

INDEPENDENT STUDY: Module 2, Class 25

Please note: The pictures and comments in the transcript and recording below have been gathered over many years and where possible, I attribute them to their original source. If anyone connected with these photographs or comments would like them removed, please notify me and I will be happy to comply.

The recording for Class 25 is 36 minutes.

Class 25: Shell #s: 60, 22

I think by now you have no doubt of the diversity among our mollusk friends. One of the most dramatic examples of this is the contrast between the vampires and the heroes. First, let me introduce the vampires.

Maculated Dwarf Triton *Colubraria muricata*



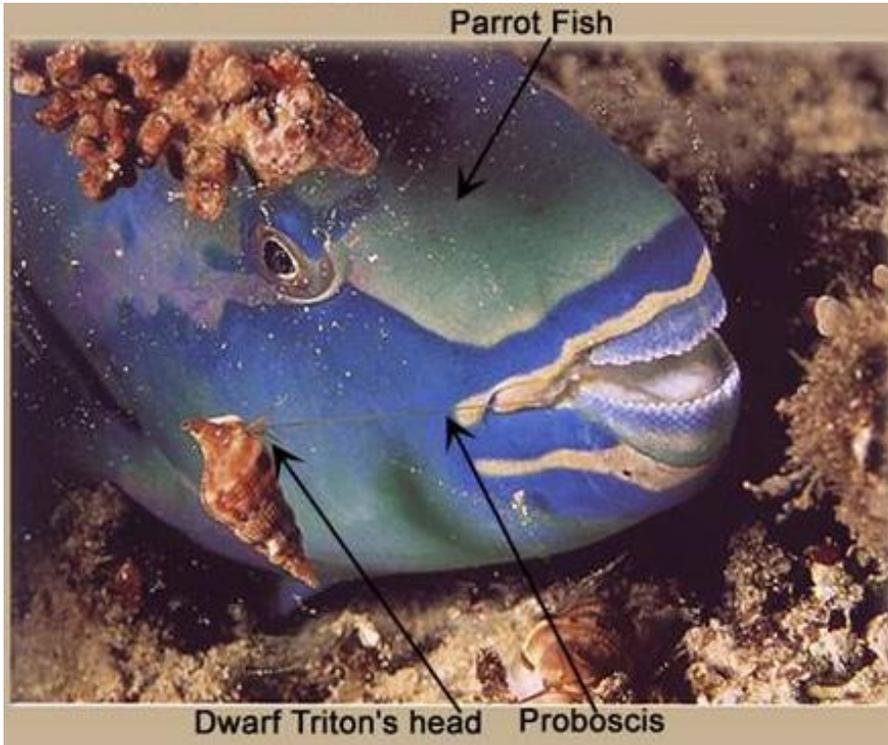
I would like you to meet the Maculated Dwarf Triton. It is much smaller than its relative, the Pacific Trumpet Triton that we met in class #14 on shells and religion.

If you recall, the Trumpet Triton was large enough to be employed as a trumpet for Shinto priests to call people in to pray.

Pacific Trumpet Triton



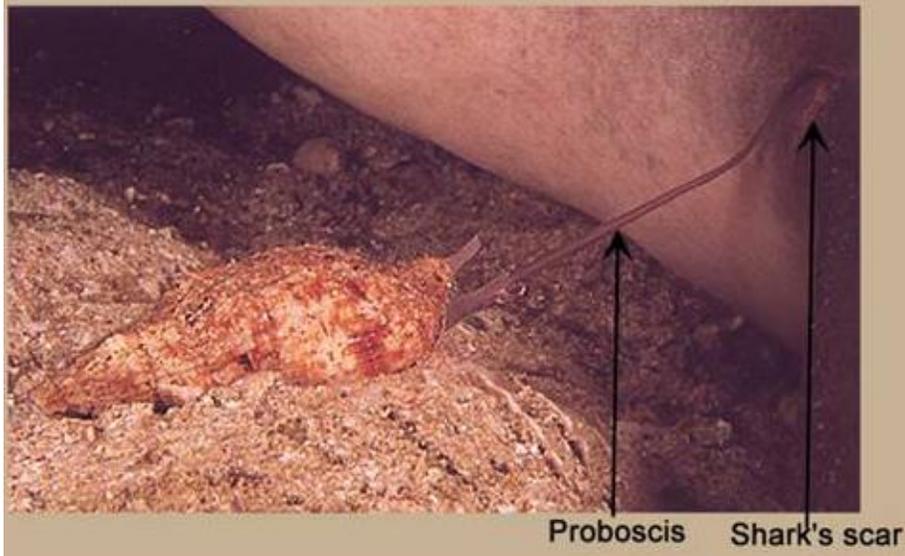
To understand why I label the Dwarf Triton a vampire, a picture is worth 1,000 words. Or should I say, two pictures.



