

tributaries

MAGAZINE OF THE SOUTH CAROLINA AQUARIUM



South Carolina
Aquarium

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

FALL 2019 / VOLUME 66

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Maybe it was his toothsome grin.

It might have been his white, almost supernatural sheen. Or his stereotypical “freeze” pose, when conserving energy, which led some to speculate he wasn’t real.

Whatever the reason, Alabaster the albino American alligator was a clear crowd favorite. When he passed away recently, the outpouring of condolences and fond memories served as a balm to the team who cared for him for more than a decade.

Alabaster was an animal who never would have survived in the wild. His condition made him susceptible to predators and to ultraviolet burn from sunlight. At the Aquarium, he found a home and a place to shine as an ambassador for his species.

In fact, the American alligator species itself was threatened with extinction as recently as 30 years ago. It was only through its listing within the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that the population was able to rebound and be removed from immediate concern.

Today, the Endangered Species Act is also threatened by proposed modifications that would weaken its impact and enforcement. When passed by a bipartisan Congress in 1973 and signed into law by President Richard Nixon, the ESA gave new hope for many species on the brink. It has been successful with 99% of the species listed, including iconic animals that you can see at the Aquarium – like Liberty the American bald eagle and Caretta the loggerhead sea turtle.

We live in an unfortunate time when more than one million species globally are determined to be at risk of extinction. Rolling back the protection of wildlife and wild places here in America will surely create even greater jeopardy.

According to polls, the vast majority of Americans want to protect the Endangered Species Act and don’t want to see it politicized. That’s certainly true here in the Lowcountry, where protecting what we love is a way of life. I hope you will let your voice be heard on the need to save species from extinction.



Kevin Mills, President and CEO



Leading the way to connect people with water, wildlife and wild places.

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Aquarium News



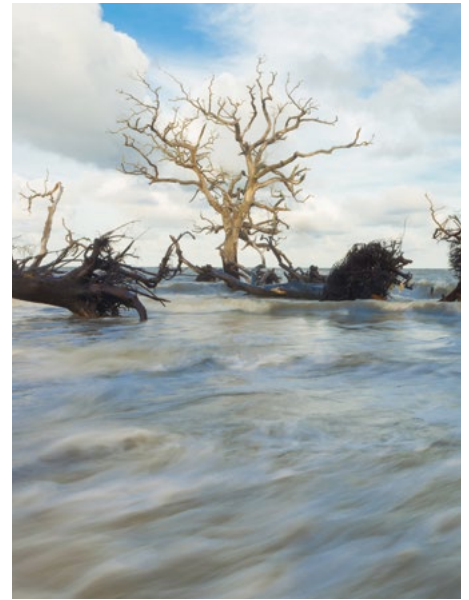
Aquarium Awarded Top National Honor for Museums

On May 7, the South Carolina Aquarium was announced as one of ten recipients of the 2019 National Medal for Museum and Library Service, the nation's highest honor given to museums and libraries that make significant and exceptional contributions to their communities. We are only the third South Carolina institution and sixth aquarium in the U.S. to win this distinction. According to the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Aquarium was recognized "not for having a massive living collection of exotic species from around the world, but for keeping its collection's focus local." Housing thousands of species native to South Carolina, the Aquarium has been awarded for educating the public about the biodiversity of our regional aquatic ecosystems, as well as its efforts in South Carolina's science education curriculum and dedication to tackling tough environmental issues. The Aquarium was recognized at a ceremony in Washington, D.C. in June. We are proud to be a conservation education leader in the community. Thank you for being an integral part of our success!



