



*Currents of Success*

ANNUAL  
**2022**  
REPORT



MYSTIC  
AQUARIUM



# World-Class Animal Care Starts Here

## OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Mystic Aquarium is an institution that inspires people to care for and protect our ocean planet through conservation, education, and research.



Susette Tibus  
President and CEO

Dear Friend,

Mystic Aquarium is an iconic mainstay and a driving cultural and economic force for the state of Connecticut. Our scientific research is an important voice in the global discussion of how best to responsibly manage ocean resources.

As the organization's new president and CEO, it is my privilege to work alongside this deeply committed and enthusiastic staff. Day in and day out, incredible people across every facet of our operation bring their best to Mystic Aquarium. At the same time, it is my responsibility to prepare us for the challenges and the promises that tomorrow will bring.

And that is where I begin looking at the potential that lives within Mystic Aquarium - its people, its facilities, and its impact.

Perhaps the most visible effort on this front is the courtyard renovation that dramatically refreshes the entry to the Mystic Aquarium campus. This project was done in parallel with an overhaul of our Jurassic Giants exhibit, shifting the focus to those creatures which swam the ocean millions of years ago. Together, the revitalized courtyard and the new Dino Seas exhibit create a distinct yet flexible venue space that dovetails beautifully with the day-to-day experience we aim to provide visitors to Mystic Aquarium.

Both projects began in late 2022 and were completed in the early part of 2023. Support from Carol and George Milne, Michelle and Thomas Marra, Julie and Thomas Mosey, and the Marku family was instrumental in this effort, and they have my sincere appreciation.

Meanwhile, an extensive review of our operations continues to uncover new opportunities. In finding areas where efficiencies can be created, Mystic Aquarium is positioned to make robust investments in our campus and our staff.

A more rewarding and invigorating experience for our guests, our donors and community partners, and a steadfast commitment to world-class animal care, will serve us well in carrying out our mission of conservation, education, and research.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Susette Tibus".

