

# SEA *change*

2019 ANNUAL REPORT



GEORGIA AQUARIUM





## LONGHORN COWFISH

**SCIENTIFIC NAME**  
*Lactoria cornuta*

**ANIMAL FACT** The longhorn cowfish employs a unique method of swimming called ostraciiform locomotion, in which the caudal fin moves from side to side, causing the fish to look as though it is hovering.

**CONSERVATION STATUS**  
Not evaluated



# NAVIGATE

GEORGIA AQUARIUM  
2019 ANNUAL REPORT

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2019 HIGHLIGHTS **26**

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# FRIENDS

**E**very year, as we pull together all of the topics we want to highlight from the year before, I am continuously impressed by the accomplishments of the amazing Georgia Aquarium team. As our donors and supporters, you all are very much a part of that team.

2019 was an excellent year for Georgia Aquarium filled with achievements and high points. We welcomed almost 2.9 million guests through our doors—our highest attendance since 2006.

Our scientists and animal care experts traveled to locations around the world to conduct innovative research. We also welcomed more than 99,000 Title I students and educators through Sponsored Education Admissions and hundreds of military personnel and their families through Military Salute programming.

Last spring, we saw the debut of our television show ‘The Aquarium’ on Animal Planet, introducing a new audience of millions to the amazing work that goes on behind the scenes every day at Georgia Aquarium.



Sincerely,  
**Brian Davis, PhD**

President & Chief  
Executive Officer,  
Georgia Aquarium

It was an incredible year for Georgia Aquarium—one that saw new milestones reached and set the bar even higher for the future. As the new President and CEO of Georgia Aquarium, let me assure you that when I look to the future of this organization, I see us as a team broadening our goals and accomplishments. I am so proud to be a part of this team.

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

## CALIFORNIA SEA LION

**SCIENTIFIC NAME**  
*Zalophus californianus*

**ANIMAL FACT** California sea lions’ whiskers can detect vibrations under water.

**CONSERVATION STATUS**  
Least Concern

EXTINCT THREATENED LEAST CONCERN  
EX EW CR EN VU NT **LC** DD NE



# DEEP FAITH

**G**eorgia Aquarium has sent research teams into the field throughout the United States and around the world to study and protect animals including bottlenose dolphins, beluga whales, whale sharks, manta rays, sea turtles, sea lions and more. Our goal is to better understand our aquatic world so that we may conserve it for generations to come.



**Marine Science Goes to  
Great Lengths to Better  
Protect Our Oceans**



# STEALTH HEALTH

Georgia Aquarium has  
participated in more than

45

shark-related research  
trips since 2010

## GREAT HAMMERHEAD SHARK

**SCIENTIFIC NAME**  
*Sphyrna mokarran*

**ANIMAL FACT** The great hammerhead is the  
largest species of hammerhead shark.

### CONSERVATION STATUS

Critically Endangered

EXTINCT THREATENED LEAST CONCERN  
EX EW **CR** EN VU NT LC DD NE

Georgia Aquarium  
researchers  
have traveled to  
the Galapagos  
Islands, Nova  
Scotia and beyond

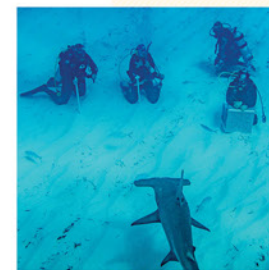
## SHARK RESEARCH

Over the last decade, Georgia Aquarium researchers have travelled across the globe to study shark species. From the remote Galapagos Islands to the frigid waters off the coast of Canada, the Aquarium has participated in more than 45 shark related research trips since 2010.

In early October, Dr. Lisa Hoopes traveled to Nova Scotia, Canada to join the OCEARCH crew for a white shark research expedition. Dr. Hoopes, the Aquarium's Nutritionist and Director of Research and Conservation, served as Chief Scientist during this trip. The main goal of the expedition was to learn about the diet and eating habits of large predatory sharks, using white sharks as a model.

Georgia Aquarium also sent a team to the Bahamas to conduct research on tiger and hammerhead sharks. Working alongside Bimini Biological Field Station, scientists collected samples to examine the feeding ecology of tiger sharks across areas of human influence. As well as studying the shark's microbiome, scientists primarily looked at plastics impacts in tiger sharks as a result of their diet.

