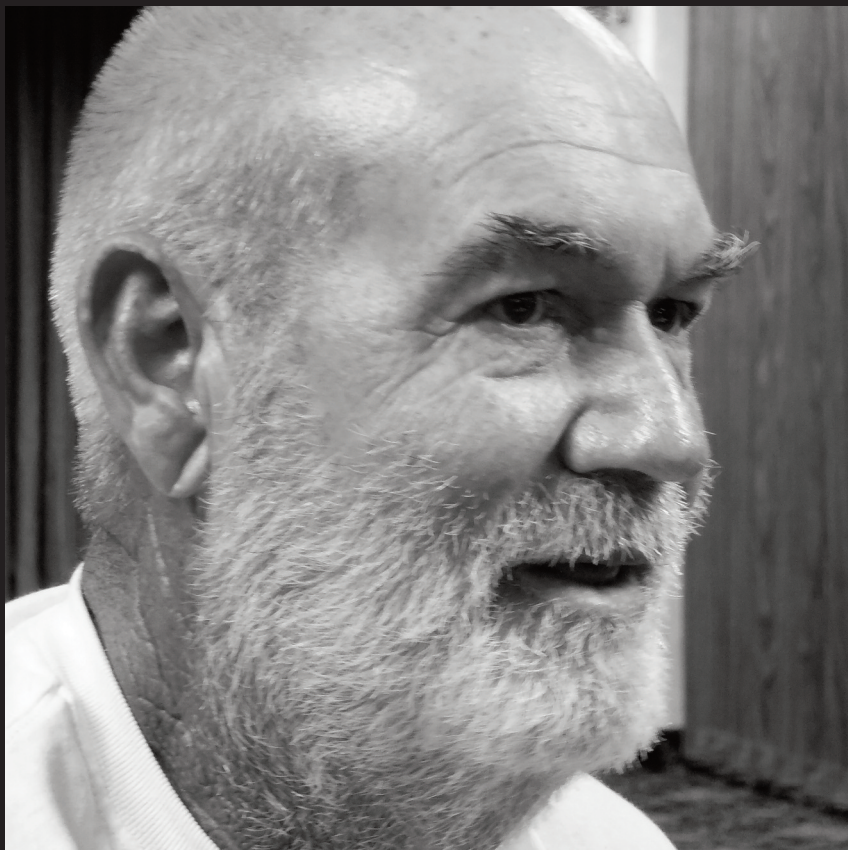


Fishers of the deep

Interviews with fishers around Puerto Rico and the USVI



Mr. Jens Peter Skov, a member of a fishing family in St. Croix, has participated in the deep-water snapper fisheries from 1990 to 2013. Jens has been a member of various advisory panels to the Caribbean Fishery Management Council. He was interviewed on the evening of December 10 2013 at the Windward Passage in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, USVI.

He relates that he was born in Fredericksted, St. Croix, and started fishing while he was very young, with his father. In the late Seventies or early Eighties he became a regular fisher with 600 to 800 traps.

When still a youngster, he fished with Teddy, an uncle from Sandy Point, who was a fisher, but really a farmer. Then he fished with the late Robert McAulif, from whom he learned more about fishing. He loved fishing ever since a little kid, “Just loved fishing.” With Robert (MacAulif) he lifted traps 6 hours per day on alternate days.

Their target was reef fish, and fished all the way to Salt River Canyon, White Horse, up to HESS, and all the catch was sold, including the grunts.

They found their places experimenting at first, before the GPS. He treasured all the information “in the head.” With the hand lines, they “felt for the fish to bite. I enjoyed the Snapper. Oh, my God, they would bite the line! Twenty yanks on the line! Silk, yellow-eyed... using 400 lb test line in deep water.” They also experimented trolling out to Northeast Lang Bank.

Before GPS, they referenced landmarks and depth, but then came the changes to the landscape. In spite of the changes, he managed to find his spots again.

He says he fished for 35 to 40 years, but has really fished all his life. Besides fishing, he worked for GM for 10 years in New Jersey, and also with Marietta Alumina in the golf courses.

