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Alaska Gets Its First Artificial Reef

Reef balls have been used successfully all over the world, including cold Canadian waters, said Todd Barber, chairman of the Reef Ball Foundation, an Athens, Ga.-based nonprofit group.

Barber said the structures typically fill in two weeks with fish that normally show up to fight. Once their territorial disputes are settled, the fish leave, with the winners returning later.

"After a full season of growth, whoever won the fight before takes it over as its new home," Barber said.

Smitty's Cove is a treasure, said local diver Jerry Vandergriff, who pushed for the project and has completed more than 1,200 dives there.

Vandergriff's favorites are the smaller creatures _ the bay pipefish that is so small it can slip through a straw, the stubby squid that turns purple when approached and the spiny lumpsucker, a fish that is ugly in name only.

"It looked like a little clown. It was bright orange and round _ just as cute as it could be," he said.

Schroeder, the wildlife biologist, on reef installation day carried around a rarely-seen heart crab _ which has hairy legs and a heart-

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A group of school children watch as concrete balls weighing hundreds of pounds each, are lowered into the water at Smitty's Cove in Whittier, Alaska Wednesday May 10, 2006 to make Alaska's first artificial reef. The reef was in response to damage done when Alaska Marine Lines expanded its container facility at Whittier last year. (AP Photo/AI Grillo) (AI Grillo - AP)

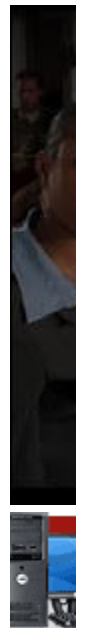
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shape _ in a water-filled container. "I've only seen one other before," he said.

He was eager to introduce the crab to its new digs.

"She will have a new home when we release her today," he said.

—

On the Net:

<http://www.reefball.org>

<http://www.artificialreefs.com>

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