Susette Tibus  
President and CEO

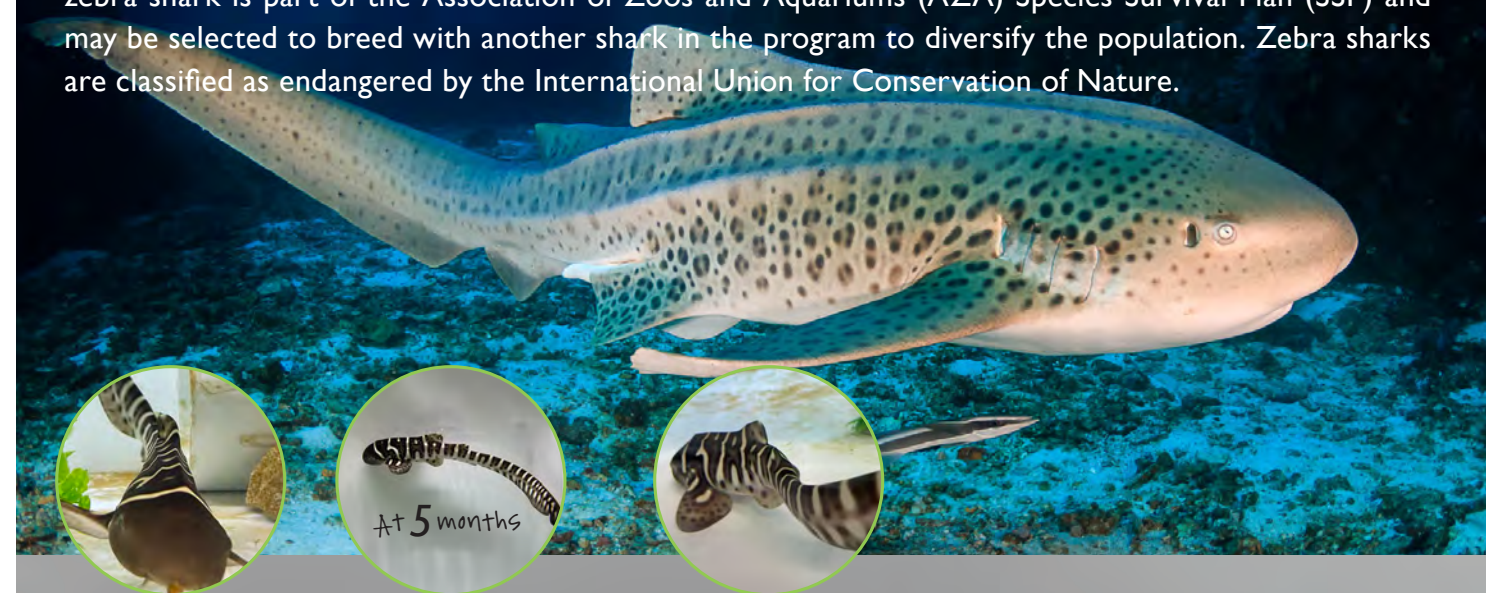


# MYSTIC AQUARIUM IS ... SAFEGUARDING MARINE LIFE

MYSTIC AQUARIUM is not just a place to see marine life, but also a facility dedicated to protecting it. The health and well-being of all animals in our care is a top priority, exemplified by our world-class animal care practices and Animal Rescue Program. Our team works tirelessly to make an impact both within, and beyond, the Aquarium walls.

## HATCHING HOPE: Endangered Zebra Shark Joins Our Conservation Mission

In exciting hatching news, a female zebra shark hatched from an egg in September 2022. At hatching, the pup was just 11 inches long and weighed 102 grams – that’s the equivalent of about 96 jellybeans. This zebra shark is part of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Species Survival Plan (SSP) and may be selected to breed with another shark in the program to diversify the population. Zebra sharks are classified as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.



**We welcomed three African penguin hatchlings** to the colony in early February. All three chicks were hatched as part of the SSP for African penguins. Found only on the southwestern coast of Africa, these animals are endangered, with only 3 percent of the global population remaining. Mystic Aquarium has participated in the SSP since 1995, hatching more than 40 chicks in our colony.



Penguin colony  
grows by  
**3**





Mystic Aquarium first encountered Shoebert, a gray seal, in 2018 when he required medical care at the Animal Rescue Program's clinic. After a successful rehabilitation, he was released into the wild. However, in 2022, he was spotted in Shoe Pond in Beverly, Mass., interacting with humans and gaining media attention. We soon discovered he was the same seal we rehabilitated in 2018, when we called him Jeckyll. Despite multiple attempts to catch him, he managed to evade capture until he unexpectedly turned himself in at a local police station parking lot. Following a thorough medical examination, he was deemed healthy and released off Block Island. Shoebert's unique personality and interactions with humans garnered international news coverage. This brought much-needed attention to the Animal Rescue Program's work in rescuing and rehabilitating stranded and injured animals.

# Shoebert's *Wild Ride*



## Joining the **AZA Aquatic Collections Sustainability Larval Program**

In 2022, Mystic Aquarium joined the AZA's Aquatic Collections Sustainability Larval Program. This program provides AZA facilities with the opportunity to receive aquacultured fish which helps reduce the need for wild-caught fish. For our inaugural year, we added smallmouth grunts, Atlantic spadefish, and glassy sweepers to our collection. This program is a strong step forward as aquariums aim to ensure sustainable collections.

In 2022, Mystic Aquarium expanded its commitment to sea turtle rehabilitation. We rehabilitated 21 sea turtles suffering from cold-stunning, including 18 critically endangered Kemps ridley sea turtles and three loggerheads. One of the loggerheads had frostbite on both front flippers, which required partial amputation of those flippers. Our veterinary team operated on the turtle in our state-of-the-art Wiederhold surgery suite and the animal was successfully released.

Our work to help sea turtles goes beyond rehabilitation. The Education & Conservation Department developed a new partnership with Thames River Magnet School in Groton, Conn. Inspired by the school's sea turtle mascot, we developed turtle-themed programming for grades K-5, focusing on turtles, animal care, and rescue.



# Saving Sea Turtles

“Cold stunning is a condition that affects sea turtles when they become hypothermic due to sudden drops in water temperature. This can lead to disorientation and lethargy and even death if not promptly rescued and rehabilitated by dedicated organizations like Mystic Aquarium. With the opening of the Milne Center, we can now provide critical support during cold-stunning events.”

