

impact 2021

INSPIRING TOMORROW'S LEADERS AND EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

The National Aquarium is a nonprofit organization changing the way humanity cares for our ocean planet. Through unparalleled exhibits, science-based education programs and in-the-field initiatives, we inspire conservation of the world's aquatic treasures by connecting people with nature to drive conservation action. We protect and restore the environment; care and advocate for animals; and educate and empower people to care for the world around them. Forty years since our opening in August 1981, we are proud of what we accomplished in 2021 to benefit people, animals and the planet.



The National Aquarium's exhibits connect guests of all ages with the natural world.

nature

RESTORING VITAL HABITATS FOR WILDLIFE AND PEOPLE

We connect people with nature to drive conservation action around our priorities to combat climate change, save wildlife and habitats, and stop plastic pollution.

From where the National Aquarium sits at the Inner Harbor's edge in downtown Baltimore, the Patapsco River winds its way to the storied Chesapeake Bay, which connects us to the Atlantic and Earth's one, global ocean. Our location is an important reminder of our responsibility to our community, region and planet.



At our annual BioBlitz at Masonville Cove, participants find, identify and record as many species of plants and wildlife as they can in several hours. Bugs definitely count!

nature



1 Our Waterfront Campus project is one way that we protect animals and people by maintaining and increasing biodiversity, promoting healthy habitats and contributing to climate resiliency. The National Aquarium started experimenting with floating wetland technology in Baltimore's Inner Harbor in 2010, reintroducing wetland habitat to promote clean, healthy water. In the project's first 11 years, we learned [several important lessons](#) that are shaping the project's future. Following a pandemic-related pause in project fundraising, in 2021 our plans to [transform our waterfront campus](#) attracted generous additional support from the community, bringing the realization of our future vision for the Inner Harbor closer to reality.

2 We are proud to support the [ambitious international effort](#) to build up the planet's resilience to the impacts of climate change by protecting at least 30% of Earth's lands and waters by 2030. We lobbied for legislation at the federal and state levels, and are one of 180 aquariums, zoos and museums from across the United States that support the Biden administration's [America the Beautiful campaign](#). The 30x30 approach helps inform our advocacy around local policies and initiatives related to [our conservation goals](#) of combatting climate change, saving wildlife and habitats, and stopping plastic pollution.

3 We also increase biodiversity, promote healthy habitats and contribute to climate resiliency by planting and maintaining trees, grasses, shrubs and wetland plants at key sites throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed, including [Nassawango Creek Preserve](#) on Maryland's Eastern Shore and [Virginia Beach](#). In 2021 alone, the Aquarium worked with volunteers and partners to put a total of 30,145 plants in the ground in these and other locations.

4 We seek to curb the negative impacts of plastic pollution on the health of people, wildlife and ecosystems through waterway and community cleanups, public awareness campaigns, advocacy for

source reduction solutions and through the elimination of single-use plastics in our own business operations. We supported Baltimore City's [Comprehensive Bag Reduction Act](#) and a new [Maryland law prohibiting balloon releases](#), both of which went into effect in 2021. It's estimated that the water bottle-filling stations in the Aquarium have kept more than 2.7 million single-use water bottles from entering landfills to date since they were installed in 2014. In addition to facilitating source reduction, we remove plastic pollution from the environment. At our cleanup events at Masonville Cove and the Fort McHenry wetland in [South Baltimore](#), Cox's Point Park in Baltimore County and through our coordination of [Ocean Conservancy International Coastal Cleanup](#) events across the state of Maryland, we worked with volunteers to remove 83,184 pieces of debris—81,834 pieces of which were plastic—from local shorelines and waterways last year. Data from these cleanups informs important advocacy work.

5 To engage community scientists and foster connection to—and responsibility for—healthy ecosystems, we manage Baltimore's participation in [City Nature Challenge](#), an annual international competition to see which city can find and identify the most species, and we hold an annual BioBlitz event at Masonville Cove, where participants find, identify and record as many species of plants and wildlife as they can in several hours. This year's BioBlitz also served as an opportunity to celebrate [Latino Conservation Week](#). Combined, the 2021 City Nature Challenge and Masonville Cove BioBlitz engaged a total of 1,113 participants who made 13,981 observations of 4,381 distinct species—including species that are considered rare, vulnerable and imperiled in Maryland, such as the American chestnut, bald eagle, pied-billed grebe and double-crested cormorant. As the Maryland affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation's [Garden for Wildlife](#) program, we certified 374 Maryland gardens in 2021, each one providing important resources like food, water and cover for wildlife.

nurture

CARING FOR ANIMALS AT THE AQUARIUM AND IN THE WILD

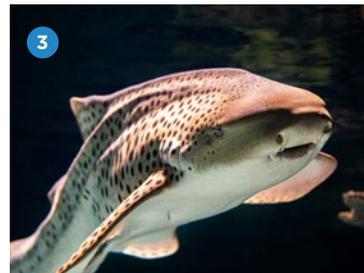
We promote environmental stewardship and practice the highest standards of animal care and promote animal welfare—both inside the Aquarium and out.