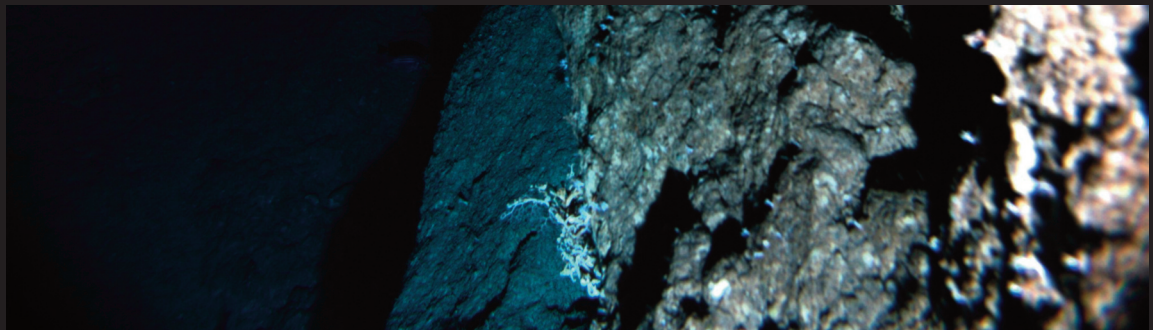
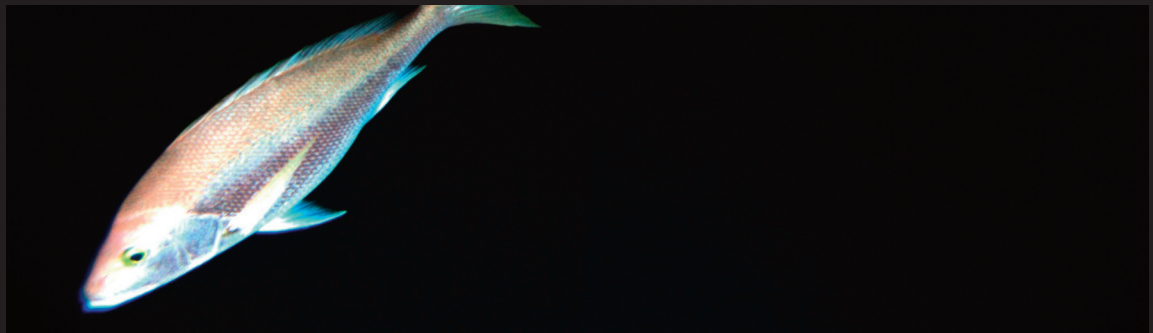
Regarding the strangest fish he ever saw, he mentioned the armored sea robin; also a blue/pink/yellow parrotfish that actually took a hook (bite); and the small shark with the spine. He remembers a fish with fangs, the deep-water pomphret.

The strangest thing he ever saw while fishing? “Whales, traveling pilot whales, and an albino marlin.”

He stopped fishing because he is a farmer now, tending his family’s goats. He had a targeted market, but stopped when sales were not enough to make the cost of the trip. He kept his market supplied Wednesdays and Saturdays, while fishing from Monday to Wednesday and from Wednesday to Saturday.

Is he satisfied? “Loved it! Hardest now, not able to do it anymore as often as before because of the COST of the trip.” He is thinking of quitting altogether and becoming a full-time farmer.

Jens pleads that they keep the Caribbean as a resource for fishing – “No SCUBA, No longlines, No netting.”



Mr. Nelson R. Crespo recently (2011-2014) joined the CFMC as member representing the commercial fishing sector of Puerto Rico. He has been a deep-water snapper fisher since XXXX, specifically targeting queen snapper since XXXX.