Meet Our New Good Catch Coordinator, Amy MacKown

Amy joined the South Carolina Aquarium family in July, bringing with her an impressive background rooted in coastal conservation. Throughout her career, Amy has been a supporter of sustainable fisheries and local food systems – a mentality solidified from growing up on a small island in the Chesapeake Bay, where commercial fishing is a common and respected way of life. Amy moved to Mount Pleasant from New England, where she worked with the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance to build a broad movement toward healthy fisheries and regional seafood systems that honor community-based fishermen and their role as stewards of the marine ecosystem. Now living off Shem Creek, Amy is very excited to be just a short paddle away from fresh, Lowcountry seafood. She is looking forward to building relationships with southeastern coastal communities to strengthen our supply of local and environmentally conscious seafood. You can find Amy at one of our many Good Catch events; be sure to say hello or send an email: amackown@scaquarium.org.



EDA Grant to Support Aquarium Environmental Modeling System

This summer, the Aquarium was awarded an Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant to work with the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, one of the top marine research institutes in the country, to create a three-dimensional inundation modeling system. This supercomputing modeling system will allow users to input a multitude of environmental variables – from sea level rise to hurricanes – to view a highly accurate model of what it would look like if these events were to occur in reality. The state-of-the-art system will also account for "what-if" scenarios, modeling the effects of future buildings, such as sea walls or green structures, on our environment. This will be the first time this type of technology will be leveraged in our part of the world – a landscape with mixed urban and rural areas, as well as saltmarsh habitats. We are very excited for the completion of this project and the incredibly powerful knowledge base it will provide our community.

What's Happening

AFTER HOURS: SOUTHERN SPIRITS (21+)
OCTOBER 25 • 7 – 10 p.m. • Aquarium

Celebrate Halloween with spooktacular tastings of some of the best spirits in the South! Come in costume and prepare your palates to sample drinks from local distilleries and beyond. Sustainably sourced small plates from Good Catch partners, animal encounters, entertainment and a beer and wine bar are also provided with purchase of your all-inclusive ticket. Event is 21+, and member tickets are \$40. Learn more at scaquarium.org/afterhours.

THE LITTLE GYM
NOVEMBER 5 & DECEMBER 3 • 10 – 10:30 a.m. • Aquarium

The Little Gym helps lay the foundation for children to become coordinated, confident and involved little people through activities such as warm-ups to directive music, tumbling and more! Recommended for ages 2-5. Registration opens one month in advance, space is limited. Included with membership, reservations required. To reserve your spot, call (843) 577-FISH (3474).

HOMESCHOOL EXPLORERS CLUB: JAW-SOME SHARKS
NOVEMBER 6 • 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. • Aquarium

Do sharks pose a greater risk to humans, or do we pose a greater risk to sharks? Get ready for a fin-tastic day learning all about the ocean's apex predator – sharks! Separate fact from fiction when it comes to these misunderstood animals. Explore updates from OCEARCH's Global Shark Tracker and meet the local sharks that frequent our Carolina coasts. Plus, learn how you can protect sharks and their relatives in the wild. Member tickets are \$9.50 (grades K-8) and \$13.50 (grades 9-12). Learn more at scaquarium.org/homeschool. To buy tickets, call (843) 577-FISH (3474).

DANCE MOVES
NOVEMBER 7 & DECEMBER 5 • 10 – 10:30 a.m. • Aquarium

Join us for a fun and energetic class from Dance Moves of Charleston! Explore basic ballet moves, warm-ups and stretches, movements across the floor, jumping and turning. Comfortable clothing or dance attire recommended. Ages 2-6. Registration opens one month in advance, space is limited. Included with membership, reservations required. To reserve your spot, call (843) 577-FISH (3474).

MEET THE KEEPER: SEA TURTLES
NOVEMBER 9 • 10:30 a.m. – noon • Aquarium

Join our sea turtle biologist, Cait Crosby, on a fun "edventure" and learn what it's like to care for our Sea Turtle Care Center™ patients. Discover the incredible stories of our sea turtles and learn ways that you can help conserve these amazing, resilient animals! Recommended for ages 6 and up. \$5 per participant; chaperones attend free. Reservations required. To reserve your spot, call (843) 577-FISH (3474).

