

Award-winning wildlife conservation expeditions



MARINE FOCUS ISSUE

■ WHALES & DOLPHINS
OF THE **AZORES**

■ CORAL REEFS OF
**MALAYSIA
& OMAN**

■ TURTLES OF
**WESTERN
AUSTRALIA**

ALSO ■ CAPACITY BUILDING & EDUCATION ON EXPEDITION
■ HOW TO CHOOSE A WILDLIFE VOLUNTEERING HOLIDAY
■ & MUCH MORE

20
12
magazine

WELCOME • WILLKOMMEN • BIENVENUE



INSPIRING CONSERVATION

Biosphere Expeditions is a multi-award-winning not-for-profit wildlife conservation organisation offering hands-on volunteer expeditions, an adventure with a purpose for everyone.

Biosphere Expeditions is for people from all walks of life who want to help support and conserve the biosphere that we all live in. Biosphere Expeditions gives people a way to harness their enthusiasm and put it to good effect by coming to work on conservation projects simply using the money and time that they would have spent going on an ordinary holiday. You can join for anything from a taster day to one or several weeks on expedition and at least two-thirds of your expedition contribution will go directly into the wildlife conservation project, funding it long-term and sustainably.

EXPERIENCE CONSERVATION IN ACTION

Come with Biosphere Expeditions on a conservation project to beautiful and interesting parts of the world, experience conservation in action, and work alongside field scientists to safeguard our biosphere's wild animals and places.

SAFE, FUN AND OPEN TO ALL

Our three key themes are safety, science and satisfaction, because our core belief is that you will work best when you are safe, well looked after, well rested and having fun. Our projects are open to all, there are no special skills (biological or otherwise) required to join as all necessary skills will be taught on the expedition, and there are no age limits whatsoever. Participants are people from all walks of life, of all ages, looking for an adventure with a purpose. Teams are small and there is a dedicated expedition leader with the expedition at all times.

FASZINATION NATURSCHUTZ

Biosphere Expeditions ist eine mehrfach ausgezeichnete, gemeinnützige Naturschutzorganisation, die es Laien ermöglicht, an echten Forschungsexpeditionen teilzunehmen.

Biosphere Expeditions ist für alle, die aktiv zum Schutz einzigartiger Natur und gefährdeter Tierarten auf unserem Planeten beitragen möchten. Mit einer Expeditionsteilnahme bieten wir allen die Chance, Zeit und Geld in einen Urlaub mit Sinn zu investieren und tatkräftig mit anzupacken. Von einem Schnuppertag bis hin zu einer oder mehreren Wochen auf Expedition – die Teilnahmemöglichkeiten sind vielfältig. Dabei garantieren wir, dass mindestens 2/3 Ihres Expeditionsbeitrags direkt in das jeweilige Naturschutzprojekt fließen, zur Sicherung einer nachhaltigen und langfristigen Finanzierung.

NATURSCHUTZ HAUTNAH ERLEBEN

Entdecken Sie mit Biosphere Expeditions schöne, entlegene und einzigartige Flecken dieser Erde; arbeiten Sie zusammen im Feld mit Wissenschaftlern und helfen Sie dabei, Lebensräume, Fauna & Flora zu bewahren.

ETWAS FÜR ALLE, SICHERHEIT & SPASS INKLUSIVE

Wir legen grossen Wert darauf, dass alle auf Expedition sich sicher und wohl fühlen. Deshalb steht jedem unserer kleinen Forschungsteams ein Expeditionsleiter von Biosphere Expeditions zur Seite. Was Sie für die Feldarbeit wissen müssen, lernen Sie vor Ort - Vorkenntnisse oder spezielle Fähigkeiten sind nicht erforderlich. Unsere Teilnehmer kommen aus der ganzen Welt – eine bunte Mischung quer durch alle Bevölkerungsschichten und jeden Alters, verbunden durch den Wunsch, ein Abenteuer mit Sinn zu erleben.

CONSERVATION INSPIRANTE

Biosphere Expeditions est une organisation sans but lucratif travaillant pour la conservation de l'environnement, qui a reçu de nombreux prix et qui propose des expéditions volontaires de terrain, une aventure ouverte à tous qui a du sens!

Biosphere Expeditions s'adresse à tous les publics, à tous ceux qui souhaitent apporter soutien et protection à la biosphère dans laquelle nous vivons. Biosphere Expeditions leur offre une façon de concrétiser leur enthousiasme et d'en faire bon usage en allant travailler sur des projets de conservation. Et tout cela pour le montant financier et le temps qu'ils auraient consacrés à des vacances classiques. Vous pouvez nous rejoindre, que ce soit pour un week-end ou pour plusieurs semaines et les deux tiers au moins de votre contribution à l'expédition iront directement au projet de conservation de la vie sauvage auquel vous participez, le finançant ainsi à long terme et de façon durable.

EXPÉRIMENTEZ LA CONSERVATION EN ACTION

Participez à un projet de conservation avec Biosphere Expeditions dans un lieu magnifique et passionnant sur notre planète, expérimentez la conservation en action et travaillez aux côtés de scientifiques sur le terrain pour sauvegarder notre biosphère, les animaux et les lieux qui la composent.

SÛR, AMUSANT ET OUVERT À TOUS

Nos trois thèmes clés sont sécurité, science et satisfaction, parce que notre credo est que vous êtes le plus efficace lorsque vous êtes en sécurité, bien entouré, bien reposé et prenant du plaisir à ce que vous faites. Nos expéditions sont ouvertes à tous, aucune connaissance particulière n'est requise (en biologie ou autre), tout ce qui vous sera nécessaire est enseigné sur place. De plus, il n'y a pas de limite d'âge. Les participants viennent de tous horizons, de toutes classes d'âge, à la recherche d'une aventure ayant du sens. Les équipes sont réduites et ont leur propre chef d'expédition qui est présent en permanence.

Another year, another background colour, another magazine for Biosphere Expeditions. As you may have guessed from the blue colouring and the articles, our 2012 Magazine is on a marine theme with features from our turtle scientist in Western Australia, our cetacean scientist in the Azores archipelago (Portugal), a participant's view from the Musandam peninsula (Oman), and one of us (Kathy) writing about our new Malaysia coral reef diving expedition. Standing alongside these features from the field, there are some background articles on Biosphere Expeditions' activities and philosophy, answers to frequently asked questions, and of course an overview of what's in store for 2012 in terms of taster/sampler days, 1-week-projects and 2-week-expeditions.

We hope you will enjoy the 2012 Magazine. Our special thanks goes to Malika Fettak, whose *magnus opus* it is, at least so far. Malika has created yet another brilliant showcase of Biosphere Expeditions and what we're all about.




Dr. Matthias Hammer
Founder & Executive Director


Kathy Gill
Strategy Director

THE BACKBONE OF BIOSPHERE EXPEDITIONS

MEET THE STAFF

Biosphere Expeditions employs a global team of wildlife enthusiasts who all contribute to the success of the organisation: expedition leaders, scientists, field-based and administrative staff. Their roles are as diverse as their backgrounds, but they all share a love of the outdoors and wildlife. Here is just one of our team and more can be found at www.biosphere-expeditions.org/staff.