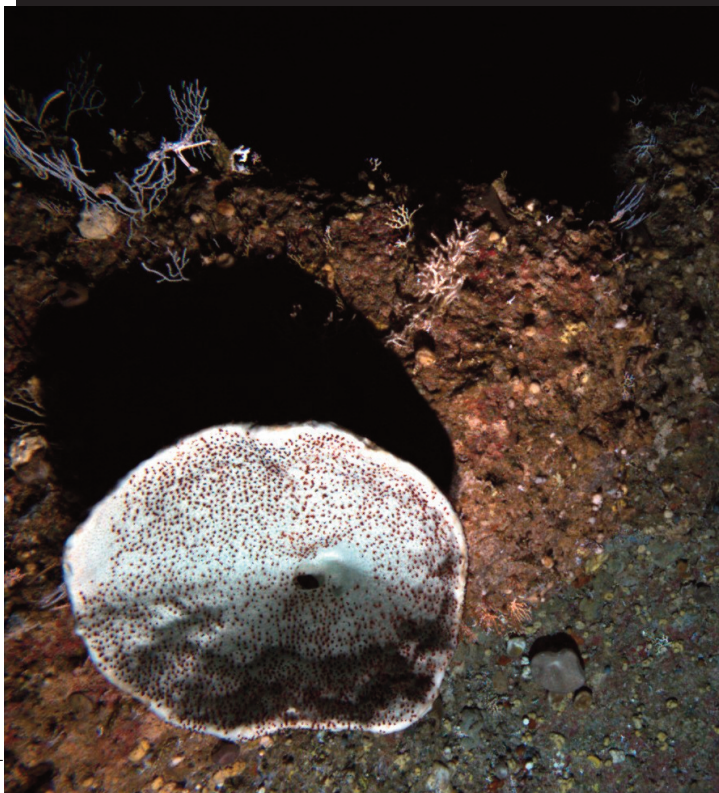
Questions for the interview conducted on December 11, 2013, at the Frenchman's Reef in St. Thomas, USVI.



Though Nelson Crespo Rodriguez was born in Manhattan, New York, at the age of six months he was brought to Rincón, P.R. He started fishing, as far as he can remember, when he was 8 years old with a group of rascals fishing with beach seines. He started fishing for deep-water snappers since he was 10 or 12 years old, during summers and after school. Fished every which way, every gear: traps, trolling, at night, baitfish, artisanal fishing, in a yola and by hand.

“I began fishing commercially when I was 12 years old and I am now 46. I have the commercial fishing license since the 1980’s, when everybody fished.”

He was taught by Pedro Muñiz, a.k.a. “Pedrosa,” in the “Cuca Gomez” tradition: you build it, you use it, and you recommend it. He began fishing in deep water using a hand line with about 20 hooks and fished for silk and queen snappers.



He enjoys fishing. “I’m the only one in my household who is passionate about fishing, maybe my oldest son will fish as a sideline. I left the University after 2 years to dedicate myself to fishing. I was pursuing an education in mathematics and sociology at the RUM (University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez). My mother wanted to kill me! My fishing companion is a special education teacher.”

He fished as mate with Sergio Ventura (Pichón) and after a few years, in 1986-1987, became an independent fisher, fishing on his own. “Pablo Valentín (Palín) was who really taught me the tricks of the trade, a little old man who was the teacher of all deep water snapper fishers. The Mentor, we all learned a lot or a little from him.”

Today he fishes only for deep water snappers and pelagics (dolphin fish, wahoo, for example) while underway.

He has been involved with the CFMC and the DNER “... to be able to manage fisheries as a bank account, to have money in the bank!”

