

# SEA *Change*



GEORGIA AQUARIUM

2018 ANNUAL REPORT



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GEORGIA AQUARIUM  
2018 ANNUAL REPORT

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## COLLARED LIZARD

**SCIENTIFIC NAME** *Crotaphytus collaris*

**CONSERVATION STATUS** Least Concern

**FACT** Collared lizards may run using only their hind legs.



## Dear Friends,

Each year at Georgia Aquarium, I am amazed by what we are able to accomplish together. 2018 was no exception.

We welcomed another 2.5 million guests through our Aquarium doors last year—only the second year since 2007 that we’ve seen such incredible numbers. Of those guests, more than 160,000 of them were students and educators, and nearly 73,000 of those came from Title I schools and non-profits through our Sponsored Education Admissions (SEA) program. Altogether, more than one million dollars in fiscal support was used to bring these students to the Aquarium who might not otherwise have the means to experience this incredible educational opportunity. I am continuously humbled and tremendously grateful for the support of our sponsors and donors for their dedication to educating these future leaders.

In 2018, Georgia Aquarium successfully achieved accreditation by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) for the third time. The AZA requires zoos and aquariums to successfully complete the process every five years. To achieve this most recent accreditation, we underwent a thorough review process that involved an in-depth application and a comprehensive on-site inspection by zoo and aquarium professionals. This is a great honor and speaks to our level of care and commitment to our mission.

We also broke ground on the next big expansion for Georgia Aquarium—Expansion 2020. The expansion will add a one-million-gallon state-of-the-art gallery featuring large, charismatic shark species. These animals are some of the world’s most mysterious and misunderstood predators and have long been the subjects of our fear and fascination. Now, they’re coming to Georgia Aquarium as we’ve never seen them before. We were joined for this momentous groundbreaking by Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, local educational leaders, and a few very special guests—students from Atlanta’s Centennial Academy, who shared with us the impact the Aquarium has already had on their education. As we look to the future, I know this gallery will provide even more young people with inspiring experiences that will stay with them for years to come.

It is your continued dedication to the mission of Georgia Aquarium that makes this all possible. Thank you, once again, for being our biggest supporters.

Sincerely,



**Michael A. Leven**  
Chairman and CEO,  
Georgia Aquarium



### CLOWN ANEMONEFISH

**SCIENTIFIC NAME** *Amphiprion percula*

**CONSERVATION STATUS** Not Evaluated

**FACT** Clown anemonefish are immune to the sting of their anemone homes.



# OUR ONLY OCEAN

## Mapping and Preserving Our Planet's Irreplaceable Aquatic Life

**E**very day, researchers at Georgia Aquarium strive to learn more about the animals in our care, develop improved methods of animal husbandry and veterinary medicine, and apply these discoveries to the conservation of aquatic animals and ecosystems. Our goal is to better understand our aquatic world so that we may conserve it for generations to come.





## Studying Ocean Plastics and the World's Largest Fish in the South Atlantic

In 2018, Georgia Aquarium researchers returned once again to the island of St. Helena in the South Atlantic, this time expanding the scope of the research expedition to include a new study on ocean plastics in addition to continuing research on endangered whale sharks.

The Aquarium has been studying whale sharks in St. Helena since 2014. The remote island is one of the only

known places where large adult males and females are found in the same aggregation, leading experts to believe the sharks use the waters surrounding

Program, joined Georgia Aquarium's Vice President of Research and Conservation, Dr. Alistair Dove and a team of Georgia Aquarium researchers and divers on this trip. Ocean Conservancy is a globally recognized conservation organization dedicated to protecting the ocean from the many challenges it faces. Together, the team conducted the first ever island-wide plastics assessments on the beaches of St. Helena, uncovering a startling number of plastics for such an isolated island. Most alarmingly, the study showed that the plastic did not come from residents on St. Helena, but was instead carried to the remote island by ocean currents, proving once again that ocean plastics, especially microplastics, are a worldwide problem.

St. Helena as mating grounds. Aquarium researchers have been gathering data on the sharks near the island over the past several years by deploying a variety of satellite tags on the sharks, as well as installing an underwater acoustic array around the island in 2016 to collect data on animal movements in the area. On the 2018 expedition, a team of Georgia Aquarium divers were able to retrieve and download the first years of data from the acoustic array.

Two research partners from the Ocean Conservancy, Dr. George Leonard, Chief Scientist, and Nick Mallos, Director, Trash Free Seas

Georgia Aquarium hopes to continue its groundbreaking research in St. Helena for years to come, focusing on discovering more about whale shark biology and working with our conservation partners toward solutions for ocean plastics.