Paul o'Dowd was born in Melbourne, Australia. From the beginning, his primary interests have been natural history and adventure. As a teenager he learned to dive and at 19 years old left Victoria to move to Cairns to work on the Great Barrier Reef in the dive industry. Shortly thereafter he was offered a job managing a dive facility in Papua New Guinea. In PNG Paul became involved in expeditionary and documentary film work. Paul has worked for the BBC's Natural History Unit and various other

companies on documentary projects as well as with assorted tourism-based expeditions to places such as the Sepik Basin and the Kokoda Track. Paul also delivers a lecture programme on rainforest ecology, conservation and sustainability for a study abroad programme for American university students. A broad base of scientific literacy and a genuine interest in communication has led to a career in introducing diverse audiences to the natural world. Diving, rock climbing and just about anything that provides a good opportunity to get into nature and help others to do the same is Paul's idea of time well spent.

At Biosphere Expeditions Paul has led projects in Oman, Honduras, Western Australia and Malaysia.

Paul o'Dowd on the Oman expedition 2011.



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STORIES

BACK-
GROUND
& INFO

EXPEDITIONS & PROJECTS

WORLDWIDE



TASTER/SAMPLER DAYS / SCHNUPPERTAGE

UK

New Forest National Park (June 2012)
 Broads National Park (July 2012)
www.biosphere-expeditions.org/tasters-uk

AUSTRALIA

Melbourne (October 2012)
 Sydney (October 2012)
www.biosphere-expeditions.org/tasters-australia

USA SAMPLER DAYS

Minnewaska State Park, NY (May 2012)
 Lory State Park, CO (May 2012)
 King's Canyon & Sequoia National Parks, CA (July 2012)
www.biosphere-expeditions.org/samplerdays

SCHNUPPERTAGE DEUTSCHLAND

Nationalpark Niedersächsisches Wattenmeer (April 2012)
 Nationalpark Unteres Odertal (Juli 2012)
 Nationalpark Eifel (August 2012)
 Nationalpark Berchtesgaden (September 2012)
www.biosphere-expeditions.org/schnuppertage

1-WEEK PROJECTS

AZORES

(April-May 2012)
 Fascinating creatures of the deep: studying whales, dolphins and turtles around the Azores archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean | www.biosphere-expeditions.org/azores

EMIRATES

(January 2012)
 Ways of the desert: Conserving Arabian oryx, Gordon's wildcat and other species of the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve, UAE | www.biosphere-expeditions.org/emirates

MALDIVES

(September 2012)
 Little & large: surveying and safeguarding coral reefs and whale sharks of the Maldives archipelago | www.biosphere-expeditions.org/maldives

MUSANDAM

(October 2012)
 Underwater pioneers: studying and protecting the unique coral reefs of the Musandam peninsula within Oman & UAE | www.biosphere-expeditions.org/musandam

PERU

(August 2012)
 Amazonian plethora: biodiversity monitoring of jaguars, pumas, primates and other flagship species of the Peruvian Amazon | www.biosphere-expeditions.org/peru

SLOVAKIA

(January-February 2012)
 True white wilderness: winter lynx, wolf and wildcat tracking in the Carpathian mountains of Slovakia | www.biosphere-expeditions.org/slovakia

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

(November 2012)
 Beach combing for conservation: monitoring flatback turtles along the stunning coastline of Western Australia | www.biosphere-expeditions.org/western-australia

2-WEEK EXPEDITIONS

ALTAI

(June-July 2012)
 Mountain ghosts: snow leopards and other animals in the mountains of the Altai Republic, Central Asia | www.biosphere-expeditions.org/altai

HONDURAS

(May-June 2012)
 Diving in a Caribbean paradise: safeguarding the coral reefs of Cayos Cochinos, Honduras | www.biosphere-expeditions.org/honduras

MALAYSIA

(March-April 2012)
 Paradise in peril: studying and protecting reefs, sharks, dolphins and turtles of the Pulau Tioman Marine Park, Malaysia | www.biosphere-expeditions.org/malaysia

NAMIBIA

(July-November 2012)
 Big cat conundrum: the challenge of protecting leopards, cheetahs and caracals in the Khomas Hochland of central Namibia | www.biosphere-expeditions.org/namibia

BIOSPHERE EXPEDITIONS PAST & FUTURE

By founder & executive director *Dr. Matthias Hammer*

Biosphere Expeditions has come a long way in the 13 years since 1999. There have been ups and downs, challenges and achievements. For me it's been a very rewarding ride on a rollercoaster of emotions. Here are some of the stops on the way.

THE UPS

All of our achievements, of which there have been many (see below), are firmly on the up side. If I had to choose one or two, then perhaps the very first – the cancellation of a wolf cull in Poland – is probably the one I remember most fondly. The construction of research stations ranks highly with me too, because my own blood, sweat and tears are invested in two of them.

Working with local people and exchanging knowledge with them in so many ways, helping people to make a living through and setting youngsters off on career paths in conservation is also etched on my mind. One of those youngsters in Peru was

Aldo, who is now one of the most sought-after and knowledgeable guides around the Peruvian Amazon, making a comfortable living from it. He e-mailed me some time ago, writing "Traditionally, my family has fished, farmed and hunted, but thanks to Biosphere Expeditions and its conservation opportunities, I have been able to dedicate my time to my interest with the local wildlife with which I grew up, rather than hunting it". This e-mail now has pride of place in my "made a difference" folder.

On expedition, a personal highlight for me every time is to see people from all sorts of backgrounds and interests come together in a motley crew first, only to transform into an expedition team bound by a common interest and goal within a few, usually long, days packed with training. Starting the engine of the Land Rover, or our boat, or setting out on foot on our journey with a purpose still gets to me every time.

THE DOWNS

There have been down sides, of course. My staff remember me sinking a Land Rover by not following proper wading procedure and paying the price for it – perpetual reminders and a 20-hour towing trip along the length of Namibia to the nearest Land Rover dealer.

The frustrations of working with people get to me too. Developers, bureaucrats, hunters and others driven by greed, indifference, envy and other such emotions that our big brains produce can drive you mad. Give me working with non-human animals on most days instead of with those people. And of course we have been taken for rides, trusting in people who abused our trust – our Caprivi expedition being a sad example of this.

I also have a phobia against bureaucracy, but luckily I am surrounded by a very capable team who have much more patience and sense than me and know how to be diplomatic and weave the red tape.

THE CHALLENGE FOR THE FUTURE

More recently the economic crisis has of course been a challenge. And this is compounded by an explosive proliferation of volunteer opportunities. It seems these days, especially in the UK and the USA, everybody is jumping onto the bandwagon



Handing over a coral reef educational booklet to the Maldives government (left) and with one of those motley crews in Namibia (right)

of "voluntourism". Many of them just slapping on a label, just as they did with the "ecotourism" badge some years back. This makes it increasingly hard for people to distinguish the good guys from the cowboys.

My co-director Kathy Gill has been at the forefront of telling the good from the bad from the ugly. We've published a "Top Ten Tips for choosing a wildlife volunteering experience" (see page 42) and we are working towards a standard. Getting

this out and mastering the challenge of the economic crisis will be crucial for the development of Biosphere Expeditions over the next few years. Stick with us and watch this space! ■

There have been a great many very tangible outcomes from Biosphere Expeditions' work. Here are just a few

More achievements at www.biosphere-expeditions.org/achievements



Fewer lions, leopards and cheetahs killed in farmer-predator conflict in **Namibia**.



Declaration of a national park in the **Ukraine**, protecting a unique steppe area jutting into the Black Sea and as such a stop-off point for many migratory birds, as well as a haven for fauna (e.g. birds & wolf) and flora (it boasts amongst other things Europe's biggest orchid field).

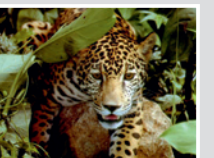


Declaration of a protected area in the **Altai** Republic, Central Asia, which provides the habitat for a number of endangered species including the snow leopard.