-Dr. Allison Tuttle, Chief Zoological Officer

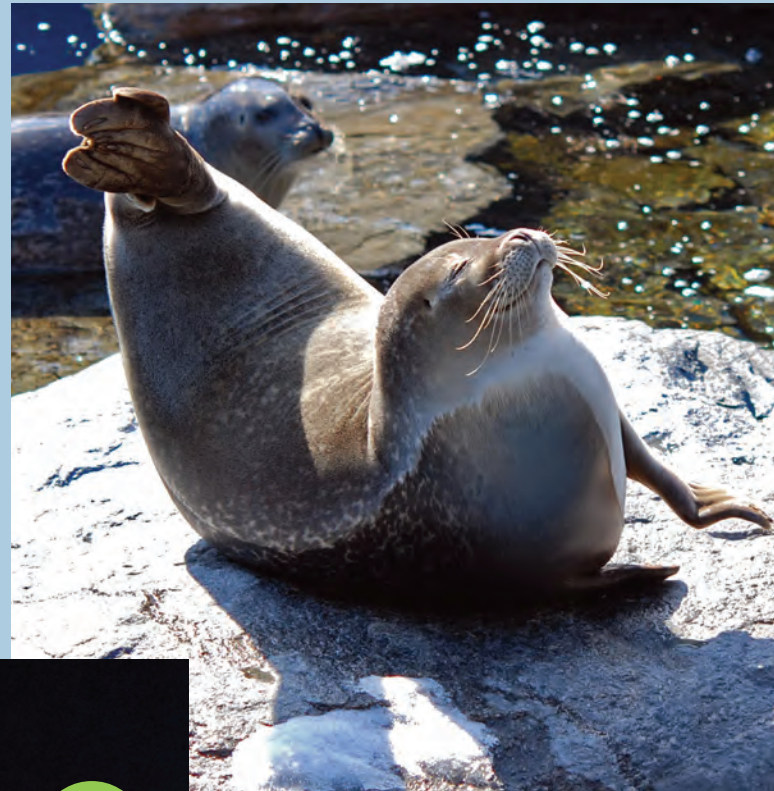




**ANIMAL CARE**  
BY THE NUMBERS

314

Species at year-end



80

Species added in 2022



20

Births or hatchings  
during 2022



**ANIMAL RESCUE**  
BY THE NUMBERS

Our Animal Rescue Program  
responded to

139

marine mammal sightings along

1,000

miles of coastline in our  
stranding coverage area



We cared for and released

21

sea turtles







# MYSTIC AQUARIUM IS ... *fostering* FUTURE STEWARDS

At Mystic Aquarium, we strive to provide educational experiences that foster a profound connection between people and the ocean, igniting a passion for learning and engagement that empowers change. Programs for preschoolers through adults nurture future generations of informed and passionate ocean stewards who actively contribute to the conservation of our planet's precious marine life and ecosystems. We develop partnerships, provide mentorship, and consistently expand our initiatives to make programs accessible to a broad and diverse audience.



## WORK-BASED LEARNING

Throughout the academic year, students enrolled in the Bioscience Environmental Technology program at Ella T. Grasso Technical High School in Groton, Conn., partnered with Aquarium staff for educational and workforce learning activities. This collaboration allowed students to gain meaningful insights into the Aquarium's daily operations, opening their eyes to potential careers in the field. Regardless of their future career path, the program imparted essential skills such as public speaking, audience engagement, and project management.



## YOUTH IN CONSERVATION

The Conservationists in Training program, supported through funding from the Environmental Protection Agency and Long Island Sound Stewardship Fund, is designed to empower youth from under-resourced communities who bear a disproportionate burden of environmental challenges. By providing financial and transportation support, the initiative eliminated obstacles to participation in enriching career opportunities. The program introduced youth to various environmental professions to help them explore career pathways.