All animals—from microorganisms to apex predators—play critical roles in maintaining healthy ecosystems and a healthy ocean, which humans rely upon for oxygen, water, climate regulation, food, energy and other resources.



Kai the green sea turtle is at home in our Animal Care and Rescue Center while our team addresses her buoyancy control issues so she can swim and dive normally again.

nurture



1 We respond to and care for wildlife impacted by climate change, habitat loss and plastic pollution. Organizations like the National Aquarium that make up the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network are facing increasing demands to respond to and rehabilitate federally protected sea turtles that are sick or injured—but there’s inadequate direct federal support for this crucial conservation work. We, together with partners across the country, are [advocating for stronger federal funding](#) for sea turtle stranding response and rehabilitation, which is vital to the recovery of these endangered animals. Underscoring the need to stop plastic pollution, a juvenile green sea turtle in our care last year passed two pieces of green plastic material that appeared to be from a balloon—the first confirmed case of a turtle patient passing plastic debris during rehabilitation at the Aquarium. In 2021, National Aquarium Animal Rescue cared for a total of 47 sea turtles in long-term rehabilitation and released 15 back into the ocean, bringing the 30-year total of animals successfully rehabilitated and released to 332.

2 In 2021 we also cared for three rescued seals—two grey and one harp, all juveniles—that were rehabilitated at our world-class [Animal Care and Rescue Center](#) before being released back into the ocean. When the male harbor seal was first admitted, radiograph results indicated foreign bodies in his stomach consistent with fishing gear, including monofilament line, a plastic lure and a hook. In addition to caring for individual animals, we also support wildlife populations through research—such as submitting samples from the seals in our care to [add to study data](#) on grey seal biology, diet and genetics, as well as migratory and reproductive patterns, helping to advance understanding of marine mammals like grey seals and other seal species.

3 In February, we announced that [Kai, a juvenile green sea turtle](#), had joined us from South Carolina Aquarium. Because of her buoyancy control issues, Kai was deemed non-releasable by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Since she arrived, a cross-departmental team has been

fine-tuning an innovative weight system for her shell to allow her to swim and dive normally again. In August, [Zuri the zebra shark](#) became the newest resident of *Blacktip Reef*. Born in January 2016 at Shedd Aquarium in Chicago, Zuri came to us from Columbus Zoo and Aquarium in Ohio. In addition to these two newcomers, we welcomed some newborns this year, too—[eight rare sandstone long-neck turtle hatchlings](#)—believed to be the first to hatch at any aquarium or zoo in the world—as well as [12 Northern red-faced turtle hatchlings](#) and one puffling nicknamed [Orzo](#). Another big animal story of 2021 came about when our team noticed that Cena, the humphead wrasse in *Blacktip Reef*, was undergoing some dramatic changes in her coloring and size. They determined that she’s in the process of changing sexes and [becoming a supermale](#), a phenomenon that, while not unusual in the fish world, is fascinating all the same.

4 To prepare the National Aquarium dolphins to move to a [seaside sanctuary](#) and thrive in a more natural environment, we continued to [build the dolphins’ resiliency](#) throughout 2021. This resiliency training included reinforcing the dolphins’ natural inclination to work together to secure food and share the results of that work and introducing the dolphins to fluctuating water temperatures as well as new objects and stimuli. We also participated in a research project in collaboration with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Johns Hopkins University and the University of New Hampshire. Scientists from NOAA are researching the impact of oil spills on dolphin health, studying whether dolphins aspirate oil when they surface to breathe. This research is an excellent fit for the Aquarium because of the direct conservation implications for dolphins in the ocean.

next generation

INSPIRING THE OCEAN CONSERVATIONISTS OF TOMORROW

With a wide range of programs for students from pre-K through college, we are an educational partner that helps young people understand their connection to and responsibility for protecting the natural world. We work with students, families, schools and communities to build skills in science, technology, engineering, the arts and math (STEAM), and we prepare students for college and careers.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics expects overall employment to grow by 5% between 2018 and 2028, but forecasts that jobs in science, technology, engineering and math fields will expand by nearly 9%. Women continue to be underrepresented in the STEM and STEAM workforce, as do Black and Hispanic/Latino communities. We believe diverse backgrounds, thoughts and opinions are critical to scientific progress and the continued development of inclusive conservation and climate change solutions.