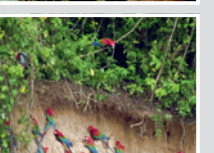


An active role in saving 50 wolves from being declared legitimate hunting targets in the Bieszczady mountains in **Poland**. This was achieved by providing accurate information on the predator numbers and by influencing the local authorities who reversed their decision to cull wolves.

Our recommendations for the management and protection of jaguars have been incorporated into national and state-wide jaguar action plans in **Brazil's** Atlantic rainforest.



Inclusion of guidelines for boat behaviour at clay licks in the Tambopata Reserve management plan. Guidelines are needed because unsustainable forms of farming, logging and tourism are threatening the natural habitat in the **Peruvian Amazon**.



Our recommendations for the management and protection of the coral reefs of the Cayos Cochinos marine protected area in **Honduras** have been incorporated into the managing authorities' action plan.



Together with our partners in **Spain**, we helped to reverse the EU high altitude carcass removal regulation, which was designed to combat the spread of BSE, but was starving high mountain vultures and bears.



POLAND • ALTAI • UKRAINE • NAMIBIA

SPAIN • HONDURAS • PERU • BRAZIL

The author out in the field.





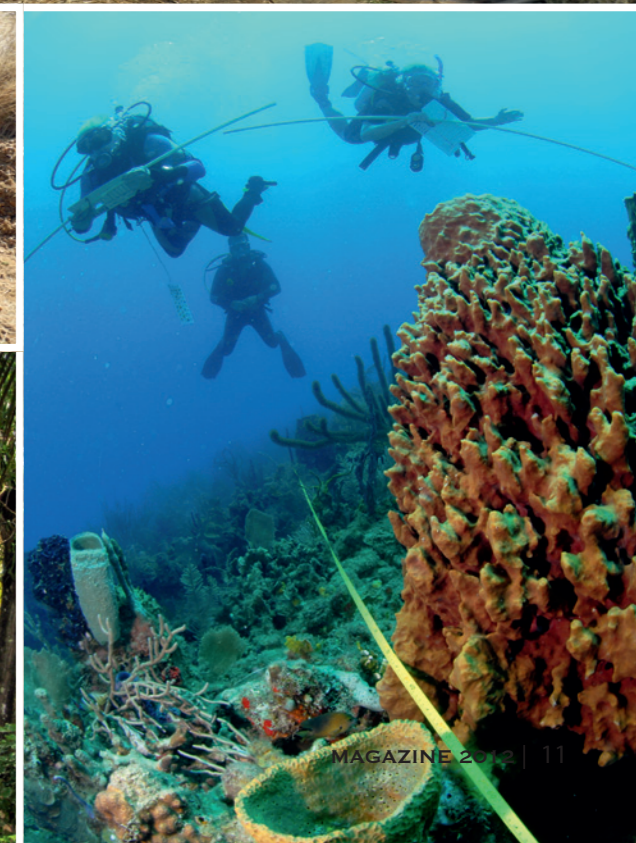
2-WEEK EXPEDITIONS

Our 2-week expeditions are true wildlife research and conservation expeditions, which last 12–14 days and go to remote and beautiful locations all across the planet to work on fascinating flagship species.

2-week expeditions start from £1390 | €1580 | US\$2140 | AU\$2190.

More at www.biosphere-expeditions.org/expeditions

- ALTAI (snow leopard)
- HONDURAS (coral reef)
- NAMIBIA (leopard & cheetah)
- MALAYSIA (coral reef)



Pictures top to bottom, left to right: crossing a river in the Altai | collaring a sedated leopard in Namibia | tracking a snow leopard in the Altai | sea turtle in the Maldives | working with a local tracker in Namibia | coral reef survey in Honduras | research station base in Honduras | dive operations base in Malaysia



Our Altai snow leopard expedition was honoured in the National Geographic Traveler "Tours of a Lifetime" and a book entitled "Once in a lifetime" (*Einmal im Leben*) by well-known German travel publisher Merian as one of "100 unforgettable travel adventures" (*100 unvergessliche Reiseabenteuer*). It was also honoured in BBC Wildlife magazine's "Top Ten Conservation Holidays" lists.

Our Caribbean coral reef dive expedition in Honduras was honoured in Merian as well.

Our Peru Amazon biodiversity expedition was honoured in responsibletravel.com magazine's "Top Responsible Holiday" list.

PORTUGAL WHALES AND DOLPHINS OF THE AZORES

By Lisa Steiner



My name is Lisa Steiner. I am a marine biologist with a BSc degree in Marine Science/Biology from the University of Miami and the lead scientist on the Azores project. I have been studying the cetaceans (whales and dolphins) found in the Azores since 1988 when I joined a research vessel operated by the International Fund for Animal Welfare, "Song of the Whale", two weeks after I graduated! There is hope for marine science students! The main focus of the research was photo-identification of sperm whales. I remained with the project until 1992 when Whale Watch Azores was set up.

Sperm whale fluke



For as long as I can remember I have wanted to study whales and dolphins. My school projects were always on some topic or other about whales or dolphins but most teachers did not share my enthusiasm. I was usually told "You will never get a job" or "You will never make any money". Well the first is not true, at least for me! If you want to study cetaceans, it is a lifestyle choice; more than likely you will not make a lot of money, but you will love your job on most days – other days can be more challenging! The hardest thing about studying cetaceans some days is standing up!

**"THE HARDEST THING ABOUT
STUDYING CETACEANS SOME DAYS
IS STANDING UP!"**

The days that are the most amazing are when you see some "old" friends at sea. There are several individual sperm whales that I can recognise as they dive down. They are identified by the markings on their flukes and luckily most of them are very differ-

ent. There is one individual "19" that was first seen in 1987! And another "2044" was first seen in 1995 and has been observed on two different Biosphere Expeditions. Maybe she is watching Biosphere!

Whale Watch Azores has been working with Biosphere Expeditions since 2004. Biosphere Expeditions comes to the Azores when there are not many tourists because of the sometimes adverse weather conditions we can experience during April and May. This enables us to collect data on species that are migrating past the islands at this time of year, as well as on the sperm whales that can be seen all year round. Just because there might be windy conditions sometimes, does not mean that we won't have any nice days.