Throughout 2019, the Aquarium's Expansion 2020 project continued to hit construction milestones. With the main structure completed, acrylic windows set and life support systems in place, the more than one million-gallon shark habitat is on track to open in fall 2020. In the coming year, Georgia Aquarium hopes that new and continued research will provide valuable information that can help sharks in the ocean and be applied to sharks in aquariums.



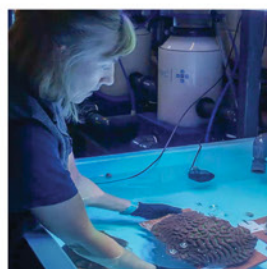


# REEF RELIEF

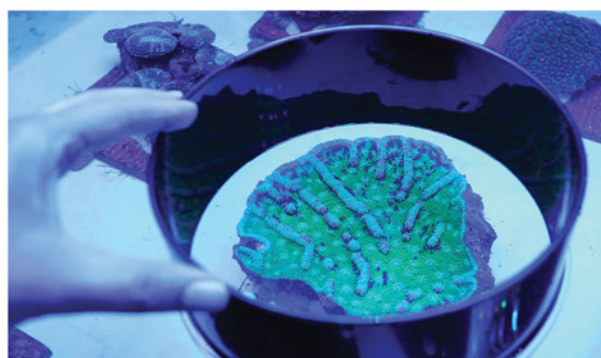
## CORAL CONSERVATION

In 2019, Georgia Aquarium partnered with The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) to rescue corals from a disease that is currently affecting reefs from Miami to Key West. The disease, called Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease, causes lesions that eventually spread, ultimately killing the entire coral colony.

Joined with other zoological facilities, as well as federal and state agencies, Georgia Aquarium rescued corals and housed them away from the disease outbreak. We received more than 85 corals representing 12 different species. These corals could stay at the Aquarium for several years before being placed back in the ocean.



## Georgia Aquarium rescued corals and housed them away from the disease outbreak



## STAGHORN CORAL

**SCIENTIFIC NAME**  
*Acropora cervicornis*

**ANIMAL FACT** Coral has been around for a half billion years.

**CONSERVATION STATUS**  
Critically Endangered

EXTINCT THREATENED LEAST CONCERN  
EX EW **CR** EN VU NT LC DD NE

Georgia Aquarium  
received more than

85

corals representing

12

different species



## CORAL RESTORATION IN THE FLORIDA KEYS

Since 2008, the Aquarium has partnered with the Coral Restoration Foundation, a non-profit ocean conservation organization dedicated to restoring depleted coral reefs to a healthy state. This partnership focuses on re-planting small pieces of living coral, called frags, on Molasses Reef in the Florida Keys.

Our efforts towards coral restoration and conservation have been supported by the UPS Foundation since 2012. This 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.

The UPS Foundation grant also allowed for Georgia Aquarium to bring on an apprentice from Spelman College. This role helped the research and conservation efforts for all our coral at the Aquarium, including the coral rescued from Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease in the Florida Keys.

The 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.



The work being done by our animal training team, biologists, and belugas helps to protect beluga whale populations globally



Typical thickness of beluga whale blubber is

4

inches (10 cm), but thicknesses of up to 10.6 inches (27 cm) have been reported

## BELUGA WHALE

**SCIENTIFIC NAME**  
*Delphinapterus leucas*

**ANIMAL FACT** Beluga whales use echolocation to find prey in murky water.

### CONSERVATION STATUS

Near Threatened



# DATA BY THE TON

## BELUGA PHYSIOLOGY PROJECT

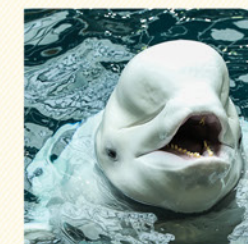
In 2019, Georgia Aquarium partnered with NOAA Fisheries and University of California Santa Cruz Long Marine Lab to begin a beluga whale metabolic study. Through working with adult beluga whales at Georgia Aquarium, researchers and conservationists will understand energetic requirements and metabolic needs of belugas in the ocean, specifically in Cook Inlet, Alaska.