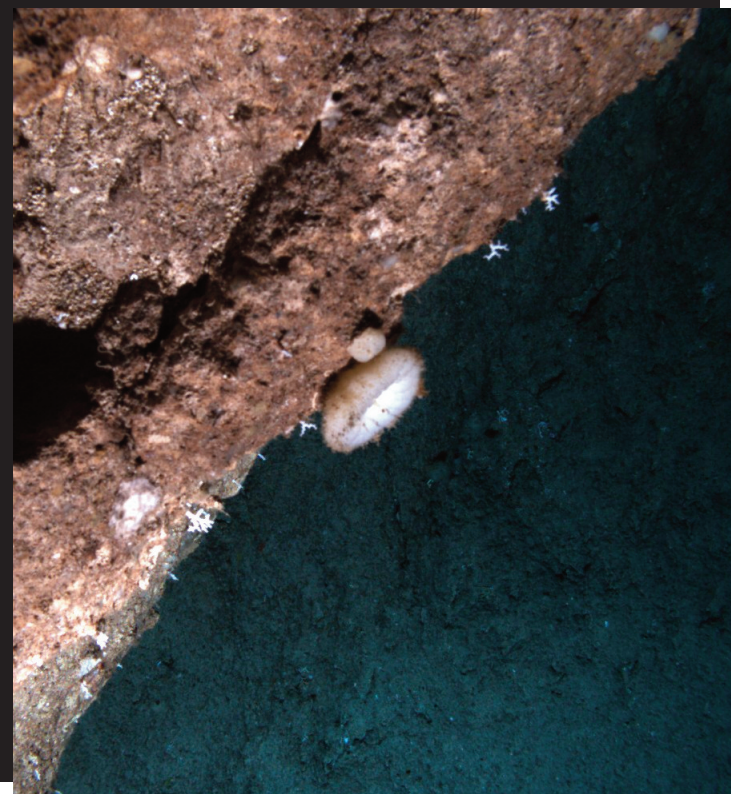
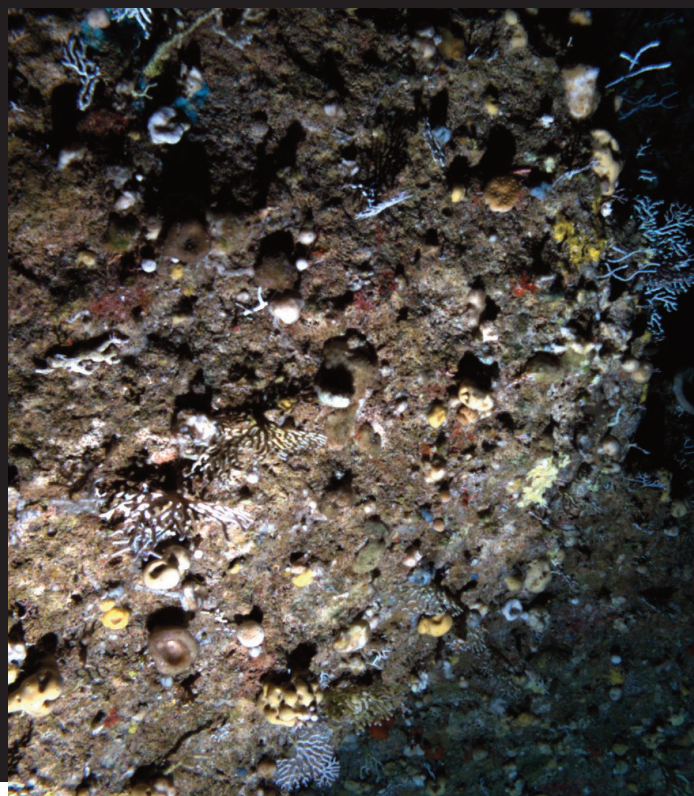
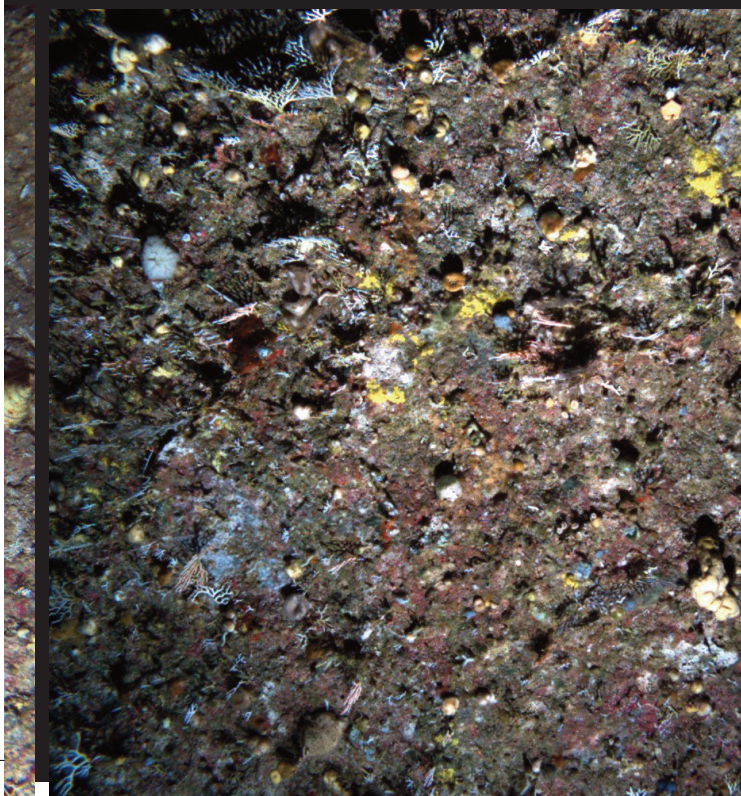
Asked about how he would improve the fishery, Mr. Crespo replied, “For the deep water snapper fishery there should be a select group fishing for these species; we are all set (referring

