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A Flying Dutchman in New York!

Invitation, Travel and NERAC II.

By Ron Hessing

Some months ago, a unique possibility presented itself to me from Joe Yaiullo, who I met in March, 2005 in London, United Kingdom.

I received an invitation to speak for LIREEF NY, the Long Island Reef Association, of which Joe is President on the 11th and 12 March 2006. This was the second time they arranged their annual event called NERAC II.

I accepted this invitation without hesitation. A visit to learn about an aquarium association overseas, meeting club members and other participants is already an event in itself, but there was a second advantage: Joe is also the co-founder of Atlantis Marine World in Riverhead, NY - the Long Island Reef Association have the benefits of that unique environment at their disposal.

This location is very special to local reef enthusiasts, in that it holds the fifth largest, and most impressive reef aquarium in the world. I regularly hear aquarists say that the quality and beauty of some reef aquariums kept by some of the more fanatical hobbyists are way ahead of what a lot of public aquariums have to offer; as a regular visitor to public aquariums I must say that it is often the case. However the aquarium in Atlantis Marine World is one of the exceptions.

Imagine the most beautiful average-sized that you've ever seen. Close your eyes- can you see it? Now, imagine that the aquarium blown up again and again several times until you finally see that splendid aquarium, an unbelievable mixed reef aquarium of 80,000 litres (320,000 gallons)!

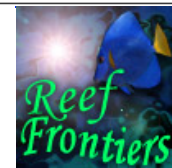
The Atlantis Marine World complex and of course that splendid aquarium formed the setting for the NERACII, organized by the Long Island Reef Association. This young club, about two years old, who put on the event, and which one can have nothing but respect for them!

The event took place in two rooms. These were used for speakers, several exhibitors, sponsors and wholesalers presenting their products, a tour behind the scenes, a raffle, a great workshop - coral fragging by Anthony Calfo- and an evening dinner in the same room where the large reef aquarium stands! A dinner with the participants and club members in such an intimate setting, surrounded by world-class aquariums was an unforgettable experience.

The four days' trip was packed with activities and the days passed quickly in a blink of an eye. We started our trip very early in the morning we were ready to leave the Schiphol airport, Netherlands. We flew, stopped off in Heathrow London then to New York the Friday morning. After a long flight (beautiful things seen beneath us, see photographs) and with the time difference in our favour, we arrived early midday in JFK airport, New York.

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Approaching New York, Long Island finally came into view. Almost there!

Some days before we travelled I checked the Internet for the weather forecasts locally for NY. We'd paid attention to rain, fog and low temperatures and had taken along winter coats and hats. To our big surprise the weather had radically changed and on arrival we found that the temperature had quickly risen around 25 degrees Celcius. The following our arrival it remained this temperature and that was first class!

On arrival we were welcomed by the treasurer of the club, Vinnie Kreyling. Vinnie transported us in a fine large American car to his house in a quiet village on Long Island. After some hours chatting about the hobby, we had admired his aquarium, met his most charming wife and ate a nice dinner. We soon left for the hotel (that the club had arranged) that lay more easterly on the island just 4 miles from Atlantis Marine World.

The hotel was also the place of residence for other attendees and speakers, so we made some contacts during breakfast the following morning. The first day we larrived early at Atlantis Marine World where the organisation was still busy putting things together properly at quarter past eleven my first lecture would start.

The first lecture went well fairly well (it was my first overseas lecture in a non- native language), though to show off the photography better I would have preferred the room to have been darker - to optimally show stunning photography it is important that the room be properly darkened. In spite of that, I continued to present, people remained seated and I gladly received compliments afterwards.



The speakers for the weekend (Left to Right), Julian Sprung, Ron Hessing, Anthony Calfo, Sallie Boggs, Todd Gardner and Joe Yaiullo couldn't resist striking a silly pose!

Joe was there for the last minutes of the lecture to remind us we were having midday lunch. We had lunch at the harbor next to the facility with a small group of 10 people, amongst which were Joe Yaiullo, Gregory Schiemer, Joe Scavo, James Chou and Julian Sprung. Afterwards, my travel companion and I took a short behind-the-scenes tour to see the techniques used by the reef aquarium and its coral propagation areas really stoked the imagination. You can see some photographs of it in the report of the aquarium.



Dinner at Atlantis Marine World

As of six o'clock in the evening we started dinner and it lasted up until ten o'clock. Everything had really been well planned for the participants and club members. The food was excellent and the caterer looked after the people very well. There had been even been the thought of live music performed by the blues band of Todd Gardner.