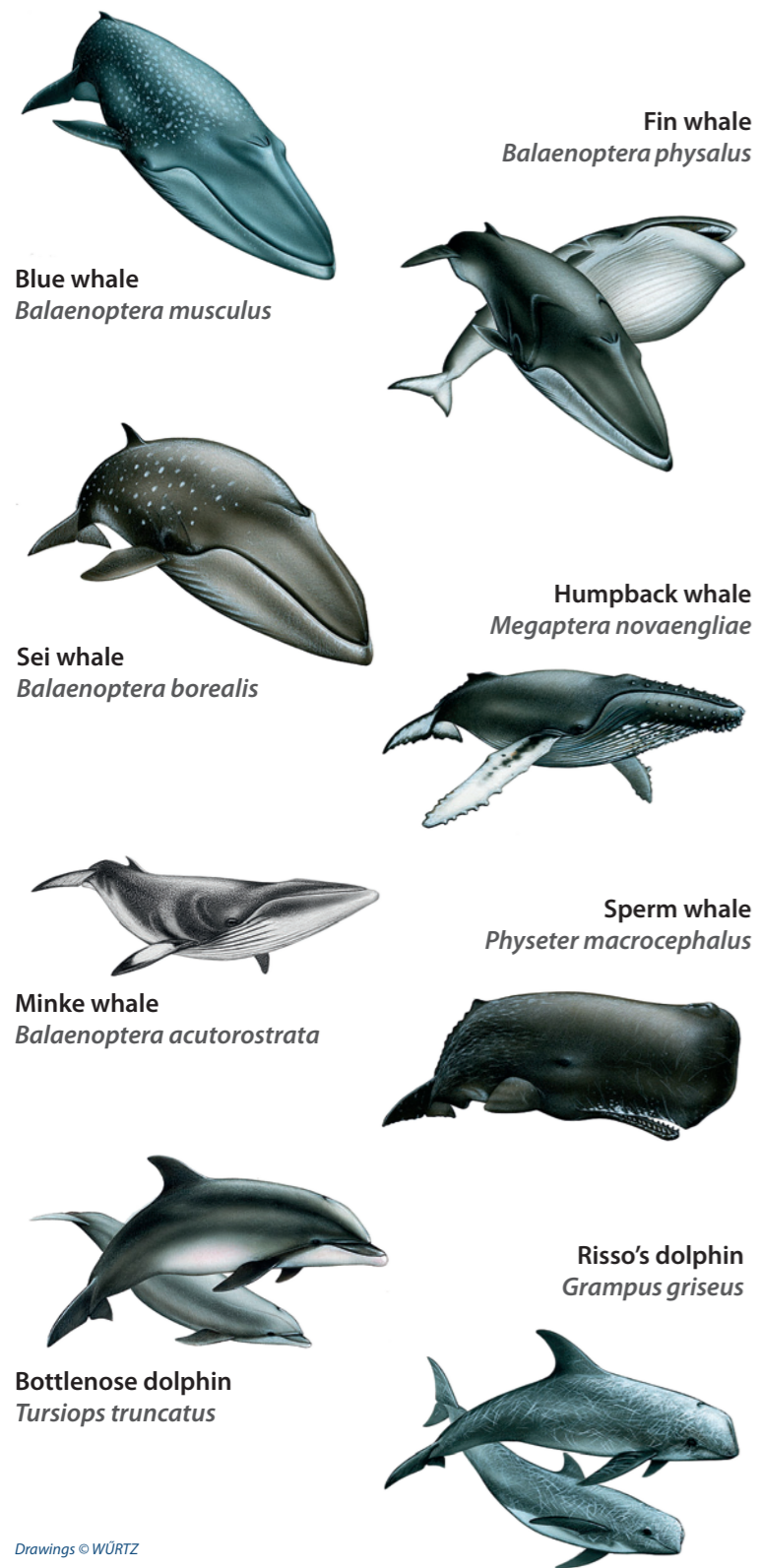
Sperm whales "19" (left) and "2044" (right) identified by their individual flukes



Bottlenose dolphin



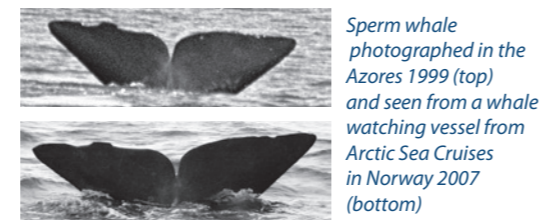
Overview of the expedition's target species



Drawings © WÜRTZ

The main aim of the expedition is to collect data on our target species: blue, fin, sei, humpback, minke and sperm whales as well as bottlenose and Risso's dolphins. We obtain photographs of individuals and then match them to catalogues around the North Atlantic to see if they have been seen in other areas.

To date, using photo-ID, I have found three male sperm whales that were seen in the Azores in 1993, 1999 and 2003 that were seen again by scientists working on a whale watching vessel from Arctic Sea Cruises in Norway in 2006, 2007 and 2008! This was a big breakthrough. We had thought that the males we see in the Azores might migrate to Norway and these 3 sightings confirm that at least some do. The Friends of Biosphere Expeditions made a donation to assist me to travel to the Marine Mammal Society Conference in Quebec in 2009 to present these important findings.



Sperm whale photographed in the Azores 1999 (top) and seen from a whale watching vessel from Arctic Sea Cruises in Norway 2007 (bottom)

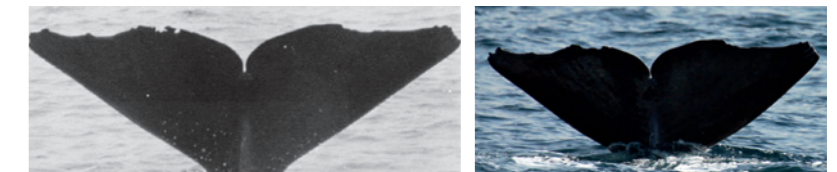
Back in 1993 I discovered an individual that had been seen in the Azores in 1990 and was re-sighted in the Canaries in 1993. This individual has since made the return trip back to the Azores in 2008 and has also been seen again in 2010. You can see the slow addition of markings in the sequence overleaf; the fluke is the same from 1990 until 2008 and then acquires a new scallop on the right hand side in 2010. If these changes were to occur rapidly, we would not be able to identify the same individuals over time, but luckily in most cases the changes are gradual. The markings are most likely caused by wear and tear on the fluke as it moves up and down through the water thousands of times a day; although some marks can also be caused by interactions with other sperm whales, predators or man-made objects.

Recently I have been collaborating with some biologists from the Canary Islands to see if there are more animals that have been seen in both the Azores and the Canaries. The Canary Islands have mainly female groups of sperm whales with their calves and the occasional male, as we do in the Azores. The Society for the Study of Cetaceans in the Canary Archipelago (SEACAC) sent me some of their photos to match to the Azores Catalogue.



Two pictures on the left: "1314" as first seen 1990 in the Azores and 1993 in the Canaries. Picture above and on the right: And finally seen in 2008 and again in 2010 off São Miguel, Azores (São Miguel photos courtesy of Futurismo and Terra Azul)

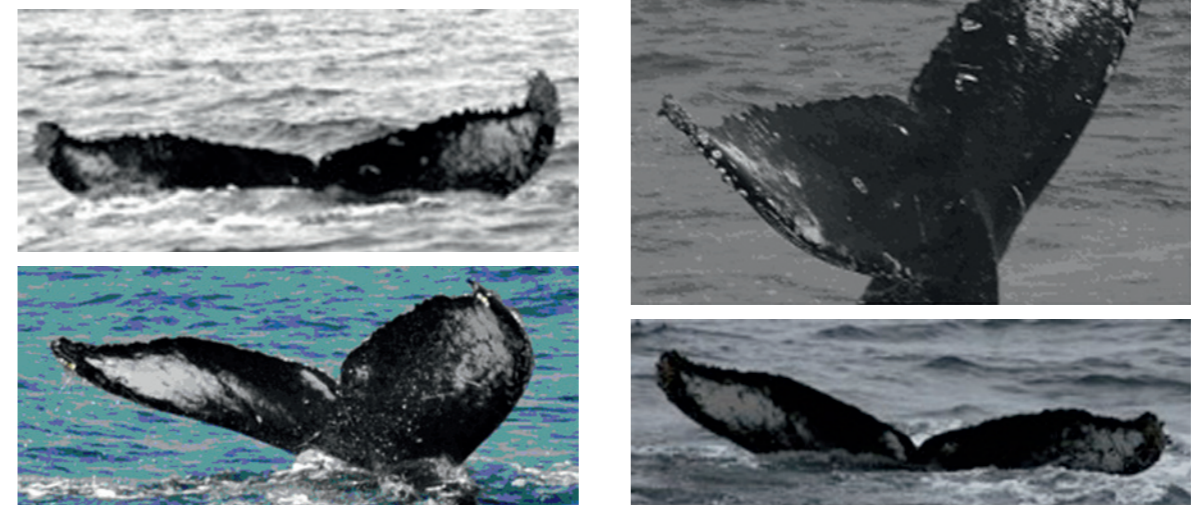
I found five more matches! One of these animals, 1019, is very interesting as she was first observed here in the Azores in 1988 and then was not seen again until the very last day of our season in 2006. In 2010 we observed her for the first time with a calf! And in the spring of 2011 she was sighted by the SEACAC biologists in the Canary Islands and was seen with her calf in the Azores again in September 2011! It is possible during the "missing" years 1989-2006, she was hanging out in the Canary Islands when there was not much photo-ID work being done or perhaps she was just hiding on the other side of one of the islands in the Azores, playing hide and seek with me.