The sub-population of beluga whales in Cook Inlet was listed as endangered in 2008 under the Endangered Species Act. Efforts were put into place, such as designating a critical habitat in 2011, to help reverse the decline in the population. Reasons why this beluga whale population is not recovering are still unknown, despite researchers studying these whales for several years.

One possible reason for the population's inability to recover could be noise pollution. Belugas use sound to communicate, navigate and to find prey, but high levels of human generated noise may be interfering with their ability to do so.

Understanding the basic energetic requirements and needs of beluga whales is critical to knowing whether prey availability is sufficient for survival, especially for the Cook Inlet population.

To complete this study, our belugas at Georgia Aquarium were taught a variety of behaviors that support the project. These behaviors allow scientists to study how a beluga's metabolism changes while conducting



natural behaviors such as swimming and diving.

Trainers at Georgia Aquarium are working with our whales to measure body condition such as blubber thickness and body mass, daily caloric intake and swimming speed. These metabolic demands will be used as a baseline when studying the needs of belugas in the ocean, including the endangered beluga population in Cook Inlet.

With this new scientific study, our beluga whales at Georgia Aquarium are continuing to serve as ambassadors for their species. The work being done by our animal training team, biologists, and belugas helps to protect beluga whale populations globally.



# SEEKING SHELTER

**Mara and Gibson are ambassadors for their species at Georgia Aquarium**

## SOUTHERN SEA OTTER PUPS

A pair of southern sea otter pups made their way to Georgia Aquarium after being found stranded on the California coast. We welcomed Mara around ten weeks old, and Gibson when he was only five weeks old.

Mara stranded at approximately one week old near Port San Luis in San Luis Obispo County, California, on January 17, 2019. Efforts were made to locate her mother; however, they were unsuccessful. She was deemed non-releasable, and Georgia Aquarium was selected as Mara's new home due to our ability to care for a young pup who required constant care.

Aquarium staff were in California preparing Mara for her trip to Atlanta, when unfortunately, another pup stranded. Gibson stranded at approximately three weeks old on March 12, 2019 near Carmel River in California. After the attempts to reunite Gibson with his mother were unsuccessful, Georgia Aquarium was selected to take him in alongside Mara.

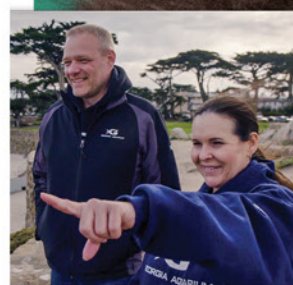
Mara and Gibson required around-the-clock care when they arrived in Atlanta. They needed to be fed and groomed regularly to help them get the nutrition they needed and to maintain their body temperature. They are now healthy and thriving in their new home.

Mara and Gibson are ambassadors for their species at Georgia Aquarium, and they continue to inspire awareness and teach guests about challenges sea otters face in the ocean.

Georgia Aquarium rescued

2

stranded southern sea otter pups from California



## SOUTHERN SEA OTTER

**SCIENTIFIC NAME**  
*Enhydra lutris nereis*

**ANIMAL FACT** Southern sea otters can store food in "pockets" under their foreleg.

**CONSERVATION STATUS**  
Endangered

EXTINCT THREATENED LEAST CONCERN  
EX EW CR **EN** VU NT LC DD NE



**“Our mission is to protect these magnificent marine mammals and make sure they always have a future in the coastal waters that we all share.”**

Dr. Gregory Bossart



## REMEMBERING DR. GREGORY BOSSART (1951–2019) THROUGH THE HERA PROJECT

The bottlenose dolphin Health and Environmental Risk Assessment (HERA) project was developed in 2003 by the late Dr. Gregory Bossart, and it continues to determine the health patterns of bottlenose dolphins in nature and their potential impact on humans.

Dr. Bossart came to Georgia Aquarium in 2008 as the Senior Vice President and Chief Veterinary Officer. He oversaw all animal care and research projects and worked to help create and build a world-renowned animal care and veterinary team.

By studying these dolphins, Georgia Aquarium researchers are able to use them as an indicator of the health of the surrounding ecosystem. These studies

also help researchers get an idea of the health of the local human population around the area.

For sixteen years, HERA researchers have safely examined and researched dolphins in Florida’s Indian River Lagoon and the coastal areas of Charleston, South Carolina. To date, over 100 HERA-related publications and close to 200 total scientific publications were authored or co-authored by Georgia Aquarium researchers.