Our School Shell-ebration event celebrated students, families, educators and caregivers who pulled off a school year like no other during the pandemic.

next generation



1 We engaged 48,125 local students in grades pre-K through 12 in our in-person and virtual education programs in 2021, including [AquaPartners](#), [Henry Hall Fellowship](#), [homeschool programs](#), [the Youth Exhibit Guide program](#) and [What Lives in the Harbor](#), as well as [field trips](#). We partner with the Maryland State Department of Education to offer field trips at no cost for Maryland students. This includes in-person field trips as well as two virtual options—[Maryland: Mountains to the Sea](#) and [Australian Adventure](#)—both of which feature video tours of Aquarium exhibits and live question-and-answer sessions with Aquarium educators. We also offer virtual conservation-focused education programs at no cost to qualifying schools so that we can serve in-state students unable to visit the Aquarium in person.

2 This marked the fifth year of [Read to Reef](#), a conservation-themed book club for young readers in Baltimore City that we offer through a partnership with Enoch Pratt Free Library. Baltimore children read books about the natural world and celebrate their reading achievements at the National Aquarium with their families. This year we also partnered with Pratt to support two virtual Pratt Library Writers Live! events, one for children with an author of a Read to Reef selection, and an Earth Day event for adults.

3 In recognition of the resiliency demonstrated by all who worked together to pull off a school year like no other, we evolved our annual Grade A Student Night into a [School Shell-cebration event](#) to celebrate students and their families as well as educators and caregivers with complimentary access to the National Aquarium. The event drew 532 guests, 69% of whom were Baltimore City residents. We also held three Family Days in partnership with

Baltimore City Public Schools Office of Early Learning, which provided free Aquarium admission to Baltimore City families with children under age 5 enrolled in programs such as Head Start or summer camp. Across the three days, 407 guests visited the Aquarium.

4 Our team engages in meaningful, solutions-focused conversations with Aquarium guests about topics like climate change, plastic pollution, wildlife and habitats—and they use [Animal Encounters](#) and education carts with props to spark guests' interest and help explain complex topics like climate change. Through these conversations, our employees and volunteers share information, resources and ideas for action. Of the 1.6 million conversations with guests our team logged in 2021, nearly 19,000 were about climate change, approximately 20,000 were about plastics (including balloons) and more than 63,000 were about wildlife.

5 Since 1999, we have partnered with the National Park Service to restore wetland habitat for wildlife, remove debris and maintain trails at the [Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine](#). This work has created a valuable green space in the heart of Baltimore City used by hundreds of species of birds, reptiles and aquatic species. To introduce local students to these animals and their aquatic habitats, we lead field trips at the Fort McHenry wetland through [our AquaPartners program](#). This year, we also worked with the National Park Service, Living Classrooms Foundation and Ultimate Watersports to host 95 Baltimore City youth and U.S. veterans in the Fort McHenry Paddle Project. Over seven days, participants enjoyed a kayaking experience around the wetland, learning about the Fort's history and taking part in a fish seining activity led by Aquarium staff.