The first shows a sleeping Parrot fish with a Dwarf Triton nearby. If you look very closely, there is a fine line leading from the Dwarf Triton to the fish.

That tiny line is the triton's proboscis...or mouth. In our lesson on Cone Shells, do you remember the radula with single file poisonous harpoon-like "teeth" to paralyze prey?

The radula ribbon is contained inside the proboscis. In the case of the Dwarf Triton, they possess a scalpel adaptation and anesthetizing chemicals allowing the proboscis to be inserted directly into the sleeping fish. The mollusk is then able to suck the host's blood to obtain nutrients.



In the second photo, the Dwarf Triton is penetrating a scar on a shark.

Since these mollusks are so tiny, I imagine the mollusk can eat its fill and be gone while the Parrot fish and shark never notice the intrusion.

Here is a fascinating description of the various components in the arsenal of these vampire tritons enabling them to suck the nutrients from a fish:

<http://dailyparasite.blogspot.com/2015/11/colubraria-reticulata.html>

With this behavior, it is small wonder that in *Ocean Oracle*, attraction to the **Maculate Dwarf Triton**, shell # 60, means "*Being drained, interacting with an exhausting person.*" If you have ever been around a person that seems to suck your energy from your body, this is a psychic vampire.

Before we discuss our next shell, please take a look at the shell on the next page and note your reaction. What do you think? Like it, bothers you, no reaction?

King Helmet Conch *Cassis tuberosa*



I want to share the information for any type of reaction because you may encounter clients who will be bothered by this shell, or you may find other times in your life when it bothers you. You can apply everything mentioned below should you encounter a time these reactions change.

This is a typical **King Helmet Conch** shell.

Helmet Conchs are large shells that grow to be 8 to 12 inches long.

Over thirty years ago when Robert first suggested that I use my own shells to do shell readings, I knew Helmet conchs were so named because their appearance resembles helmets worn by ancient warriors. In divination, Helmet Conchs represent “An ally, a champion on your behalf.” This is **shell #22** in *Ocean Oracle*.

If this shell’s meaning was derived from its name and appearance, do any of you notice something odd about the number assigned to this shell? #22 is not in the Name and Appearance category.

Do you remember the *Testiculus testiculus* that carried the meaning of someone with a lot of courage based upon its name? Many years later, I told you that I found a photo of this animal removing a sea urchin’s spines before consuming the urchin meat...visual proof that it lived up to its name. This allowed me to retain the meaning, but switch categories to the Behavior of the animal.

The King Helmet is #22 because many years after Robert’s suggestion to use my shells for readings, it also displayed behavior that confirmed the meaning originally derived from its name and appearance. That leads me to one of my favorite stories. It involves the Helmet Conch but requires a bit more of a foundation.

In Class 24, we learned what the razor clam had to teach us about compassion. If mankind’s spiritual ideal is to achieve a place of compassion and unconditional love, all we need do is regard our domestic pets to see they already possess these qualities.

As you have seen, these classes seem to mirror articles in the news the same week. After I taught this class, in that Sunday’s newspaper, the title of one article was “What our pets think of us.” It begins with this account:

Thor nibbled on his owner’s ear. The pit bull worked hard to awaken Kemper Hunter and his girlfriend, Sarah Laughlin. Instantly, they understood Thor’s urgency. They desperately attempted to fight the smoke to get to Shelby, their 3-month-old baby, but couldn’t. The fire department arrived to find the panicked couple screaming outside their home, assuming they had lost their baby and their dog in the still-blazing fire. Just then, they all witnessed Thor pulling the bassinet out the door to safety. Baby and dog were OK.