"1019" as she first appeared in 1988; "1019" as seen on 27 June 2010

One of the most significant findings since Biosphere Expeditions began working here in 2004 is the discovery of two humpback whales that were photographed in the Azores that were also seen in the Cape Verde Islands. One of these animals was actually photographed during an expedition and without Biosphere Expeditions the animal would not have been identified here.

These sightings caused a lot of excitement in the humpback whale community, because the Cape Verde population of humpbacks is not very large and they do not have many animals appear in other locations, unlike the humpbacks that migrate up the East coast of the US from the Dominican Republic to Cape Cod. So our records are an important contribution towards understanding the movements of the "Western" humpback whales.



Humpback whale seen in the Azores in 2006 (top left) and re-sighted in the Cape Verde Islands in 2009 also sighted in CV in 2010 (top right) Humpback whale seen in the Cape Verde Islands on 20 March 2011 (bottom left) and re-sighted in the Azores on 5 May 2011! (bottom right)



So far we have not been as lucky in finding matches with the other species and have no matches of blue, fin or sei whales to other locations. We will keep trying and sooner or later we will get a result.

During the expedition we also study the resident bottlenose and Risso's dolphins, identifying individuals by the markings on their dorsal fins. The dolphins move a lot faster than the sperm whales, so it takes a bit of practice to photograph the fins.

NO ONE KNOWS WHY ANIMALS BREACH, BUT IT'S A SIGHT YOU WILL NOT FORGET!

Sometimes we can be treated to a show while we are photographing the animals. And these animals are not jumping on demand as they do in captivity. You never know when it is going to happen. But as the Scout's motto says "Be Prepared"!

I like to think that we are being rewarded for our hard work when we are privileged to see this type of behaviour. No one knows for sure why animals breach, but it is a sight that you will not forget!

When you join an expedition to the Azores, you will take turns doing jobs on board the boat, such as recording the information for the sightings, listening on the hydrophone, filling in the logbook, trying your hand at taking photographs with the expedition camera or being an observer.

There may be a lot of time spent searching for animals and then in a blink of an eye it is all hands on deck as an animal or group of animals are spotted! Some of the animals we see are not "target" species for the photo-identification projects, but we still record the information during the sighting and



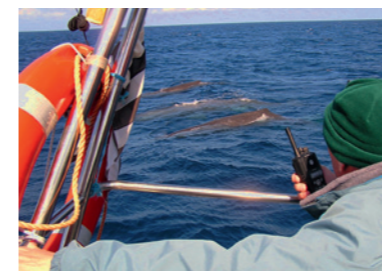
Risso's dolphins are identified by the scratch markings on the fin (top above)
Bottlenose dolphins are identified by the nicks on the back of the fin (bottom above)



Risso's dolphin leaps during socialising (left), sperm whale breaching (right)



(from left to right)
Taking GPS co-ordinates
Trying to photograph a whale fluke
Listening for sperm whales on the hydrophone



(from left to right)
Whale sighting
Measuring a loggerhead turtle
Releasing a tagged loggerhead turtle



sometimes we have time to take a closer look or maybe the animals are taking a closer look at us.

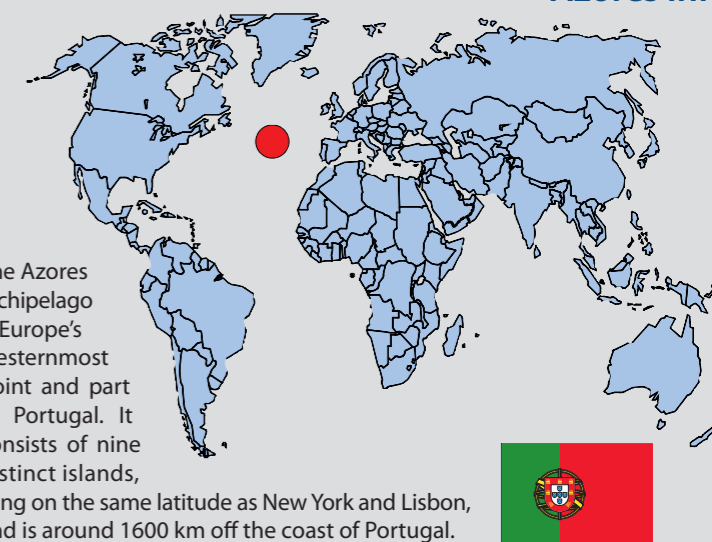
During the expedition, if we see loggerhead turtles, we try to catch them for a tagging programme run by the University of Florida and the University of the Azores. It is always a busy time when we have a turtle on deck.

So far only one of "our" tags has been recovered and that was only as far as the south coast of Pico, not a very long journey considering that these animals hatched on the beaches of Florida and will be returning to the same beach 15-20 years later. There have been other tagged turtles that have made the journey back to the beach, but as you can see this is a very long-term project.

THE AZORES ARE AN AMAZING PLACE TO WORK IN. THERE ARE NOT MANY PLACES ON EARTH WHERE YOU COULD SEE A FEW DIFFERENT SPECIES OF WHALE IN A SINGLE DAY.

The Azores are an amazing place to work in, especially at the time when the expedition takes place in April and May. There are not many places on Earth where you could see a few different species of whale in a single day, not to mention the dolphins! When I first began working here in 1988, I thought maybe I would look for some other site to work in the winter. But I collect so much data from April to October that I need a couple of months to try and sort through all of it. I don't even consider going anywhere else anymore! So come out and join me on one of the expedition slots and see what you can spot! And then try your hand back at the field base to match the sperm whales to ones sighted previously or crop and match some Risso's dolphin pictures. ■

Azores info



The Azores archipelago is Europe's westernmost point and part of Portugal. It consists of nine distinct islands, lying on the same latitude as New York and Lisbon, and is around 1600 km off the coast of Portugal.

Lying on the mid-Atlantic ridge, the islands display spectacular volcanic scenery, impressive black lava sea cliffs and, towering above them all, the highest mountain in Portugal on the island of Pico. The volcanic activity continues with bubbling mud pools and hot mineral pools on São Miguel and Teceira islands and you can walk on land that rose from the sea just 50 years ago. The countryside also has a gentler side with large areas of green fields, distinctive hydrangea hedgerows and forests.

The Azores were discovered in 1427 by Portuguese explorers and colonised shortly after by people of mainly Portuguese and Flemish descent. During the 20th century the islands were an important stopover point for undersea communications cables, trans-Atlantic flights and yachtsmen. Today their main income is from agriculture and fishing. Mainstream tourism has all but passed by the islands.



1-WEEK PROJECTS

Just like our 2-weeks expeditions, our 1-week projects are true wildlife research and conservation expeditions, but they last 7-9 days and offer you opportunities to explore fascinating parts of the world, not quite as remote as the 2-week expeditions. You will have an adventure of a lifetime and get truly hands-on, working in wildlife conservation out in the field with local scientists and people.