neighbors

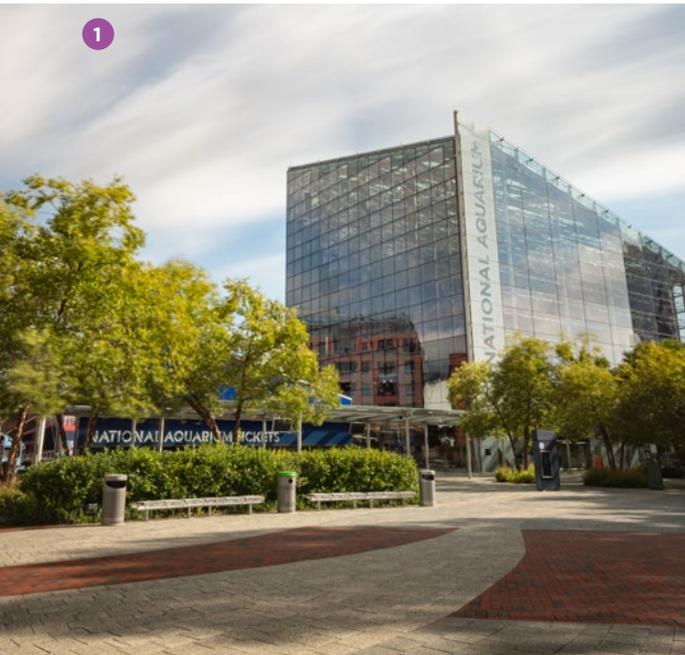
HONORING OUR COMMITMENT TO OUR COMMUNITY

The National Aquarium attracts visitors from around the globe, but we belong to Baltimore. We work to ensure that a visit to the Aquarium is within reach of all our neighbors. We also invest in projects and engage city residents in important conservation work right in their own neighborhoods—from Jonestown to Locust Point to Curtis Bay. In 2021, we continued to support immediate community needs brought on by the pandemic.



Dedicated volunteers from Jonestown join forces with Aquarium staff to plant, maintain, harvest and distribute fresh produce in the Exeter Street Community Garden.

neighbors



- 1 Once COVID-19 vaccinations became widely available, to encourage people to get vaccinated and do their part to stop the spread of COVID-19, we participated in the MD GoVAX program, offering 1,000 free tickets to vaccinated Marylanders, and partnered with the Baltimore City Health Department to hold multiple vaccination clinics on-site at the Aquarium and provide more than 100 free tickets to individuals giving and receiving shots. In 2020, we introduced special pricing for Maryland public health workers; in 2021, this program served more than 750 people, nearly double the number served in the first year.
- 2 To inspire new audiences to join us in combating climate change, we tried an innovative new approach: we met them at the theater. We partnered with Baltimore Center Stage to serve as the climate science consultant for the production of “A Play for the Living in the Time of Extinction,” an original one-woman comedic show grappling with the climate crisis. We trained 23 Center Stage staff members on climate change communication, connected the playwright with scientists working on local solutions and provided curriculum guide content and other resources for a virtual student library. We also held four watch parties—including their first in-person screening of the filmed play—and coordinated panel discussions to help share the play’s messages with as many people as possible.
- 3 We continue to partner with neighbors in Baltimore’s historic Jonestown community, where our [Animal Care and Rescue Center](#) is located. The Exeter Street Community Garden was established by Jonestown community members and maintained as a Helping Up Mission client project for the past several growing seasons. In 2019, as a result of neighbors’ desire to have the garden be a community project once again, the Aquarium began to host social gatherings and maintenance events in the garden. This year, the garden was again a source of free fresh vegetables and herbs for Jonestown neighbors, and a place where people from the neighborhood could safely come

together to connect in person while planting, maintaining, harvesting and distributing fresh produce. We hosted garden hours for volunteers twice a week from April through November, cultivating a volunteer group of Jonestown residents committed to caring for the garden on a regular basis. The ongoing workdays culminated in a fall clean-up in November that attracted 23 volunteers, seven of whom were local youth and one of whom earned service hours for their work.

- 4 Also in Jonestown, we expanded and evolved our annual ACRC Open House into Jonestown Community Day, partnering with other local organizations—including the Albemarle Square Tenant’s Association, Baltimore Women’s Civic League, Helping Up Mission, Jewish Museum of Maryland, McKim Center and Ronald McDonald House—to hold an outdoor, community-focused event in October. Residents were highly engaged in planning and shaping the experience, both by serving on the planning committee and providing input through 2019 ACRC Open House surveys. At our five-booth Aquarium Zone, we shared animal artifacts, talked about recycling and composting, distributed free, reusable tote bags, and gave away fresh produce grown in the Exeter Street Community Garden. We also offered free tours of the ACRC.
- 5 Internationally renowned oceanographer Dr. Sylvia A. Earle joined us at the National Aquarium in December for one of the first stops on a tour to launch her book, “National Geographic Ocean: A Global Odyssey.” She spoke about the evolution, beauty and impact of our ocean, the challenges it faces—such as climate change, plastic and overfishing—and the ways we can help protect it. The event, which was held in partnership with Mission Blue and National Geographic, was a hybrid event that welcomed 155 guests in-person and reached 8,860 viewers online. Before the lecture, we invited community partner Black Girls Dive Foundation for a private meet-and-greet with Dr. Earle.

