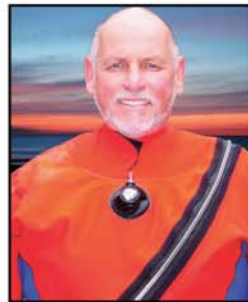


# Brick Diver's New Book Shows Undersea Jersey Shore



by Christa Riddle

**BRICK**--After the terror of Hurricane Sandy, the once-thought timeless treasures of the Jersey Shore became more precious than ever. The scars left behind by the super storm--toppled landmarks, ravaged homes, endless piles of wreckage and torn-apart boardwalks--will once again become our riches, thanks to the determined and spirited communities that have already begun the process of rebuilding. Yet somehow, despite all of the turmoil and



unfathomable changes that took place along our coast in October, the green-blue, salty waters of the Atlantic Ocean continue to ebb and flow, licking the inflicted shoreline much like an injured cat cleaning its wounds.

As coincidence would have it, Jersey-Shore resident, scuba diver and underwater photographer Herb Segars debuted his book, *Beneath the Garden State: Exploring Aquatic New Jersey*, only six months before Hurricane Sandy hit, paying testament to the hidden jewels that subsist in abundance below the surface of the Atlantic Ocean.

The book features over 230 color photographs capturing familiar and unfamiliar wildlife subjects that dwell in the Atlantic waters off of the Jersey coastline, along with Segars's anecdotes and personal accounts. Segars's photos borderline the magical as he brings to life the mysterious creatures living below the surface of the Atlantic, subjects that most of us never get the chance

to encounter or appreciate, such as a monkfish devouring a whole black sea bass and a sea star sprouting new limbs. Segars's photographs include snapshots of fish, invertebrates, turtles, sea horses, dolphins and whales.

Commenting on his book, Segars shares, "I worked all of my life towards this book. I like it because divers can show friends what they see. I also want non-divers to say, 'Wow, I didn't know we had this in New Jersey.' My goal is to show people what's here, to reveal what they otherwise would never get a chance to see. I find that children really take to the book because kids have a strong ability to focus. They love to observe and ask questions. After all, they are the ones that are going to someday change the world."

For three decades, Segars has combed the Jersey shoreline's artificial reefs, made of sunken subway cars, tanks, tug boats and ships, searching for the often-allusive photo of something never seen before. "I have favorite places, but I like going someplace new, not knowing what I'm going to find," shares Segars. "Wildlife photography, especially underwater, is difficult to time. You never know when you will encounter that special moment, and that is why you have to dive a lot. That is why it took me 30 years to accumulate the pictures for this book. Some things I have only seen once

during all of the years I have been diving, and I will never see them again. Once-in-a-lifetime moments are what I look to capture and share." Segars's love of the water began at a young age, when he would go swimming in a small pond near his home in South River, New Jersey.

"This was the first place I snorkeled. One summer, I made it my project to raise from the bottom of the lake an old boat filled with rocks," recalls Segars. "The boat's wood was waterlogged, and even though I removed the rocks, the boat stayed where it was." Around 1980, in the Cayman Islands, Segars headed underwater for the first time with a camera. The snapshots fell short of his expectations, but his interest in capturing marine life through a lens had only just begun. Segars took a diving course in Grand Cayman and became certified to dive. "I had to be actively doing something while diving, and I was already interested in photography," says Segars. Soon, Segars started exploring the waters off of the Jersey Shore, an area convenient location-wise but difficult to photograph underwater due to low light and poor visibil-

ity. "Either you love to dive here, or you hate it," comments Segars. "There is no in-between. And, of those who love it, only a small percentage are photographers."

I am happy that the number continues to grow due to digital photography." The artificial reefs and 2,000-plus shipwrecks off of the Jersey coastline provide underwater wildlife havens; a good num-



ber of these are captured in Segars's book.

Segars likes to keep his dives to depths of 80 feet or less so he can spend more time taking pictures. "One intriguing dive for me was off the Long Branch coast, where two pre-Civil War locomotives rest on the bottom of the ocean, side by side. No one knows who built them, when they were actually built or how they wound up on the bottom of the ocean," shares Segars. Segars also likes photographing tug boats; his wife, Veronica, has one of

her own. Segars has not been diving since Hurricane Sandy and will not do so until June or July. However, he expresses concern that the Barnegat Bay will take a long time to recuperate from all of the sediment and sand that now covers the underwater ecosystems due to storm surges. "You have eel grass covering the bay's floor. Certain marine life use this eel grass for food, homes and protection. With the eel grass covered by sand and sediment, this dependent wildlife may not survive. This affects the entire underwater food chain in the area," tells Segars. He also notes that the sediment has raised the water level, which causes a risk for future flooding; if the bottom of the bay is dredged to alleviate this problem, it will greatly impact the bay's underwater eco systems.

For more information about Herb Segars and his new book, *Beneath the Garden State: Exploring Aquatic New Jersey*, as well as a sampling of his awe-inspiring photography, be sure to visit his website at [www.gotosnapshot.com](http://www.gotosnapshot.com).

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