ST. HELENA



# WHALE SHARKS

### WHALE SHARK

**SCIENTIFIC NAME** *Rhincodon typus*

**CONSERVATION STATUS** Endangered

**FACT** Although it's the largest fish in the world, the whale shark eats some of the tiniest creatures in the ocean, called zooplankton.

### Working Together for Trash-Free Seas

Georgia Aquarium has been a member of Ocean Conservancy's Trash Free Seas Alliance since 2015, joining a group of more than 20 sustainability leaders from across the globe. The Trash Free Seas Alliance is a unique forum launched by Ocean Conservancy in 2012 that brings together leaders from industry, conservation and academic organizations to create a forum for pragmatic, real-world collaboration focused on measurable reduction of ocean trash. Alliance members commit to shared exploration of long-term strategies that improve ocean health by reducing or eliminating ocean trash.





# DOLPHINS

## COMMON BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN

**SCIENTIFIC NAME** *Tursiops truncatus*

**CONSERVATION STATUS** Least Concern

**FACT** Bottlenose dolphins don't chew food—they usually swallow it whole.

## Dolphins and HERA at the Conservation Field Station



In 2018, Georgia Aquarium researchers led crucial research on the health of bottlenose dolphins directly from the Georgia Aquarium Conservation Field Station (GACFS) in Marineland, Florida. The GACFS is a stranding response center under federal authorization for dolphins and small whales located in the St. Johns County and Flagler County areas.

The bottlenose dolphin Health and Environmental Risk Assessment (HERA) project was developed in 2003, to determine the health patterns of wild bottlenose dolphins and the potential connections to human health.

HERA was launched by Georgia Aquarium Senior Vice President and Chief Veterinary Officer Dr. Gregory Bossart, in collaboration with Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute (HBOI) at Florida Atlantic University and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Charleston.

Several members of the Aquarium's senior leadership team joined researchers in the field in 2018, giving them a close-up look at this important research initiative in action.

For fifteen years, HERA researchers have safely examined and released more than 360 bottlenose dolphins in Florida's Indian River Lagoon and the coastal waters of Charleston, South Carolina. To date, more than 100 scientific publications have been produced from the HERA project, with four new scholarly works published in 2018 alone.

In the Indian River Lagoon, the HERA researchers found high levels of mercury in the native dolphin population, which could be mirrored in the health of local fishermen

and residents. Previously published work by HERA scientists detailed how these dolphins also exhibited problems associated with immune suppression, viruses and infectious agents—some of which are also potentially dangerous to humans.

Researchers studying the dolphin population near Charleston documented high levels of chemicals, likely introduced into the water from industrial and non-point sources.

Atlantic bottlenose dolphins are great signifiers for the health of their environment because they have long life spans, they typically remain close to shore, feed at a high level of the food chain and their bodies store fat that can serve as deposits for toxins.

The main goals of the HERA project are to develop standardized tools for health and environmental risk assessment and to explore the relationship between the health of the local dolphin populations and potential environmental stressors



28°11'01.95"N

Image courtesy of NASA





## Protecting Puffins

2018 kicked off with the opening of the new Puffins habitat in the Cold Water Quest gallery. The new addition features tufted and horned puffins as well as common murres and pigeon guillemots—all seabirds of the North Pacific. Georgia Aquarium partnered with the Alaska SeaLife Center and other conservation partners to successfully bring these birds to their new home in Atlanta, Georgia.

The habitat was designed to closely resemble the rocky coastal cliffs where these seabirds nest. The rockwork within the habitat includes burrows, the preferred nesting space for tufted and horned puffins. These species are part of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Species Survival Plan (SSP) program. Other features of the new habitat include seasonal lighting and temperature changes that mirror the subarctic environment these birds call home.



