

SEA *Change*

2017 ANNUAL REPORT



GEORGIA AQUARIUM

Dear Friends,

2017 was an excellent year for Georgia Aquarium filled with accomplishments and highlights.

We traveled to remote Cenderawasih Bay, Indonesia to conduct truly ground-breaking whale shark research. The Aquarium banded together as an organization to support our conservation partners impacted by last year's devastating hurricanes—sending reinforcements to Marineland Dolphin Adventure as they braced for Hurricane Irma and providing refuge at our animal care facility for more than 50 sea turtles evacuated from Florida's Loggerhead Marinelife Center. For the second year in a row, we welcomed 2.4 million guests through our doors, including more than 145,000 students educated through Aquarium programming and more than 400 military personnel who participated in our Veterans Immersion Program (VIP).

Last January, we welcomed our seventh rescued California sea lion, Hunter, to the family, and later in the year, we saw another young sea lion, Scarlett, born right here at Georgia Aquarium. We hatched a total of 13 endangered zebra shark pups in 2017, with more eggs still developing—their most prolific year yet. Through it all, nearly every person at Georgia Aquarium was involved in the lengthy and in-depth process of applying for reaccreditation with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

It was a defining year for Georgia Aquarium—one that gave us a chance to take another look not just at what we do, but who we are. We ultimately decided to fine-tune our mission statement into something that better represented our true identity: Georgia Aquarium is a nonprofit committed to inspiring awareness and preservation of our ocean and aquatic animals worldwide.

For all of this, I thank you, our greatest supporters, who make it all possible.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Michael A. Leven".

Michael A. Leven

Chairman and CEO, Georgia Aquarium

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wonderworld

**NAVIGATING
WILDLIFE
PRESERVATION
ACROSS *the*
GLOBE**

As a leader in aquatic research and animal care, Georgia Aquarium is committed to fostering a deeper appreciation for our ocean and the amazing animals that call it home. Our team conducts vital research by working with animals both in our care and in their natural habitats across the globe, including work with African penguins, whale sharks, manta rays, sea turtles, coral, dolphins, and many others.

FIRST SUCCESSFUL WILD WHALE SHARK HEALTH ASSESSMENTS PERFORMED

This past summer, Georgia Aquarium's researchers led a group of scientists in performing the first ever successful health assessments on a wild population of whale sharks in Cenderawasih Bay, Indonesia. The expedition was a joint effort between Georgia Aquarium, Conservation International (CI) and the Indonesian government. Aquarium experts, who care for whale sharks daily, brought their knowledge and proven techniques for safely handling the whale sharks during the health assessments while collecting biological samples, measurements and attaching satellite tracking tags to the sharks.

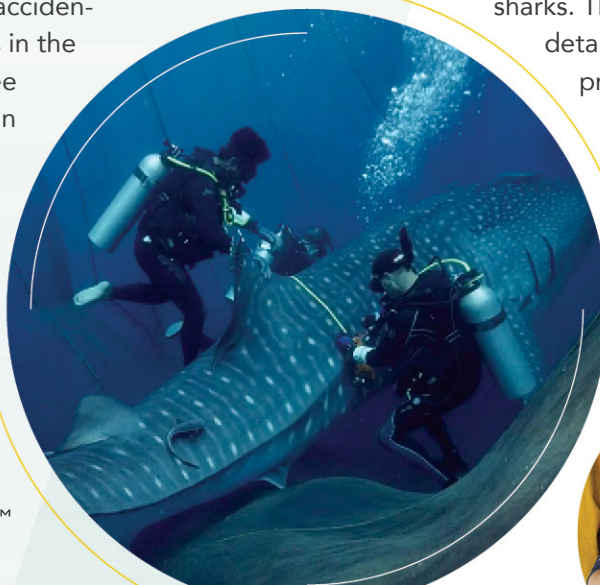
The whale shark is a migratory species, and is constantly on the move, making it extremely difficult to study free-swimming whale sharks. The ground-breaking research was made possible by a unique interaction that occurs between

fishers and whale sharks in Cenderawasih Bay. Indonesian fishers in the area catch schools of fish by suspending large nets beneath floating platforms, called bagans. Whale sharks are often seen feeding on these fish around the bagans, and, in the process, can accidentally

trap themselves in the nets. Fishers, who see whale sharks as a sign of good fortune,

release them after clearing the nets of their catch. Researchers were able to use these very same bagans to temporarily suspend the whale sharks during health assessments, and safely release them again once the assessments were complete.