The field of marine research and conservation is forever changed because of Dr. Bossart’s work. We are committed to continuing his research initiatives and honoring the legacy he leaves behind.

SEA LIONS / SEA TURTLES / WHALE SHARKS

# HIGHLIGHTS

**2** rescued California sea lions, Alex and Josie, came to Georgia Aquarium in June.

Upon arrival it was discovered that each had irreparable blindness in one of their eyes caused by severe cataracts. Both sea lions underwent successful surgery to remove the damaged eye.

Whale Shark IPA, Sea Lion Sour and Octopus Brown Ale were added to the line of beers made in partnership with Atlanta Brewing Company.

A portion of the proceeds from each beer is donated to Georgia Aquarium’s research and conservation efforts

## WHALE SHARK HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

Georgia Aquarium staff traveled to the Galapagos Islands to test deep water satellite tags on whale sharks that gather around the islands. In the future, researchers hope to create a tag that can withstand the intense pressure at the depths these sharks dive to.

Thanks to a grant from Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta, the Green Revolving Fund was able to complete two internal sustainability projects in 2019. 535 pieces of HVAC equipment were updated, and more than 3,000 light fixtures were converted to LED.

## HURRICANE RELIEF

In September, Georgia Aquarium was proud to offer a temporary home to animals from the Georgia Sea Turtle Center seeking refuge from Hurricane Dorian.

**150+**

Kroger stores now offer a line of limited-edition reusable bags fabricated from recycled plastic bottles in partnership with Georgia Aquarium.

A portion of these sales will be donated back to the Aquarium’s global research and conservation efforts



# We SEA

# T

Bubbling  
Up Creativity  
Through  
Immersive  
Education



**Georgia Aquarium** is helping present and future generations gain a greater understanding of the connection between human, animal and ocean health through educational programming.



**70,654**

SPONSORED  
EDUCATION  
ADMISSIONS  
STUDENTS

**805**

INSTRUCTOR  
LED PROGRAMS  
TAUGHT

## SEA PROGRAM

Thanks to the generous donations made by individuals and corporations, Georgia Aquarium was once again able to offer General Admission to groups and individuals in need of financial assistance through the Sponsored Education Admissions (SEA) program. With this program, the Aquarium hopes to provide students with educational experiences that connect them to aquatic ecosystems across the globe.

**336**

ADULTS

**564**

CHILDREN

FOR  
HOMESCHOOL  
DAYS

**375**

CAMPERS FOR  
CAMP H2O

**275**

EXTERNAL  
TEACHERS FOR  
PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT



## STEAM SERIES TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In February, Georgia Aquarium collaborated with Atlanta Botanical Garden, Zoo Atlanta and the High Museum of Art to host a professional development STEAM Series called Project Conservation.

Each component of this series offered hands-on ways to integrate conservation into national and local STEAM curricula content requirements for instruction. The conservation focus for this session was African penguins. The teachers met and interviewed a trainer, researched penguin threats and designed a public service announcement inspiring penguin conservation.

## CAMP H2O SCHOLARSHIPS

During the summer, the Aquarium's Education Programs team was able to provide Camp H2O experiences for students from Atlanta Title I schools surrounding Georgia. Aquarium thanks to a grant from Rheem Manufacturing.



*"We received the SEA grant and we are ever so grateful! Our kids loved the experience!"*



## NEW SPONSORED OUTREACH PROGRAMS

During the 2019 Fall semester, the Education department piloted new Sponsored Outreach Programs made possible by Southwest Airlines. These programs provided an opportunity to create memorable experiences that engage students in standards-based instruction while bringing the Aquarium to their classrooms.

*“The SEA grant provided our students an opportunity to experience something they would never get to otherwise.”*

## ROV CAMP

For a second year, a generous grant from the Motorola Solutions Foundation has allowed Georgia Aquarium and Sweetwater Middle School, a Gwinnett County Title I school in Lawrenceville, Georgia, to partner for a week-long ROV (remotely operated vehicle) camp. Sixteen girls from the seventh grade STEAM program were selected to join the Education team for an intensive week of learning and applying engineering principles in the design and build of remotely operated vehicles. At the end of the week the students were able to put their ROVs to the ultimate test by flying them in pools located on the deck of the Aquarium’s largest exhibit, Ocean Voyager. This camp was designed to encourage young women to consider STEAM paths for their future school and professional career aspirations. Georgia Aquarium is proud to provide a program that helps these potential future engineers develop confidence and new skills.