# PUFFINS

### HORNED PUFFIN

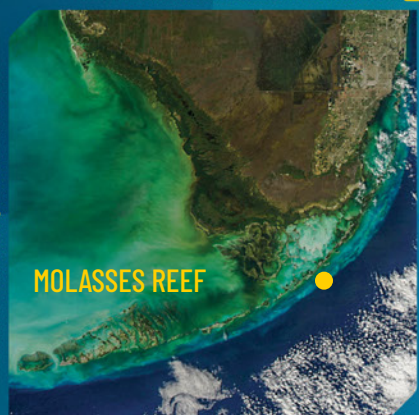
**SCIENTIFIC NAME** *Fratercula corniculata*

**CONSERVATION STATUS** Least Concern

**FACT** Unlike the penguin, puffins and other alcids can fly—although they mostly swim while at sea.



# CORAL REEFS



MOLASSES REEF

Image courtesy of NASA

## STAGHORN CORAL

### SCIENTIFIC NAME

*Acropora cervicornis*

### CONSERVATION STATUS

Endangered

**FACT** Coral reefs cover less than one percent of the ocean floor, however they support about 25% of all ocean life.

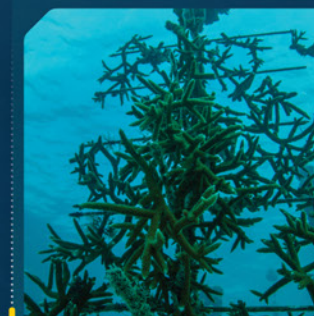
## Celebrating 10 Years of Coral Restoration



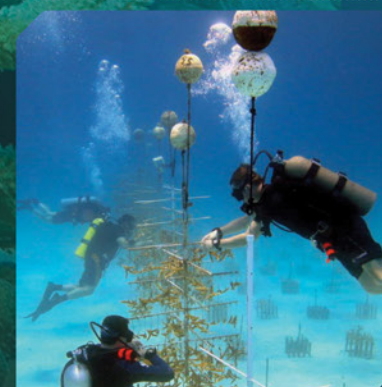
2018 marked 10 years of Georgia Aquarium's coral restoration efforts in the Florida Keys. Since 2008, the Aquarium has partnered with the Coral Restoration Foundation (CRF), a non-profit ocean conservation organization dedicated to restoring depleted coral reefs to a healthy state. The partnerships focuses on outplanting small pieces of living coral, called frags, on Molasses Reef in the Florida Keys.

Since 2012, The UPS Foundation has provided financial support for Georgia Aquarium's coral restoration efforts with the CRF, and has generously gifted the Aquarium a total of \$350,000 to fund this important conservation initiative. The UPS Foundation's continued generosity has allowed Aquarium team members to travel each year to the Florida

Keys National Marine Sanctuary and re-plant critically endangered staghorn and elkhorn coral fragments onto the degraded Molasses Reef. To date, hundreds of fragments have been re-planted, coral spawn has been collected



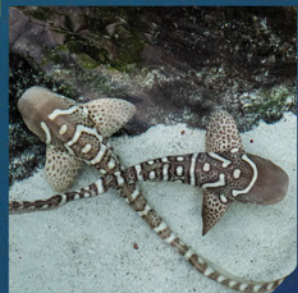
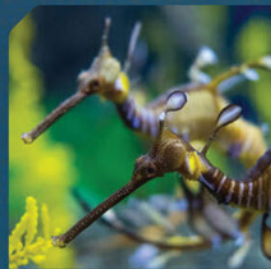
to strengthen genetic diversity through sexual propagation techniques, and a coral propagation tank was constructed at the Aquarium to hold coral samples. This continued support has helped conservation efforts to restore and protect coral reefs, one of the most valuable ecosystems on Earth, for current and future generations.





## Our Youngest Members

In 2018 we welcomed four new chicks to our colony of endangered African penguins, young weedy sea dragons, and two tufted pufflings—the first pufflings ever hatched at Georgia Aquarium! We also continue to participate in the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Species Survival Plan (SSP) program for the endangered zebra shark. We had 15 zebra shark pups hatch in 2018!



## Atlanta Brewing Company Partnership

A portion of the proceeds from the release of new seasonal craft beers Sea Dragon Basil Blonde, Puffin Chocolate Porter and the relaunch of Whale Shark Wheat help fund Georgia Aquarium's research and conservation initiatives.

## Autism Certification

In October, Georgia Aquarium was the first aquarium ever to become a Certified Autism Center (CAC). The CAC designation means that guests of all ages who have autism and other sensory disorders are provided an exceptional experience that caters to their needs and connects them with the wonders of the aquatic world.



## Cook Inlet Beluga Whale Study

Researchers published their findings on the first hearing tests performed on wild beluga whales conducted in Bristol Bay, Alaska by a team of researchers and marine mammal experts from multiple institutions, including Georgia Aquarium.