Last summer, Hunter, who lives in Bristol, Ind., told me, "I'm convinced if it wasn't for my dog, we would all be dead." The firefighters agreed.

At one time, scientists believed that dogs responded this way to save themselves, and in the process, they sometimes happened to save human lives. But in this and many other stories like it, the dog clearly risked his life. It appears as if Thor made a conscious decision to seek out and save the baby. How can this behavior be explained?

Certified applied animal behaviorist Patricia McConnell has a pretty simple explanation. "It's love," she says.

If you are willing to concede that these animals are pretty high up on the evolutionary ladder, what about a snail? Surely man is more highly evolved than a snail. Before deciding on an answer, let me submit this story of the Helmet Conch.

Horned Helmet *Cassis cornuta*

Aperture view



Proper position for the animal
to travel around seeking food.



First, a little background information: In *Ocean Oracle*, I photographed my Helmet Conch, shell #22, positioned on its side to show its aperture. However, this is not the proper position for the animal in its native environment. If the animal were positioned on its side, it would face two major dilemmas: The first involves its operculum. We learned in earlier classes that the mollusk's operculum functions as a trap door behind which the animal is safely ensconced in its shell. However, when it comes to Helmet Conchs, sources either report that Helmets lack operculums, or possess small operculums that do not fit their apertures. In either case, if the shell were on its side, the animal would be exposed to potential predators.

An equally vital reason that the aperture must be on the ground is to provide an exit for its foot so that the animal has a means to travel in its quest for food. The bottom picture of the Horned Helmet Conch shows the correct position for the mollusk.

With that background, on to the story!

In his book, *Shells Alive*, Neville Coleman, the Australian biologist, writes in great detail about his encounter with a group of Helmet Conch snails. During his routine recording of underwater functions, he came across three Helmet Conchs in a triangular formation each about 16 feet (5 meters) away from the other two. Two were positioned

properly to move around, but one was buried in the sand on its side, destined to death by predators or starvation as it would not be able to forage for food. Neville admits that it never occurred to him to turn this animal over because his mind was full of the recent observations from his swim, and he had to return to change film. He barely took notice of the three conchs except to observe their position. The only thought he gave them was to assume that other divers had gathered them on a boat and tossed them overboard after being informed that they were a protected species. A few hours later, with fresh air tanks and new film he made his way back and was amazed to see that the two conchs that were correctly positioned had moved closer to the one in trouble. Being a trained scientist, he sat back and observed the action.

It took many hours, but after the other two conchs approached the one buried in the sand, *“They had furrowed out a depression around the immobile shell, having dug away the sand as efficiently as if they were a pair of miniature bulldozers.”* He says: *“I just didn’t believe what might be happening, but I took the pictures anyway.”* As he watched in awe, after loosening the sand around the conch that was stuck, the two mobile conchs came around behind it, climbed up on the shell and toppled it over. Neville was nearly in tears as he witnessed, as he said, two *“dumb, unfeeling invertebrates without vision or any known form of communication, with pea-sized ‘brains’ and no reasoning mechanism that we are aware of combine their actions to assist another of their species in trouble.”*

My first thought after reading about this rescue was how remarkably in sync this account was with the divination meaning of “a champion on your behalf” someone willing to fight for you. The behavior of the animal confirmed the meaning originally based upon the name and appearance of the shell. In quite dramatic contrast, after I read Neville’s account of the Helmet Conchs, the headline story in my newspaper that night was about a woman in New York who was mugged. Despite her screams for help, everyone ignored her because they didn’t want to get involved. I couldn’t help but think that a Helmet Conch would devote hours to come to her rescue, *so which is the more evolved species?*

Neville also wrote of his spiritual challenge with what he witnessed. As he put it, *“I hated what my brain would eventually do to that scene. I cursed every bit of cold calculating behavioral biology I’d ever learned...I hated beyond hate, science, myself, and the world in general because I knew in my heart that this, like a thousand other encounters in the animal world must fade into objectiveness.”* He explains that science has exacting principles, *“of which feelings play no part. One cannot evaluate animal behavior in terms of human experiences and emotions.”*

As a scientist, I have faced a similar challenge to Neville’s when learning to translate seashells. I had to leave cold science and venture into the realm of feelings and intuition. I believe that animals are not some lower life forms that only operate upon instinct. Who says that we are ascribing human traits upon these animals?

