

# It's time to *live blue*™

Right Whale Researchers Predict Calf's Birth Whale Scientists Bring Expertise to Aquarium 50 Years of Aquarium Memories

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Our website is full of conservation information, animal facts, and details that will help you plan your next trip to the Aquarium. On the cover: California sea lions. Photo: Keith Ellenbogen

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At the time this issue was being prepared, the Aquarium, the City of Boston, and most of the world were facing enormous challenges brought about by the COVID-19 outbreak. We greatly appreciate the continued support of our members during these difficult days. Much has changed and much more will change, but our mission to protect the blue planet remains steadfast.

The Aquarium is very fortunate to be located on Boston's flourishing downtown waterfront, overlooking a clean and vibrant



From the President and CEO

Boston Harbor. When the Aquarium opened its doors on Central Wharf in 1969, that was not the case; Boston Harbor was literally a dump.

Around that time, early environmental activists were sounding the alarm about our natural resources and the need to protect them. The first Earth Day was celebrated in 1970, the same year the federal government established the Environmental Protection Agency. The Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act followed soon after. In 1985, by court order, the Boston Harbor cleanup began. Thirty-five years and billions of dollars later, a revitalized Boston Harbor and miles-long Harbor Walk attract residents and visitors alike.

On April 22, we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. For those of you who choose to mark the day with a walk on the beach, scan the surface of the water for whales.

This spring we look forward to the annual migration of North Atlantic right whales from their winter calving grounds off the coast of the southeastern United States to the northernmost regions of the Gulf of Maine. Between 2017 and 2019, only 12 North Atlantic right whale births were observed. Ten new calves have been spotted this season-hopeful news for a species with fewer than 411 individuals remaining. One of those calves was born to Harmonia, whose pregnancy was discovered this summer by the New England Aquarium right whale team. Read more about our hormone analysis research and Harmonia on page 1.

In this issue, you will also meet three of the newest members of the Aquarium's team. Senior Scientists Peter Corkeron and Jessica Redfern and Vice President for Animal Care Leigh Clayton share a dedication to animal welfare both in the wild and in our care. Read more about them on pages 2-3 and 4-6.

You will also hear from Director of Conservation Policy and Leadership Kelly Kryc about how Aquarium visitors are helping advocate for policies that support sustainable ocean use (page 7).

Thank you all for helping us carry on the work started decades ago protecting our blue (and green!) planet.

Best,

Achlu Nopmill

Vikki N. Spruill President and CEO, New England Aquarium

### How our team predicted the birth of a right whale calf As North Atlantic right whales face important health conditions in declining numbers and the threat of right whales. extinction, each newborn calf is worth

Learning this fall that Harmonia (Catalog #3101), a mature 18-year-old female right whale, had elevated levels of reproductive hormones (such as progesterone and estrogen) suggesting that she was pregnant was both exciting and important. North Atlantic right whales are not reproducing as often as they should be. Knowing whether this is because females are not able to get pregnant or females are getting pregnant and failing to bring the fetus to term is critical to understanding why their reproduction is so low.

celebrating.

**SCIENCE IN ACTION** 

"There were only 12 births in the last three years compared to the 60-plus we expected, so every pregnancy is a cause for celebration," said Philip Hamilton, Research Scientist at the Aquarium's Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life.

In early January, an aerial survey team from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission spotted Harmonia and her newborn calf off the coast of Georgia, verifying what our samples had intimated: She had been pregnant!

So how did our scientists predict the calf's birth ahead of time?

In August, a team from the Anderson Cabot Center's Kraus Marine Mammal Conservation Program collected a sample of Harmonia's feces in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, where she was sighted with two other right whales. The analysis of her hormone levels by our Marine Stress and Ocean Health team indicated she was pregnant.

For years, our scientists have been scooping whale feces from the ocean and using it to identify vital hormone signals, including pregnancy diagnosis reproductive activity, stress responses, and nutritional state, as well as other

Cabot Center.