## NOAA TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT


At the beginning of the year, Georgia Aquarium hosted a professional development for grade 6–12 classroom teachers, Exploring the Deep Ocean with NOAA. This full day workshop introduced Ocean Literacy standards, along with hands-on activities and resources to guide instruction on topics such as ocean health, unique underwater habitats, underwater mapping and remotely operated vehicles (ROVs).

## AQUAPONICS TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Thanks to Georgia Pacific Foundation, Georgia Aquarium was able to offer seventeen teachers across Georgia as well as West Atlanta Watershed Alliance the opportunity to participate in a two-day professional development in aquaponics. These teachers learned how to use aquaponics as a tool to increase STEAM, conservation and health awareness in their classrooms. Following this professional development, a full aquaponics system was shipped to each teacher’s school to be utilized anywhere within their classroom or school building.







**G**eorgia Aquarium and our Military Salute program's founding partner, The Home Depot Foundation, are proud supporters of our armed forces. Georgia Aquarium is dedicated to impacting military personnel and their families with positive experiences through our Military Salute programming.

# GOLDEN METTLE

Shining A Light of Hope on Our  
Courageous Heroes and Their Families



**T**hrough our **Veterans Immersion Program (VIP)**, we provide an opportunity for recreational therapy to our nation's wounded heroes. Our Military Mondays allow free or discounted admission to military personnel, veterans and their loved ones. Our **Gold Star Families** initiatives serve to honor and acknowledge the families of fallen soldiers through interactive and extraordinary programming.

Georgia Aquarium's Military Salute programming is funded entirely by private support. Major support comes from The Home Depot Foundation and Lockheed Martin.

## GOLD STAR FAMILIES

On August 4th, 2019, Georgia Aquarium opened its doors to Gold Star Family members, including over 70 children. These children, parents, grandparents and siblings of fallen U.S. Armed Forces personnel explored the Aquarium and participated in a variety of Georgia Aquarium experiences, including the beloved sea lion encounter.

During their visit, Gold Star Family members explored Georgia Aquarium with members of the Aquarium's Education team. The educators prepared lessons geared towards the different age groups of the family members, which included classroom lessons and hands-on projects for children to further inspire awareness and preservation of our oceans and aquatic animals.

Many Gold Star Family members participated in a sea lion encounter, where they watched two of Georgia Aquarium's resident sea lions, Jupiter and Diego, demonstrate their range of vocalizations and their "dance" moves.



## VETERANS IMMERSION PROGRAM (VIP)

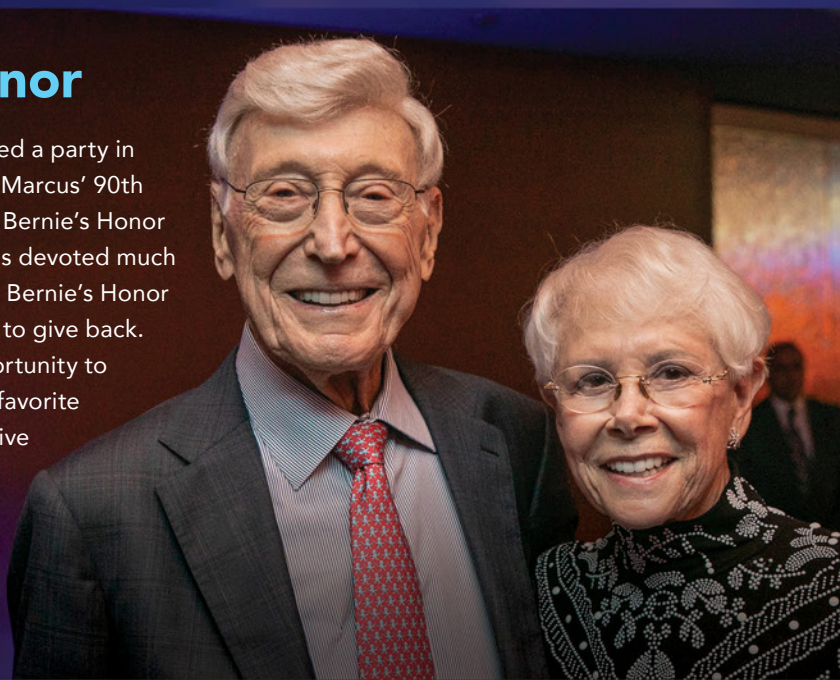
Georgia Aquarium's **Veterans Immersion Program (VIP)** is designed to work with current rehabilitation and reintegration programs and offers participants the opportunity to snorkel or scuba dive in Georgia Aquarium's 6.3 million gallon habitat, Ocean Voyager Built by The Home Depot.