Let’s consider this scene Neville witnessed. These conchs had to:

- (1) know a comrade was in trouble,
- (2) care enough to travel for hours to respond,
- (3) cooperate in figuring out a plan of action, then
- (4) carry it out—and *they did!*

Was this simply animal instinct? We can choose to believe that, or to believe that through compassion, intelligence, and dedication, that they accomplished a rescue that neither could have achieved alone.

Perhaps animals so obviously possess traits to which we aspire, that the only way we allow ourselves to be comfortable with their capacity for unconditional love is to label them as instinct. Otherwise, if animals possess this spiritual trait we desire, logic dictates that they are the more evolved beings, which many humans can’t accept. But, what if a dog *does* have a choice whether to run into a burning building or to dive into freezing waters to rescue a family member? These acts of love are then the genuine article and dismissing them as instinct does us all a disservice. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if the animals were mirroring our own potential, expressing the loving beings we really are?

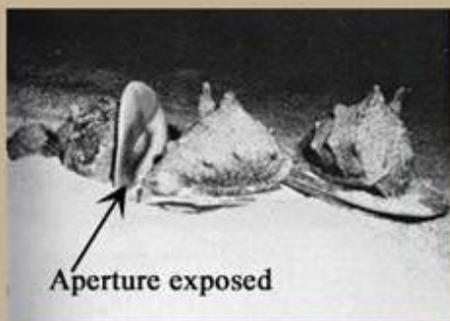
When I first posed the question, *“Who is the more evolved species?”* comparing the conch to the people who ignored the mugging victim, I was leaning toward the conch. I have since come to believe that energetically we are all light beings. One of us comes to Earth and zips on a “human suit,” another a “dog suit,” another a “snail

suit,” but underneath we are all formed from the same source. At this energetic level, no being is above or below another on the evolutionary scale: we are all one. Instead of looking upon this demonstration of animal compassion as “less than” by evaluating and labeling a behavior as “only instinct,” why not see the gift they offer us, teaching us who we are—even in the behavior of a snail?

Despite Neville’s knowledge that scientific methodology forbids interpreting animal behavior in terms of human emotions and values, I think he may have come to the same conclusions that I did. He ends his account with these words: “*Regardless of how, or why, I saw two ‘lowly invertebrates’ spend several hours saving the life of another ‘lowly invertebrate’ and nobody on this planet is going to convince me otherwise.*” You can also read his letter to me at the end of this transcript, and see how his scientific research has affected his beliefs.

With Neville Coleman’s permission, I’m honored to share the photographs of this rescue so that you can witness the act of these remarkable animals yourself and draw your own conclusions.

Horned Helmet Conchs *Cassia cornuta*



The conch in peril is on the left side of this photo. Two other conchs have approached the scene.



The two mobile conchs work like mini-bulldozers to loosen the sand around their stuck comrade.



Once the endangered conch was no longer stuck, the other two made their way around its back, climbed up on the shell, and toppled it over.

Photographs taken by Neville Coleman copied with permission from his book *Shells Alive!*

Now, let's look back at your reaction when you first viewed the King Helmet Shell. If the picture of the Helmet Conch bothered you, this reflects concerns around trust. Since Helmet conchs demonstrate that they are willing to fight for you, if you dislike this shell, it means someone you thought would be willing to fight for you let you down, perhaps harming your capacity to trust. If a loved one can't be trusted, how can you trust anyone? When this occurs, two things happen: 1) You hesitate to delegate anything to others because that gives them the power to let you down. Instead, you take on every task yourself. 2) In addition, if anyone asks you to do anything, you readily comply. After all, you know how it feels to be let down, and you would never want to create that pain in anyone else. Since there are only so many hours in the day, if you are unable to delegate and unable to say no to requests from others, you are faced with a dilemma. The more work you take on, the greater the risk that your standards will start to suffer. Should this happen to you, please reevaluate your feelings about trust.