Interestingly, this is the second pregnancy we have been able to detect for Harmonia. In addition to studying hormones in feces, we were the first to develop methods to quantify hormones in exhaled breath, or blow, of right whales. In 2015, while this innovative study was in progress, our team collected two blow samples and a fecal sample from Harmonia. These showed levels of reproductive hormones characteristic of pregnancy, and Harmonia gave birth 10 months later.

"Being able to track Harmonia's pregnancies using rather unconventional samples, like poop and blow-which can be collected without

# Reproducing Results

"Studying the health of large whales is challenging. Fecal samples are a gold mine of information, providing us the rare opportunity to learn about right whale reproduction and health beyond what is revealed from visual observations," said Katie Graham, Assistant Scientist at the Anderson

even touching the whale-is a testament to our innovative science to study whales at sea," said Elizabeth Burgess, Research Scientist at the Anderson Cabot Center. This research continues a rare long-term study that has amassed an unmatched database on changes in right whale health through time.

—Jon Kinson

# cool jobs

-Emily Greenhalgh

# Leigh Clayton, DVM

# Vice President of Animal Care

From turtles to tunicates, is there a cooler job than being in charge of the Aquarium's animals? Dr. Leigh Clayton, Vice President of Animal Care, certainly doesn't think so.

According to our last marine life census (yes, we do those!), there are about 19,380 animals between Central Wharf and our behind-the-scenes facility in Quincy, MA. That number includes a variety of animals, such as Myrtle the turtle, Ron the California sea lion, comb jellies, sea cucumbers, and juvenile fishes. It doesn't count our temporary charges, such as the turtles currently being treated by our Sea Turtle Rescue Team.

With nearly 20,000 animals under her care, Clayton says it's tough to pick a favorite.

"I definitely have a soft spot for our harbor seals, and as a kid growing up in Massachusetts, they were one of the species I was always drawn to," she said. "I also love anemones, particularly Pacific Northwest species. But I really do love them all!" With that many animals relying on her and her team, Clayton pointed to a quote she says has always stuck with her: "Our quality of care is their quality of life." It's her professional philosophy when working with animals, especially here at the Aquarium. Clayton works closely with not just the members on her team, but other Aquarium groups, such as Facilities staff members, since they are responsible for the life support systems our animals rely on.

Clayton joined the New England Aquarium in fall 2019, coming from the National Aquarium, located in Baltimore, and she took a circuitous route to get where she is. She earned her undergraduate degree in political science, but was always interested in animals. She said she went to veterinary school because she thought it would be an interesting way to touch on conservation work and work with animals.

She also thinks zoos and aquariums play a vital role in communicating that conservation work to the public.



Photo: Vanessa Kahn

"I believe zoos and aquariums are important places for people to connect with animals and to connect with each other."

"There are a lot of people on the planet, but there are not a lot of people who really care about animals and animal conservation," Clayton said. "I believe zoos and aquariums are important places for people to connect with animals and to connect with each other."

Those conversations can go beyond conservation and straight into the planet's biggest challenge: climate change.

"Climate change is impacting us more and more. The weather isn't as stable. Habitats are less stable than they were even five years ago. No one has the answer, and it's a really ambiguous future," Clayton said. "But that's part of what we do. We think about animals. We think about habitats. We think about the spaces and places we exist, and that conversation is becoming more and more important. "We're facing some really serious issues coming up, and none of us has the answer, so we're going to have to get really serious about what winwin solutions look like," she said. "I think zoos and aquariums have an important role to play in that dialogue. We can pull people together to have that conversation."

When asked about the hardest part of her job, Clayton said it is taking care of animals we have never worked with before, something we do often at the New England Aquarium.

A great example is our larval fishes program at our Quincy facility. The animal care staff responsible for that program is working on a complex environmental puzzle.





Dr. Leigh Clayton regularly meets with Aquarium staff to discuss animal care. Photo: Vanessa Kahn

"It's not just supporting the adults. It's how to support the adults so they can successfully breed. How to support the eggs. How to support every stage of the baby fish, because most of the fish we're working with aren't live-bearers," she said. (This means the fish lay eggs rather than breed live young).

Her favorite part of the job? Working closely with the animals, seeing their behaviors, and seeing how they interact not just with each other, but with the humans who care for and come to visit

them

"It is great to see how animals behave, to see the light in their eyes, and see how they process their world," Clayton said. "That will never, ever grow old for me."



