

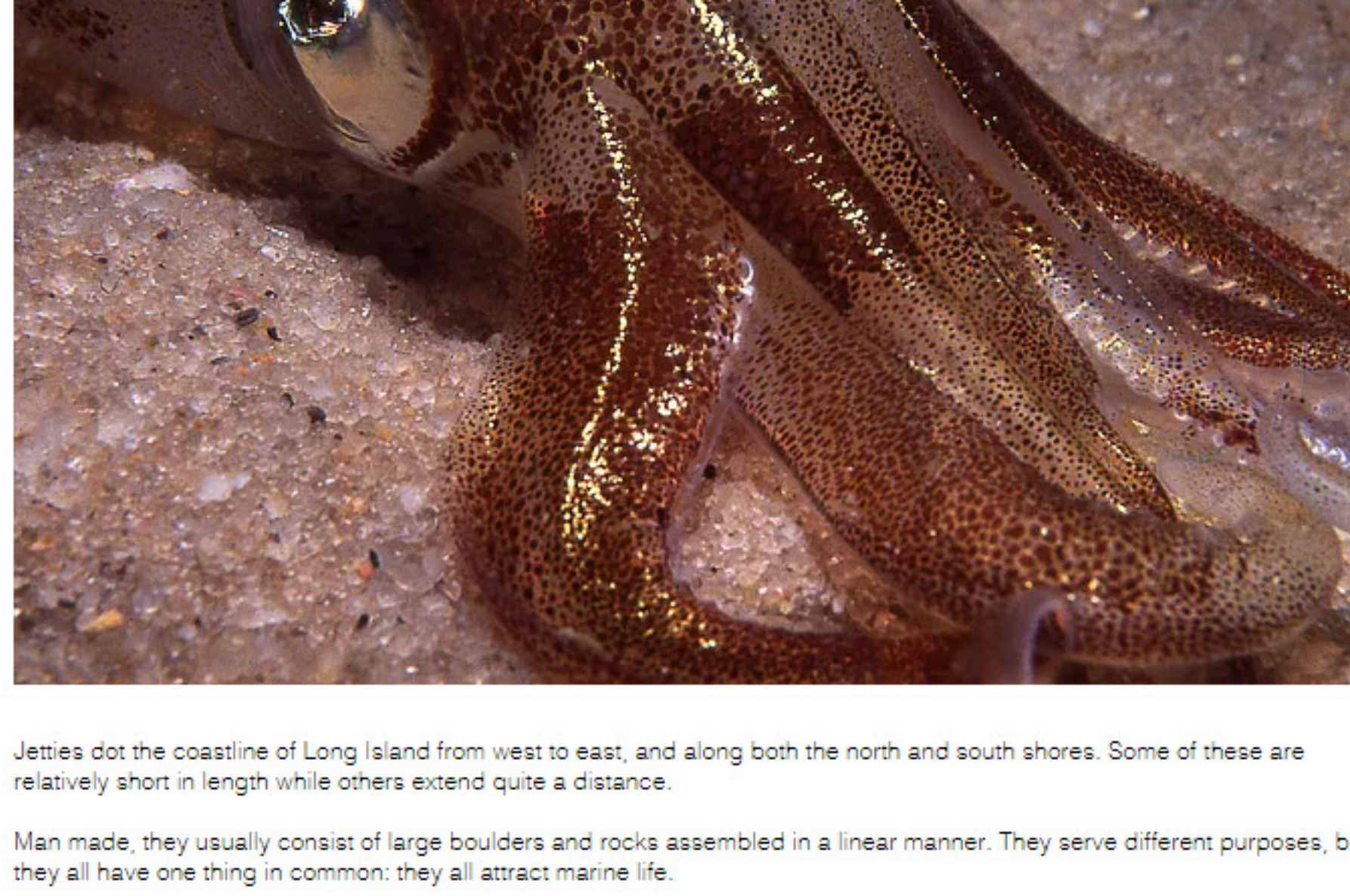
Northeast Dive News Features

Life on the Jetty

June 7, 2017 | Article and photos by Michael Salviarezza and Christopher Weaver (Eco-Photo Explorers)

Jetty, Breakwater, Groin, Rockpile.

