
Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

April 2009

Deep Sea Adventure

By May Taylor

As far back as Caron de Mars can remember, she always wanted to become a marine biologist. Unfortunately, a trip she

made to a dermatologist's office to accompany her sister changed her fate. Although she was not the patient, the doctor spotted her and told her she needed to stay out of the sun because her skin was too sensitive and fair. This made Caron decide to put aside her

dream of working at sea as a marine biologist. *(Continued on page 2)*

Below: The National Geographic expedition team on the ship (Caron is in the middle of the front row wearing a white t-shirt).



APRIL MWF Meeting ■ **When:** 6:30 p.m., Monday, April 20, 2009. **Where:** Christine Purka's home, 1661 Dasmariñas Ave., Dasmariñas Village, Makati. **What:** Luigi Manzi, an Italian businessman living in the Philippines, will introduce the Art of Living, which offers simple but effective techniques that lead to better knowledge of oneself and eliminate toxins and stresses accumulated in our systems over time. We will practice a unique rhythmical breathing technique that can modify the negative tendencies of the mind and enhance peace, joy, and enthusiasm. **Bring:** Something to share for the potluck dinner. **May Meeting:** Monday, May 18, 2009.

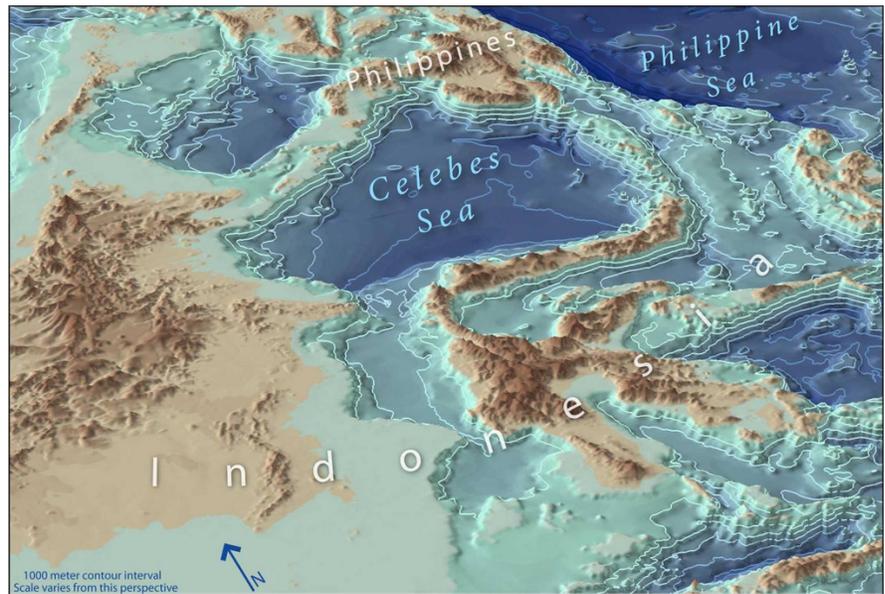
(Deep... from page 1)

Caron went on to pursue other interests, including working in broadcasting and insurance. She earned a Masters in Business Administration and joined the US Foreign Service in 2001. She currently works for the US Embassy as a Science, Technology and Environment Officer. She often organizes presentations for scientists visiting the Philippines: most recently a triad of speakers, including officials from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA); a biologist talking about marine biodiversity; and the Chicago Field Museum mammal curator, who has been coming to the Philippines annually since 1981 to study terrestrial biodiversity.

