

COVER STORY

Sea Save Foundation makes most of expedition

Malibu nonprofit relaunches blog to urge protection of Cocos Island

LAUREN COUGHLIN, Editor

Georgienne Bradley worries that she is not getting her point across.

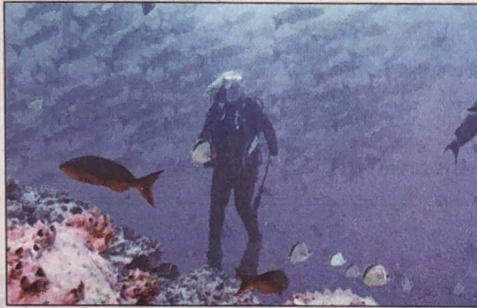
Her voice is strained by asthma, and she catches herself talking in circles. She has no reason to worry; her passion and the reason for it comes through crystal clear in each and every word she utters.

The director of Malibu's Sea Save Foundation is talking with the *Surfside News* about her latest expedition to Cocos Island — a place she refers to as her own personal heaven. And though not everyone's idea of heaven is a national park teeming with sharks and lacking civilization, Bradley is not everyone, and the pristine marine ecosystem found at Cocos Island — a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization World Heritage Site since 1997 — is not everywhere.

"Cocos Island is a huge place for me," Bradley said. "I always tell people it's where I leave my heart and when I go back, I'm going home."

For roughly 30 years, Bradley has been drawn time and time again to Cocos Island.

During the most recent trip, from May 3-14, Bradley — along with fellow Sea Save representatives Jay Ireland, Phil Coles and Toby Meinken, among others — were joined by



Malibu's Georgienne Bradley calls Cocos Island — a place where "every dive could probably be the best dive of your life" — her personal heaven.

a notable guest: Haydee Rodriguez, Costa Rica's deputy minister of water and sea.

"To get her out there was critical ... so she could actually see and experience what a lush, healthy ecosystem looks like," Bradley said.

And though Cocos Island has many protections, Bradley does not think for a second that it is immune from threats including development or poaching.

"I think we're getting further and further away as a species from the paradigm of nature," she said. "We don't really embrace raw nature."

Bradley noted that Rodriguez faces pressure from the fishing community in Costa Rica to open protected areas to fishing, but Bradley hopes the visit inspired her to not only keep the existing protections in place, but to increase them.

"I think this trip gave her ideas, knowledge and potential solutions," Bradley said.

Meanwhile, Bradley and Sea Save Foundation are

looking to bridge the gap and educate those who have not been able to experience the unique ecosystem one-on-one. That's a large segment of the population, Bradley notes, as trips to the island are costly and it can only be reached by boat. Further, there is no lodging on the island.

Bradley paints a picture of diving in an environment where one must hold their breath so as not to scare away sharks that are mere feet away, and in which sunlight all but disappears as schools of fish surround their guests.

"Every dive could probably be the best dive of your life," Bradley states.

The land does not disappoint either. Cliffs and waterfalls adorn the lush, tropical island.

According to UNESCO, Cocos Island is host to "some 70 endemic species of vascular plants and several endemic animals, including three birds, two reptiles and even two freshwater fish" as well as a robust population of several rare sharks.

"It is a very rich eco-



Sea Save Foundation Director Georgienne Bradley (left) shows Haydee Rodriguez, Costa Rica's deputy minister of water and sea, around Cocos Island in a submarine. PHOTOS BY SEA SAVE FOUNDATION



Cocos Island is home to hammerhead sharks as well as a number of rare sharks.

system where we're seeing changes constantly, depending on which apex predators move in and out," Bradley explained. "It's a living laboratory."

Protecting Cocos Island, as well as its threatened and endangered marine life "is critical to a civilized society [and] future," Bradley said.

Sea Save Foundation is

looking to spread that message far and wide through its recently revived blog, cocoslandnews.seasave.org. Bradley hopes individuals such as Rodriguez also will provide an important voice for the area and its various rare inhabitants.

Later this year, Sea Save Foundation will again go to battle for endangered species.

The Malibu nonprofit is among those who are to attend the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, commonly known as CITES.

The event was originally scheduled for late May in Sri Lanka, but was canceled after area bombings took place on Easter Sunday.