



Prescott College
For the Liberal Arts, the Environment, & Social Justice

Abram B. Fleishman

Prescott College Affiliation	Alumni
Program	oncampus
Area of Study	Environmental Studies with an Emphasis in Marine Studies; Adventure Education
Graduation Year	Spring 2008
Area of Expertise	Waterbirds; Marine Biology

I entered Prescott College in 2004 to study Adventure Education, hoping to follow a dream of exposing young people to the mountains. In the beginning of my second year, my world turned upside down. From a sea kayak in Monterrey Bay, CA, I realized my love of the ocean and the bizarre creatures that inhabited the tide pools and near shore waters of Elkhorn Slough, Santa Cruz, and Tamalus Bay. I enrolled in every class available that enabled me to spend time at Prescott College's field station, the Center for Cultural and Ecological Studies, in Bahia Kino, Sonora, Mexico.

The rest of my Prescott College career was spent plying the waters of the Gulf of California learning everything I could about the Gulf, one of the most productive bodies of waters in the world. Under every rock, hundreds of creatures blazed red, green, purple. With a mask and snorkel, thousands of fish swirled into my curiosity. For the first time in my life I saw whales and dolphins in the wild, a pelican soaring at dawn over a glassy plane, and the elegance of the Storm-petrel plucking copepods from the surface of the water. For the first time, I saw how fish were really caught. I realized I was addicted.





I began to follow a new dream. I wanted to contribute to conservation; be involved with helping to save one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world; make a real contribution for conservation with my Senior Project. I monitored nesting water birds on Isla Alcatraz, a small rocky island located just off shore in Bahia Kino. The monitoring results were summarized and submitted to Comision Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP), the governmental office that is in charge of monitoring the island. They could then use the information in the future decision-making of the island. After graduation, I worked as a field assistant for the Marine Studies quarter and in January 2009, I was offered a Fellowship in Research and Conservation at the field station.

For the past two and a half years I have lived and worked in Bahia de Kino as part of an amazing international team of biologists and educators. I have had the chance to explore the gulf further and be involved with a suite of projects ranging from field work with whales and dolphins to studying the composition of bycatch (incidental capture of non-targeted species) aboard shrimp trawlers. I have also had the opportunity to continue to develop and expand the Center's Waterbird Monitoring Program. My main focus has been on monitoring waterbird populations, both migratory and resident, which use the islands and coastal wetlands in the region for nesting, roosting, and wintering. Projects include monitoring more than 20 species of nesting waterbirds on islands

and in estuaries, as well as over 90 species and tens of thousands of individual migratory and resident waterbirds, which use the coastal wetlands to forage and roost. The ideal behind these efforts is to fill gaps in regional knowledge of waterbirds so that the information can be summarized and used to support conservation efforts.

This amazing sea—a body of water that Jacques Cousteau called “the world’s aquarium”— is far from pristine. Fisheries are crashing, top predators are disappearing, invasive species ravage some of the islands, coastal development and aquaculture run rampant, contaminating the estuaries and bulldozing coastal scrub. Through some eyes the situation is bleak, but through the eyes of a tireless conservation community made up of several academic, governmental and Non-governmental institutions, the situation is getting better.

If you asked me what I wanted to do with my life when I first came to Prescott College, I would have said something about climbing mountains and skiing powder. Prescott College introduced me to the ocean in a formal way and changed my path forever. The Gulf of California is now in my blood, and while my fellowship has come to an end, I will always have my heart in Kino, and will be returning soon.

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