Here is an exercise that might help with this issue. Imagine that every task asked of you is written on a separate plank of wood. There you stand with your arms outstretched, and one plank after another is placed upon your arms. If you never say no, the wood will keep piling up, one after the other, relentlessly. Their increased weight will eventually surpass the capabilities of your arm muscles causing you to drop the entire load. If, however, you can ask someone else to take a few pieces of wood from your arms, in essence delegating those pieces to someone else, you regain some strength in your arm muscles. This allows a breather before the next batch, and your arms will be capable of carrying the wood much longer. All you need in order to spare your arms, and the possibility of dropping everything, is trust enough to allow someone else to take a few of those planks from you.

That seems easy enough when presented logically. However, as with every other shell we have discussed, this inability to trust may not be at the conscious level. The client is on automatic pilot taking those planks of wood, one after the other, with no idea of his hidden motivation. He may not even notice that he is holding all this lumber until his arms give out and he drops everything. With his behavior on automatic pilot, this removes his ability to make choices. If he is unaware that he is carrying this pile of wooden planks, he is rendered incapable of delegating or refusing them. When this shell is disliked in a reading, it presents an opportunity to bring this belief of distrust to the client's awareness. Now, if he is open, he can decide if this belief is serving him, and choice can be restored.

As Dr. Phil has said so many times, you can't change what you don't acknowledge.

Here is the letter from Neville Coleman:

DEAR MICHELLE,

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INQUIRY AND INTERESTING INFORMATIONYES ...THERE ARE FAR MORE THINGS IN NATURE THAN MOST HUMANS COULD EVER IMAGINE , LET ALONE UNDERSTAND OR ACCEPT! AND THERE ARE A LOT MORE THINGS IN HUMAN NATURE THAN WE GIVE CREDIT FOR.....ALSO.

" HUMANS ARE AT WORST THEIR BEST.....AND AT BEST , THEIR WORST! NC.2003
WE HAVE THE "ADVANTAGE OF ADVERSITY" JUST LIKE NATURE....WE WORK BEST UNDER PRESSURE.....SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST !

YET IN HUMANS THIS DOES NOT ALWAYS APPLY AS SOMETIMES IT IS THOSE OF US WITH "GIFTED AFFLICTIONS" WHO RISE TO BE THE BEST AT WHAT WE DO DESPITE MATTERS THAT TO MOST MIGHT APPEAR IMPOSSIBLE (FOR THEM) TO OVERCOME. DOWN THROUGH HISTORY THERE ARE MANY EXAMPLES.

ONE CAN HAVE "FAITH IN BELIEF" OR "BELIEF IN FAITH " EITHER WILL WORK DEPENDING ON THE PERSONS PROGRAMMING BUT ONLY ONE REQUIRES THOUGHT!

YES YOU HAVE MY PERMISSION TO USE THE PICTURES.....

CREDITS...< www.nevillecoleman.com.au>

SINCERELY NEVILLE COLEMAN

In 2010, I received a letter from Neville commenting on the copy of *Ocean Wisdom* I sent him 6 months earlier. I had forgotten I sent it when I received a letter with a package from Neville.

5/24/2010 (Letter from Neville after receiving a copy of Ocean Wisdom)

Dear Michelle,

your book came at just the right moment.

Many thanks for the thoughts and acknowledgements and all the many ways you have found to help others.

I am sending you a "spiritual" book of my own poems and proverbs called "Mind Your Self".

Its really significant in a way, that we have attuned.

Quite remarkable in fact.

You could not have known, yet you found the story of the HELMET SHELLS.

It was the first time in recorded history that this behavior had ever been known amongst "lowly invertebrates". Especially ones with pea sized brains and no eyesight and they did it with such precision, at night!

I came from a very destructive background and shells were what led me to my present place in life.

A student of universal thought, who has listened to the silence in the wilderness and heard many wondrous things.

Thanks for sharing your messages.

