

# **Prolific Sea Life Abounds at Sarasota County Artificial Reefs**

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On November 12, 1999, monitoring dives were conducted at two Sarasota County artificial reef sites (M-17 and M-4). Todd R. Barber, President of the Reef Ball Development Group, Ltd. and Foundation, Inc. in Sarasota, organized the monitoring excursion. Mr. Barber is the inventor of the current concrete reef ball design used in many artificial reefs around the world. Scuba Quest, Inc. in Sarasota donated the dive boat. The dive group consisted of State artificial reef coordinators and members of the Gulf and Atlantic States Marine Fishery Commission.

The first dive was at the M-17 reef ball site, located 10 miles west of the Venice Inlet. Growth on the 200+ reef balls was astonishing. Though only three years old, every reef ball harbored lots of hard corals, 14 types of tunicates (sea squirts), and oculina (ivory bush coral) up to 2 feet long. Fish species were varied and abundant. Divers observed thousands of fish around the site, including juvenile and adult jewfish, grouper, snapper, amberjack, hogfish, filefish, and tropical fish, such as blue angels, grey angels, and beaugregories.

A sea turtle, beautiful purple and yellow nudibranchs (shell-less snails), and a variety of starfish were also reported. The coral growth and marine life usage in only three years at this reef is truly remarkable, especially when compared to the life on reefs constructed of other materials.

The second dive was conducted at the M-4 artificial reef site, located approximately 7 miles west of New Pass. This site consists of concrete culverts that were placed ten years ago and 225 concrete reef balls that were deployed one year ago. The coral growth on the reef balls far surpassed the growth on the ten-year old culverts! Again, divers observed prolific and varied sea life in and around the artificial

reef structure. Porgies were in schools so thick that they obscured the view of the reef balls. Hundreds of flounder, grouper, lizard fish, snapper, Spanish mackerel, barracuda, and large jewfish were also observed.

It was also noted at both artificial reef sites that no subsidence or sinking of the reef balls has occurred. This was a problem with earlier artificial reef materials such as bricks/blocks and concrete culverts. The concrete reef balls are built with larger flat bottoms to reduce subsidence when placed on soft sand or mud bottoms.

We thank Mr. Todd Barber, President of the Reef Ball

Development Group, for his report on the monitoring dives and for contributing to the tremendous habitat success of Sarasota County's artificial reefs.