

Interactive Session:
**Species at Risk? How to make the most of your partnership
with public aquariums for fish and invertebrate conservation.**

Wednesday, July 20th 2022 (16:00-17:30 PT)

Ashley Kidd, MS, Organizer

Sunflower Star Laboratory
ashley@sunflowerstarlab.org
www.sunflowerstarlab.org

Beth Firchau, Panelist

AZA Florida Reef Tract Rescue Project
bfirchau@aza.org
www.aza.org

Meghan Holst, MS, Panelist

Aquarium of the Bay, UC Davis PhD student
meghan@bayecotarium.org
www.bayecotarium.org

Kevin Curlee, Panelist

Disney's Animals, Science and the Environment
kevin.k.curlee@disney.com
www.disney.com

Summary

In this 90 minute interactive session, we first introduced the four panelists who each gave 10 minute presentations. These presentations covered the Association of Zoo & Aquarium conservation overview, followed by projects the panelists are actively involved in and how the scope and type of projects differ based on the staff, collaboration and resources facilities have. Acknowledging that there is a low proportion of scientific articles produced relative to the number of public aquariums, resources were provided on where information is disseminated and stored. The second half of the session engaged the participants and panelists in a candid, round-table conversation to share their perspectives on collaborations, identifying areas where partnerships are synergistic, how one would approach collaborations with aquariums in the future, and discussed characteristics of prior research based in aquariums and identified ways to improve the chances of mutually beneficial partnerships.

Outcomes

From our roundtable discussions, we summarize key points on creating successful partnerships below. The results of this session highlighted that aquariums partaking in research should have clear research objectives of their own to ensure the collaboration advances the institutional mission and can be incorporated into educational messaging and/or applied animal husbandry. Ideally, the team of husbandry employees ought to be paired early with a researcher in order to discuss objectives and design, to develop trust and respect, as with other stakeholders in a conservation partnership. Success is dependent upon the personalities and social skills of husbandry employee people and researchers. Aquariums are valuable conservation partners, and more intentional partnerships, whether through a suitable broker/liason or conservation and research coordinator, will improve the experience and success of a partnership and better tap into the multidimensional approach required of conservation projects.

Summary of round table topics regarding successful collaborations in Aquarium and Zoo settings

| <p>A poor relationship Characteristics:</p> | <p>A successful relationship Remedy:</p> |
|---|--|
| <p>Communication challenges. A collaboration without clear deliverables, timelines, financial support and objectives ends up without true collaborations that benefit both partners.</p> | <p>Form mutual respect shown in reasonable expectations of communication. Emails and phone calls are returned in an agreed upon timeline with objectives and timelines set.</p> |
| <p>Lack of understanding and mutual respect. Following poor initial communication, mismatching timelines may cause friction between researchers juggling grant cycles and academic timelines while husbandry employees navigate tight daily schedules.</p> | <p>Identify and connect researchers and husbandry employees early on. Time commitments should be considered in the planning and budget. Often staff are on schedules planned to the minute. Taking on research or ‘loaning tanks’ for research will always add to the workload of a husbandry employee.</p> |
| <p>Little alignment of expectations of animal care and welfare. Research and welfare committees may need to be consulted.</p> | <p>Understanding that the primary focus of the husbandry employee is the health and welfare of each individual animal. Agree upon a plan for the management of the research animals through all life stages. Terminal experiments may not be acceptable.</p> |
| <p>Research will have little direct correlation to the mission of the Aquarium or Zoo. Outreach and messaging of research will not be shared with public.</p> | <p>Aquariums should have clear conservation and research objectives. Highlight the work with aquarium audiences i.e. through social media or as a lecture, or written summary for educational interpretation. Include aquarium staff in the paper writing process.</p> |

Aquarium conservation and research projects discussed:

Florida Reef Tract Rescue Project, <https://www.aza.org/coral-reef-rescue>

AZA SAFE programs, <https://www.aza.org/aza-safe?locale=en>

White Abalone Conservation Consortium,

<https://marinescience.ucdavis.edu/research-programs/conservation/saving-white-abalone/warc>

Sevengill shark research, Aquarium of the Bay & UC Davis

<https://saveourseas.com/project-leader/meghan-holst/>

AZA Aquatic Collections Sustainability Committee

<https://www.aza.org/aquatic-collections-sustainability-committee?locale=e>