Best wishes to you and yours.....Neville

With his transformation from unwavering scientist to a spiritual poet, I wrote back to Neville concluding that there were multiple reasons he was there to witness that event. The Conchs rescued more than their comrade that night.... they rescued Neville too. ☺

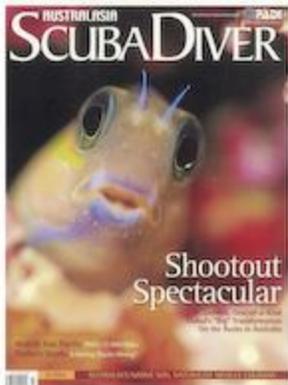
As you know, I always check on the internet to remain current with information for you. I am sad to report my discovery that in May 2012 Neville Coleman peacefully passed away. As the tribute on his website affirms, he left a tremendous legacy, and will always be remembered as a great underwater explorer and naturalist who dedicated his life to the World of Water. He leaves a great empty space in the diving community.

<https://divehappy.com/australia/neville-coleman-a-life-less-ordinary/> Interview with Neville Coleman.

(If this is no longer available, I copied this interview below.)

Neville Coleman – A Life Less Ordinary

50 years ago no one took Neville Coleman seriously when he set out to dive the entire Australian coast and document the incredible marine life he discovered. Now he's regarded as one of the world's leading authorities on Asia-Pacific's underwater world.



This article was first published in Scuba Diver AustralAsia magazine, Issue 3, 2008. It appears here in its unabridged form.

Unfortunately, Neville Coleman's website has disappeared from the internet since he passed away in 2012. You can still view it at Archive.org

If you've ever wondered exactly what exotic species of underwater creature you're looking at during a dive, chances are Neville Coleman can tell you. This 67 year old Australian has spent much of his life scuba diving and documenting marine life across AustralAsia, identifying 450 new species and classifying over 11,500 more.

Completely self-educated, Coleman's self-financed, four year Australian Coastal Marine Expedition between 1969 and 1973 saw him literally diving his way around the coast of Australia in order to assess the continent's largely unknown marine life. In doing so, Coleman established the first visual identification system of Australian aquatic flora and fauna and has continued to expand it in the years since, taking in much of the Indo Pacific as well.

To share his knowledge with a wider audience, Neville has authored over 60 reference books – the latest, Nudibranch Encyclopedia, is his most comprehensive identification volume yet, which has also been published digitally for viewing on both iPods and Pocket PCs. He is also working on an account of the Marine Expedition

and a series of television documentaries on his subsequent Indo-Pacific explorations which explain his conviction that “scuba diving is the greatest adventure activity on the planet”.

In 2007 Neville Coleman was inducted into the Scuba Hall Of Fame in recognition of outstanding achievements to the understanding and classification of marine life. Coleman’s enthusiasm for the ocean and his thirst to share new discoveries remains boundless.

Your induction into the Scuba Hall of Fame is a deserved recognition of your discovery of your work. As you’re a wholly self-taught and self-motivated scientist, do such plaudits have much value for you?

Certainly they do. Especially as it is an overseas award which is recognized the world over and therefore on the highest level obtainable. Advancing knowledge of the aquatic world in Australia appears to be of small consequence as there is little encouragement from government bodies as the government is also in the education business. Those who are employed by the government are not about to bestow any recognition on any individual, especially if they and the government and its entire resources can’t match that individual’s achievements.

Did you have any mentors when you were younger – either in person or simply from books?

When I was about 10 years old I cut out all sorts of animals from magazines and from stamps and breakfast cereal box cards and stuck them into the albums. I had a mammal album, a bird album, an insect album, a flower album, and a fish album, with critters from all over the world. I also had an old natural history encyclopedia (which I still have) which told of amazing creatures, though the drawings were a bit exaggerated, and the natural history details, as we know them today, somewhat of a giggle. However, these creatures inspired me, especially the strange fish (which I saw in the “SOLVOL SOAP” fish book of 1950). I was very keen on nature but there was no nature study at school.

Fifteen years later, I met Mr. Jack Ramsay who as a boy had built his own camera in the 1920s and took the first bird pictures in Australia. His father had been the Director of the Australian Museum and he was born in the basement. He helped our family along the road of life and showed me his shell collections and natural history collections and through seeing these I realized that perhaps the impossible dreams of a ten year old boy becoming a natural history explorer might not be that impossible.