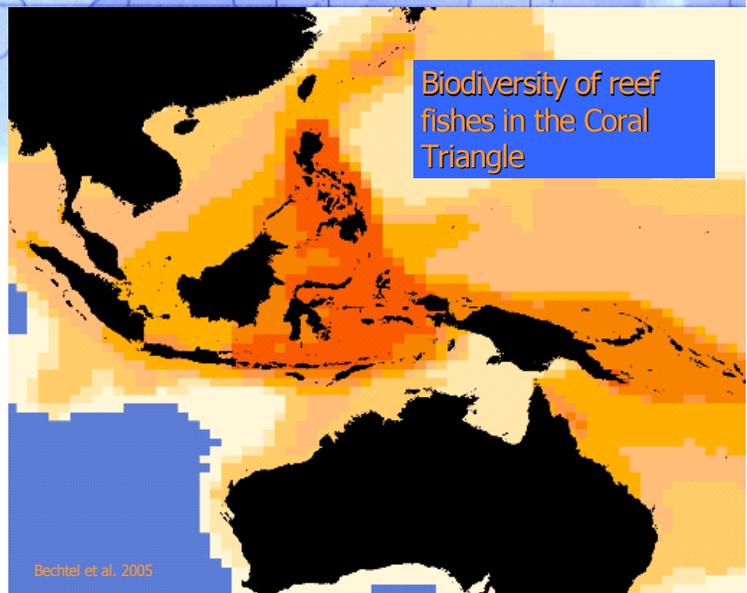
A few years ago, Caron was pleasantly surprised when she was asked to assist a group of marine biologists led by National Geographic that included scientists from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. They had been trying in vain for four years to organize an expedition dedicated to discovering new marine life in the deep ocean in Southeast Asia. The deep ocean is of interest for marine biologists as it is one of the largest areas of living space on earth. It is considerably different from the shallow waters, so exploring it could lead to the discovery of many new species and new biological phenomena. Unfortunately, less than 1% of its volume has been explored. New technologies such as remotely-operated underwater vehicles now allow survey and study of animals in the deepest parts of the ocean.

The National Geographic group was interested in the "coral triangle," a region containing the highest levels of marine biodiversity in the world that is located in the Celebes Sea off the coast of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Its deep, unexplored trenches are thought to have rich marine biodiversity akin to its shallow waters. This is what the researchers hoped to discover in the Inner-Space Speciation Project.

The group turned to Caron for help after the Indonesian government formally turned down their request to organize
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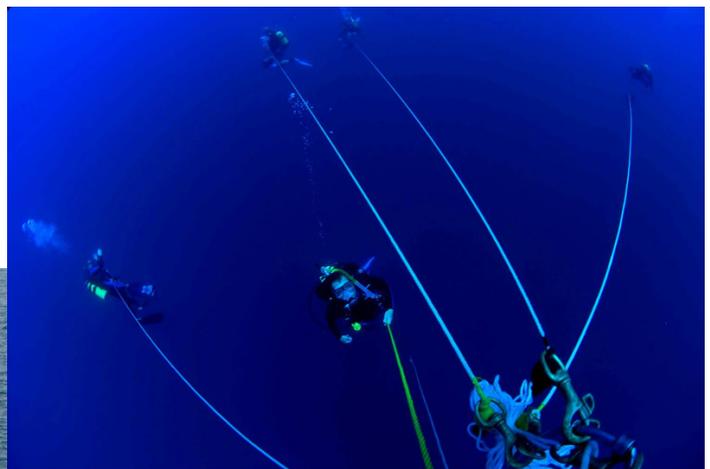
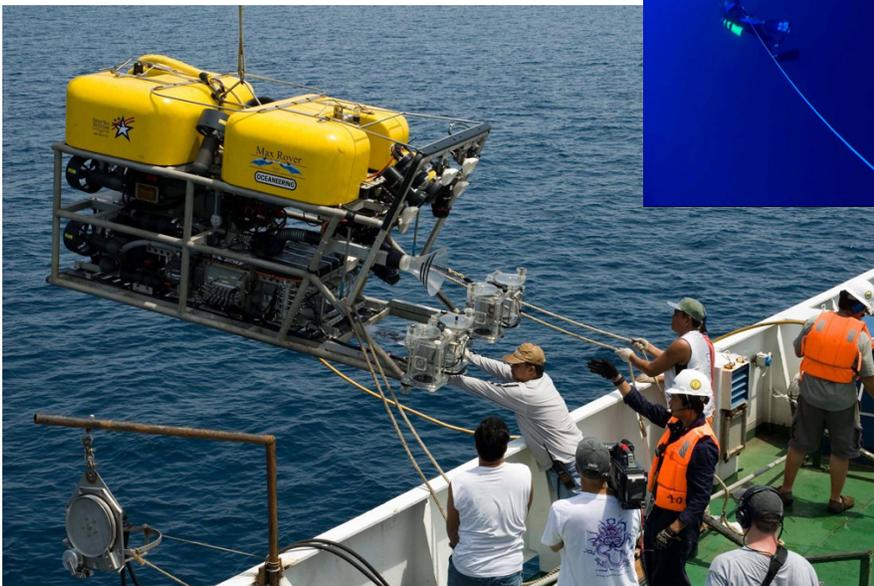