Photo: Jeff Fillman

# 50 years of conservation

-Clayton Starr

# WHALE SCIENTISTS

# Bring Expertise to Aquarium



Photo: Vanessa Kahn

# Q How did you get into marine science?

I'm from Australia and, as a kid, my family lived in Papua New Guinea for a couple years. I started snorkeling around coral reefs, and it went from there. When I began my research, not many people were doing cetacean (whales, dolphins, or porpoises) work in Australia, so I was finding my own way. I've worked with whales, dolphins, dugongs, and seals. For me, it's been much more about being a marine wildlife conservation biologist than being a specialist. North Atlantic right whales are the main focus of my work, but I intend to keep working on other species in trouble as well.

**Q** When it comes to North Atlantic right whales, what sorts of questions do you try to answer?

The big ones are, "How many are there?" and "How are they doing?" Answering

**DR. PETER CORKERON** tackles large challenges facing the world's biggest animals

moving to new habitats. We had to

address the question, "How do you know

they hadn't just moved?" We solved that.

so now it's a matter of keeping track of

how things are going for right whales.

**Q** Previously, hadn't the number

of North Atlantic right whales been

about 2% per year, but they should be

increasing by at least 4% annually. For

four southern right whale populations

That 2% per year increase for North

Atlantic right whales was not good

that are increasing by 6 to 7% per year.

enough, and now the planet is changing.

the sake of comparison, there are at least

Yes, they had been increasing by

increasing?

Peter Corkeron, Ph.D., now leads the whale research team at the Kraus Marine Mammal Conservation Program of the Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life. His current work focuses on how humans and environmental changes affect the number and migrations of North Atlantic right whales. Dr. Corkeron uses what he learns to inform sustainable management strategies and advocate for this endangered species. His research has taken him from the Ross Sea in Antarctica to near the North Pole, and many places in between. Along with other researchers at the Anderson Cabot Center, he believes in using the best available science to overcome the many challenges facing marine wildlife and to help ensure vibrant oceans for generations to come.

those questions is complicated because the number of right whales went into decline at the same time they started Like other animals, some North Atlantic

right whales are moving to new habitats in search of food. They are ending up places where there are challenges they haven't encountered before or places where people have not had to plan around whales before. That's the simple version of what's happening in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. At the moment, and certainly if we don't see any meaningful changes to human behavior, the trajectory of the species is dire. There's little indication that it will turn around anytime soon. We know enough about North Atlantic right whales to save them It's just a matter of getting ropes out of the water and preventing ship strikes.

Q Could you describe the Aquarium's new project with Draper to monitor whales from space?

The basic idea is to find whales where we haven't been looking for them. Draper can help us do that by integrating satellite imagery with other forms of data to detect and sort through images of whales. This could be applied to, for example, some populations of blue whales that we don't completely understand-where they go, what their story is, how many there are. We know that there are populations of some whales that we know almost nothing about-whales are rather big things to have missed, but then the ocean is a big place. Learning more about those populations would be a significant step forward for their conservation.

# Q What challenges do you hope to tackle at the New England Aquarium?

This is such an amazing group, and there's so much good work happening here that it's a bit intimidating to walk in. But North Atlantic right whales are facing huge problems. It's important to solve those problems because we need to have a habitable planet for all life. We will solve those issues, and this center is going to be a big part of it. That gets me up in the morning.

# **DR. JESSICA REDFERN** studies where whales will be and finds ways to minimize risks they face

Dr. Jessica Re Scientist and C Ecology, Mapp (EcoMap) Prog Cabot Center f develops mod and uses these minimize risks of collisions be developing me Cabot Center f (NOAA) South developed mo and fin whales

# **Q** What does it mean to be a spatial ecologist?

I create models that assess the risks that whales face from human use of the ocean. My research is about identifying areas where we expect there to be lots of whales and planning human activities in areas where there will be fewer whales. This planning ensures that we are using the ocean wisely and sustainably. My goal has always been to contribute to wildlife conservation. Something that's really important to me is that all of my research has had a management application.



