

# Smithsonian Splash



Smithsonian  
Scientific Diving Program

Spring 2025



Credit: Maggie Benson/NMNH

## Welcome to Splash, the Smithsonian Scientific Diving Newsletter

Welcome to the first edition of the Smithsonian Splash! Splash is the bi-annual newsletter providing updates, new information and exciting news involving the Smithsonian Scientific Diving Program.

The SDP conducts research all over the world in exciting locations and works on many important projects which we will highlight in this newsletter.

We will also provide notices of training opportunities as well as any updates in the SDP.

This edition features the 2024 program statistics and projects from divers at NMNH and SERC. We also introduce the Dive Safety Officers from the Central Dive Office and each of the Smithsonian Dive Units.

If you or your team have news to share, please reach out to your unit diving officer (UDO) so that we can highlight and showcase your work in future editions of the newsletter.

Enjoy our first newsletter!

In this newsletter  
you can expect:

Program Updates

Reminders for  
Divers

Meet the DSOs

2024 Statistics

Scientific Diving  
Spotlight



Credit: Maggie Benson/NMNH

# Program Updates



Credit: Leah Harper/SERC



April 2025

## Training at Smithsonian Marine Station, Fort Pierce

The SDP will host a Scientific Diver Training Course at SMSFP from April 21 through May 2, 2025. This training is for scientists who need to utilize scuba diving for their research.

The two week course will be packed full of lectures, pool training sessions, rescue diver training, safe boating practices, scientific diver skills, safe diving practices, and much more.

At the conclusion of the course, trainees will become certified scientific divers ready to conduct research underwater.

If you are a Smithsonian employee, fellow, intern, contractor, or volunteer who needs scuba to conduct your research and are interested in the Scientific Diver Course in the future, contact your Unit Diving Officer (UDO).



Credit: Zach Foltz/SMS

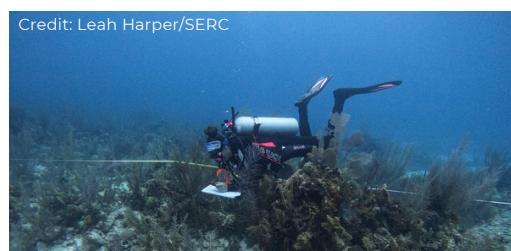
## DSO Meeting in Fort Pierce

**January 2025**

Unit Diving Officers from SERC, STRI and SMSFP met for a week of training and professional development in Fort Pierce, FL, in January.

Diving officers and staff from SMSFP completed a two-day Wilderness First Aid course, which provided thorough emergency training for those working in remote locations.

Diving officers spent the rest of the week working on standardizing diving first aid training, practicing diving skills, and planning upcoming training sessions.



## Dive Officers at AAUS

**March 2025**

The SDP was represented by the Central Dive Office and the UDOs from SERC and SMSFP at the annual American Academy of Underwater Sciences (AAUS) meeting, hosted by the University of Washington in Seattle, WA.

AAUS establishes the training and diving standards which scientific diving programs adhere to. At the annual meeting, diving officers attended training sessions, scientific diving seminars, and the business meeting, where organizational members discuss challenges, standard changes, and new developments in the scientific diving community.

# Reminders for Divers

## DecoStop Profiles



Credit: Ryan Chabbotte/SERC

With summer approaching, now is the perfect time to login to your [DecoStop](#) account and review your profile.

Ensure that your contact, emergency contact, and any additional information is correct and current. Additionally, you can review your diving first aid, gear service dates, and dive log information to ensure that you are up to date.

Reviewing and updating this information now will help limit delays in dive plan approval and authorization.

## Dive Plan Submission

Field season will be here soon! As you are developing plans to dive either at your unit or at a remote field site, please keep your unit diving officer in the loop.

It is helpful to discuss any upcoming dives with your UDO as early as possible. The earlier that your UDO is aware of your diving plans, the easier it is to overcome obstacles or find solutions to challenges.

Please submit your dive plan in DECOStop at least 6 weeks before you plan to start diving.



Credit: Ryan Chabbotte/SERC



Subtidal oyster reef in Maryland. Credit: SERC

# Meet the Dive Safety Officers



## Smithsonian Scientific Diving Program

The Smithsonian Scientific Diving Program (SDP) is made up of the Central Diving Office (CDO), located within the Office of Safety, Health, and Environmental Management, and the Smithsonian Diving Units.