## Rescuing Smuggled Stingrays

In 2018, Georgia Aquarium welcomed rescued freshwater stingrays to one of our touchpools. The rays were confiscated from an illegal wildlife trafficking operation by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and were unable to be safely returned to their natural habitat. Georgia Aquarium is proud to work with USFWS to provide a safe haven for rescued animals like these rays.

## SANCCOB Saves Seabirds

Georgia Aquarium continues its partnership with the South African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB), by supporting their efforts to rescue, rehabilitate and release African penguins.

## E3 Award for Water Conservation

Last October, Georgia Aquarium received the 2018 E3 Liquid Assets Award from the Metro Atlanta Chamber (MAC) in recognition of our state-of-the-art closed-loop water reclamation and filtration system, which allows us to reclaim, filter and reuse more than 99.5% of exhibit water.

## Fundraising

### Eco Tour in the Galapagos

The first ever Georgia Aquarium eco tour set sail in the Galapagos Islands last September. Travelers embarked on an once-in-a-lifetime experience including offshore excursions and nature lectures from Georgia Aquarium's Vice President of Research and Conservation, Dr. Al Dove.



## Aqua Vino

Our premier food and wine fundraising event raised more than \$130,000 in 2018 for Georgia Aquarium's research and conservation initiatives.

## Science on Tap

Ticket sales from our lecture series support Aquarium research and conservation initiatives. Featured speakers in 2018 included Georgia Aquarium's resident whale shark expert Dr. Al Dove and award-winning photojournalist and conservationist Brian Skerry.

## Ringing in the New Year

At the second annual New Year's Eve Black and White Celebration, we welcomed 2019 by raising more than \$78,000 for research and conservation efforts around the globe.

## Grants to Green

Georgia Aquarium received a grant from the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta to establish a green revolving fund. The fund focuses on implementing projects that improve the Aquarium's sustainability while reducing energy costs.



# DISCOVER EVERY

CHANNELLED

**Stirring  
Imagination  
Through  
Marine  
Science**



At Georgia Aquarium, we aim to provide learning opportunities that are standards-based and student-centered, with an emphasis on conservation and connecting students to nature.



**W**e are committed to ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to experience Georgia Aquarium. To meet the needs of students who are unable to visit under normal circumstances, we are proud to offer **Sponsored Education Admissions (SEA)**, funded primarily by private support.



In 2018 Georgia Aquarium welcomed

**162,073**

STUDENTS from

**96** Georgia  
counties

**21** states

**4** different  
countries



International students served

**22** from  
Turkey

**32** from  
Germany

**18** from the  
United Kingdom

**26** from  
Colombia



## ROV Camp

Thanks to a generous grant from Motorola Solutions Foundation, last spring Georgia Aquarium was able to host an underwater ROV (remotely-operated vehicle) camp for 12 girls and two teachers from Sweetwater Middle School, a Gwinnett County Title I school in Lawrenceville, Georgia. Over the course of the four-day camp, the girls used engineering and physical science knowledge, skills and applications to successfully design and build an ROV. On top of using engineering design to construct their own ROVs, the girls and their teachers talked with an expert about ROV applications for research in the field, learned about the importance of women in STEM careers and developed team building and communication skills. At the end of the camp the girls took their ROVs for a real-world test in Georgia Tech's pool and diving facilities.

This incredible learning opportunity was made possible by a generous \$10,000 grant from Motorola Solutions Foundation, the charitable arm of Motorola Solutions Inc. The grant focused



on forging strong community bonds, supporting STEM education programs and preparing the next generation of innovators for the future. Georgia Aquarium and Motorola Solutions Foundation hope that by participating in the ROV camp the students and teachers will return to school with the knowledge and confidence to view engineering as a feasible college and career path for girls. Georgia Aquarium is proud to announce that it will be receiving the Motorola Solutions Foundation grant for a second year in a row. Spring 2019 will bring another 16 girls and two teachers from Sweetwater Middle School to participate in our spring break ROV camp.



## Sponsored Education Admissions (SEA Program)

Georgia Aquarium is proud to offer Sponsored Education Admissions (SEA), which provides Aquarium admission to individuals and groups in need of financial assistance. The SEA program aims to meet the needs of students who are unable to visit under normal circumstances. Individuals, corporations and foundations with means of donating funds allow students to participate in educational experiences at Georgia Aquarium and gain appreciation for the wonders of the underwater world.