Dr. Jessica Redfern is a Senior Scientist and Chair of the Spatial Ecology, Mapping, and Assessment (EcoMap) Program at the Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life. She develops models of whale habitats and uses these models to find ways to



Photo: Vanessa Kahn

minimize risks to whales. Her current projects include assessing the risk of collisions between ships and whales in areas with high shipping traffic and developing methods to assess entanglement risk. She comes to the Anderson Cabot Center from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Southwest Fisheries Science Center in La Jolla, CA, where she developed models to map the spatial distribution of blue, humpback, and fin whales, among other marine species.

# Q How has your work been applied to conservation?

At NOAA's Southwest Fisheries and Science Center, I developed models to map the spatial distribution of many ocean species. My work began with efforts to help the U.S. Navy plan training exercises to mitigate their effects on marine mammals. In 2009, I started to focus on the risk of ship strikes, collisions between ships and large whales. New California air pollution regulations had shifted ship traffic farther offshore, and I wondered what this change meant for the risk of ship strikes.

# **Q** Can you discuss your most recent paper?

My January 2020 paper uses multiple vears of ship traffic and whale data to examine the risk of ship strikes for fin, humpback, and blue whales in waters off California. Most studies use a single year of shipping data and a single map of whale distributions that represents average patterns. My study is novel because it looks at how changes in both ship traffic and whale distributions affect the risk of ship strikes. As expected, the location of shipping traffic had an effect on risk. But the management solutions are not straightforward because offshore traffic is good for blue and humpback whales, but dangerous for fin whales in most locations. (Continued on Page 6) (Continued from page 5)

#### **Q** How do you balance whale conservation and various stakeholder needs?

In a paper that came out in July 2019, my team and I helped stakeholders find ways to minimize ship strike risk off Southern California. Stakeholders included the shipping industry, conservation organizations, air pollution control districts, and several government agencies. We found that expanding the area to be avoided surrounding the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary was acceptable to all stakeholders and reduced risk for all three whale species. It's a solution that is a win for all the different stakeholders and a win for the whales. That, to me, is the most exciting scenario.

#### **Q** What new opportunities do the New England Aquarium and East Coast offer?

The East Coast presents new challenges for me. As waters warm, the North Atlantic right whale's range is shifting. How do you manage a species with a changing distribution? That will be an important question to pursue. There's already great work being done here and great groups that I'm excited to collaborate with. I'm also excited about the tools I've developed and how they can be used to solve conservation challenges.



# A Career Dedicated to Marine Mammals Kraus Marine Mammal **Conservation Program Named** for Retiring Dr. Scott Kraus



From left: Dr. John Mandelman. Vice President and Chief Scientist. Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life; Vikki Spruill, President and CEO, New England Aquarium; and Dr. Scott Kraus, Former Vice President and Senior Science Advisor, Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life and Chief Scientist, Kraus Marine Mammal Conservation Program.

For 40 years, marine mammal research at the New England Aquarium has been synonymous with Dr. Scott Kraus.

Kraus joined the Aquarium's Research Department in 1980 and advanced to the position of Aquarium Vice President and Chief Scientist Marine Mammals before stepping down at the end of 2019.

During his tenure, Kraus published more than 110 papers on marine mammals, bluefin tuna, harbor porpoise, fisheries, and bycatch. He spent a portion of 40 summers in the field at the Aquarium's field station in Lubec, ME, studying endangered North Atlantic right whales.

He has been a constant advocate for marine animals and environments, from testifying last year in Washington, D.C., on right whale protections to penning op-eds in support of the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument.

"Scott Kraus is a true pioneer, with fierce dedication to marine mammal

science and conservation, especially around the North Atlantic right whale." said Dr. John Mandelman, Vice President and Chief Scientist, Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life.

To honor Kraus's leadership and countless contributions, the Anderson Cabot Center's Marine Mammal Conservation Program—the program that studies North Atlantic right whales—has been renamed the Kraus Marine Mammal Conservation Program.

"By renaming the marine mammal conservation program for Scott, we are honoring his enormous legacy and carrying his dedication well into the future," said Mandelman.

