

Saving our Reefs, by Robert Wintner, Author of Reef Libre

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Saving our Reefs, by Robert Wintner,
Author of Reef Libre

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The Effects of Mass Capture for Aquariums

We are delighted to share an article today from the photographer and author of Reef Libre, Robert Wintner. You may know him as Snorkel Bob. His wonderful underwater photography is at its best as he takes us to the reefs off Cuba.

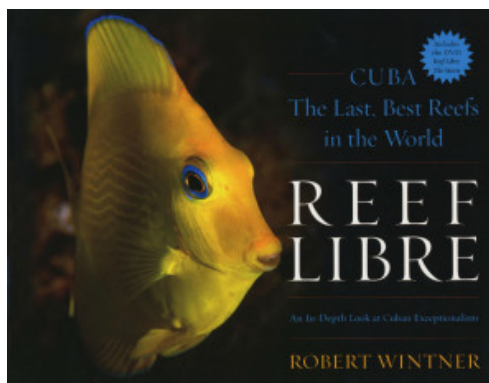
Mr. Wintner is currently on a virtual book tour that runs from October 19th to November 20th. You can see the full tour schedule and learn more about the book and the author at [iRead Book Tours](#).

We asked the author to share more about the mass capture of fish for aquariums and how that affects the reef system, something that should cause concern in each of us.

From Robert Wintner:

Most people don't think about aquariums, or the critters inside. Reef wildlife is taken around the world to supply the aquarium hobby, a last vestige of trafficking in wildlife for the pet trade.

Planet Earth now suffers the third catastrophic bleaching event in recorded history. Climate change compounds el niño—a natural cycle of ocean warming—putting reefs in peril. 95% of all corals in the world may bleach. Corals have a temperature tolerance of about 4° Fahrenheit. Bleaching begins with warming. Corals often turn purple, then chalk white. Some may recover. Bleaching is a severe illness requiring an effective immune system to survive.



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Reef wildlife maintains reefs as an immune system. Aquarium trade extraction has devastated habitat and species for decades, undetected—underwater. \$5 billion in revenue is based on merchandise—tanks, stands, lights, pumps, filters, chemicals, gadgets and so on—dependent on reef wildlife. The industry is "sustainable" through mortality; 99% of reef wildlife taken for the aquarium trade dies within a year. Most species live long in the wild. Yellow tangs, two thirds of Hawaii aquarium extraction, live to 40 years on the reef, grazing algae. Hawaii reefs now suffer algae overload.

28 million reef wildlife individuals must be in the aquarium trade pipeline at all times to "sustain" the trade and the hobby. Reef systems protected from aquarium extraction show healthier corals and species. Komodo National Park (Indonesia) and Palau, both ban aquarium extraction to save reefs and generate more revenue from reef-based tourism.

Wildlife trafficking for the pet trade damages source habitat and species as well as destination habitat and species every time. Alligators appeared in the New York sewer system when "pet" alligators got flushed. Parrot and macaw populations were decimated on the wild bird trade. Burmese pythons now breed uncontrollably and decimate the fragile Everglades. Worse yet is the lionfish curse brought to the Atlantic and Caribbean by the aquarium trade. Lionfish are beautiful and live naturally in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, where predators keep them in check. Lionfish are voracious, and now outnumber all other species combined in the Atlantic and Caribbean. The aquarium trade still sells lionfish to anyone, anywhere.

People often feel helpless when recycling and car pooling seem inadequate. But, you can have a word with management/ownership if you see a glass tank with reef wildlife inside. This "decoration" is not harmless but hurts reefs around the world. Wild critters are needed in the wild. Once captive, they can never go back, because a closed system could introduce microbes to a wild system. Children readily see the truth on captive wildlife and can make an effective scene. In any event, patronage should end until the glass tank(s) are gone. Don't be fooled; 2% of all aquarium species are captive-bred. The rest are wild caught.

The end of reefs is not a potential for the future. It is upon us, right now.

