

Main Program: Curaçao – and a Shell Collecting Submarine Dive

Presented by **Leonor Parker Desmarais**

Meeting notes by Alan Grant and Faith Rubin



Photo courtesy of Steven Desmarais

Leonor presented an exciting trip that she and her husband **Steve**, and their son **Andrew**, made last year to **The Royal Sea Aquarium Resort in Curaçao**. **Curaçao** is one of the three **A-B-C islands** in the **Caribbean**. After setting the stage for both the island and the beautiful accommodations, Leonor went on to talk about their adventures on this trip. Leonor and her husband visited Curaçao in 2003, and throughout her talk, Leonor compared some of the places they visited 18 years earlier. There was an area to snorkel just off the resort, where many fascinating animals could be observed.

To begin their trip, the intrepid travelers, **Leonor**, **Steven**, and **Andrew**, squeezed into the sub with a pilot at **Substation Curaçao**. They journeyed *800 feet* down, stopping along the way to observe and collect bottles and shells. No effect of this dive depth was felt by the sub inhabitants. In addition to fish and coral, one of the more interesting observations was the **carrier shells** (*Xenophoridae*). The shells could be clearly seen on the sand, and several specimens were collected. Four of the collected carrier shell specimens were exhibited at the talk.



Photo courtesy Leonor Desmarais / taken by Martha Chiarciaro

Left to right: Steven, Leonor, and Andrew Desmarais



Shell-filled beer bottles collected onto a framed net attached to the sub
Photo of Image courtesy Alan Grant; Image courtesy Leonor Desmarais

The pilot was able to maneuver the sub to “scoop-up” the shell or bottle into a net attachment which held the items until the sub surfaced. One of the most interesting things collected was empty bottles discarded into the ocean. Two of the bottles had **Heineken** and **Amstel** labels, which makes sense since **Curaçao** is a **Netherlands** island and those are **Dutch beers**. For each bottle collected, the depth was recorded. The bottles themselves are not what is sought, but rather it is the contents of the bottle that is desired. They are often filled with shells. Leonor speculated that a small octopus might have used the empty bottle as a safe place to consume its prey (based on the research of and personal guidance from **Dr. Jerry Harasewych**, Smithsonian Curator of *Gastropods Emeritus*).

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Leonor carefully emptied the bottles of shells. The contents of each bottle were then cleaned, categorized, and each shell was identified (with expertise volunteered by fellow BMC members, **Scott Robichaud** and **Dan Teven**). The individual bottles and their contents were each shown to the club.

In addition to the fantastic sub dive, the **Desmarais** were able to snorkel and SCUBA dive. **Andrew** described a snorkeling encounter that he and Leonor had with wild sea turtles. **Steven** did some diving and described his experiences at various depths. The family was able to swim and interact with **dolphins** at the **Curaçao Dolphin Academy**. Some beautiful photos were shown of all three travelers being “kissed” by a dolphin.



Photo courtesy Alan Grant



Substation Curaçao

Curaçao Dolphin Academy



Photos courtesy Leonor Desmarais

Leonor ended her excellent presentation by describing and discussing various cultural features of the island, including other wildlife. For example, **birds** such as **Troupials**, **Bananaquits**, and **Magnificent Frigatebirds** were abundant. In one memorable event at the **aquarium**, Leonor described a close-up eye-to-eye encounter with a **queen conch** and many other unusual and beautiful animals. The floating markets, and the amazing food and cuisine of the island were described. Curaçao sounds like a fascinating land where much spectacular wildlife and interesting mollusks are encountered.