There are many different ways to describe the structures built out of rocks and boulders that we often see extending out to open water with the intention of altering currents, tidal flows or protecting inlets and boat channels. For divers, though, the word most often used is "paradise".



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Jetties dot the coastline of Long Island from west to east, and along both the north and south shores. Some of these are relatively short in length while others extend quite a distance.

Man made, they usually consist of large boulders and rocks assembled in a linear manner. They serve different purposes, but they all have one thing in common: they all attract marine life.

Diving a jetty is a great way to observe the plethora of marine organisms that inhabit our waters. Because jetties are simple to navigate and are often protected from dangerous currents, divers of all levels can enjoy the marine wonders they contain.

Marine Life

Jetties serve as their own form of artificial reefs. One of the first things divers will see when exploring a jetty are the anemones, tunicates and encrusting sponges that attach themselves to the hard surfaces of the rocks and boulders. These organisms can transform the bland surfaces of the rocks into thriving, colorful reefs of marine life.

Careful examination of the jetty walls will also reveal starfish clinging to the rocks and searching for their next meal. Dining on mussels and other small shellfish, starfish help to keep populations of these bivalves in check. Another invertebrate often found wedged in the creases between the rocks are sea urchins, which graze the jetty eating algae and other small plant life.

In the crevices, holes and other protected corners of the jetty walls divers can spot a variety of crabs lobster and fish seeking shelter from predators. On Long Island, divers will most often see calico crabs, spider crabs, rock crabs, and blue-claw crabs, along with hermit crabs, moon snails, whelks, and scallops.

In addition to the invertebrate life, fish find jetties a great place to hide, hunt and raise their young. Hiding in the holes created by the jumbled rocks are bergall, blackfish, black sea bass and an occasional American eel. Besides the fish seeking shelter, jetties who search the sandy bottoms along the jetty will find flounder, sea robins and porgy. Schools of striped bass, menhaden, and bream will also visit the jetty and swarms of baitfish will often be found near the breakwater.

Jetties are home to virtually all species of marine life found in our local waters. Divers who venture below at night will be blessed with an explosion of nighttime activity on the jetty as anemones extend their tentacles, crabs emerge from their crevices to scavenge for food and lobsters prowl for prey along the bottom.

During the late summer and early autumn months, the Gulf Stream brings wayward tropical fish to the waters of Long Island. These fish, caught in the northward bound current of this great ocean river, find themselves a long way from home in colder waters facing certain death in the coming winter months. Triggerfish, butterflyfish, grouper, and even an occasional angelfish can be seen hiding along the jetty. For Long Island divers who wish to stock their home aquariums, these lost tropicals make a perfect addition as they will be unable to tolerate the coming winter months.

Safely Diving the Jetty

Although there are a number of jetties along our shores, it is not lawful or permissible to dive all of them. Before planning a jetty dive, first ensure that it is legal to do so. In some cases, town permits may be required. Make sure you have these or you may face an expensive surprise when you surface from your jetty dive.

Even though jetties seem simple to navigate, always be sure to take a compass reading and use a dive flag to mark your presence in the water. Recreational boats often use jetties as fishing spots and a dive flag will alert the boat operator to your presence.

Make sure you properly assess the dive conditions prior to the dive. Jetties can be subject to dramatic tidal movement so a dive at low tide might end up being too shallow. If there are waves crashing against the rocks, chances are visibility will be very diminished and the surge might be dangerous.

When diving a jetty, simply swim out alongside the jetty until you wish to turn around or until you've reached the point. Be careful of monofilament line and other entanglement dangers as you explore the rockpile and don't reach into deep holes to avoid getting stuck, stung or bitten by something that might be living there. Some jetties mark the entrance to boat channels. It is never legal, or safe, to dive on the inside of a boat channel. Do not "round the corner" at the point of the jetty to venture into the boat channel. If you are making a night dive along a jetty, make sure you have a light source on shore that you can rely on to indicate where the dive should end and be sure that you have redundant light sources underwater while you are diving.

Where to dive jetties on Long Island

There are several spectacular jetty dives on Long Island. The Montauk Twin Jetties, marking the eastern and western boundary of the entrance to Lake Montauk, make excellent night dives. Divers on the western jetty will find water depths reaching 38 feet at the tip of the jetty where schools of menhaden are often seen.

