

A Remarkable Exploration at Your Fingertips

By John Tapley

Beneath the Garden State: Exploring Aquatic New Jersey, written by acclaimed photographer and diver Herb Segars, is a wonderful read for dive and travel enthusiasts and an incredible teaching tool for anyone interested in the world beneath the waves. Spread across nearly 150 pages, this masterfully produced compendium evokes imagination, inspiration, and the importance of ecological conservation and exemplifies the many diverse, unique creatures which inhabit the natural world. The top notch quality imagery, captioned with informative and adventurous vigor, openly invites readers of all ages to share in Segars' underwater expeditions.

The book begins with a personal, warming account of Segars' family, followed by an important understanding that the ocean's majesty is not limited to the gargantuan; indeed, it is all the aquatic components big and small; familiar and bizarre; colorful and drab - which make our oceans important and instill a sense of wonder in us all.

Chapter 1, The Underwater Garden State, showcases



oceanic life dotted just off New Jersey's coast. Segar stresses the important impact these inshore and offshore waters have on the state's fishing, recreational and restaurant economies. Featured in this section are butterflyfish, sculpin, sea snails, varieties of crab, and a phenomenal view of the Shark River Inlet.

The next chapter, Offshore Building Blocks, is a compelling section which emphasizes the importance of reefs for providing homes for countless creatures. Wreck divers will find this chapter particularly inspiring, as it unveils six unique artificial reef sites. The reefs' residents include anemones,

sea stars, nudibranchs, urchins, and corals; they are brilliantly photographed in colorful poses.

The third chapter, Reef Fish, shows the litany of fish which inhabit local reefs: Blackfish, sea bass, hake, cod, and sculpin to name some. Of special mention are Segars' incredible shots of the elusive, camouflaged sea ravens.

Slimmer critters are the subject of Chapter 4: The Nook and Cranny Dwellers. All sorts of sea life which jut and scurry through cracks and crevices are photographed with extreme detail: pout, toadfish, and eels to name a few.

Lengthy chapter 5, entitled The Sand Dwellers, focuses on the multitude of creatures which make the sandy bottom their home. Captured in print, readers can enjoy skate, flounder, monkfish and exquisitely patterned scallops, whelks, crabs, and snails.

Pelagic Species, chapter 6, features the larger denizens of the New Jersey waters. Segars' photographs of sharks, seahorses, rudderfish, turtles,

and scamp are offered in stunning clarity. The bizarre ocean sunfish presented in this chapter is an odd spectacle not to be missed.

Jellyfish, medusae, plankton, and other luminous specimens are presented in vibrant, electrifying contrast against dark backdrops in Jellyfish and Plankton. This chapter highlights some of the most unique creatures ever discovered in the underwater world and their alien shapes, textures, and colors.

The adventure through New Jersey's waters finishes with two chapters - New Jersey's Artificial Reefs and New Jersey Shipwrecks - which offer immense, exceptionally detailed looks at the state's offshore man made reefs. The rusted remnants of ships, tugboats, cars, and even a tank and locomotive are all presented in large images with aquatic life draped all over their structures. These images are hauntingly still and provoke thought of environmental consciousness; it is a perfect message to end the book. ■



▲ Herb Segars with camera. Photo © 2002 Veronica Segars