Step up and say something.

—Robert Wintner is the author of Reef Libre, An In-Depth Look at Cuban Exceptionalism & the Last, Best Reefs in the World. He is Executive Director of the Snorkel Bob Foundation and has worked for years to end aquarium trade devastation.



Book Description for Reef Libre

Cuba reefs host apex predators and coral cover at optimal levels. While Cuban reef vitality may be linked to economic default and no shoreline development, no agricultural pesticides or fertilizers and limited human population growth, the Castro regime is aggressively developing its reef potential.

Seas to the south are now 100% shark protected.

Most Cuba travelogues advise "getting off the beaten path," but Reef Libre examines that path, to see where it might lead as things change. Will Cuba reefs remain protected? Or is this perilous age of natural decline a last chance to see a healthy reef system?

Robert Wintner and the Snorkel Bob Jardines de la Reina Expedition herein provide narrative insight with photos and video. First stop is the baseline: Havana urban density. Down south at Cayo Largo, reef collapse seems imminent with 600 guests changing daily, and the phosphate-laden laundry water flowing directly to the deep blue sea. Will Cuba's Ministry of Tourism step up with the Jardines de la Reina paradigm? Rising from the Golfo de Ana María, Jardines is a thousand square miles of mangrove estuary, for ages compromised by constant extraction of its biggest predators, taken as food. Protected, it now rises on the world reef stage.

A DVD comes with the book in a paper sleeve glued to the inside cover. Reef Libre, the movie, runs about an hour.

Buy the book: [Amazon](#) [Barnes & Noble](#)

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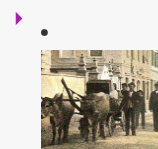


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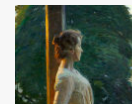


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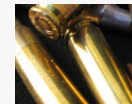
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About The Author

Best known as Snorkel Bob in Hawaii and around the world, Robert Wintner captures Cuba above and below the surface with urgency and hope. As a pioneer in fish portraiture, Wintner demonstrated social structure and etiquette in reef society. Reef Libre goes to political context, in which human folly will squander Cuba's reefs as well—unless natural values can at last transcend political greed. As pundits joust over who did what to whom and why, Wintner ponders reef prospects in view of political changes.

Robert Wintner has authored many novels and story collections. Reef Libre is his fourth reef commentary with photos and his first overview of survival potential in a political maelstrom. He lives and works in Hawaii, still on the front lines of the campaign to stop the aquarium trade around the world.

Connect with the author: [Website](#) ~ [Facebook](#)



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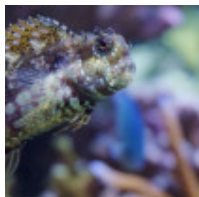
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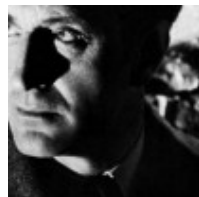
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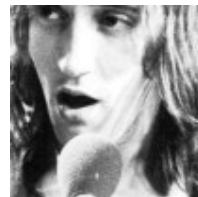
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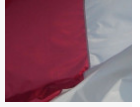
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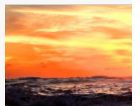
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**Robert Wintner**

OCTOBER 21, 2015

Thanks for the podium. Cuba reefs benefit from 60 years of no development, no runoff, no aquarium trade and in recent years no fishing. The big question is continuing protection with big-dollar tourism and development at hand. We can hope that whoever calls the future shots in Cuba will maintain reef values in a culture of caring for the golden goose.

[Post a Reply](#)**Merry Citarella**

OCTOBER 21, 2015

Thank you so much for your article Bob. I hope we help to get the word out. More awareness will surely help. Appreciate it!

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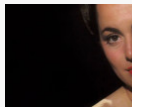
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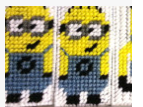
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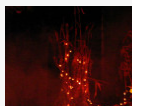
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