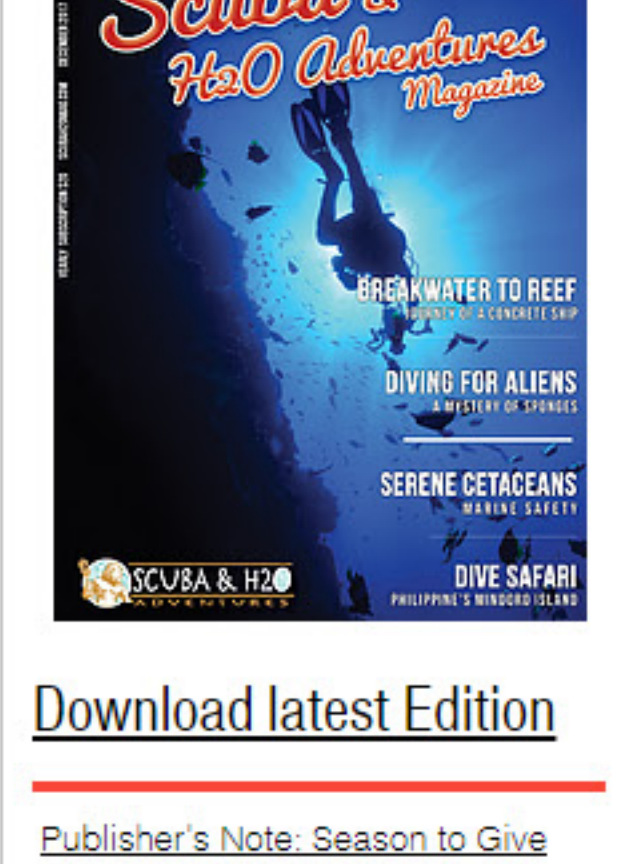
In the town of Southold, the East and West Jetties alongside Mattuck Inlet are home to a wide variety of marine life. A Town Parking Permit is required at this site, but divers who are able to dive here are rewarded with good conditions and great marine life. At Cedar Beach Town Park in the town of Mt. Sinai, two jetties extend out into the Long Island Sound and are a favorite for both fisherman and scuba divers. The dives start in very shallow water but depths can reach 20 feet or more at the tips of the jetties. In the town of Greenport, one of the longest jetties on Long Island can be found. It extends south into the Peconic Bay and is home to a wide array of local marine life. This jetty is almost a half-mile from any parking so it is best to arrange diving on this jetty by boat. Similarly, the jetty at Jones Beach is located on a State Park where shore diving is prohibited. Boat dives on this jetty are possible and the site is home to many species of northeast marine life.

The jetties at Shinnecock Inlet extend into the open Atlantic Ocean. Both the East and West Jetties can be dived as long as you stay under the inlet, which is a very active, and dangerous boat channel. Be aware that the rocks of the west jetty extend underwater and curve east inside the inlet. Depths can reach 90 feet or more with strong currents so be sure not to extend too far along this jetty. These jetties are a great place to see tropical fish in the early autumn months, along with skates, stingrays, and black sea bass.

The best way to learn about diving on these or any other jetties is to check with the local dive shops. There you can inquire about tides, currents, water conditions and any access restrictions that may exist before you venture out. Jetty diving is a great way to experience the myriad life forms in our waters. Long Island is home to some spectacular jetty dives, an opportunity not to be missed.

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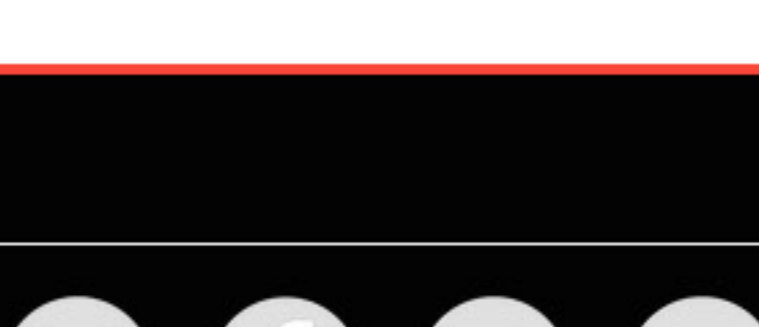
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