1-week projects start from £980 | €1090 | US\$1490 | AU\$1540.

More information
www.biosphere-expeditions.org/projects

- AZORES (whales & dolphins)
- EMIRATES (Arabian oryx & Gordon's wildcat)
- MALDIVES (coral reef & whale shark)
- MUSANDAM (coral reef)
- PERU (cats & primates)
- SLOVAKIA (wolf & lynx)
- WESTERN AUSTRALIA (turtles)



Our Azores whale & dolphin project was honoured in the "Top Ten Outdoor Pursuits" list in the Independent on Sunday, in the "Best Ten Wildlife Holidays in Europe" list in the Guardian and in Islands magazine Voluntourism Blue List where it won the "Best in Sustainable Travel" award.

Our Slovakia project was honoured in the "Best New Trips" list in the National Geographic Adventure magazine.

Our Musandam coral reef project in Oman was honoured in The Independent's "Best Activity and Adventure Breaks" list and in Travel + Leisure's "Best Save-the-Earth Trips" list.

Pictures from top to bottom, left to right:
 sloth in Peru | liveaboard expedition base in Musandam
 swish resort expedition base in Western Australia | common dolphin in the Azores | yellow tang in the Maldives
 expedition Land Rover in Slovakia | lynx in Slovakia | Arabian oryx with GPS collar in the Emirates



AUSTRALIA FILLING IN THE INFORMATION GAPS ON AUSTRALIAN FLATBACK TURTLES

How volunteers can make an important contribution by *Glenn McFarlane*

There are seven species of sea turtle in the world with six listed internationally by the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) as Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable. The missing seventh species is listed as Data Deficient.

The strength of these two statements alone should be sufficient for researchers, conservationists, community members and volunteers to sit up and take notice. Sea turtles have existed for around 200 million years, yet in the last 100 years human impact has reduced populations as well as foraging and nesting habitats. Chances are that sea turtles as a whole will continue to survive despite our impact, but can we afford to lose further species? Seven species may become four in our lifetime.

At the top of the IUCN sea turtle listings, the Kemp's ridley, leatherback and hawksbill turtles appear as Critically Endangered. The category above this status is Extinct in the Wild.

Australian flatback turtle, listed as Data Deficient by IUCN



There are many threats facing sea turtles worldwide: the illegal take of eggs and turtles; ingestion of and entanglement in marine debris; destruction of nests by pest animals; and the loss of nesting beach habitats. Whilst this is not an exhaustive list of threats, these common factors seem to repeat on a global scale and should be considered high priority when addressing the current level of human impacts.

THE SIMPLEST QUESTIONS VOLUNTEERS ASK ABOUT SEA TURTLES ARE "WHERE DO THEY LIVE? HOW MANY ARE THERE?"

Most of what we know comes from annually studying nesting sea turtles at night on beaches during the peak of the season. Tag and recapture programmes, after many nesting seasons, can enable population numbers to be estimated and lead to informed management decisions to be made for a species. Some turtles are fitted after nesting with a small transmitter so researchers can track inter-nesting and then migratory movements over the course of a year or more. Each turtle can also have a small piece of flipper removed for DNA analysis, which genetically links populations in different parts of the world. Undertaking these research actions enables science to help answer these two basic questions.

In Australia, with a vast (25,760 km in circumference) and remote coastline, sea turtles can potentially nest on more than half of this coastline in temperate waters, hence there are still information gaps for all six species found in Australia. The Australian flatback (*Natator depressus*) is only found in Australia and nearby waters and is the IUCN species listed as Data Deficient. It is this species that Conservation Volunteers are currently focusing on in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

So that is a brief summary of the state of sea turtles. My personal story and love affair with sea turtles started in 2003 on a hot, tropical beach in Central America. As the leader of a group of 15 volunteers in Costa Rica for a month, the first stop was a leatherback nesting programme at Playa Langosta on the Pacific Ocean side. This beach is one of three in Parque Nacional Marino Las Baulas (the Leatherback National Park) nearby to the renowned and long-running leatherback tagging programme at Playa Grande. It was not until I saw my first leatherback slowly make her way out of the water, up the beach and begin to nest that it all started to become clear. Imagine as a volunteer being underneath the rear of this ancient species collecting her eggs in a bag to take to the nearby secure hatchery. Her head was as big as mine; her flippers extended longer than my arm reach; her weight in excess of 500 kg. It was during those brief eight minutes as eggs were deposited that my love affair began.

"IT WAS DURING THOSE BRIEF EIGHT MINUTES AS EGGS WERE DEPOSITED, THAT MY LOVE AFFAIR BEGAN."

Soon after this I moved to Costa Rica for a few years, to work with leatherbacks, hawksbills, olive ridley and green sea turtles. The nesting beaches of the Pacific and Atlantic became my home, the locals and the turtles my university. Move forward to 2007 in Australia and the start of a range of sea turtle monitoring programmes in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Conservation and research activities, from marine debris surveys to tagging programmes and transmitter deployments now help to fill information gaps. But my nesting friends in Costa Rica weren't forgotten and a return by me almost every year since leaving, with volunteers in tow, to work at critical leatherback nesting locations.



Beach patrol scanning Eco Beach for signs of the Australian flatback turtle

In Australia, Conservation Volunteers now has a range of sea turtle programmes, which protect key nesting habitats by the removal of marine debris and ghost nets (discarded pieces of fishing industry nets). Each year teams of volunteers walk beaches collecting everything larger than a bottle cap. The items are sorted, counted, weighed and then disposed of. International bar coding helps identify the country of origin and a specialised net kit is used to identify the make and origin of ghost nets. A typical annual sweep of a 6 km beach may yield thousands of pieces of rubber footwear washed down from Southeast Asia, hundreds of kilograms of plastic items and dozens of ghost nets. The nets often have dead marine life entangled, including sea turtles. Nesting beaches are also protected by volunteers monitoring feral animal predation of nests. In areas of high egg mortality, control measures may be initiated by government authorities.

Nesting turtles also come under the watchful eye of volunteers on our tag and recapture programmes. Small, numbered titanium flipper tags are inserted after the turtle nests. Volunteers also assist with the DNA sampling of each turtle, and they actively engage in track and body measurements, visual egg counts, body observations (cuts, scars and barnacles), the installation of nest temperature data loggers, hatchling emergence and exhumations of nests after they have naturally hatched.

SCIENTISTS DO NOT WORK ALONE

Scientists do not work alone. We partner with a range of organisations to achieve our outcomes. From local community groups to the corporate sector; from government agencies to indigenous land owners. One such partner since 2010 has been Biosphere Expeditions.

The first teams of volunteers attended the Eco Beach Sea Turtle Monitoring Programme in Western Australia during November 2010 armed with enthusiasm, the desire to learn and to work hands-on with a protected species. Their arrival to the programme was warmly greeted, and the diverse range of backgrounds and nationalities made for an informative two weeks, both for the volunteers and field staff.

A key feature for one team was to be able to assist with the deployment of a Platform Terminal Transmitter (PTT) on "Lucy Jack" who decided to visit the beach and attempt to nest in the late afternoon sun. Biosphere Expeditions volunteers helped flipper tag, DNA sample and attach the transmitter whilst going about their other required sea turtle data recording. Lifting a 120 kg turtle onto an upturned plastic tub and positioning her into the transmitter harness takes great care and the volunteers proved their passion, understanding and interest for the animal's well-

fare during the short process. Two PTTs were deployed during the 2010 season and they tracked the daily migratory movements of the turtles from their natal nesting beach to their foraging (feeding) grounds, which may also act as breeding grounds.