Since its founding, the Veterans Immersion Program (VIP) has hosted more than 3,000 personnel and guests who have been physically, emotionally or mentally wounded.

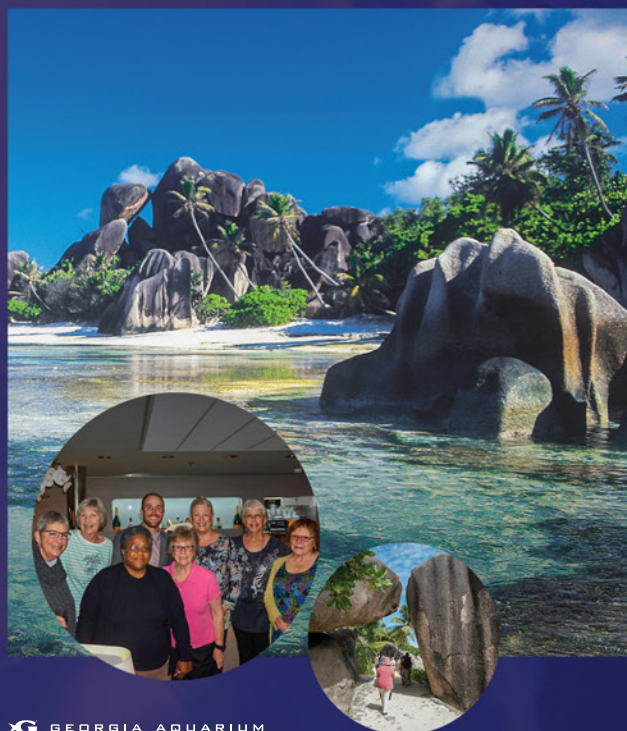


## In Bernie's Honor

In June, Georgia Aquarium hosted a party in honor of our benefactor, Bernie Marcus' 90th birthday in culmination of the In Bernie's Honor fundraising campaign. Bernie has devoted much of his life to philanthropy, and In Bernie's Honor gave the community the chance to give back. Generous donors took this opportunity to raise money for four of Bernie's favorite causes: Shepherd Military Initiative at Shepherd Center, Marcus Autism Center, Grady Health System's Marcus Stroke & Neuroscience Center and Georgia Aquarium.



## Travel with Georgia Aquarium



Georgia Aquarium's Adventure Travel Program is centered around our animal collection and curated for guests looking to deepen their involvement abroad with one of the world's largest aquariums. We seek to develop experiences that appeal to different activity levels and interests and are conducted in an eco-friendly manner. Proceeds from these trips go back to Georgia Aquarium's research and conservation initiatives.

In April 2019, travel guests were accompanied by PhD Candidate and shark researcher Cameron Perry as they took a luxury cruise beginning in the Scattered Islands and ending in the Seychelles. Perry was chosen to accompany the guests because of his experience working alongside the Aquarium's research team in the field to better understand whale sharks. As there are resident populations of whale sharks and manta rays in this part of the world, it was decided these destinations were ideal for Georgia Aquarium and guests to visit. During the trip travelers had several snorkel and dive excursions, participated in land tours to see Aldabra giant tortoises and got the opportunity to share the message of the Aquarium abroad.

## Fundraising Events



### FISH & CHIPS

We held the 14th annual Fish & Chips Golf Tournament at the Capital City Club in 2019. Raising over \$250,000, these proceeds enabled students attending Title I schools to experience the magic of the world's premier aquarium through our Sponsored Education Admissions (SEA) program.