The new research has significant implications for unlocking the mysteries surrounding the overall health of these sharks. The whale shark is the world's largest fish and has been classified as "endangered" since 2016. The new research could help scientists better understand the overall health of whale sharks—including the potential impacts of tourism on these sharks. The hope is that these details will help us to better protect this incredible species for future generations.



“As we begin decoding what we’ve collected from wild whale sharks, we become better positioned to protect them and educate the public about their importance.”

— Alistair Dove, PhD, Vice President of Research and Conservation, Georgia Aquarium





“Our findings suggest that the wild dolphins of our study have immune systems that are chronically activated and challenged.”

— Dr. Gregory Bossart

Chief Veterinary Officer and Senior Vice President of Research and Conservation, Georgia Aquarium

DOLPHINS IN THE OCEAN ARE TRYING TO TELL US SOMETHING

Georgia Aquarium’s long-time involvement with the bottlenose dolphin Health and Environmental Risk Assessment Project (HERA) continued in 2017 with the publication of a study based on the findings from the health assessments. The research, published in May in the scientific journal PLOS ONE, is the first of its kind. It compares the health of dolphins in their natural habitat with the health of those in human care. Samples and data were analyzed from four groups of dolphins—two groups living in natural environments in the Indian River Lagoon, Florida and near Charleston, South Carolina and two groups living in human care at Georgia Aquarium and at the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center in San Diego.

The study was co-authored by Dr. Gregory Bossart, Georgia Aquarium’s Chief Veterinary Officer and Senior Vice President of Research and Conservation. Bossart has been conducting routine health assessments with Georgia Aquarium’s research partners on more than 360 individual dolphins living in the Indian River Lagoon and Charleston since 2003 as part of the HERA Project. So far, the findings are concerning.

The 2017 study found that the two groups of dolphins in natural habitats are experiencing more active immune systems—and more health problems—than dolphins living in human care, raising concern among researchers about the overall

health of the ocean, and the long-term health of bottlenose dolphins. HERA researchers have recorded emerging infectious diseases, tumors, antibiotic resistant bacteria and alarmingly high levels of contaminants in dolphins from both native populations. Because dolphins are high on the food chain, they accumulate any toxins ingested by their prey in their body. The dolphins living in human care, however, had fewer health problems.

Georgia Aquarium is committed to the conservation of bottlenose dolphins and other marine animals, and will continue its work with the HERA Project, in hopes that this work will help the scientific community better understand how the ocean impacts the health of marine species.



**GEORGIA AQUARIUM
CONSERVATION
FIELD STATION**

A YEAR OF MILESTONES FOR SEA LIONS AT GEORGIA AQUARIUM

HUNTER: GEORGIA AQUARIUM'S SEVENTH RESCUED SEA LION

In early 2017, Georgia Aquarium introduced and welcomed our seventh rescued California sea lion, Hunter. In recent years, an unusually high number of California sea lion pups have become stranded and in need of rescue in an event known as an Unusual Mortality Event, or UME. Hunter was one of many pups in need of rescue during the UME. Like many rescued sea lions, it was discovered that Hunter had sustained several injuries in the ocean—including a propeller wound, fish hooks in his mouth and a problem with his left eye. On August 31, 2017 Hunter underwent surgery to hopefully help the difficulties in his left eye. Using the funds raised from 2016's Aqua Vino event benefiting California sea lions, Georgia Aquarium's veterinary and animal care teams worked alongside a veterinary ophthalmologist who specializes in aquatic animals, and a veterinary anesthesiologist, to successfully complete the surgery and provide Hunter with the best possible care.



Hunter was initially found malnourished, injured and emaciated on the coast of California.



2017 brought the first sea lion pup born at Georgia Aquarium.

SCARLETT

Resident California sea lion Edith gave birth to Scarlett on October 30, 2017. Named after the classic character Scarlett O'Hara, this pup is unique, sassy and has met many milestones like nursing successfully and finding her 'roar!' "We are looking forward to seeing Scarlett continue to grow and what she has in store for us over the coming months!" said Will Elgar, Director of Animal Training, Pinnipeds, at Georgia Aquarium.

CORAL RESTORATION

CORAL SPAWN TRANSFER

Reef-building corals reproduce by spawning: each animal releases reproductive material into the water at the same time, during what is known as a “spawning event.” By collecting this material and transferring it to a laboratory setting, experts can effectively breed healthy coral “babies” that can grow in optimal conditions and eventually be transported back to a struggling reef in the ocean.