TADPOLE EXPLORERS
NOVEMBER 16 • 8 – 9 a.m. • Aquarium

Guests from ages 1-3 get the Aquarium all to themselves! Enjoy stations in the Lower Ocean Gallery including crafts, animal encounters and foam block building. Snacks, coffee and muffins will be provided. \$10 per member child; two adults free per child. Reservations required. To reserve your spot, call (843) 577-FISH (3474).



LEGEND: MEMBERS ONLY / PUBLIC EVENT



HOLLAND LIFELONG LEARNING
MICROPLASTICS AND MEGA PROBLEMS: POLLUTION SOLUTIONS IN THE LOWCOUNTRY
NOVEMBER 21 • 6 – 7:30 p.m. • Aquarium

One of the biggest threats we face today is smaller than a pencil eraser. Microplastics are toxin-absorbing pieces of plastic less than 5-millimeters long. Learn more about the research being conducted in the Charleston Harbor and how communities are addressing this issue. The South Carolina Aquarium is honored to welcome Dr. John Weinstein, chair of biology at the Citadel and Lia Colabello, principal of Plastic Pollution Solutions. Learn more at scaquarium.org/lifelonglearning.

HOLIDAY DIVE SHOWS WITH SCUBA CLAUS AND THE ELVES
NOVEMBER 30 – DECEMBER 23 • 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. • Aquarium

Watch as your favorite friends from the North Pole swim with the fish! Scuba Claus or one of his elves will make a special appearance in the Great Ocean Tank at the 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. dive shows each day beginning Saturday, November 30. Included with membership. Learn more at scaquarium.org/holidays.

SUNDAYS WITH SANTA
DECEMBER 1, 8 & 15 • 11:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. • Aquarium

Meet jolly old Saint Nick at the Aquarium this holiday season! Visit with Santa and have your photo taken in the Great Hall near the Carolina Seas exhibit. Photo packages and ornaments are available for purchase, and Aquarium members receive a 10% discount. Included with membership. Learn more at scaquarium.org/holidays.

SEA LIFE BY STARLIGHT IN WONDERLAND
DECEMBER 7 • 8 – 11 p.m. • Aquarium

You're invited down the rabbit hole for a holiday ball in Wonderland! Join us at the 9th annual Sea Life by Starlight for a night of whimsy as we support the Sea Turtle Care Center. Adventure through our fantastical, underwater world; dine on scrumptious hors d'oeuvres from our Good Catch partners; sip from the open bar; bid at the silent auction and dance to live music – all included with your ticket. Don your best red, white or black cocktail attire, and accessorize with timepieces, top hats and white gloves. It will be a dream to remember – don't be late for this very important date! Learn more at scaquarium.org/slbsl.

HOLIDAY EXTRAVAGANZA
DECEMBER 16 • 6 – 8 p.m. • Aquarium

Join us for a festive, family-friendly celebration! Enjoy light refreshments, pictures with Santa, cookie decorating stations, holiday crafts and animal encounters. Shop for friends and family with a one-day-only 20% discount in the Aquarium Gift Shop. \$10 per member adult; \$5 per member child; children 2 and under free. Registration opens November 4. Reservations required; to reserve, call (843) 577-FISH (3474).



[SCAQUARIUM.ORG/CALENDAR](https://scaquarium.org/calendar)

There's always more to explore

Food for Thought:

Ever wondered how we choose what our animals *chomp on*? With more than *4,000* mouths to feed, it's no surprise that we stock upwards of 40 different types of food. Our Aquarium family is similar to yours – we have *picky eaters*, varying appetites and tons of taste buds to accommodate. Most importantly, we want *every animal* in our family (whether they have fins, fur or scales) to *eat a balanced diet*.

