

Letter to the Editor

First-Ever West Coast AMMPA Annual Meeting Held May 7-9 in San Diego

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The Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA) held its 2024 Annual Meeting May 7 to 9 in San Diego, California, the first time the association has met on the West Coast of the United States. Hosted by SeaWorld San Diego, AMMPA members and friends from seven countries and one U.S. territory attended this year's meeting, which featured speakers on marine animal research, conservation, animal welfare, and a range of other topics.

The meeting kicked off with a presentation by Terri Williams, Ph.D., professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, on a lab-to-zoological-facility-to-field approach to conserving marine mammals in the world's changing oceans. Her presentation was followed by talks by Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute (HSRI) senior research scientist Ann Bowles, Ph.D., and Wendy Noke Durden, research scientist II, about the Institute's work over 60 years and its future science in the tradition of Carl and Laura Hubbs. Jason Bruck, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Biology at Stephen F. Austin State University, concluded the morning session with a presentation on his paper published earlier this year titled, "The Cetacean Sanctuary: A Sea of Unknowns."

Afternoon speakers explored the work of two associations to help support and drive strong animal welfare practices in zoological facilities. Lance Miller, Ph.D., who chairs the AMMPA Animal Welfare Committee and is vice president of conservation science and animal welfare research at the Chicago Zoological Society Brookfield Zoo, outlined a strategic plan for AMMPA facility animal welfare, and Kelly George, Ph.D., executive director of the Zoological Association of America (ZAA), spoke about ZAA's animal welfare work.

Later in the afternoon, Austin Allen, Ph.D., marine science and conservation postdoctoral researcher at Duke University, Marine Laboratory,

Nicholas School of the Environment, and Audra Ames, Ph.D., animal behavior & senses post-doctoral research associate at HSRI, spoke about the successful first year of the Marine Mammal Research Network. Grey Stafford, Ph.D., host of the Zoo Logic podcast, and actress and entertainer Carolyn Hennesy shared insights into the world of celebrities and their activities and philanthropy related to animals.

Hendrik Nollens, DVM, MSc, Ph.D., with the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, presented on how zoological facilities can select conservation contributions for greater impact; Dr. Harley Newton, DVM, OCEARCH chief scientist, spoke about OCEARCH's Western North Atlantic white shark study and how it is a model of collaboration, shared access, and public education; and Jay Sweeney, DVM, chair of the AMMPA Veterinary Committee, co-founder of Dolphin Quest, gave an update on the challenges posed by the emergence of bird flu in marine mammals.

Day two of the meeting kicked off with a keynote talk titled, "Why Octopuses Are Having a Moment: Innovative Approaches to Marine Wildlife Education" by Warren Carlyle, founder & CEO of OctoNation and co-author of the newly released *Secrets of the Octopus*. Other morning presentations included a talk by Dr. Forrest Gomez, director of conservation medicine at the National Marine Mammal Foundation (NMMF), on the foundation's Operation Grace and its work with river dolphins on the brink of extinction and efforts to build capacity in South America, and a talk by Celeste Parry, director of community engagement at NMMF, on the organization's "Seal to Seal" program that features learning with local San Diego heroes.

Following the NMMF presentations, Zoo Logic host Grey Stafford moderated a panel on addressing the mental health needs of zoo and aquarium employees in a post-pandemic world.

Panelists included Pablo Joury, curator of pinnipeds at Columbus Zoo; Hannah Fullmer, director of supportive services/MFHS instructor, Growing Resiliency for Aquarium and Zoo Employees (GRAZE); and Michelle Campbell, AMMPA past chair and executive vice president, Dolphin Quest/Quest Global Management. Marilyn Dudley, AMMPA studbook keeper for common bottlenose dolphins, presented on the state of *Delphinapterus leucas*, *Tursiops truncatus*, and *Zalophus californianus* populations cared for by AMMPA facilities. Kevin Willis, chair of the AMMPA Population Management Subcommittee, followed with a presentation on what it will take to ensure a sustainable AMMPA facility bottlenose dolphin population well into the future.