August of 2017 marked one of the most successful transfers of live coral spawn to date. Hundreds of newly fertilized corals were transferred by Georgia Aquarium staff from the Florida Keys to Atlanta. This exciting event was a major step in creating a coral nursery at an inland facility, in human care. This effort was part of our continuing conservation partnership with Coral Restoration Foundation which has also enjoyed support over the last five years by The UPS Foundation.



CHASING CORAL EVENT

In October, Georgia Aquarium along with The Kendeda Fund hosted an exclusive screening of the Sundance Film Festival award-winning documentary, *Chasing Coral*. The occasion concluded with a panel of the filmmakers and our coral experts discussing the plight of coral reefs around the world with event attendees.



Beluga Whales

The beluga whales in Cook Inlet, Alaska, are critically endangered and have not shown signs of recovery for more than 20 years. Georgia Aquarium has partnered with other organizations to support new research on these whales. The goal is to use this information to guide conservation initiatives and help ensure the survival of this endangered population.

Beluga Calf Rescue

In September, an orphaned, four-week old beluga whale calf was rescued from Cook Inlet, Alaska and taken to the Alaska SeaLife Center (ASLC) in Seward, Alaska. Georgia Aquarium staff immediately travelled to assist with the constant and vital around-the-clock care. The male calf, named Tyonek, is a member of the critically endangered Cook Inlet beluga whale population. He has made a remarkable recovery, and Georgia Aquarium is honored to be a part of his rehabilitation.



MMHSRP
MMPA/ESA
Permit No.
18786-02

Chris Garner,
Department
of Defense

Elasmobranch Husbandry Manual

Multiple Georgia Aquarium experts made significant contributions to a 2017 animal care manual for sharks and rays published by the Ohio Biological Survey. The latest version of the Elasmobranch Husbandry Manual includes sections authored by Georgia Aquarium's Vice President of Research and Conservation, Dr. Alistair Dove, Nutritionist and Director of Research and Conservation, Dr. Lisa Hoopes, and Senior Director of Animal Health and Chief Veterinarian, Dr. Tonya Claus, DVM.



Sea Otters in Alaska

Georgia Aquarium assisted the team at Alaska SeaLife Center with the daily grooming and hand-rearing of an abandoned northern sea otter pup.

RESEARCH & CONSERVATION on OUR SHORES



Hurricane Relief Efforts

In September, Georgia Aquarium team members hit the road to help Marineland Dolphin Adventure brace for the impact of Hurricane Irma. Thanks to these efforts, Marineland sustained only minimal damages, and all animals and personnel were kept safe.

Georgia Aquarium's staff on site also aided in Hurricane Irma relief efforts, with the Animal Care Facility mobilizing to temporarily house more than 50 turtles from the Loggerhead Marineland in Juno Beach, Florida, evacuating from the powerful storm.

Listening for Manta Rays

Over the summer, Georgia Aquarium researchers installed a series of underwater listening stations, called a receiver array, off the coast of northern Florida. The stations will record when any previously tagged manta ray or other tagged animal swims near the station, helping researchers better understand the movements of these marine animals.



Red Brick Brewing

Georgia Aquarium and Red Brick Brewing Co. have entered into a long-term partnership to release seasonal craft beers. A portion of the sales help fund the Aquarium's global research and conservation efforts. 2017 saw the release of Whale Shark Wheat, Penguin Pale Ale, and Sea Otter Stout.



Zebra Sharks Born at Georgia Aquarium

In 2017 a total of 13 shark pups hatched, with additional egg cases still developing. The zebra sharks at Georgia Aquarium are part of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Species Survival Plan (SSP) program, in which the Aquarium works with other accredited zoological institutions to collectively manage the population of this endangered species in human care.

Georgia Manatee Study

In May, Georgia Aquarium and Conservation Field Station staff joined a team led by the Sea to Shore Alliance and Georgia Department of Natural Resources to collect, assess and tag a small sample of Florida manatees that utilize Georgia's coastal waters during the summer months.

Puerto Rico Manatees

In August, approximately sixty individuals from around a dozen institutions, including Georgia Aquarium, traveled to Bahia de Jobos, Puerto Rico, to participate in manatee health assessments.