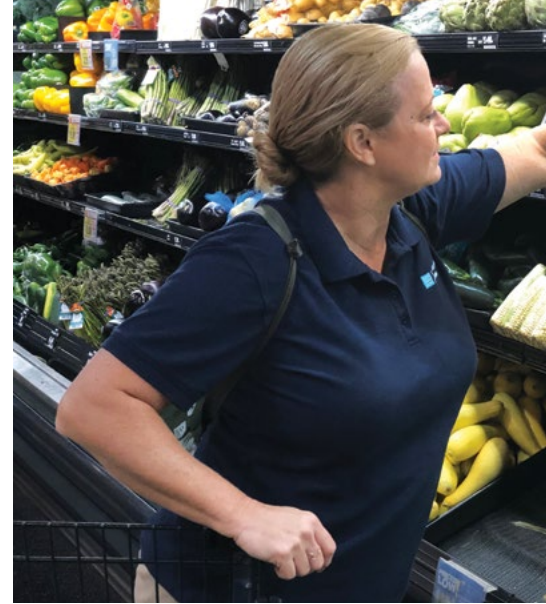
It's a team effort between our *veterinary and husbandry* staff to determine what, when and how we feed our animals. We take into consideration *age, weight and any historical data* we have to determine what will work best for each individual or species.

Feeding our Animals





An Aquarium volunteer prepares a meal of squid, fish and krill.



Sea Turtle Care Center manager, Melissa Ranly, shops for veggies to feed the turtle patients.



Green thiamine is sprinkled onto a meal before being served.



Fish in the Carolina Seas tank are fed broadcast-style.

Purchase

First and foremost, we try and buy local! As our Good Catch program proclaims, limiting the miles that food has to travel to reach us will decrease our carbon footprint. That's why we try to purchase local seafood, produce and seed whenever possible. You might even see our staff perusing the local produce aisle at your grocery store, in search of animal-approved snacks.

Whatever we cannot acquire locally we get from reputable sources. As a member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, our colleagues at other institutions are reliable reviewers for many companies and vendors.

Their insight, coupled with the extensive knowledge and standards set by our own staff, allow us to make the best choices when purchasing food.

Prepare

Same-day service is a mantra for our staff! Nearly all food is prepared daily, taking into consideration any changes to an animals' behavior, health or personal preference. Contrary to what might happen at home, dirty dishes don't pile up overnight at the Aquarium. On a given day, as many as ten volunteers are on hand, preparing food platters and cleaning up the kitchen throughout the day.

Supplement

Dietary plans typically include multivitamins and supplements based on each species' unique needs. These vitamins work in tandem with food to sustain healthy body systems. Vitamin E and thiamine (vitamin B1) are given to our fish-eating species – vitamin E has antioxidant properties and thiamine helps convert carbohydrates to energy. Sharks take a multivitamin to keep their cartilaginous skeleton strong. Stono the river otter takes Cosequin, a nutritional supplement for arthritis; he had an injured ankle as a pup that needs extra care in his later years. Birds of prey, like Pippen the barn owl and Phoenix the American kestrel, have a multivitamin sprinkled on their food, designed specifically with their nutritional needs in mind. (It also gives their feet that healthy, yellow glow!) There's plenty more multivitamins out there, so we constantly monitor our animals' needs and adjust accordingly.

Serve

Our animals can't gather around a table to dine together, so we bring



the food to them! We have five main ways we feed our animals: broadcast, target, case-by-case, cooperative and enrichment.

Many of our fishy friends take their meals broadcast-style, which is the equivalent of family-style serving at home. To avoid a feeding frenzy, sharks and some larger fish are individually target fed, helping us track exactly what they're consuming. Sea turtles in rehabilitation are the best example of case-by-case diets, as they all have different dietary needs aligning with their treatment plan. If we're training an animal, cooperative feeding allows us to teach them using tasty treats. Lastly, unusual items in exhibits, like ice molds and PVC pipes, usually mean enrichment-led feeding is occurring. This type of feeding encourages natural behavior, such as foraging. When needs arise, we can mix-and-match all these methods as well.

And there you have it! One thing is for sure – it takes time, talent and a lot of manpower to make meals for our animals.

Otters prefer to play with their meal before eating it...