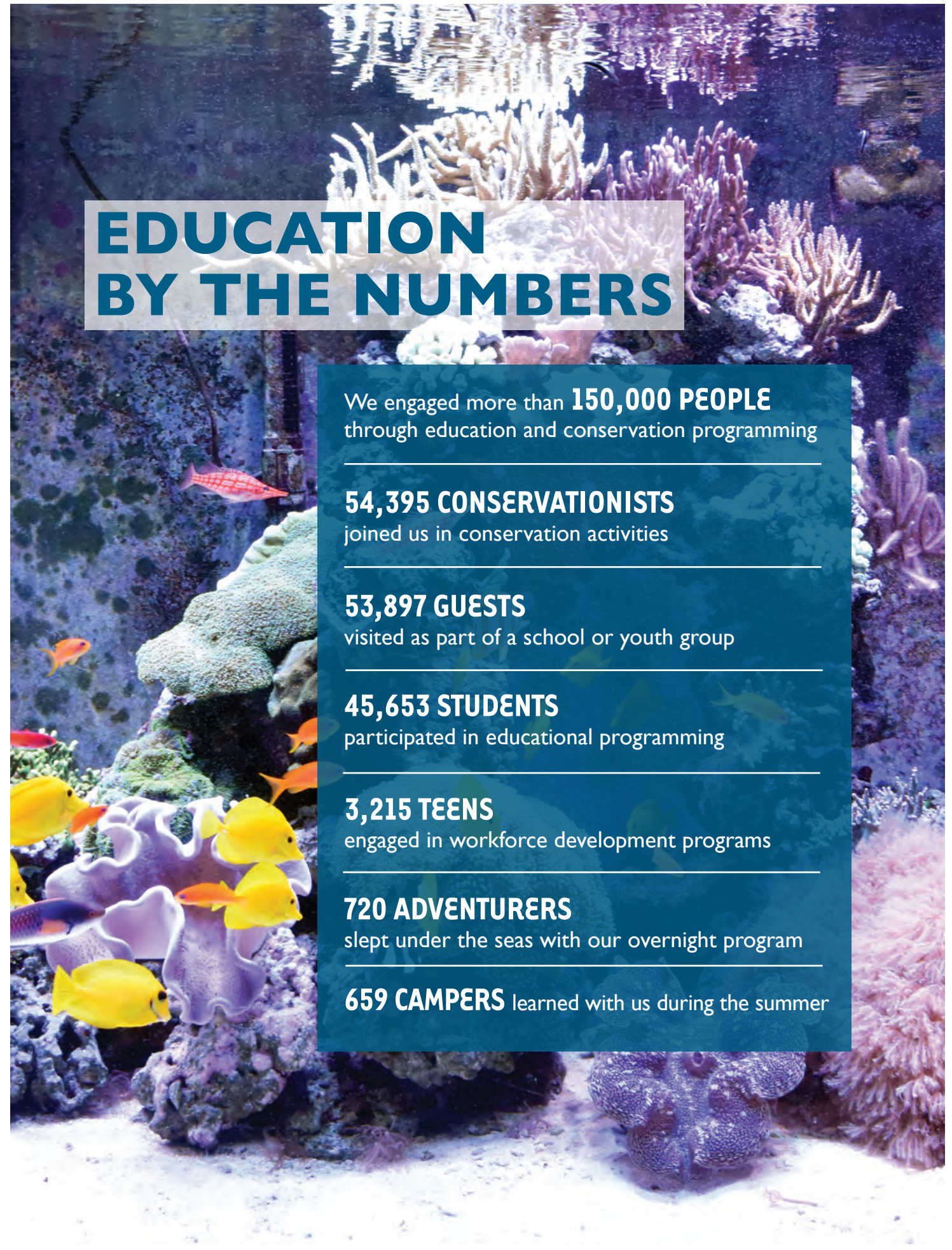


## A FACE FOR RADIO

In partnership with National Public Radio's "Science Friday" show, Mystic Aquarium celebrated Cephalopod Week in June 2022. We hosted an evening event that featured short science documentaries, a panel discussion, and exclusive behind-the-scenes views of the octopus' habitat and cephalopod enrichment. Over 110 marine enthusiasts attended, and the event was broadcast to 1.8 million listeners of the weekly radio show, introducing them to Mystic Aquarium's animal care and environmental stewardship initiatives.

## INTERNATIONAL OCEAN FILM FESTIVAL

Mystic Aquarium served as the regional host for the International Ocean Film Festival in October 2022. The two-day event featured 12 hours of films on topics relevant to coastal communities. Prior to the festival, a two-day youth filmmaking workshop was held to empower youth to create conservation-focused films about the Aquarium's animals and exhibits. The youth films were screened in front of a standing-room-only audience, joining an impressive line-up of films that aimed to educate and inspire viewers to protect our ocean resources.



# EDUCATION BY THE NUMBERS

We engaged more than **150,000 PEOPLE** through education and conservation programming

**54,395 CONSERVATIONISTS** joined us in conservation activities

**53,897 GUESTS** visited as part of a school or youth group

**45,653 STUDENTS** participated in educational programming

**3,215 TEENS** engaged in workforce development programs

**720 ADVENTURERS** slept under the seas with our overnight program

**659 CAMPERS** learned with us during the summer





# MYSTIC AQUARIUM IS ... ADVANCING INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY

At Mystic Aquarium, we are committed to advancing inclusion and accessibility, ensuring that everyone feels welcome and can benefit from our rich educational resources. Through our established and newly emerging efforts and partnerships, we strive to create an environment where diversity is celebrated and barriers are removed, enabling all individuals to connect with the wonders of the marine world.