to the new regulations of the PR DNER setting a limit to the number of fishers involved in this fishery). The key is the Fisheries Research Laboratory, they should be working as should be, otherwise none of the fishery management plans will be well implemented. The Port Agents are essential in collecting the data and knowing the fishers.”

Regarding which species? “Silk and queen snappers. These species have a natural protection because fishing for them is dependent on the currents and weather conditions. No wind and strong current means no one goes out fishing because nothing will be harvested. The most severe weather is during these days (December). There are fewer fishing days and fewer fishers who go out fishing.”

“We have noticed changes, perhaps due to global warming, when the line is set and brought onboard and the weights are hot, fish won’t bite. The innards of the fish are also warm. When there is good fishing, the innards of the fish are cold, as if taken from the refrigerator. This year fish are not coming out to feed, there should be a way to measure the temperature at these depths and see how these change over time and how this impacts fishing.”

“The cycle has changed, fish will come to eat during the summer and will not hide. What will happen in ?”



Where? "From the shore of Rincón to Pichinchos, to Abrir La Sierra; all of the west coast to Mona and Cabo Engaño."

How far? "Between 40-50 miles but not out of the US EEZ."

And the depth? "From 80- to 240 fathoms; my favorite is 160- 200 fathoms targeting queen snapper."

How did you find the places? "As a mate I didn't know the fishing grounds. When I became an independent fisher I found the 160 to 210 and have always liked that depth. Haphazardly, at random, triangulating and using a pre-measured hand line with hooks, and if the fish would bite we would mark the site with something in the landscape and we would remain fishing in the area."

How did you get to the fishing grounds? "Like I did this past summer (2013), looked for waters deeper than 250 fathoms and experimented; my dream! When the waters are warm, look deeper for colder waters. The method used for finding fishing grounds was always to leave the line with hooks with the reel tied to a buoy in place."

Where you able to get back to them? "Triangulating we believed we were in the same place, but we knew by the depth. We had faith!"

How many years did you fish? "Commercially, 34 years and my whole life fishing!"

What was the strangest fish you ever saw? "Many! The oilfish, the pictures I sent to Graciela, the small shark, wide and with teeth like a mouse."

The strangest thing you ever saw while fishing? "Banco del Medio, where I saw whales with calves and they would not leave us alone. They would follow us everywhere and all the time; took a fishing line. Deep water snappers are fished dur-

ing the day, but we leave port at night to fish during the day."

Why have you stopped fishing? "No, I haven't stopped. I continue to experiment with hooks and other things to try and produce more with less effort."

How often do you go out fishing? "With optimal weather conditions, 3-4 times per week, but with bad weather, 1-2 trips per month. Each set costs about \$300.00 and with bad weather the buoys go underwater and are not seen and we can lose them."

What was your market? "Restaurants, but also sell to individuals, always."

What do people want to eat? "The freshest fish, today's not yesterday's. Red; red snappers and white meat. In Aguadilla they prefer tuna, wahoo and dorado."

Was your market satisfied? "Good – we don't supply enough."

Are you satisfied? "I like it, I'm my own boss and do what I want to do and I would like to continue doing it! Provide well for my family –fishing!"