Following the lecture and the dinner, we had a group photograph session of all the speakers in front the aquarium – it was one of the highlights of my day!

Later in the evening we went to the bar of the hotel with a few people then we met at NERAC to socialize for some hours. This was with president of the Boston Reefers Club, Joe Scavo, and a couple of his friends. Very nice social people, and I had a great time. They were also present during the two days, and had good appreciation for the LIREEF.

The next morning, of course on time, we arrived in Atlantis Marine World, where my second lecture was to kick off at quarter past eleven. This lecture went much better in all areas than the first and that felt great. The room was also much darker which was much better. My presentations are a mixture of the content of interest and lots and lots of beautiful photos that I have taken. They show much better in a darker room! It was exciting because besides the large number of club members, some board members and other speakers present, it went well. Thank goodness because it was being videoed!

The people in the room reacted spontaneously and there was a good overall interaction with everyone. The interaction was appreciated by all and allowed more people to feel free to ask questions. That is what a speaker hopes for, in my opinion. Everyone gave a long and warm applause afterwards which was nice, however, as a speaker you always have to thank the audience because of the mass of material they have to sit and absorb for quite a long time. The people seemed to have enjoyed it nevertheless, which was great!

Saturday night during the speaker's photo session I first met Anthony Calfo. Anthony was also present during the lecture on Sunday morning and his positive contribution was welcome. Anthony Calfo has his own company and is a very 'all round' sort of man. Anthony has his own spot on several forums and every year has a full agenda giving lectures and workshops worldwide. You can find Anthony Calfo on www.marinedepot.com or www.reeffrontiers.com and on his own site, www.readingtrees.com, and as a writer, he has produced several Articles and several books written by himself. Visit his site for further information.



Anthony Calfo demonstrates coral propagation. First, the finesses of a razor blade to remove a ring of tissue from the capitulum of a sarcophyton (top L and R), leaving an aesthetically pleasing colony to regrow (bottom L). Second, the brute force of a wet saw and chisel needed for some stony corals (below R).

See the pictures below for Anthony in action during his workshop!

Because Anthony was leaving Monday night, just like us, we discussed with each other what we would like to do on the Monday morning. Because we really wanted to see Manhattan and Anthony was also enthusiastic, we decided to do just that.

After the NERAC raffle had taken place and Anthony gave his fragging workshop, the event came to an end. We were asked to join some club members for an evening dinner. Off course we joined the gang and they decided that an Italian was the right choice - indeed it was an experience. In an old Italian/American fashion and style, we were served such a huge quantity of food that only the biggest and hungriest people could have eaten it all! Eric and Simone, who selected the restaurant, made a fine choice!

I met some new people, and after a couple of very sociable and enjoyable hours we were asked by Eric and Simone to join them for a drink at their home to see pride and joy of Eric. Of course it's Simone, but this time he meant his aquarium ☺



Eric peers through the Ogles Mesoscope (left) and a beautiful Blastomussa in his aquarium (right).

Eric and Simone took us in their luxurious (through European eyes), large American Pick Up to their house where we saw a really beautiful and established aquarium. Of course, I took some photographs to give you a sneak preview. I unpacked the Ogles Mesoscope and they saw their corals as they'd never seen them before, they were truly surprised by the view! You see things in a manner that the naked eye simply cannot see.

The following morning at half past six ,we got up for the busy journey to the center of New York, Manhattan. We were picked up by Anthony Calfo and Jim More. Jim is a board member of LIREEF, and for his profession as electro technical mechanic, he has worked for 15 years in the center of New York. He sure knows the way around! Far beyond his duty, he volunteered to be our guide. And to be completely honest, a great guy and the best guide you'll ever find!

After a splendid day, under the best weather conditions conceivable, we were thrilled to be among things like the Chrysler building, Trump Tower, Empire State Building & the Rockefeller building. We also saw the Jewish temple (impressive from the outside, spectacular on the inside!!), the New York Public Library, a short and unexpected visit to the sound check for the David Letterman program, Times Square, City Hall, the subway, Ground Zero, and Wall Street.



Three of Manhattan's impressive Skyscrapers!

Quite hungry from the walk through the city we decided to grab some lunch at a nice restaurant in the district of Little Italy. Afterwards, we said our farewells in the nicest of ways.

Richer in experience and full of new impressions, we left some new friends. In the taxi en route to JFK airport, we were thinking how to plan the quickest way to visit again ☺.

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