Manatees in Peru

Georgia Aquarium sent a financial donation to the Rainforest Awareness, Rescue and Education Center (RAREC) in Iquitos, Peru to aid with the rehabilitation of a group of Amazonian manatees. The RAREC team works to rescue and rehabilitate wildlife along the Amazon River, and perform outreach to educate the local communities on the importance of conservation.

Trash-Free Seas

Georgia Aquarium is committed to eliminating ocean trash, and has teamed up with Ocean Conservancy's Trash Free Seas Alliance® to work toward this goal. Trash Free Seas Alliance® unites industry, science and conservation leaders who share a common goal for a healthy ocean free of trash.

African Penguins

Georgia Aquarium continues to support our partnership with the South African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB) in South Africa.



...and
AROUND
the **WORLD**

Imagination **STEMulation**

**INSPIRING
YOUNG MINDS**
with the **BUILDING
BLOCKS of
LEARNING**

Georgia Aquarium's educational experiences are an opportunity for students to discover the aquatic realm in an immersive learning environment. We also offer our Sponsored Education Admissions (SEA) program to ensure that diverse audiences, regardless of economic status, have an opportunity to participate in our unique educational experiences at no cost. We are able to provide this gift thanks to private charitable donations from generous corporations, foundations and individuals.



EDUCATION PARTNERS WITH SMITHSONIAN

This year Georgia Aquarium partnered with the Smithsonian Institute to offer multiple educational opportunities through a series of workshops. The popular adults-only lecture series Science on Tap, featured acclaimed scientists and conservationists who spoke on environmental topics over drinks and hors d'oeuvres. In September, teachers in grades K-2 explored ways to help young children discover the physical properties of water and how it interacts with other materials. "I thought it was really cool learning how to engage students with open exploration using the water table because it gives the students a sense of exploring their own curiosities about water and different ways to manipulate water," said Katie Sheffield, an environmental educator. Georgia Aquarium also hosted a one-day field trip in October, which allowed Title I middle school students in the Metropolitan Atlanta area to visit the Aquarium.

Georgia Aquarium, in conjunction with Georgia-Pacific, Inc., has developed a free video series entitled "STEAM Forward" that highlights the variety of career pathways at Georgia Aquarium in the fields of science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics. The Smithsonian Institution Field Trip program is designed to build on this platform using the Aquarium's galleries to illustrate different career opportunities and make the connection between what students are learning in the classroom and what our experts are doing in the field.

145,204

TOTAL STUDENTS
WELCOMED

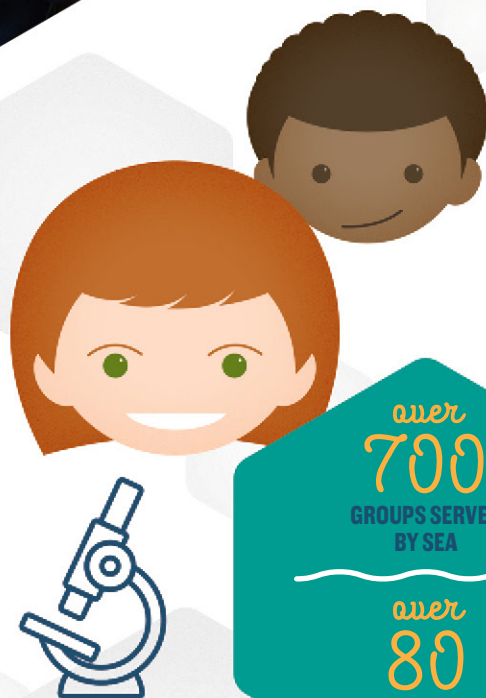
2,579

SCHOOL GROUPS
SERVED



“
I thought it was really cool, learning how to engage students with open exploration using the water table, because it gives the students a sense of exploring their own curiosities...
”

— Katie Sheffield,
Environmental Educator



over
700
GROUPS SERVED
BY SEA

over
80
COUNTIES REACHED
BY SEA

SPONSORED EDUCATION ADMISSIONS (SEA) PROGRAM



To meet the needs of students who are unable to visit under normal circumstances, the Aquarium is proud to offer Sponsored Education Admissions (SEA), which provides free admission to groups and individuals in need of financial assistance. The SEA program provides individuals, corporations and foundations with a means of donating funds to allow students to explore the wonders of the underwater world by participating in an educational experience at Georgia Aquarium.

Of the **145,204** students served, we sponsored **72,557** students from Title I schools and non-profits in Georgia to attend the Aquarium at no charge.