by the numbers

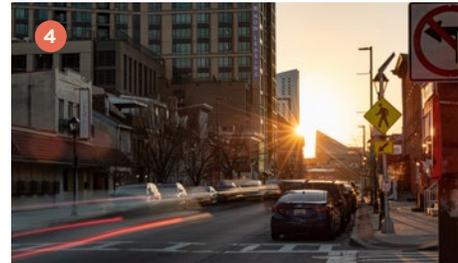
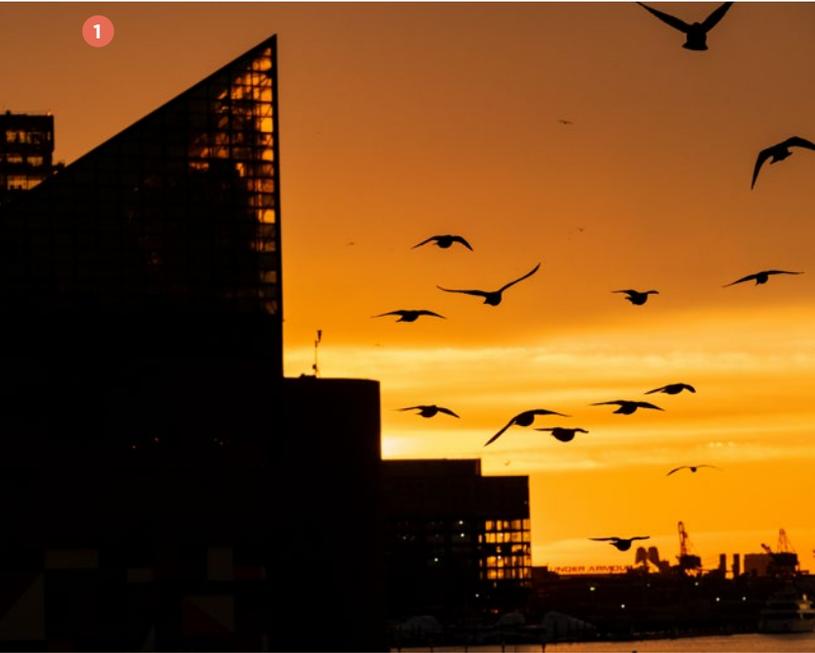
OUR ECONOMIC IMPACT: SUPPORTING MARYLAND BY ATTRACTING VISITORS AND CREATING JOBS

Since the day the Aquarium opened in 1981, we have served as an important economic anchor in Baltimore City and throughout Maryland. This remained true in 2021, despite capacity limitations in place for much of the year due to COVID-19. Our award-winning exhibits still attracted visitors to Baltimore, generating a significant amount of tax revenue. As one of the top three aquariums in the United States and the largest paid cultural destination in Maryland, we have historically created \$455 million in economic activity statewide each year. *(Source: "The Economic Contributions of the National Aquarium: A 2017 Update" created by Sage Policy Group, September 2017.*



This year marked the 40th anniversary of the National Aquarium's grand opening on August 8, 2021. Since then, much has changed and much has stayed the same.

by the **numbers**



- 1 Historically each year, we create \$455 million in economic activity across the state of Maryland—including generating \$20 million in tax revenue and supporting 4,500 jobs statewide, as well as creating \$9 million in tax revenue for Baltimore City. We employ 350 people at the Aquarium.
- 2 We are ranked as one of the top three aquariums in the United States and usually welcome more than 1 million guests each year. In 2021, we hosted a total of 956,778 guests, despite operating under limited capacity for several months due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3 Typically, 5 in 6 Aquarium visitors are from outside the Baltimore region, and 1 in 3 stay in the area overnight. In normal years, nearly 90% of Aquarium visitors report that the Aquarium is their primary reason for visiting Baltimore.
- 4 According to survey data, 54% of Aquarium guests ordered food and drinks from a nearby restaurant before or after their visit, and 28% visited a nearby store or retailer.

stay connected

As a nonprofit organization, the National Aquarium relies on donations to support our animal rescue efforts, habitat restoration work, education programs and conservation initiatives. Contact our Philanthropy team if you'd like to join our community of hopeful conservationists or sign up for our newsletters to stay updated on Aquarium news, conservation events and more!

philanthropy@aquarium.org

our donors

UNLEASHING POSSIBILITY WITH YOUR GENEROSITY

lifetime giving

The National Aquarium exists today because of the leadership and continuing support of the entire community. The following list recognizes those who have contributed a total of \$200,000 or more to the National Aquarium since it opened in 1981.

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