## TEAMING UP WITH QUINNIPIAC UNIVERSITY

We are proud to have established a new partnership with Quinnipiac University, designating Mystic Aquarium as a non-traditional field site for their Occupational Therapy program. Four doctoral-level students joined us in the summer of 2022 for a 12-week externship, contributing significantly to our accessibility and inclusion efforts. They hosted a sensory-friendly evening, revamped our website's accessibility content, conducted staff training, and provided direct support to our employees, volunteers, and students. This partnership provides Mystic Aquarium with expertise as we continue to advance our inclusion and accessibility efforts.

## ELEVATING THE MYSTIC AQUARIUM EXPERIENCE WITH AUDIO INTERPRETATION

As part of our commitment to accessibility, we introduced audio-based interpretation accessible through QR codes at 17 exhibits. This initiative, in partnership with Connecticut Radio Information System, Inc., provides supplemental information in both English and Spanish, enhancing the educational experience for all guests, including those who have difficulty reading informational signs. We are proud to have had 8,878 downloads utilized in 2022, marking the highest number for any organization using this program.

## CONNECTING THROUGH COMPASSION

Through a new collaboration with the Connecticut Alzheimer's Association, we provided programming for individuals in the initial stages of Alzheimer's to engage alongside their families. In 2022, we provided tours of the Aquarium that were specifically designed to meet the needs of the individuals. This is just the beginning as we explore additional ways to partner on training and outreach. It is a rewarding experience collaborating with the Connecticut Alzheimer's Association and becoming an integral part of this community.



# MYSTIC AQUARIUM IS ... EXPLORING THE DEPTHS OF KNOWLEDGE

With our mission in mind, we design our research and conservation efforts to enhance the health and welfare of animals in our care, restore and conserve ecosystems and wildlife, and foster a greater appreciation for our ocean planet.



## WELCOME, DR. SMITH!

In September 2022, Dr. Susan Smith joined the Mystic Aquarium research team. Before this, she was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Connecticut (UConn), where she also obtained her master's and Ph.D. degrees in Oceanography studying marine microbes. Dr. Smith is passionate about research and teaching. She previously worked with us as a Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) mentor, where she and her student studied ciliates from the blowhole of belugas. At Mystic Aquarium, she will apply her molecular expertise to advance animal care and conservation.



## BUILDING CONNECTIONS

Dr. Laura Thompson went to Spain to work with Oceanogràfic València on beluga dive physiology research. She met with veterinary and husbandry teams to start a study that would collect blood and blow samples before and after diving. This study mirrors our research with our own belugas and helps us learn how beluga immune systems adapt to diving and what factors can make them more vulnerable to dive-related issues. Additionally, Dr. Thompson worked with the Naval Submarine Medical Research Laboratory in Groton, Conn., as well as free divers in Croatia, to collect human SCUBA dive samples for comparative studies with marine mammals.

## ROLE OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Dr. Peter Auster and his colleagues have been studying National Marine Protected Areas, such as Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary and Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary for years. In 2022 they celebrated 20 years of intense research on the changes in seafloor habitats in Stellwagen Bank. Through comparing the areas where commercial fishing is prohibited to those where it is allowed, his study revealed that the communities of seafloor organisms, which include various structure-forming species such as sponges and invertebrates, differ over time and in response to fishing regulations. These findings help fisheries managers make informed decisions about how to conserve marine habitats.

*"Our studies at Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary focus on predator-prey interactions and the behavior of animals that engage in cooperative hunting. This year, we observed new species that hunt in groups! Findings from our work underscore the significance of no-take marine protected areas in preserving the natural interactions of undisturbed wildlife populations."*

- Dr. Peter Auster, Research Scientist



## MONITORING MARINE LIFE WITH eDNA

Were you aware that from a sample of water in the ocean our research team can isolate environmental DNA (eDNA) that can identify the presence of animals in an area, even if they are not visible? During the Spring of 2022, Mystic Aquarium researchers began studying eDNA as a non-invasive tool to monitor sea turtles and seals to assess the effects of human activities, such as offshore wind farm construction. The eDNA profile found in water samples can provide insight into which animals were recently present in the area and even estimate the duration of their stay.





## BELUGA HEALTH WATCH

Drs. Ebru Unal and Tracy Romano received a grant from the North Pacific Research Board to evaluate and monitor the health of the beluga populations in Alaska, with a focus on the Cook Inlet belugas, which are in danger of becoming extinct. This project uses new genetic technology to study all the genes that each whale stock is expressing and aims to identify the factors responsible for their decreasing numbers. The study also highlights the conservation initiatives undertaken by Mystic Aquarium.