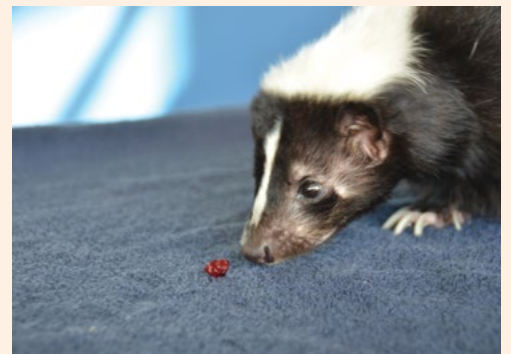
Muscadine vines or hibiscus flowers are savory snacks for the tortoises.



The octopus enjoys siphoning shrimp from its enrichment toy.



Sassafras the skunk eats the occasional raisin or two... or three...



Your Turn!

Want to try your hand at feeding our resident fish or stingrays? Learn more at scaquarium.org/feed-the-animals. Member discounts available!

Conservation Matters



Before: Maryville marsh 20 years ago.



After: Maryville marsh today.

Mystery of the Maryville Marsh

Aquarium director of conservation, Al George, stood alongside Mr. John Carr of the Maryville community in Charleston, South Carolina, gazing over football fields' worth of saltmarsh die-off. Mr. Carr's family has resided in Maryville for generations; his great grandfather was the last mayor of the town before it became part of the City of Charleston. Rich in history as one of South Carolina's first African American townships, Maryville was also once known for its abundance of saltmarsh.

Mr. Carr took out a photograph of his father on his 80th birthday, taken in this exact location, and showed it to Al. In the foreground, Mr. Carr's father sits on a swing against a background of thriving saltmarsh. Taken only 20 years prior, the photo starkly contrasts the empty view ahead of them.

For the past few years, the Maryville community has grown to fear the local water that was once their friend, assuming the fatalistic saltmarsh die-off must be the result of toxic dumping in the area. Many community members stopped consuming seafood altogether, in fear that they may also be contaminated by the saltmarsh killer.

Al suspected a different culprit. He immediately added the saltmarsh "before and after" photographs to the Sea Rise Project, located within the South Carolina Aquarium Citizen Science app, to document the dramatic change. He also shared the photographs with knowledgeable saltmarsh experts, who confirmed toxic waste was not killing the saltmarsh. Using site-specific LIDAR analysis, Dr. James Morris, distinguished professor emeritus of the University of South Carolina, believes the Maryville saltmarsh die-off to be a result of a change in water elevation, also known as sea level rise and sediment redistribution.

Unfortunately, saltmarsh die-off is not limited to Maryville. Studies show that the coast of Georgia has already lost approximately 30% of its marsh cover due to climate change and sea level rise. About 66% of our nation's saltmarsh lives between Georgetown, South Carolina, and Jacksonville, Florida, and it is estimated that 65-70% of Atlantic pelagic fisheries species spend about one third of their lifecycle in this biome, putting their existence at risk. Saltmarsh even reduces erosion and flooding along our coastlines by buffering waves, trapping sediment and absorbing rainwater. Lucky for us, saltmarsh is resilient. By tackling the issue sooner rather than later, we can prevent the die-off of this dynamic ecosystem.

In this case, the Aquarium conservation team will continue to work within the Maryville community to build a trusted relationship based on sea level rise education and mitigation planning. By helping bring key players to the table – from local universities and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources – we can continue to study the area to find and introduce a new strain of saltmarsh that will thrive within the area's new sea level. Then, we will be able to begin the scientific repopulation of the Maryville saltmarsh.

"Saltmarsh plays a vital role in promoting a healthy biome, as does the resilience of a community in the face of flooding due to sea level rise," said Al. "If we can help this area respond and come up with a strategy, we will help this community become more resilient in a multitude of ways."

WANT TO HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE?
Download the South Carolina Aquarium Citizen Science app today and join the Sea Rise Project to photo document flood-related impacts in your area.

Introducing the Learning Lab



The Maritime Center Redefined

For nearly 20 years, the Aquarium has stood as a beacon for transformational education on our city's eastern peninsula. Serving more than 40,000 students each year through core standards-based learning programs, the Aquarium is among the foremost STEM education presenters in our region.