Unfortunately I had no qualifications, not even a school certificate as I had left school early to get a job and help with paying the rent as my Dad was a violent alcoholic and drank most of the money he earned.

I was already scuba diving by the time and took all my new discoveries to the Australian Museum. It seemed so extraordinary to me that marine life was not common knowledge alive, only those found at low tide had been recorded. I could not understand that one had to have a dead preserved specimen before identification could be made and that there were only one or two people in the whole of Australia that could tell one specific creature from the other in any given group because they were the only experts. *There was no visual identification system for aquatic creatures in the whole of Australia.*

The Australian Coastal Marine Expedition lasted for 4 years. Would you say it was the defining event in your life from which everything else has flowed?

The decision to go ahead with the Australian Coastal Marine Expedition (even after the two underwater photographers who had also been going pulled out at the last minute) and left my dreams in tatters, was the second most important decision of my life. The first was to become a scuba diver after I had been badly scared by a shark in the shallows on the Great Barrier Reef when searching for shells.

My idea to complete a underwater photographic fauna survey of the Australian continent as a one man and one girl expedition without any previous experience, credentials, photographic experience, knowledge of Australia, insurance, institutional or business backing was to all the experts (who knew it was impossible) a joke. I couldn't understand why nobody had the vision to see how important aquatic visual identification would be to the future.

I guess on paper it didn't shape up to much. How can a boy's dream of being an explorer compete with the common sense of those who knew better? It seemed that everybody knew I would not get back alive, so there was not much point in them supporting the expedition. That is what gave every discovery so much value. Every day I put my life on the line, you don't get to be much closer to your spirit than that. I think some scientists became aware of what I was doing and today I have some of the most truly appreciated references any lay person could wish for from the Australian scientific community.

I worked in a printing factory, working as much overtime as I could to save for expedition over two years and sold my sports car to buy the 1952 land rover and 4 metre boat and 9 hp outboard. The Australian Rope Manufacturers donated some rope. The Australian Commonwealth grant system donated \$250.00 as 4 new tires and Smith's Crisps donated 10 bags of chips and 20 tins of dried vegetables. The expedition cost over \$48,000.00 (1969/73.)

Have you seen radical changes occurring at the dive destinations to which you've returned over the years? What do you think is the Big Picture view ?

Yes, I have seen lots of changes but as we have no base line studies available, everybody is only guessing. We really have no idea of what we have, so who can make any judgment on what used to be? Nature is very resilient and every thing changes every minute, with the seasons, the weather, the time, nothing is ever the same, from one minute to another.

Very few humans have any understanding whatsoever of the sea and its inhabitants. We are but children in the wilderness of ignorance making assumptions based on 40 years of human knowledge on a marine environment millions of years in the making. Of course humans change things, mostly because of greed, ignorance or survival. Because we have the technology to take everything we DO!

Is it fair to say that despite the huge amount of species that you've discovered and others that have been catalogued, there is still a huge backlog of work to be done in understanding these creatures? Do we need more marine biologists?

There is a gigantic backlog of marine life awaiting descriptions in museums. There are no longer even taxonomists in the various departments of Australian Museums as there are no jobs because there is no funding from the government just for the advancement of knowledge. Today's museums have to pay their own way, they are no longer fully supported by the government. Very few marine taxonomists have been trained in Australia over the last 40 years because there have not been jobs for them.

We are very much behind the eight ball. That is why my original AustralAsian Marine Photographic Index will prove so beneficial to the future of the Diving Industry because in reality.....divers are the only ones now who can successfully explore the oceans and record the marine life. Divers are now the only hope the World of water has. Unless we all work together to establish base line studies of our dive sites, it will never happen.

Marine science does not have the business interest, the skills, the motivation, or the opportunity to go photograph the entire marine fauna of the Asia/Indo- Pacific this because they must have funds to perform any duties and there are no funds. We, as the diving industry must wake up and see that we need to look after our own backyards and establish real programs of discovery for the new age of scuba divers to participate in, because everybody is an explorer and "learning is the greatest adventure" there is.

[**Update:** sadly Neville Coleman passed away on 5th May 2012 – his work will continue to be an inspiration and education for generations to come about the underwater world.]