# TOP 5

counties served  
**DeKALB**  
**FULTON**  
**CLAYTON**  
**COBB**  
**GWINNETT**



The **SEA program** was able to reach roughly

# 40%

of the **STATE OF GEORGIA**, including  
**every county** in Metro Atlanta

Of the **162,073 students** served,

# 72,590

were students from **Title I schools** and  
**non-profits** in Georgia that were sponsored  
to attend the Aquarium **FREE OF CHARGE**

# \$1,030,537

in **FUNDING** was used for the **SEA program**





Providing Our Heroes with  
Moments of Serenity

# TRUE BLUE

**G**eorgia Aquarium is proud to continue our **Military Salute** programming with the support of our founding partner, **The Home Depot Foundation**. Through Military Salute, The Home Depot Foundation and Georgia Aquarium work together to honor the brave individuals who serve our country.





**T**hrough our **Veterans Immersion Program**, we provide an opportunity for recreational therapy to our nation's wounded heroes. With Military Mondays, we are able to offer free or discounted admission to military personnel, veterans and their loved ones. Our **Gold Star Families Initiative** serves to honor and acknowledge the families of fallen soldiers through interactive programming.

Georgia Aquarium is committed to providing meaningful experiences to the brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces.



## Veterans Immersion Program

The Veteran's Immersion Program 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 originating in 2008, the Veterans Immersion Program has served more than 3,000 military personnel and guests to date who have been physically, emotionally or mentally wounded.



**“IT BROUGHT  
ME TO A  
DIFFERENT  
WORLD”**

—VIP Participant



“I FELT  
MORE IN  
TOUCH”

—VIP Participant

## Thank You to Our Partners and Supporters

Everything we offer our brave service men and women through Military Salute is thanks to our partnership with The Home Depot Foundation. Our Military Salute program is funded entirely by private support through foundations, corporations and individual donors. Major support includes Lockheed Martin as well as our founding partner The Home Depot Foundation, which makes this important work possible.



## Gold Star Families

On June 13, 2018, Georgia Aquarium welcomed over 150 Gold Star Family members from the Travis Manion Foundation. These children, parents, grandparents and siblings of fallen U.S. service personnel explored the Aquarium, participated in a variety of animal encounters, swam with the whale sharks, and even spent the night as part of our Sleepover program.



## 2018 Board of Directors

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## 2018 Presenting Sponsors



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### CALIFORNIA SEA LION

**SCIENTIFIC NAME** *Zalophus californianus*

**CONSERVATION STATUS** Least concern

**FACT** May jump out of the water, a behavior known as "porpoising," or surf in the waves.



# Thank You to Our Donors

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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🏹 Susan and Tony White  
Mr. and Mrs. Marsh Willis  
🏹 Dr. Jennifer Wohlers  
World Of Coca-Cola  
Mr. James Young  
The Zaban Foundation  
🏹 Angelina and Sara Zubas

## Gifts In Kind

1KEPT  
Active Production and Design, Inc.  
The Alliance Theatre  
Andretti Indoor Karting and Games  
AT&T  
Atlanta Botanical Garden  
Atlanta Hawks  
Atlanta United  
Bairiki by Jan Barwick  
Ballstone Inn Savannah Georgia  
Blue Ridge Grill  
Busch Gardens Tampa Bay  
Chatanooga Zoo  
The Coca-Cola Company  
College Football Hall of Fame  
Delta Flight Museum  
Elkay  
The Georgian Terrace Hotel  
The Gifted Ferret  
iMonkey Media  
Kendra Scott  
Kia Motors  
Kitchen Six  
Lanier Parking  
Little Italia  
Mandarin Oriental Atlanta  
Mercedes-Benz USA  
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Nashville Zoo  
Piedmont Healthcare  
Pulseworks  
Ray's in the City  
Restaurant Associates  
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Robin Lehman Glass  
Sculpted Contours Luxury  
Medical Aesthetics  
Seasons 52  
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Southwest Airlines  
SunTrust Banks  
Tessitura  
Thunderbolt Power Yoga  
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Voga Italian Gelato  
White Oak Kitchen & Cocktails  
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Zoo Atlanta





## Help Create **A SEA CHANGE**

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

**GEORGIAAQUARIUM.ORG/SUPPORT**

#### **WHITE SPOTTED JELLY**

**SCIENTIFIC NAME** *Phyllorhiza punctata*

**CONSERVATION STATUS** Not Evaluated

**FACT** A large group of jellies is called a smack.





GEORGIA AQUARIUM

225 Baker Street NW, Atlanta, Georgia 30313  
404.581.4136 | [GeorgiaAquarium.org](http://GeorgiaAquarium.org)