The value of volunteers on programmes such as this must not be underestimated. After introduction and training, they become an essential part of the program's overall success and put in many thousands of hours each nesting season, sometimes walking long distances to find a nesting turtle to record. At this Eco Beach program alone some 2,846 hours on the beach over 77 days were logged for the 2010 season.

Successful sea turtle monitoring means a high level of participation night after night during the peak of a nesting season. Volunteers from Biosphere Expeditions are helping in fulfilling this role. ■

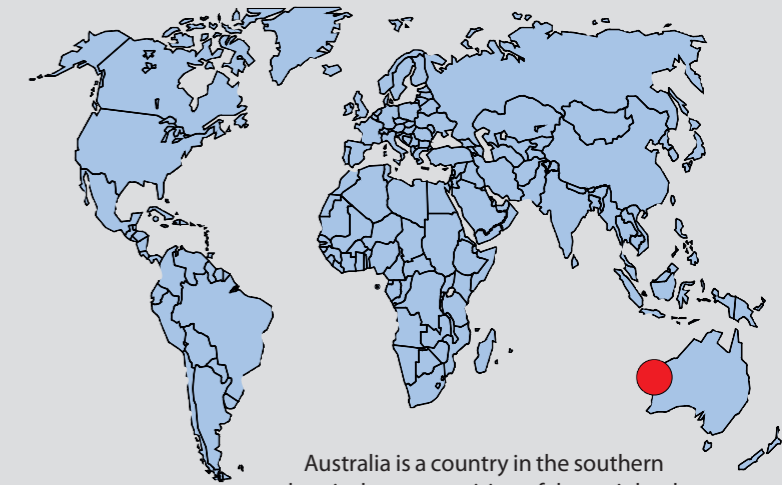
A turtle is placed on a tub prior to fitting a PTT (below)
Calming down a turtle by placing a towel over its eyes (top right) and fixing a PTT (bottom right)



Measuring a turtle (top)
Taking a DNA sample (bottom)



Western Australia info



Australia is a country in the southern hemisphere comprising of the mainland, which is the world's smallest continent (also largest island), the major island of Tasmania and numerous other islands in the Indian and Pacific oceans.

For around 40,000 years before European settlement commenced in the late 18th century, the Australian mainland and Tasmania were inhabited by over 400 individual nations of indigenous Australians. After sporadic visits by fishermen from the immediate north, and European discovery by Dutch explorers in 1606, the eastern half of Australia was claimed by the British in 1770 and initially settled through penal transportation to the colony of New South Wales, founded on 26 January 1788. The population grew steadily in the following years; the continent was explored, and during the 19th century another five largely self-governing Crown Colonies were established. On 1 January 1901, the six colonies became a federation, and the Commonwealth of Australia was formed.



The project's study site, Eco Beach, is located approximately 130 km south of Broome in a remote part of one of the world's most strikingly beautiful stretches of coastline. The study area is located at the bottom of Roebuck Bay, a large area of extensive white and red sandy beaches and intertidal mudflats, which is rich in invertebrate fauna and fed by Roebuck Plain. Roebuck Bay is also of international importance for the millions of migratory waders or shorebirds that use it seasonally on migration through the East Asian - Australasian Flyway from their breeding grounds in northern Asia.

TASTER DAYS / SAMPLER DAYS

Taster days are held in the UK, USA & Australia, and they are just what they say they are: days that will give you a unique insight into what it's like to be in the field with Biosphere Expeditions assisting scientists with wildlife research and conservation. They are set amongst the beautiful scenery of national parks or protected areas, where you will be part of a small team, alongside a nature guide and your expedition leader. You will discover expedition and wildlife research and conservation skills such as working with a map, GPS and compass, collecting important animal data, reading animal tracks and signs, using telemetry equipment and wildlife camera traps. You will also learn about the area you are in, its fauna and flora, history and the conservation work that is going on.

Taster days are a standard £65 | US\$95 | AU\$95 per person. We will credit £50 | US\$75 | AU\$75 back to you if you subsequently join one of our expeditions or projects.

More at www.biosphere-expeditions.org/tasters

• NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK
• BROADS NATIONAL PARK **UK**

• COLORADO
• NEW YORK STATE
• CALIFORNIA **USA**

• MELBOURNE
• SYDNEY **AUSTRALIA**



Our taster days were honoured in The Independent on Sunday's "Best Holiday for Green-Minded Travellers" list.

SCHNUPPERTAGE

W o Schnuppertag draufsteht, ist auch Schnuppertag drin: Verbringen Sie einen unterhaltsamen Tag mit uns und schnuppern Sie rein in das Feldforscherleben und Mitforschen bei Biosphere Expeditions. Unsere Schnuppertage finden in einigen der schönsten Nationalparkflecken Deutschlands statt. Als Teil eines kleinen Teams erlernen und probieren Sie Seite an Seite mit einem Naturführer und Ihrem Expeditionsleiter Techniken und Fertigkeiten im Natur- und Artenschutz aus, wie z.B. Spurenlesen, Navigation, Datenaufnahme, Arbeit mit Kamerafallen und Radiopelnsendern für Wildtiere. Obendrein lernen Sie selbstverständlich auch den Nationalpark kennen; seine Fauna, Flora, Geschichte und Naturschutzaktivitäten. Am Ende Ihres Schnuppertages werden Sie also nicht nur viel über den Nationalpark wissen, sondern auch einen sehr guten Eindruck davon haben, wie es ist, mit uns auf Expedition zu sein.

Alle Schnuppertage kosten einheitlich €65 pro Person. Falls Sie sich nach dem Schnuppertag für die Teilnahme an einer Expedition oder einem Projekt entscheiden, schreiben wir Ihnen €50 davon wieder gut.

Mehr unter www.biosphere-expeditions.org/schnuppertage

- NATIONALPARK NIEDERSÄCHSISCHES WATTENMEER
- NATIONALPARK UNTERES ODERTAL
- NATIONALPARK EIFEL
- NATIONALPARK BERCHTESGADEN

Unsere Schnuppertage wurden im Merian-Buch *Einmal im Leben* als eines von "100 unvergesslichen Reiseabenteuern" aufgeführt.



Above: using telemetry equipment (Broads National Park, UK)
Below: using compasses in Melbourne, Australia
Bottom: moose in Colorado, USA