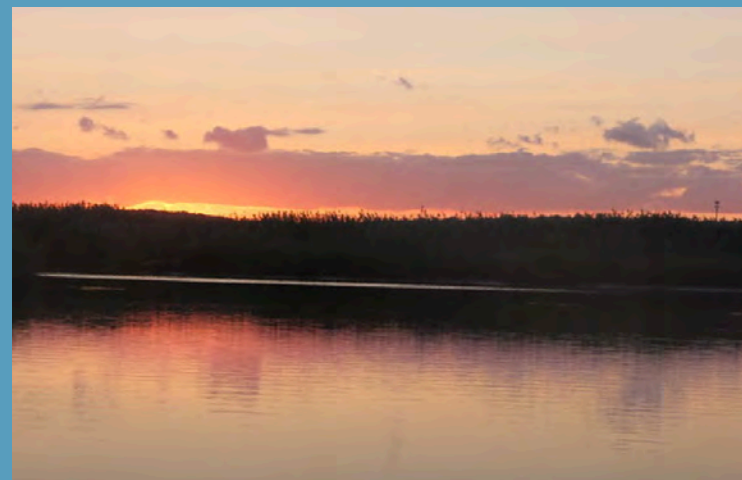
## ON THE INTERNATIONAL FRONT

Dr. Peter Auster, together with a team of scientists from various countries, examined the effects of bottom fishing on vulnerable marine ecosystems in the open ocean. They discovered several inadequacies in the analyses of these evaluations and presented their observations at a High Seas Workshop in New York in August, which was held at the United Nations Headquarters. As a result of their work, the UN General Assembly passed the annual 'Sustainable Fisheries' resolution in December. The resolution included a new aspect, which is the importance of assessing the impact of fishing on all species linked to vulnerable marine ecosystems. This issue was identified as a significant gap in the impact assessments in the report.



## PROTECTING COX LEDGE

In August 2022, the New England Fishery Management Council presented a preliminary proposal for a Habitat Area of Particular Concern around Cox Ledge, located off the southern coast of New England. This proposal would establish Cox Ledge, which serves as an important breeding ground for Atlantic cod, as an oceanic area with significant ecological value that is vulnerable to human interference. Dr. Peter Auster was among a diverse group of scientists and managers who collaborated to create the proposal for public review and approval by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Dr. Auster's research was instrumental in shaping the conservation objectives of the plan.



## PRESERVING LONG ISLAND SOUND

In January 2022, the Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve was officially designated as the nation's 30th such site, after six years of deliberation and public engagement. This designation serves to protect 52,160 acres of land and offshore areas in southeastern Connecticut. Dr. Peter Auster was a member of the Site Selection Team.





# MYSTIC AQUARIUM IS ... CHARTING A GREENER COURSE

Protecting our ocean planet begins at home, which is why Mystic Aquarium is committed to increasing our sustainability practices, reducing our carbon footprint, and cutting down on waste. The Campus Sustainability Strategy for the years 2022 to 2026 positions Mystic Aquarium as a frontrunner in catalyzing systemic change by integrating sustainability initiatives and impactful messaging to influence public behavior regarding conservation and environmental sustainability.

## GREEN BANK PROJECT

The Connecticut Green Bank Project, which was announced in November 2021, includes new solar panels on Mystic Aquarium's roofs along with new, energy-efficient heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems throughout campus. We are also upgrading energy-monitoring equipment, interior and exterior lighting, and equipment in animal habitats to provide a cleaner and healthier experience for both guests and marine life.

## LEADING THE CHARGE

Thanks to our innovative and collaborative efforts to accomplish our efficiency and energy goals, Mystic Aquarium was awarded the 2022 **Outstanding Project Green Bank Award** in the "Building Solutions" category. The Connecticut Green Bank, in collaboration with Verogy and Environmental Systems Corporation, established the Green Bank Awards to recognize companies advancing the green energy movement and helping bring resilience, health, and equity to Connecticut.



## GOING SOLAR

One of our biggest achievements is the installation of a state-of-the-art rooftop-mounted solar energy system in 2022. This system, comprised of 600 solar modules, is set to significantly reduce our carbon footprint and provide a reliable source of clean energy for decades to come. It is expected to produce more than 295,649 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of energy annually, enough to power 40 homes for a year. Additionally, on an annual basis, the project's arrays will offset the equivalent of about 209 metric tons of carbon dioxide, equivalent to the amount of emissions generated by an average passenger vehicle driven more than 537,000 miles every year.