This means **49%** of the students were sponsored!

This equates to over **\$939,000** in fiscal support for our SEA program.



Top 5

COUNTIES SERVED BY SEA

DEKALB COUNTY • **15,370**
FULTON COUNTY • **14,999**
CLAYTON COUNTY • **6,616**
COBB COUNTY • **5,130**
GWINNETT COUNTY • **3,768**



MILITARY
SALUTE

BEAUTY & HONOR

SUPPORTING OUR VETERANS *through the* **WONDERS of the SEA**



OR

Georgia Aquarium and our founding partner, The Home Depot Foundation, are proud supporters of our armed forces and have worked together to honor the brave individuals who serve our country with our Military Salute programming. Georgia Aquarium is dedicated to impacting military personnel with these meaningful experiences.

VETERANS IMMERSION PROGRAM

The Veteran's Immersion Program (VIP) is one way we support the brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces. This unique experience is designed to complement current rehabilitation and reintegration programs and offers participants a chance to snorkel or SCUBA dive in Georgia Aquarium's 6.3-million-gallon habitat, Ocean Voyager Built by The Home Depot.

Since its founding in 2008, the Veterans Immersion Program has served more than 2,700 military personnel and guests who have been physically, emotionally or mentally wounded—injuries both seen and unseen. Participants challenge themselves with an experience outside their comfort zones, encounter enormous animals, and for some, relax and move in the water in ways they may no longer be able to on land.

Georgia Aquarium's Veterans Immersion Program is funded entirely by private support. Donors and sponsors play an important role by ensuring this incredible experience reaches as many veterans as possible. Major VIP supporters include The Home Depot Foundation and Lockheed Martin.

“It gets these soldiers out of their rooms, out of their barracks, out of the homes and opens their eyes to new ideas and adventures.”

—VIP Participant and Member of
the Warrior Transition Battalion

UNDERWATER REENLISTMENT CEREMONIES

Georgia Aquarium is proud to host underwater reenlistment ceremonies, in which military personnel that are committing to another term of service with a branch of The United States Armed Forces are able to swear their oath in one of the world's largest aquarium habitats—6.3-million-gallon Ocean Voyager Built by The Home Depot.

“This trip will help me heal with others that share a similar pain that is often shunned by those that haven't experienced the sacrifice.”

—VIP Participant and Member of Gold Star Families



“This experience is once in a lifetime for these patients and gives them a renewed spirit to return to therapy the next day and work even harder.”

—VIP Participant and Therapist

MILITARY MONDAYS

At Georgia Aquarium, we recognize the extraordinary sacrifices our military personnel, veterans and their loved ones have made while serving our country. Military Mondays are our way to say thank you for their outstanding service. We are honored to provide special discounts to active and former military members, veterans and their families.

GOLD STAR FAMILIES

The Gold Star Families program is our way of honoring the sacrifices of families who have lost a loved one in combat. On Gold Star Mother's Day, September 24, 2017, Georgia Aquarium opened its doors early for a special day for Gold Star Families, which included free admission and special interactive programming for 175 family members of our fallen heroes.

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS, SPONSORS AND FRIENDS

Everything we do under the umbrella of Military Salute is thanks to our founding partner, The Home Depot Foundation. Other foundations, corporations and individual donors support the therapeutic programs like Veterans Immersion Program and the Gold Star Families Programs, but it's all possible because of our partnership with The Home Depot Foundation.



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As a 501(c)3 not-for-profit, we rely on the support of our community to ensure that we can continue our groundbreaking research initiatives, conservation efforts, educational programs, and community partnerships. By supporting Georgia Aquarium, these generous donors allow us to make a positive impact on the health and welfare of aquatic life from around the globe and remain at the forefront of aquatic science.

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CREATE A SEA CHANGE FOR GOOD

Georgia Aquarium is a nonprofit committed to inspiring awareness and preservation of our ocean and aquatic animals worldwide.

In order to continue these efforts, we need your help.

PLEASE SUPPORT GEORGIA AQUARIUM

Together, we can create a sea change—in our ocean, and for the wondrous life that inhabits it.

You can support the work being done in our facility and in the field through a tax-deductible contribution to Georgia Aquarium. Your contributions are vital to the success of our mission.

We couldn't do this without you!

For more information on how you can help, please contact our Development department at (404) 581-4136 or development@georgiaaquarium.org or visit www.georgiaaquarium.org/support.





GEORGIA AQUARIUM

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