

Nothing reflects the love of the ocean more beautifully than pearls. Yet, in order to protect these natural treasures of the sea, we must ensure that our delicate ecosystem remains intact. We spoke to world-famous freediver and pearl lover, Herbert Nitsch, about his fascinating relationship with the oceans of our planet.

Photographs – HERBERTNITSCH.COM

FASCINATION OF THE DEEP BLUE SEA

*I*t was purely by chance that Herbert Nitsch, known as “The Deepest Man on Earth”, was introduced to freediving whilst on holiday in Egypt. Because the airline had lost his diving equipment, he decided to dive with just his mask and flippers. It wasn’t long before he discovered a natural talent for freediving – and so his passion for the sport was born. Today this exceptional athlete has traveled around the world, is the holder of several world records and can hold his breath under water for more than nine minutes.

As a freediver, Nitsch is not only fascinated by our oceans but has a deep love for them too. Increasingly concerned about the pollution of our seas and the environment, he has been a volunteer with the Sea Shepherd Conservation So-

ciety since 2013. He actively campaigns to raise awareness about issues such as overfishing, illegal fishing methods and the destruction of our natural ecosystems. Herbert Nitsch is convinced: if each and every one of us played just a small part in looking after the environment, the world would be a better place. We talked to Herbert Nitsch about his fascination of the deep blue sea.

Do you wear pearls?

HERBERT NITSCH: I have a single large black pearl on a leather string necklace. It reminds me of my connection with the beautiful deep blue oceans. My Dutch pearl Jeanette, now my wife, gave it to me as a gift many years ago, when we first met in the South Pacific.





ABOUT

HERBERT NITSCH

Herbert Nitsch currently holds 33 world records in freediving. The "Deepest Man on Earth" is the first and only freediver who can dive to depths of over 250 meters and hold his breath for over nine minutes.

Have you ever dived for pearls yourself?

HERBERT NITSCH: Pearl diving, as an occupation, barely exists nowadays. The only country where there are still pearl divers is Japan. The Ama divers, predominantly female, have been carrying out their profession for over 2000

years. I would love to meet these extraordinary and courageous people and dive with them, before this field of work dies out completely.

In what way is environmental protection important to you?

HERBERT NITSCH: There are a number of different issues, as far as environmental protection is concerned. Unfortunately, the media tend to focus on climate change caused by CO₂ emissions. There are other problems which are just as important, such as the pollution of our oceans through plastic waste. Yet they don't get the same amount of attention. If we all contributed in some way, no matter how small, we could preserve the sensitive balance of our marine ecosystems and protect the fauna and flora of our seas.

Herbert Nitsch is particularly fond of the beautiful surroundings in which he dives. That is why he is actively involved in protecting the seas and their inhabitants.

Photographs – HERBERTNITSCH.COM

Are there any dives that are particularly memorable?

HERBERT NITSCH: Probably the most unforgettable experience I had while freediving was in Palau, when I was attacked by a big bull shark. Back then, the only thing I could do to protect myself was to dig my heel into its nose, with every last bit of strength I had. Miraculously it worked. I think the shark was as stunned as I was – in any case he swam off quickly enough.

Where is your favorite place to dive?

HERBERT NITSCH: That depends on whether I am diving for fun or taking part in a competition. French Polynesia and Palau are pretty unbeatable if you are looking to get up close to marine life. I really love to dive around ships and plane wrecks and in underwater caves. Dean's Blue Hole in the Bahamas is a pretty unique location for standard competitions. As far as deep-sea diving is concerned, there are a number of breathtaking places to dive in and around the Greek islands.

