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From the open sea to death ashore

Verella verella, known as by-the-wind sailors, find their Valhalla on Southland beaches.

BY CORINNE PURTILL AND SEAN GREENE

The corpses are washing up by the thousands on Southern California's beaches: a transparent ringed oval like a giant thumbprint 2 to 3 inches long, with a sail-like fin running diagonally down the length of the body.

Those only recently stranded from the sea still have their rich, cobalt-blue color, a pigment that provides both camouflage and protection from the sun's UV rays during their life on the open ocean.

These intriguing creatures are *Verella verella*, known also as by-the-wind sailors or, in marine biology circles, "the zooplankton so nice they named it twice," said Anya Stajner, a biological oceanography doctoral student at UC San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

A jellyfish relative that spends the vast majority of its life on the surface of the open sea, *V. verella* move at the mercy of the wind, drifting over the ocean with no means of locomotion other than the sails atop their bodies. They tend to wash up on the U.S. West Coast in the spring, when wind conditions beach them.

Springtime *V. verella* sightings documented on community science platforms like iNaturalist spiked both this year and last, though scientists say it's too [See Sailors, A12]



ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times
THE SETTING SUN illuminates one of the thousands of oval-shaped, jellyfish-like creatures that have been washing up on Southern California shores, including Huntington Beach. They move at the mercy of the wind.

Class of '24 faces overhaul in rites, tradition

Amid Gaza protests, outcome of USC's graduation could set the stage for such events across nation.

BY JAWEED KALEEM AND JENNA PETERSON

The chain-link fences are up, bag searches in place and metal detectors installed.

At many universities across the country, graduation for the Class of 2024 will feel more like making it through airport security than a procession through a free-flowing campus green or a cheering stadium crowd.

The drastic changes arrive as universities grapple with pro-Palestinian tent camps — the scenes of recent mass arrests and turmoil — during a volatile time of campus divisions over the Israel-Hamas war. Last week at UCLA a mob attacked an encampment, and violence erupted.

The biggest commencement overhaul is at USC, where the 65,000-attendee "main stage" ceremony was canceled after unspecified threats over the selection of a pro-Palestinian valedictorian who critics said was antisemitic.

Early Sunday morning, police in riot gear cleared an encampment where protesters were pushing for divestment from Israel. It was set up near the site of where the stage would have been and remerged after Los Angeles police arrested 93 people there on April 24.

Graduating USC students are capped at getting eight tickets — often fewer for satellite commencement — and administrators are scrambling to entice angry parents with new attractions as the university moves around traditional celebrations.

"We had planned to bring up to 25 people," said An [See Graduation, A8]

The dream that won't die: Making East L.A. a city

Decades of efforts to create a stand-alone municipality have failed. A new Assembly bill would examine the issue again.

GUSTAVO ARELLANO

1931. 1933. 1961. 1963. 1975. 2012.

Those years were on the lips of the 130-plus people who crammed into the cavernous East Los Tacos on a recent morning to hear from Eastside Assembly-member Wendy Carrillo. She was there to address the crowd about the dream that never dies: making East L.A. a city.

Famous across the world as a cradle of Chicano politics and culture, East L.A. is the most populous unincorporated community in California, with about 119,000 people under the governance of L.A. County instead of their own city officials.

For decades this has rankled some residents, who have pushed state and county officials to help [See Arellano, A12]



ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times
EAST L.A. is the most populous unincorporated community in California, with about 119,000 people who lack their own city officials.

Possible Tik Tok ban stirs worries

L.A. influencers and businesses that rely on the app fear the loss of significant revenue.

BY CAROLINE PETROW-COHEN

Brandon Hurst has built a loyal social media following and a growing business selling plants on TikTok, where a mysterious algorithm combined with the right content can let users amass thousands of followers.

Hurst sold 20,000 plants in three years while running his business on Instagram. After expanding the business he launched in 2020 to TikTok Shop, an e-commerce platform integrated into the popular social media app, he sold 57,000 plants in 2023.

He now conducts business entirely on TikTok and relies on its sales as his sole source of income. Hurst, 30, declined to say how much he makes.

Hurst also posts content about plant care for a 186,000-person following on TikTok. He's one of thousands of content creators who engage with an audi [See Tik Tok, A8]



BRIAN VANDER BRUG Los Angeles Times
GRAHAM COOPER, an Oakland biotech executive, exercises with a training mask that simulates the low oxygen levels at high altitudes on Mt. Everest.

Training for Everest while catching Zs

Climbers break with tradition to create possibly better, more ethical ways to scale world's tallest peak.

BY JACK DOLAN

TRUCKEE, Calif. — Graham Cooper sleeps with his head in a bag.

Not just any bag. This one has a hose attached to a motor that slowly lowers the oxygen level to mimic, as faithfully as possible, the agonies of fitful sleep at extreme altitude: headaches, dry mouth, cerebral malaise.

"It's not all bad," Cooper insisted, nodding to the humming motor. "That's like white noise."

Cooper, 54, an Oakland biotech executive who has handled finance for a number of companies, including one that sold for \$7 billion, isn't a masochist, exactly. He's acclimatizing, in the bedroom of his second home near Lake Tahoe, for an attempt to climb Mt. Everest this month.

He has signed up with an Olympic Valley-based guide service whose founder, Adrian Ballinger, is breaking with decades of tradition to create what he believes are better and more ethical [See Mt. Everest, A4]

Ukraine marks 3rd Easter at war
 Russia launches a barrage of drones and says it took over a village. **WORLD, A4**

Police clear USC encampment
 Protesters beat drums, chant and pledge to resume their demonstration. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Buehler back on Dodgers mound
 The onetime ace is returning after a second Tommy John surgery. **SPORTS, D1**

Weather
 Lots of sun.
 L.A. Basin: 73/53. **B6**

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