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Vertical 6

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River Valley Periodontics

Salem Marble

Stonington Vineyards

*We appreciate all our supporters and apologize if your name was inadvertently omitted from this listing. Please contact [Development@MysticAquarium.org](mailto:Development@MysticAquarium.org) with any concerns.*



## In Honor of

**Diana Bortolin**

Loredana and George Curtis  
Dorette and John Gerspach  
Brian Kurz

**Emily Bernstein**

Carole Bernstein

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Marleen Dutra

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## In Memory of

**Jerry Desmond**

Marianna Davila  
Cristy James  
Eleanor and Michael Payton  
Heidi and Robert Simmons  
Mary and James Byron  
Debra and John Callaci

**Joseph Cronin**

International Citizens Fund

**Anthony Wetmore**

Anthony Wetmore, Jr.

## In-Kind Donations

## Anonymous

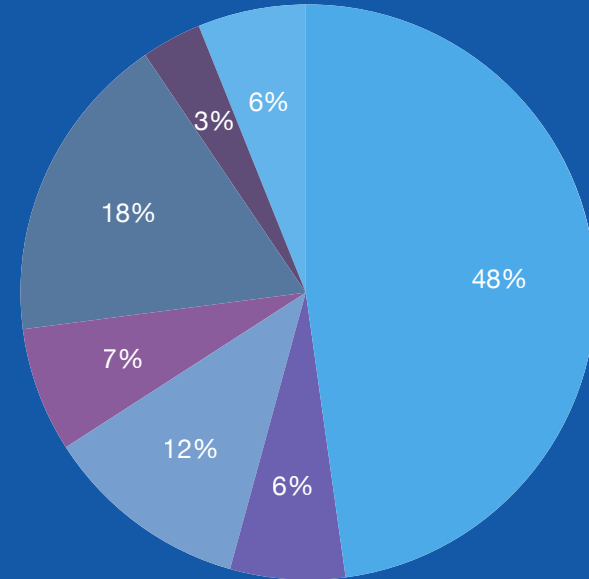
Cannonball Management, Inc.  
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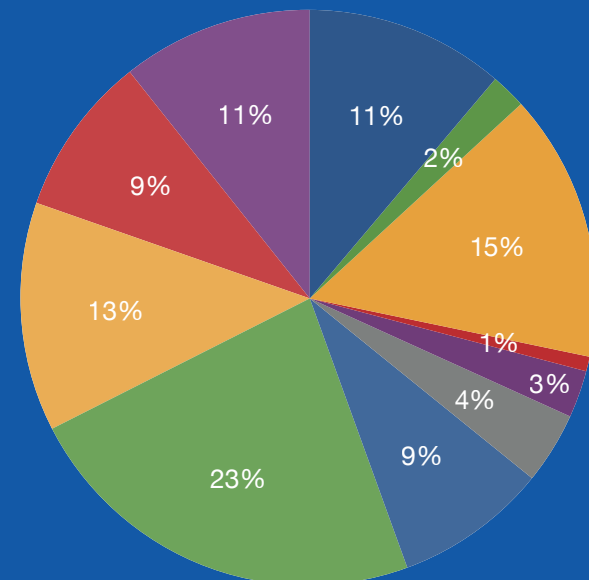
## REVENUE

● Admissions	\$15,979,936
● Memberships	\$2,163,718
● Auxiliary Operations	\$3,889,357
● Donations	\$2,361,452
● Operating Grants	\$5,882,546
● Programs/Classes	\$1,131,853
● Other	\$2,013,867
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$33,422,729</b>