In 2020, in partnership with the City of Charleston, we will embark on a fresh journey to engage more students than ever before.

The Maritime Center, positioned just south of the Aquarium, will be brought to life as Charleston's first interdisciplinary learning center on the water. In the coming year, the Aquarium will begin the process of renovating and upfitting this facility to become a vibrant center for STEM education, serving all age groups and drawing students from throughout our state to the water's edge.

This new Learning Lab will comprise four state-of-the-art central classroom spaces and a waterfront outdoor classroom. The facility will be animated year-round, housing the Aquarium's Structured School Program and a new series of interactive experiences tailored to teens. During the summer months, the Aquarium will offer accessible seasonal programming designed to connect elementary school students directly with the water through field excursions. The Aquarium is already engaging with community partners to make the Learning Lab a welcoming space for as many students and teachers as possible, breaking down the

barriers that have often isolated our city's residents from the waterfront.

Slated to open in 2021, the Learning Lab will be the inaugural project of the Aquarium's five-year strategic plan, titled Landmark 2025. This vision is defined by collaboratively transforming our east peninsula into a welcoming access point on Charleston's harbor – reimagining both the world within our walls and our impact on the world beyond them.

For more information or to learn about how you can support the launch of the Learning Lab, please email the Aquarium's advancement team at advancement@scaquarium.org.



What's Your Story?



The Westerman Family

Eighteen-month-old Abby Westerman breaks out into a grin and exclaims, "Look, turtle!" Abby has spotted Caretta, sea turtle queen of the Great Ocean Tank. Abby's older sister, Clare, laughs and points out the reptile to the rest of her family.

"We visit the Aquarium around twice per month and they are always this excited," laughs the girls' mom, Carly. "They love this place, they run around like they own it," explains dad, Tom, before chasing after Abby, who has just turned the corner. The Westermans have been Aquarium members for the past two years.

"We love coming here because so many of the values we want to pass down to our daughters – kindness, compassion, curiosity, respect – are reflected in our experience here," Carly says. "When the girls are here, they're around different kinds of people and animals. They're able to ask questions and satisfy their curiosity. Here, our girls learn the obligation we have to the creatures around us and how to do our best by our natural world."

In addition to being Aquarium members, the Westermans recently secured for their family a commemorative fish on the Pillars of Support. Their decision to make their permanent mark in the Great Hall was easy, inspired by their family's love for the Aquarium and their desire to support the institution for future generations, both for their girls and others.

"The Pillars of Support is an opportunity for us to give something back to the organization that we've benefited so much from as a family," Carly explains.

"Clare and Abby feel at home here. They have a good time, but they're also learning. They can ask questions and learn about things in a way that makes sense for their age," Tom adds. "We feel proud that we've been able to contribute to the mission of an organization that we really believe in and that's doing critical work. And as the girls grow up and see our family's name as a permanent fixture in the Aquarium, we know they'll feel proud too."



CREATE YOUR LEGACY AT THE SOUTH CAROLINA AQUARIUM

Your family's name can also be beautifully displayed on a legacy fish on one of four lighted pillars, prominently exhibited within the Great Hall, to publicly recognize your support for the South Carolina Aquarium. To learn more, visit scaquarium.org/pillars-support or contact Nick Mercer, Giving Programs Officer, at nmerc@scaquarium.org

The Fran and Dennis Nolan Education Center

When the Aquarium team first began designing Zucker Family Sea Turtle Recovery™, we knew that creating an interactive classroom would be an important part of the new exhibit, but we never knew just how animated this space would become. The Fran and Dennis Nolan Education Center has proven to be a vibrant space within the Aquarium, creating new opportunities for our visitors and members to directly interact with our staff, meet new animals and explore the natural world.