Kraus continues his important work as an Affiliate Scientist in the Anderson Cabot Center and Chair of the North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium.

- Emily Greenhalgh

# **Aquarium Inspires Visitors** to Advocate for the Ocean

# Campaign generates 750 comment cards that were delivered to Congress

For the past two years, the Aquarium has been building a policy and advocacy program to help us engage with decisionmakers on conservation priorities for the Aquarium. These topics range from protecting endangered species like the North Atlantic right whale, preserving special places in the ocean like the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument, and supporting efforts that keep our fisheries laws the strongest in the world.

This past August, Aquarium visitors took part in a national campaign to advocate for strong, science-based fisheries management policies in the United States. After learning about how sustainable fishing can have a profound positive impact both locally and globally, more than 750 people signed comment cards addressed to their representatives in Washington, D.C., joining advocates across the country in this vital effort.

Overfishing of the world's ocean is a true global challenge, and maintaining healthy and diverse fish stocks globally is important for many reasons. Biological diversity helps make ecosystems more resilient to the impacts of climate change. Seafood has a smaller carbon footprint than land-based proteins and could play an important role in reducing harmful emissions of greenhouse gases. Seafood is also an important source of food and nutrition for billions of people around the world, and it provides livelihoods for millions of them.

As part of the Aquarium's mission to protect the blue planet, we are working on many fronts to help ensure that global fisheries are sustainable. From our aquarists' innovative and sustainable efforts to collect and cultivate the fishes

in our exhibits to the work our fisheries experts do to ensure that the seafood our culinary partner. Patina Restaurant Group, provides to both our visitors and our animals meets our high sciencebased and sustainable sourcing standards, the Aquarium is committed to this issue across all aspects of our operations.

Thanks to this strong foundation, the New England Aquarium was selected by the Ocean Project as one of six aquariums across the country to participate in the campaign, which was funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. The Ocean Project is a nonprofit organization that works with aquariums, zoos, and other partners to implement innovative public engagement programs and campaigns for conservation impact. The goals of the campaign were to raise visitors' awareness of seafood issues

Acadian Redfish (Sebastes fasciatus)

We partnered with Mystic Aquarium to create a public service announcement that told the story of the Acadian redfish, a local fish species whose numbers have recovered due to the strong national fisheries policy we have here in the United States. After audiences watched a video (neag.org/redfish) in our Simons Theatre, we asked them to show their support by signing a comment card to Congress. The more than 750 cards we collected made our first policy messaging campaign with visitors a success.

# *live blue*™

-Kelly Kryc



and document their support for sciencebased fisheries management policies.

As the Aquarium's Director of Conservation Policy and Leadership. I was excited to see our visitors' positive response to our advocacy messaging.

This campaign also gave staff from different departments across the Aquarium the opportunity to work together in support of a shared outcome. The success of this effort was shared by the Policy, Marketing and Communications, Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life, Education, Visitor Experience, and Fishes teams, in addition to our volunteers.

In October, Katie Cubina, Senior Vice President of Mission Programs at Mystic Aquarium, and I hand-delivered more than 2.000 comment cards to 165 House offices, which constituted 38 percent of Congress. It was an incredible opportunity to visit congressional offices across the country and share that their constituents had visited our aquariums and wanted their representatives to know they cared about strong, science-based fisheries management policies in this country.

So, the next time a fisheries bill comes up for a vote, a congressman from Kansas or congresswoman from New Mexicoplaces where the ocean may not be front of mind-may remember that their constituents took the time to communicate with them about the need for sustainable fisheries management in the United States. That may be all that is needed to inform and influence their vote.

# I remember...

To celebrate our 50th we asked for your most memorable moments at the Aquarium, and you responded. Thank you! Here are a few of the memories that were special to us.



Photo: Jake Levenson

Our favorite memory is of Myrtle the turtle. I like to see her tank and watch her swim around and around. I also like the light-up sharks on the wall.

The Wayne Family

When me and my mom went past the lobster tank right by the touch tank, I almost touched the lobster, and it was getting his pinchers ready.