The afternoon concluded with legislative and policy news from around the world presented by Dr. Fernando Delgado C., DVM, AMMPA vice chair and chief of operations and animal welfare officer for Delphinus for Mexico; Laura van der Meer, director, MEA Strategies, for Canada and Europe; and Rita Irwin, chair, AMMPA Government Affairs Committee and CEO of the Dolphin Research Center, Patricia Nelson, principal at the OB-C Group, and Jim Lister, partner, Birch Horton Bittner & Cherot, for the U.S.

Morning sessions on the third day of the meeting included presentations by Audra Ames of HSRI on understanding toothed-whale communication; Lance Miller of Brookfield Zoo on the introduction to a new animal welfare monitoring tool; and Laurie Macha, senior director of marine mammals and birds at Mystic Aquarium, on regulatory issues. Michele Sousa, senior curator of mammals and animal ambassadors at the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center, also spoke on the importance of facility economic impact studies and how to conduct them. Hailee Tocco, incoming chair of the AMMPA Education Committee and director of marine

mammal education and conservation at Wildlife World Zoo, Aquarium & Safari Park, and Terran McGinnis, outgoing chair of the Education Committee and facility historian and manager of community development at Marineland Dolphin Adventure, spoke on AMMPA educators' work over the past year and plans for the coming year.

The day also included updates from representatives with other trade associations, including Jill Nizan, director of conservation operations for American Humane, and Guillermo Sánchez Contreras, DVM, MsC, director of veterinary services and research at The Dolphin Company, for the European Association for Aquatic Mammals.

Five facilities were welcomed as newly accredited AMMPA member facilities: Cabo Dolphins, Dolphin Adventure, Ocean Connections Hersheypark, Ocean World, and Texas State Aquarium; and seven facilities were recognized for earning reaccreditation this year: Atlantis Paradise Island, Dolphin Research Center, Jardim Zoológico/Lisbon Zoo, Sea Life Park Hawaii, SeaWorld San Diego, Wildlife World Zoo, Aquarium & Safari Park, and Zoomarine Portugal.

The meeting was preceded by an Alliance Board and Committee Chair meeting. New incoming Board members Lee Kellar, general curator at Coral World Ocean Park, and Michele Sousa, senior curator of mammals and animal ambassadors at the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center, were welcomed; and outgoing Board members Michelle Campbell, executive VP for Dolphin Quest, Art Cooper, vice president/director of operations at Dolphins Plus Bayside, and outgoing Education Committee chair Terran McGinnis, facility historian and manager of community development at Marineland Dolphin Adventure, were thanked for their service.

Presenting AMMPA committee chairs, vice chairs, and Board members included Patrick Berry, AMMPA treasurer and executive director of Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park; Michelle



Campbell, AMMPA past-chair and executive vice president at Dolphin Quest/Quest Global Management; Dennis Christen, chair of the AMMPA Accreditation Committee and senior director of animal wellbeing and behavior at the Georgia Aquarium; Kathleen Dezio, AMMPA president & CEO; Eric Gaglione, outgoing AMMPA Board chair and vice president of zoological operations at Georgia Aquarium; Meredith Horn, chair of the Communications Committee and vice president of guest experience and education at Mississippi Aquarium; Terran McGinnis, outgoing chair of the Education Committee and facility historian and manager of community development at Marineland Dolphin Adventure; Lance Miller, chair of the Animal Welfare Committee and vice president of conservation

science and animal welfare research at the Chicago Zoological Society/Brookfield Zoo; Jay Sweeney, chair of the Veterinary Committee and partner at Dolphin Quest; and Rita Stacey Vondra, vice chair of the AMMPA Accreditation Committee and chief conservation and science officer at the Texas State Aquarium.

Sponsors and Friends of the Alliance for the 2024 meeting included Atlantic/Pacific, Bionic Zoo and Aquarium, Birch Horton Bittner & Cherot, Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Dolphin Quest, Georgia Aquarium, Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute, International Animal Exchange, Inc., KORE Zoo & Enrichment, McRoberts Sales Co., Mike Stahl Seafood, PGAV Destinations, Pisces Seafood, SeaWorld San Diego, and TJP Engineering.