The CDO provides oversight to the individual units while the unit diving officers work directly with the scientific divers in the respective units.

Diving officers are available to answer questions, provide support and guidance, and help scientists navigate the standards and requirements to safely and efficiently use scuba for their research.



**Douglas Schleiger**  
CDO

Doug has served as the Smithsonian Institution's Scientific Diving Officer (SDO) for over 11 years, providing oversight to SDP activities.

He joined the Smithsonian after a 27-year career as a Corps Officer and civilian with NOAA and has vast experience and knowledge in diving, small boat safety, and shipboard operations.

Contact: SchleigerD@si.edu



**Laurie Penland**  
CDO

Laurie serves as the Assistant Scientific Diving Officer and works with the SDO in managing the SDP providing oversight to all Smithsonian research diving activities.

She has traveled the globe providing diving support to scientific research, dive training, and underwater photography, including diving in extreme cold environments.

Contact: PenlandL@si.edu

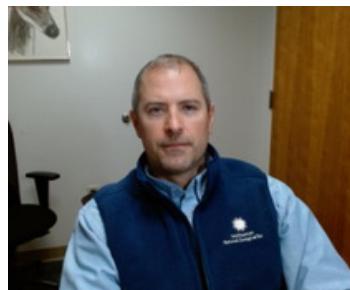


**Paul Johnston**  
NMAH

Former Vice Chair of the SDCB, Johnston is UDO for the National Museum of American History.

A nautical archaeologist, he serves the NMAH as Curator of Maritime History and Acting Chair of the Division of Work and Industry. His research specialties are shipwrecks and motorcycles.

Contact: JohnstonPF@si.edu



**Richard Quintero**  
NZCBI

Richard has been with the NZCBI since 2006 focusing on animal science, husbandry, conservation, and operations and maintenance of aquatic LSS for the Living Collection at NZCBI Rock Creek campus.

He joined the SDP in 2012 and became the NZCBI UDO in 2015. Much of the diving operations at NZCBI are devoted to the care and maintenance of the aquatic animal habitats at the Rock Creek campus

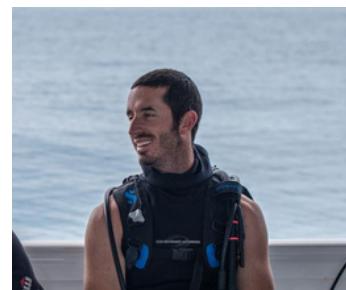


**Emily Anderson**  
SERC

Emily serves as the UDO for SERC and provides oversight to all SERC diving activities.

Along with her UDO duties, Anderson is a technician in the Fisheries Conservation Lab and the MarineGEO program and is involved in long term fisheries research and habitat monitoring in the Chesapeake Bay and around the world.

Contact: AndersonER@si.edu



**Zach Foltz**  
NMNH/SMSFP/CCRE

Zach has been the UDO for SMSFP and [CCRE](#) programs for the last decade and recently stepped up as the UDO for NMNH.

He is experienced in conducting fish diversity and population assessment surveys throughout the Caribbean. Zach is also the station manager for the CCRE program, based on Carrie Bow Cay, Belize.

Contact: FoltzZ@si.edu



**Raul De Leon**  
STRI

Raul De Leon has served as the UDO for STRI for over 10 years. With more than 30 years of experience in technical, commercial, and scientific diving, he has certified and trained divers at all levels.

Additionally, Raul brings extensive expertise in aquatic safety to STRI, having worked as a safety diver for numerous films and television shows.