Lily and Ashley Williams

I remember visiting the New England Aquarium when I was a child. The darkness and the illuminated tanks made an impression as there was discovery in every corner. Searching for the octopus and observing the penguins were always favorites. And, of course, walking outside full of joy acting out the beloved line, "I can walk like a penguin!" I still have the souvenir T-shirt.

Barbara Hatch



About a year and a half ago, I took my grandson Ethan to the Aguarium. He was then about 3 years old. We went early on a Sunday for a members' early admission. We arrived a little early and went over to the outside tank of harbor seals. Ethan was fascinated by them, counting them, giving them names, trying to rub noses through the glass ... We then went through all the exhibits, and he was interested in everything. As we left, we visited the Gift Shop, and I told him he could pick out one item ... he went straight for the stuffed baby seals and didn't look at anything else. After paying, we went out and he pulled me forcefully to the outdoor tank. He then held up the stuffed seal against the glass to "show" it to all the tank inhabitants! He patiently waited until all the animals had come to see the "baby."

### Sherry Jones

In the 1960s, a group of Boston business and civic leaders had the audacious idea of building a major aguarium on the city's abandoned and decaying waterfront. Enthusiasm for the enterprise was scarce, but The Boston Foundation saw the potential. In 1965, it made a grant of \$100,000 to the New England Aquarium. The grant provided a key endorsement. The Boston Foundation is proud to have played such a pivotal role in launching the Aquarium. Effective philanthropy is making informed bets on promising people and ideas. In this case, it helped to build one of the greatest aquariums in the world.

Paul S. Grogan President and CEO The Boston Foundation



50th anniversary sponsor

My favorite memory was created on the night of October 10, 1995. My 10-year-old son, Brendan (now 33), and I attended a Save the Oceans event in the Aquarium. Entertainment for the event consisted of a solo performance by one of my favorite artists of all-time, Bruce Hornsby. Bruce was seated at the piano on the first-floor landing directly adjacent to the penguin pool ... As the night wore on, the crowd began to depart whilst Mr. Hornsby continued to play and sing. My son and I positioned ourselves standing right next to the piano and were entertained for some time. I even made requests for a few of my favorite songs, and Bruce obliged. We in effect had a near private concert for a time ... It began to get late after 9 p.m. and at one point we could hear the penguins in the pool making noises in unison with the song Bruce was playing. They were enjoying the music ... I would imagine like us that Bruce Hornsby too remembers this night as how often do you have a group of penguins in the orchestra seats during a live performance? A truly incredible experience and one that my son and I will never forget. We met Bruce Hornsby after the show and he autographed the event program I had. The memory is one for life.



As a leading, community-centric

financial services company headquartered in the Northeast, it is our mission to be an advocate for financial well-being in the communities we serve, and we believe it starts with creating an environment where we can all thrive! Sustainability is a core component of People's United Bank's Corporate Social Responsibility strategy, and we understand that the health of our oceans, waterways, marine wildlife, and the entire planet in which we call home, is directly linked to creating an environment where individuals, businesses, and our economy can prosper. We are proud to support the New England Aquarium in recognition of its 50th anniversary, and in their mission to be a catalyst for change in our coastal communities and beyond."

Bruce Figueroa Head of Nonprofit Banking People's United Bank



50th anniversary sponsor

I first started coming to the Aquarium in the late 1980s. There was a display about the polluted Boston Harbor. Years later, I came back on business and visited the Deer Island Sewage Treatment Plant and visited the Aquarium again. The exhibit was now replaced by a clean shoreline exhibit. A real success story!

Julie Ribes

# **Planned Giving**

Bequests and other revocable planned gifts are a wonderful way to support the New England Aquarium and further your legacy. For more information, please contact Anne Norton, Director of Individual Giving, at anorton@neaq.org or 617-226-2230.



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# Your Aquarium Needs You

While we have temporarily closed to visitors, our responsibility to deliver critical care for our 20,000 marine animals continues. We need the help of individuals like you to ensure that we can continue to realize our mission in these uncertain times. Your continued membership support or a gift of any size to our Mission Forward Fund supports animal care both at the New England Aquarium and our Animal Care Center in Quincy.

Learn more: neaq.org/give

