



Georgia Aquarium Conservation Field Station

Located in Marineland, Florida, the Georgia Aquarium Conservation Field Station (GACFS) was established in 2008 as part of Georgia Aquarium's ongoing research and conservation efforts through our 4R Program. The field station is dedicated to furthering our understanding of dolphins, marine mammals and aquatic species found along our coast through the 4Rs: **R**escue, **R**esearch, **R**ehabilitation and **R**esponsibility. GACFS is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization dedicated to research and rescue of dolphins and small whales in Northeast Florida. The state-of-the-art facility is fully equipped to respond to medical emergencies, perform field studies and help with the rehabilitation and release of animals that need immediate care. Animals deemed releasable by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will be released in the oceans after rehabilitation. Animals deemed by NMFS to be unfit for release will be provided a home for life at Marineland or another location selected by NMFS.

GACFS is an active member of the National Marine Fisheries Service's Marine Mammal Stranding Network. Upon entering into a Stranding Agreement in April of 2009, GACFS is currently authorized to respond in the event of dead or live marine mammal strandings (whale and dolphin) in Flagler County, Florida. As a member of the South East Region, GACFS also plays a supportive role in stranding and rescue events with neighboring network participants.

GACFS research programs not only help our understanding of marine mammal strandings, but also the health of our oceans. GACFS research programs are now documenting the cause of marine mammal strandings and the identification of emerging diseases in these species. Special emphasis will be placed on the study of the gross and histopathologic characterization of diseases. There is a present concern about the health of our oceans based on emerging diseases that suggest infectious, toxic and human-related etiologies.

GACFS will nurture conservation outreach programs already established in Mexico, Belize, Guyana, Dubai and at Colombian and Brazilian Amazon sites. This component GACFS program involves providing veterinary care to aquatic mammal species, while at the same time training local caregivers to provide future care on their own. At present, conservation outreach programs involving Antillean manatees (*Trichechus manatus manatus*) and Amazonian manatees (*Trichechus inunguis*) are ongoing in Mexico, Guyana, Colombia and Brazil and with dugongs (*Dugong dugon*) in Dubai.

GACFS personnel and investigators from Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute are conducting a population assessment study in Northeast Florida Intracoastal Waterways and Atlantic Seaboard. This research will focus on collecting baseline information regarding the identification of individual Atlantic bottlenose dolphins using photos of dorsal fins. A catalog of information will be created for animals in the area and will be compared with other known animals from other research areas on the East coast of



GEORGIA AQUARIUM

at Pemberton Place

the U.S. Information such as habitat usage, home ranges and estimated population size will help lay the foundation for continuing research in the area.

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About Georgia Aquarium

Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta, Georgia, is the world's largest with more than ten million gallons of water and the largest collection of aquatic animals. The mission of Georgia Aquarium is to be an entertaining, educational and scientific institution featuring exhibits and programs of the highest standards; offering engaging and exciting guest experiences promoting the conservation of aquatic biodiversity throughout the world. Georgia Aquarium is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums. For additional information, visit www.georgiaaquarium.org.