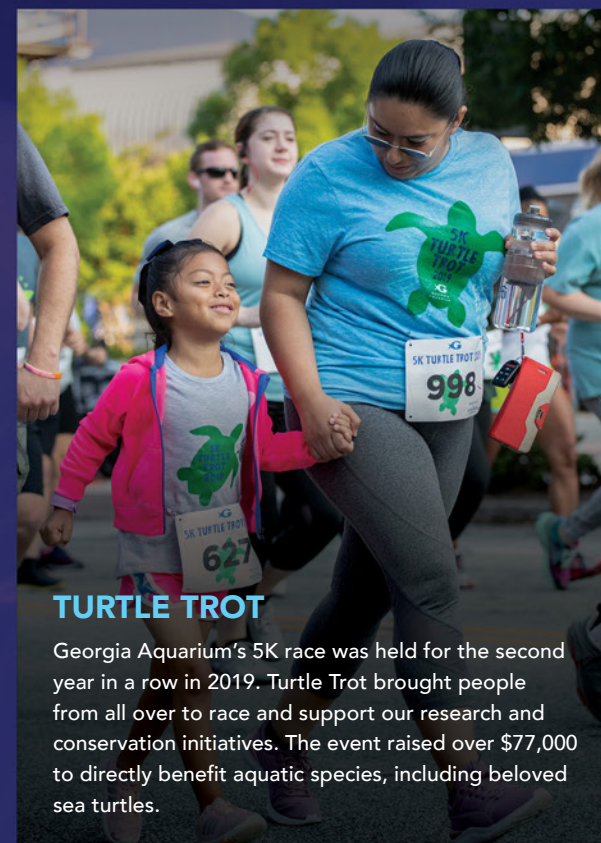
### AQUA VINO

We welcomed hundreds of guests to toast to conservation in October during our premier food and wine fundraising event, Aqua Vino. This event raised over \$166,000 for Georgia Aquarium's continued research and conservation efforts.



### RED, WHITE & BREW

Guests celebrated Independence Day with beer, cider and barbeque in our Oceans Ballroom followed by spectacular views of Centennial Olympic Park's Fourth of July fireworks celebration from the top of our parking deck. Proceeds benefit the Aquarium's Sponsored Education Admissions (SEA) program.



### TURTLE TROT

Georgia Aquarium's 5K race was held for the second year in a row in 2019. Turtle Trot brought people from all over to race and support our research and conservation initiatives. The event raised over \$77,000 to directly benefit aquatic species, including beloved sea turtles.



### NEW YEAR'S EVE

Georgia Aquarium helped guests ring in 2020 during the Splashing '20s New Year's Eve event. Proceeds did an ocean of good, raising over \$77,000 for Georgia Aquarium's research and conservation efforts around the globe.

### SCIENCE ON TAP

Ticket sales for our lecture series, Science on Tap, supported Georgia Aquarium's research and conservation initiatives. Featured 2019 speakers included Dr. Brian Stone, Director of the Urban Climate Lab at Georgia Tech and Dr. Nick Pyenson, Research Geologist and Curator of Fossil Marine Mammals at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History.





2019  
Presenting  
Sponsors



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EMERALD TREE BOA

**SCIENTIFIC NAME**  
*Corallus caninus*

**ANIMAL FACT** Emerald tree boas are born red or orange in color and transition to green at about 4–12 months.

**CONSERVATION STATUS**  
Not evaluated

EXTINCT  
THREATENED  
LEAST CONCERN

EX EW CR EN VU NT LC DD NE



# Thank You to Our Donors

As a 501(c)3 nonprofit, 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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Beaufort Inn	Dancing Dogs Yoga	Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens	Nashville Zoo	Seasons 52	Whoops! Macaroons
Ben & Jerry's	Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steakhouse	Kendra Scott	Nespresso	Serenbe Playhouse	Wolfgang Puck Catering
The Broadmoor	Derma Glove	Kia Motors	Nikolai's Roof	Seven Lamps	SOHO American Bistro
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			Olivia Yee Portrait		
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#### RED LIONFISH

**SCIENTIFIC NAME**  
*Pterois volitans*

**ANIMAL FACT** The red lionfish is primarily a reef-associated species, but is also found in other warm, marine waters in the tropics, including estuaries.

**CONSERVATION STATUS**  
Not evaluated

EXTINCT THREATENED LEAST CONCERN  
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GEORGIA AQUARIUM

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