You can always find something to enjoy in the Education Center:

- Each summer and into the early fall, many of our **sea turtle releases** are livestreamed into the theater from the beach, transporting our visitors to the exciting work taking place beyond our walls.
- Stop by the Center every morning at 9:30 a.m. to enjoy the **Seaside Story Time** program for toddlers. Our interpreters will read one of our favorite books and introduce you to a new animal!
- From Liberty the bald eagle to Caretta the sea turtle, you can connect with the keeper of your favorite animal at the Aquarium during our scheduled **Meet the Keeper** programs. Learn about the behind-the-scenes work that goes into caring for some of our most popular residents! Check out upcoming Meet the Keeper programs at scaquarium.org/calendar.

- The Education Center is a designated **sensory-safe** area for families with sensory needs to find a quiet environment while visiting the Aquarium. Stop by the Center to sit down, relax and watch an educational video about our sea turtle rehabilitation efforts.
- Once a quarter, the Education Center becomes a central classroom for young students during the **Homeschool Explorers Club**. Learn more at scaquarium.org/homeschool.

Whether you have been to the Aquarium once or a thousand times, there is always something new to discover. On your next trip, make sure to stop by the Fran and Dennis Nolan Education Center in Sea Turtle Recovery and explore a new way to connect with water, wildlife and wild places!

The Education Center, and the programming within, is made possible by Fran and Dennis Nolan, who believe deeply in the power of education. Fran and Dennis have been involved with sea turtle conservation on Harbor Island for more than a decade. They were integral in establishing a weekly, free sea turtle education program in the Beaufort area for islanders and visitors to learn more about sea turtle nesting.



Sea Turtle Care Center™ Update



Left: Fish skin is applied to Timon's wound to help it heal. Right: Just a few weeks after the fish skin graft, Timon's flipper healed!

Getting Creative with Sea Turtle Rehab

The Sea Turtle Care Center and our vet staff are not afraid to get creative with treatment options – like in the case of our green sea turtle patient, Timon. Timon has osteomyelitis, an infection of the bone, in his left front flipper. Timon's case was so severe, his joint was exposed. Chief veterinarian, Dr. Shane Boylan, surgically debrided it, removing the infected tissue.

Unfortunately, the wound wasn't healing at the rate Dr. Shane hoped. Vet staff discussed the idea of trying fish skin to aid in the healing process. Veterinary assistant, Whitney Daniel, did some research and found a company called Kerecis®. She reached out to Kerecis, and they graciously donated two samples of Kerecis Omega 3 fish skin. When grafted onto damaged tissue, the material provides a structure on which the body's own cells can multiply, resulting in new tissue growth.

"Imagine trying to build a house without a foundation," said Dr. Shane of the procedure. "Normally, with a wound, there's enough skin left to provide a 'basement' membrane upon which new skin can build. In Timon's case, the wound went all the way through the joint, destroying that basement membrane."

"We gave his body something on which to build, and it worked. Timon's wound has successfully healed," said Dr. Shane.

We're thankful to Kerecis for donating the fish skin so we could try this treatment method on Timon. Learn more about Timon's treatment at scaquarium.org/timon.



2019: A RECORD-BREAKING YEAR FOR SEA TURTLE NESTING

2019 was a record year for sea turtle nesting in the Palmetto State, with numbers clocking in at more than 8,000 nests, breaking 2016's record of 6,446. That means that it's super important to keep our beaches free of debris, and we're not just talking trash.

Be sure to remove your beach chairs, tents and other beach gear as well as fill in any holes and knock down sandcastles before leaving the beach. Items like these could disorient and misdirect hatchlings on their way to the water. Help keep our beaches clean and future sea turtles safe — leave no trace.

IN MEMORY OF

Alabaster

the Albino American Alligator

BELOVED MEMBER OF OUR
SOUTH CAROLINA AQUARIUM FAMILY



Thank you to our
members for your
outpouring of
love and support.