## EXPENSES

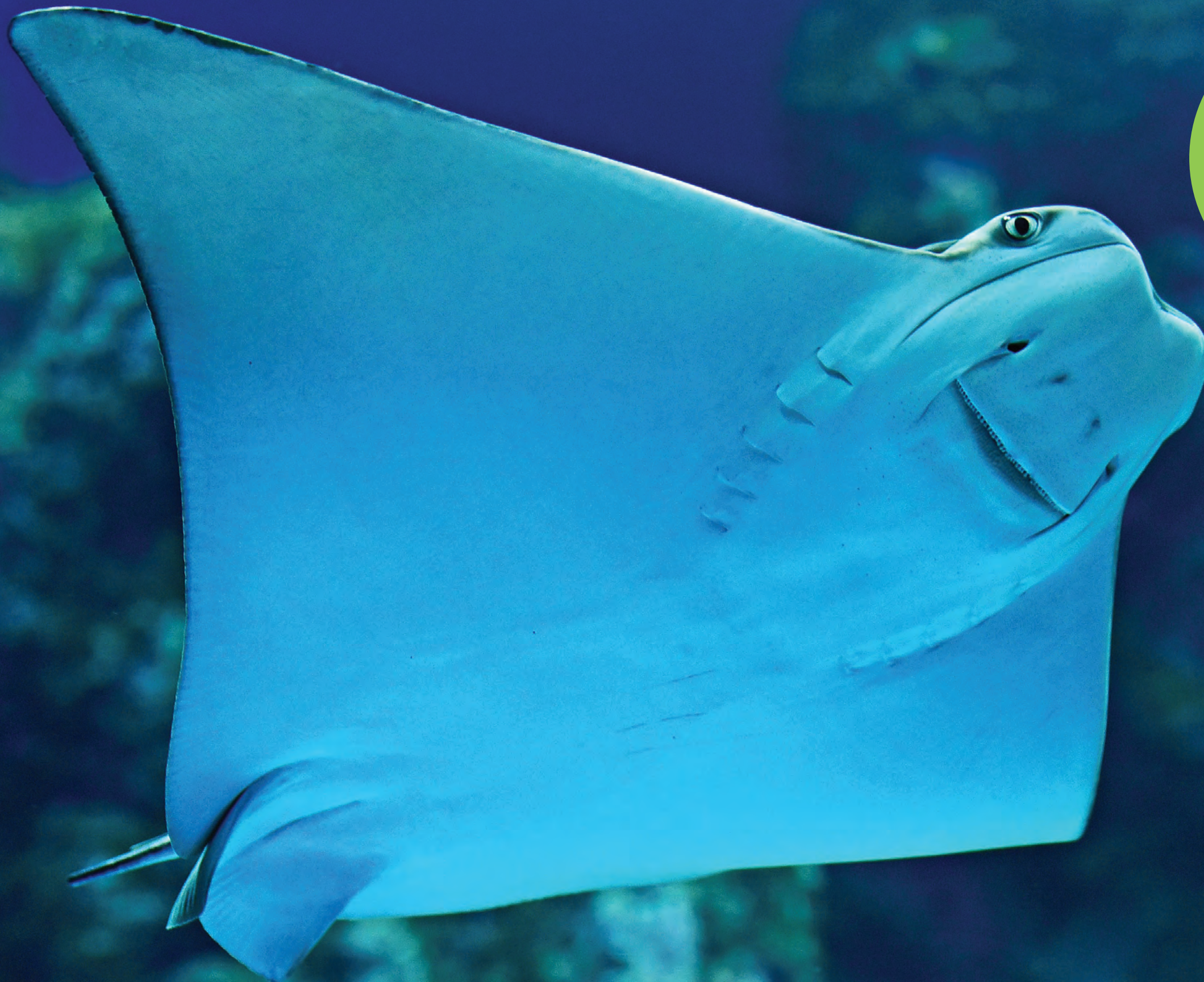
● Administration	\$3,087,993
● Human Resources	\$550,600
● Facilities	\$4,177,559
● Exhibits	\$229,300
● Technology	\$739,003
● Development	\$1,119,753
● Marketing	\$2,389,741
● Zoological Operations	\$6,381,922
● Visitor Services	\$3,540,363
● Education	\$2,476,261
● Research & Veterinary	\$2,955,413
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$27,647,908</b>



\*\*\*Complete audited financial statements are available upon request from Sea Research Foundation, Inc. d/b/a Mystic Aquarium







Mystic Aquarium is an institution that inspires people to care for and protect our ocean planet through conservation, education, and research.

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## **MYSTIC AQUARIUM IS ... inviting you to join us on the journey.**

By donating, you become an essential partner in our journey to make a positive impact not only within our aquarium walls but also on a global scale, inspiring future generations to cherish and protect our beautiful blue planet. Together, we can create a sustainable future for marine life and ensure the longevity of our oceans.

Let's work together to make a positive impact on our ocean and the amazing creatures that call it home. You can make a difference by making a tax-deductible donation to Mystic Aquarium. Your support is crucial to the success of our mission and we truly appreciate it.

For more information about how you can contribute, please reach out to our Development department at [Development@MysticAquarium.org](mailto:Development@MysticAquarium.org).

**Thank you for your help!**