Above: The Celebes Sea is located between the Philippines and Indonesia.
Below: The expedition targeted the deep trenches of the Celebes Sea.



Right:
The highest levels of biodiversity are found in the dark orange area known as the Coral Triangle.

Top left, counterclockwise: The scientists observing and recording samples collected. ■ The security detail from the Philippine Navy and Coast Guard. ■ The remotely operated submersible equipped with cameras and a device (shaped like a funnel) to collect samples. ■ Divers collecting samples during a blue water dive. ■ Collecting a sample. ■ The new species of worm that was discovered during the exhibition.



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 the expedition, after four years of bureaucratic delay. The government was worried about security due to kidnappings in the past, and they were suspicious that the group might be spying or trying to profit from newly discovered species (biopiracy). They definitely chose the right advocate! Caron worked tirelessly and persistently for a year to get all the necessary approvals and logistical requirements in place for the expedition, including a boat, crew, security from the Philippine Navy and Coast Guard, food, and clearing all of the high tech equipment through customs (without paying bribes!). Truly an amazing feat. In exchange for all of her hard work, Caron was allowed to join the 59 other people on the ship for the 2 week expedition.

Once onboard, the group went to work. A highly maneuverable remotely operated underwater vehicle that can withstand being submerged in deep waters was used to take pictures and collect specimens in the deepest part



Above: An adorable box fish.

of the ocean. A large trawl net was used to collect small sea organisms such as jellyfish. Very specialized baited cameras were also lowered down on ropes to lure animals close to the camera in order to take their pictures. Unfortunately, two of these very expensive cameras were lost because they got tangled in large mounds of garbage deep in the ocean. In the shallower waters, the group went scuba diving to collect very small organisms and jellyfish. Using a harness so they wouldn't get disoriented in the featureless blue water, they dove down to 120 feet and used jars to collect the floating sea creatures.

Hundreds of organisms were collected and documented during the expedition, and a new species of worm and a black tinafore were discovered. The group was surprised that only two new species were found, but there were technical difficulties with the ship; if not lost, the two rope cameras may have recorded more new species; and the expedition was shorter than expected due to customs delays. But the expedition was still very useful as new data on biodiversity, evolution and ecology of deep-sea animals was collected and analyzed, and data from the study are contributing to the Census of Marine Life. National Geographic created a television documentary of the expedition that aired in the U.S. recently called "Into the Abyss." For Caron de Mars, this expedition was the culmination of a year of hard work, an exciting adventure, and the fulfillment of a life-long dream.

Although National Geographic Asia hasn't yet purchased the rights to "Into the Abyss," Caron has a copy to premier at noon on Earth Day, Wednesday April 22, 2009. If MWF members would like to preview this 47 minute National Geographic documentary, please email demarsce@state.gov with your full name, title, organization, and fax number by April 17, and she will fax an invitation to you.

Manila Women's Forum

Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, talk to women of various cultures, and share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join.

The current officers are: **Amy Alexander**, Message Board. **Julia Holz**, Treasurer, Membership and Programs. **Cecilia Leung**, Programs. **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair. **Lisa Stuart**, Message Board Moderator. **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter, Website. **Shari Virjee**, Programs, Message Board.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P40 for non-members. For more information about MWF, please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com.

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