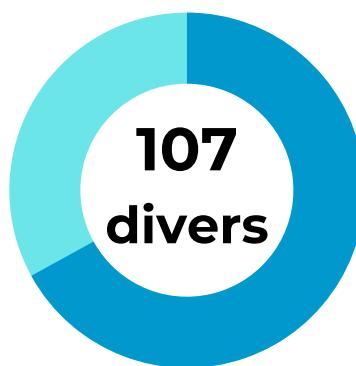
Contact: DeLeonR2@si.edu

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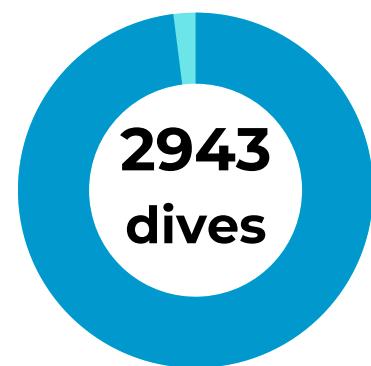
## 2024 Statistics



127 Authorized plans  
6 Cancelled plans



73 SI Divers  
34 Visiting Divers



2882 dives with air  
61 dives with Nitrox

2024 was a great year for the SDP with 127 authorized dive plans, 107 divers, and 2943 dives logged in DecoStop. While dive plans, number of divers, and total dives were slightly lower in 2024 compared to 2023, we have made a great recovery from the COVID-19 recession.

Congratulations to our top divers of 2024! Leah Harper was the most active diver with 159 logged dives.

Our divers were well-traveled in 2024. We logged dives around the world including at the SERC, NZCBI, SMS, CBC, and STRI units as well as Hawaii, Australia, Mozambique, Senegal, France, Brazil, Curaçao Galapagos, Costa Rica, Florida, and the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. We're excited to see where our divers go in 2025!

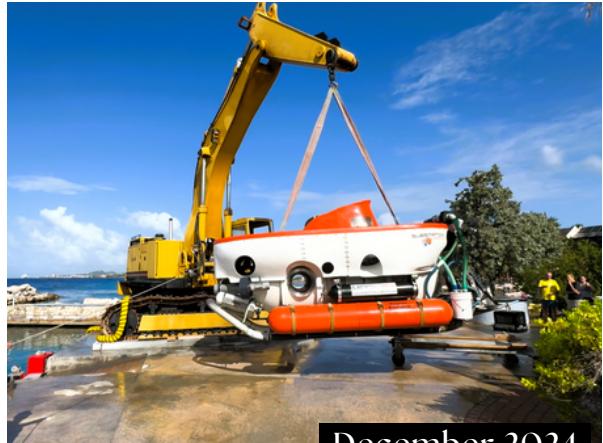
### Dive Leaderboard

Diver	Unit	Dives
Leah Harper	SERC	159
Anabell Cornejo	STRI	133
Diego Valladares Quiros	STRI	113
Carolina Cesar Avila	STRI	89
Migdonio Gonzalez	STRI	83



**Where are we diving?** Smithsonian divers traveled around the world in 2024, with dive plans in locations ranging from the Galapagos Islands to Australia

# Scientific Diving Spotlight



## Carole Baldwin

In early December 2024, a group of ten NMNH staff teamed up for a Deep Reef Observation Project (DROP) expedition to Curacao to retrieve and process 12 autonomous reef monitoring structures (ARMS) that were deployed in 2019 at depths from 50 to 700 ft.

They also retrieved 11 temperature loggers from the reef slope between 50' and 800', downloaded data that they recorded every minute for the past year, and redeployed them to obtain year 12 data.



DROP is in its 14th year of exploring biodiversity and long-term changes on tropical deep reefs in the southern Caribbean and has involved more than 40 Smithsonian marine scientists and staff.

The December 2024 expedition team included Valerie Paul, Zach Foltz, and Jessica Zehnpfennig from SMSFP and Chris Meyer, Lee Weigt, Sarah Tweedt, Amy Driskell, Katie Murphy, Matt Girard, and Carole Baldwin from NHB. Luiz Rocha from the California Academy of Sciences and several members of his team joined us to learn how to process ARMS. Great team, great field effort!

Learn more about DROP [here!](#)



# Scientific Diving Spotlight



January 2025

## Reef Life Survey in Saudi Arabia

Leah Harper

Leah Harper, along with MarineGEO volunteer diver Matt Doherty, traveled to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia to conduct a week-long Reef Life Survey mission at King Abdullah University of Science and Technology.

The group surveyed 11 distinct reef sites, where they identified and counted ~230 unique species of fishes and mobile invertebrates.

The data collected will represent the first contribution to Reef Life Survey's standard global database from Saudi Arabia.



Photo Credit: Leah Harper/SERC

*Thank you for reading!*



**Smithsonian**  
*Scientific Diving Program*

[dive.si.edu](http://dive.si.edu)