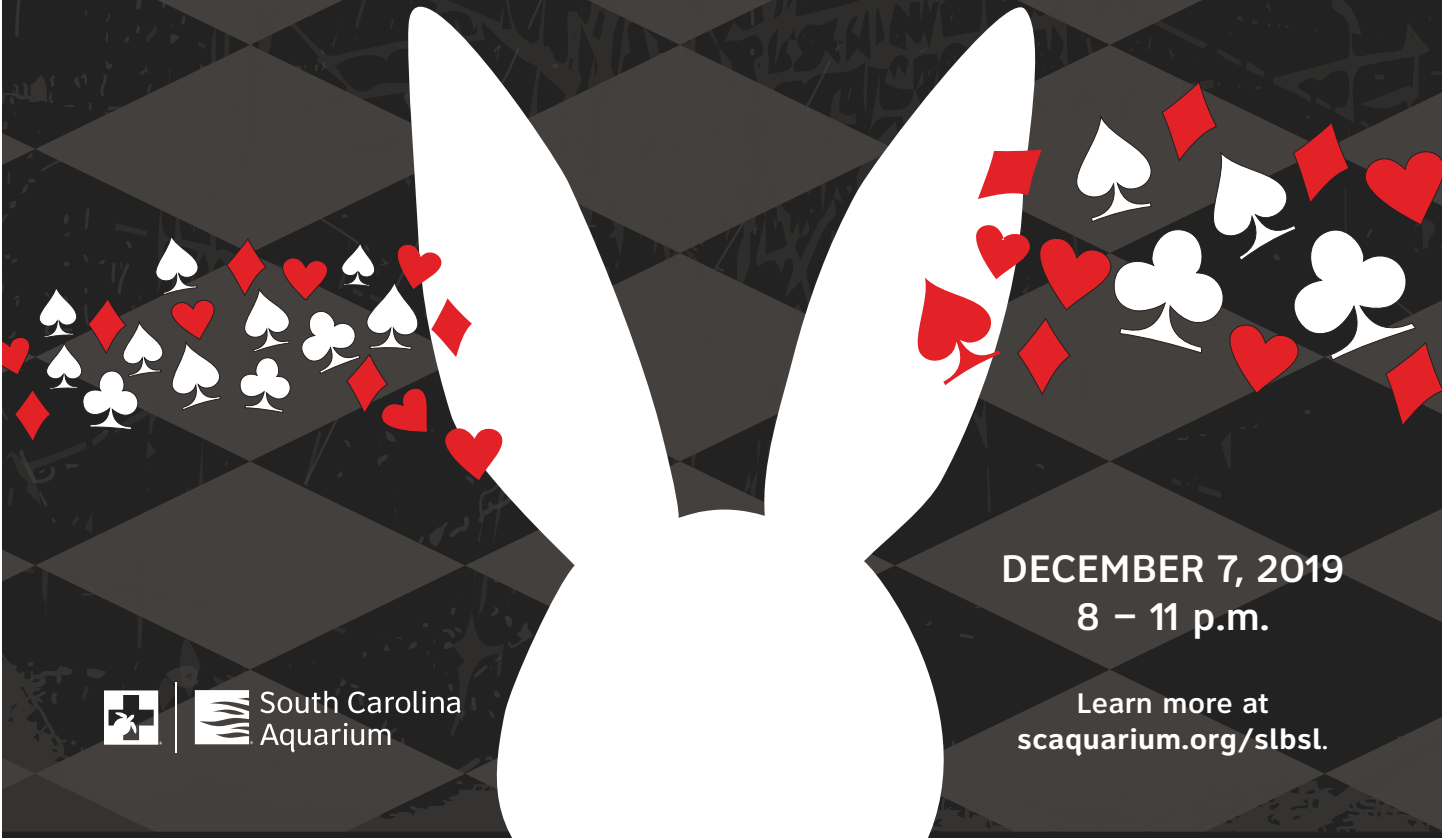
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SEA LIFE BY STARLIGHT

IN  Wonderland

BENEFITING THE SEA TURTLE CARE CENTER™



DECEMBER 7, 2019
8 – 11 p.m.

Learn more at
scaquarium.org/slsl.