

Introduction to the Society

Santa Catalina Island is a unique place. It lies in the center of the Southern California Bight, approximately 40 kilometers from the Los Angeles metropolitan area. The relative isolation of the island permits the well-known maintenance of some of its original, terrestrial endemic fauna and flora. However, the Island's underwater environment is also matchless. Its marine temperature and exposure to the ocean is different than that of the mainland and other Channel Islands resulting in different marine biological assemblages. Most of California's marine fishes are found in the Southern California Bight and around the Island.

For many people a trip to Catalina is their introduction to the Pacific Ocean. Nightly cruises witness the famous Catalina flying fish. Near-surface Garibaldi are commonly seen while walking along the piers. Slightly deeper depths are revealed from glass-bottom boats or snorkeling in the clear waters of Lover's Cove. Deeper still, Avalon hosts one of the oldest underwater parks in the United States, frequented by SCUBA divers from around the world. These opportunities to observe the underwater world make Catalina a portal to the ocean for the hundreds of thousands of people who visit the island every year.

Santa Catalina, by virtue of its location, is uniquely situated for studying the ocean. It is easily accessible to volunteer researchers, many of whom became excited about the ocean from a visit to the Island. The Island is large, providing lots of habitat types such as kelp forest, underwater caves, pinnacles, sand barrens, rocky substrates, mud flats, headlands and coves. It is surrounded by deep water and bathed in the California Current. It is also in the Southern California Bight, a region of ocean that is a natural laboratory for analyzing ocean processes. And the underwater environment is relatively pristine providing a natural venue for analysis of the natural world. There is a long history of scientific study on the island enabled by the marine research facilities located there.

The Catalina Marine Society is dedicated to the study of underwater Catalina. The Society's researchers are volunteers, perhaps excited about the ocean during a Catalina visit, who strive to deliver top quality scientific contributions and insights. Scant resources can go along way when husbanded by volunteers who can undertake long term projects. They are not dependent on somewhat ephemeral funding mechanisms, nor driven to produce results on a rigid timetable that emphasizes a large number of papers in place of quality.

Of course a good study can take one far a field of the original issue. Insights into Catalina may be obtained from study of the adjacent waters. But that is okay. Catalina is connected to the rest of the earth through its relation to the ocean. And it is that relation which is the emphasis of our Society.