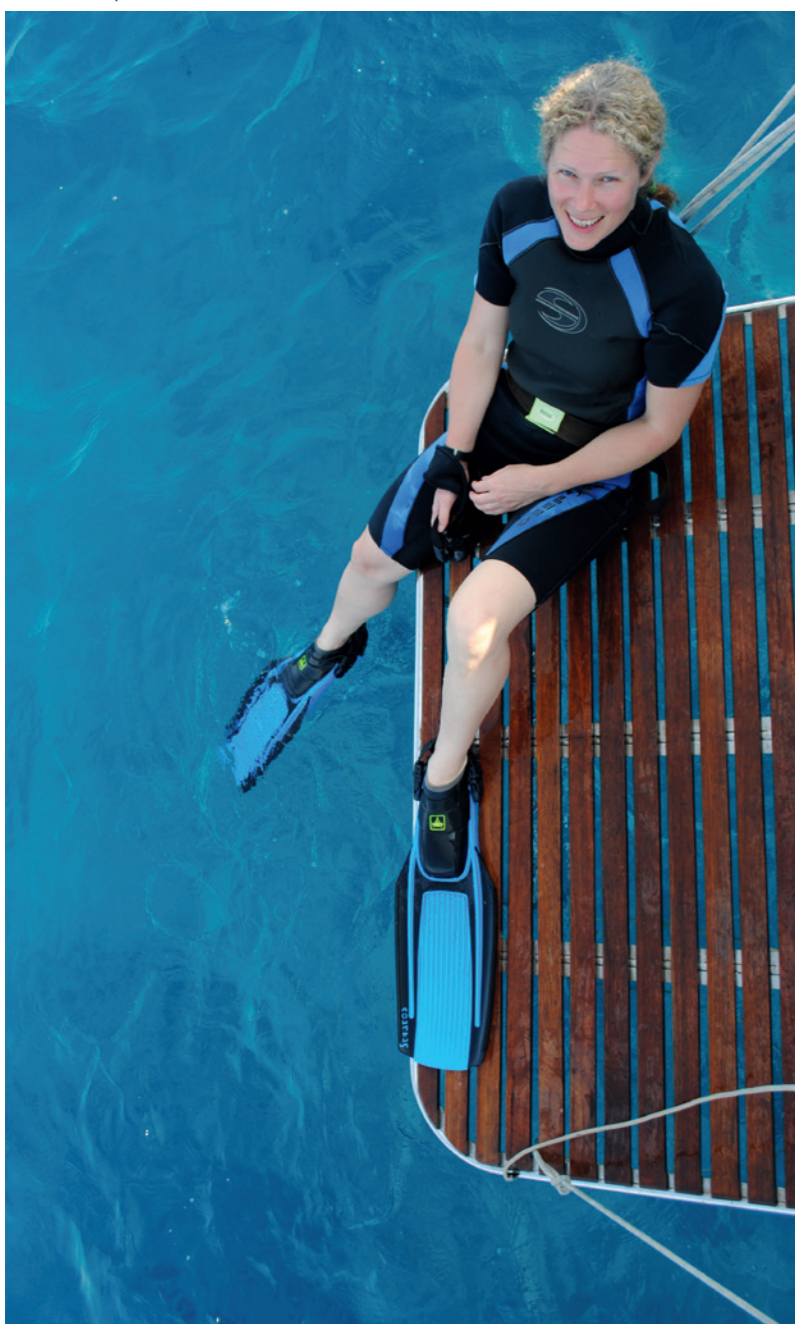
Top: canoe expedition (Nationalpark Unteres Odertal)
Above: alpine terrain field walk (Nationalpark Berchtesgaden)
Below: the Urftalsperre view point (Nationalpark Eifel)



MALAYSIA BLAZING THE CONSERVATION TRAIL

By Kathy Gill

Kathy tests
the new dive platform



Almost at the bottom of the landmass that points south from Burma and Thailand (Singapore sits at the very tip), and with its long beak nestling between the islands of Sumatra and Borneo, lies the neck and head of the beautiful swan-like bird that is Peninsula Malaysia.

Landing in the urban jungle of Kuala Lumpur, only called 'K.L.' by those who live there, was a pleasant, if somewhat sterile, experience. Tall shiny buildings rose from dirty central streets and a sky-rail ran above the mass of pedestrians and vehicles that clogged them. Traffic took its time to move around the maze of roads and arriving at my hotel in a car felt like an achievement greater than the arrival at the airport after more than 14 hours of flying. I only had one evening to see a tiny part of the city, but I was wowed by an exhilarating thunder and lightning display and torrential rain during which I was happily seated undercover in an outdoor restaurant, sheltering beneath the landmark of the Petronas Towers. The next morning I was on a short internal flight to the island base of scientist and dive centre owner, Katie Yewdall.

"THESE REEFS HAVE NEVER BEEN SURVEYED BEFORE AND IT WOULD BE REALLY VALUABLE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS HAPPENING OVER THERE."

Katie had approached Biosphere Expeditions earlier in the year with an interesting proposition, 'I live on an island and study the reefs that are reachable on day dives, but I've been offered the use of a sailing yacht that people can sleep on and I really want to be able to take a team round to the other side of the island to survey the reefs on the opposite side. These reefs have never been surveyed before and it would be really valuable to understand what is happening over there.'

I had met Katie once in the UK to talk concepts, but now I was travelling to see how things were on the ground. This is, of course, one of the fun parts of my job – seeing a research base for the first time and talking real details with the scientists. But it is also a very hectic time, with a rush from checking out local restaurants (don't look so cynical, I don't get to eat in them all), to checking dive gear and safety requirements, talking about emergency evacuations, and finding local photocopying and laminating shops (those of you who have been with us will know that whatever the environment or distance from civilization you will always have important stuff pinned up in the relevant place at base, and it will, barring disasters of a kind that I cannot bear to think about, always be laminated!).

The small twin-prop airplane I was on for the internal flight was heading straight for a jungle-covered mountainside when it suddenly turned sharply to the right and swooped down onto the landing strip that ran alongside the beach. Now I felt like I was arriving at an expedition site. A short taxi ride (the walk actually takes about half an hour if you saunter along the beach) and I was at Swiss Cottage, my land base for the next few days. It is a series of small wooden structures set on the beach, with a lovely open-fronted area for breakfast and, at the front of the accommodation bungalows, Katie's dive centre. The dive centre itself had a number of busy people gearing up for a dive, and another group checking fish identification guides and comparing notes on what they had seen on their last dive. After putting my stuff in my room I wandered down onto the beach just in time for Katie to point out the arrival of our sailing boat – perfectly timed after sailing non-stop from Thailand for the last three days and nights. The boat had been kitted out for diving and my trip on her was going to be to test the new gear – a compressor had been set up and holders on the bow for dive tanks to sit in.



Katie preparing for a dive (above)
Swiss cottage entrance (below)



Also, a new fold-up diving platform was attached to the side of the boat so that the boat could sail unimpeded, but such that it could still be used easily for diving. I was keen to take a look at her but realised that the captain and crew would probably rather not see me until the next day so that they could get some rest and make everything 'ship shape'. So instead I spent the afternoon talking science with Katie and learning about the island and its people.

The next couple of days were spent looking at restaurants, walking through the jungle in the middle of the island to visit a turtle sanctuary on the far side, checking out local shops (not many – and no lamination!!) and walking the two minutes down the beach to the only bar in town for an after-supper beer and some lively chats with locals and visitors alike. Then, at last, it was time to get on board our boat and head off round the island for some diving.

We were an interesting bunch onboard. Jordie, our captain, is not only a wonderful sailor but also a self-taught free diver who gives lessons (I confess I carried on with the traditional 'carry all the air down that you could possibly need' approach). Katie, our host, whose understanding of all things under the sea was fascinating. A friend from the UK, Kay, who has spent a lot of time working with communities abroad and as a PADI open water diver had kindly volunteered to be a guinea pig team member. Another diving instructor was also there to check on the facilities and myself to see how everything would come together on board.

We spent three fabulous days sailing and diving in some of the most beautiful dive sites I have been to. Comparisons were made between sites in different areas and the workings of the boat were discussed.

We found:

- that teaching could be undertaken in the very spacious area 'downstairs' in the boat,
- that I couldn't hit my head on any part of the boat, something that I usually manage with little difficulty,
- that Jordie cooks up a mean supper,
- that the compressor was good but that we also had back-up facilities in the shape of a hotel at one end of the island if necessary (and that they make some excellent cocktails),
- and, most importantly, that it felt great to be part of a small intrepid team, plowing through the waves in the name of science.

At the end of the few days that I spent on and around Tioman we all agreed that we could run an expedition. The space on the boat would be tight for sleeping, but it was agreed that if we could get ten people to come (5 at a time) on this adventure, then it would be possible and the science could be done. The first week will be spent at Swiss Cottage so that training and early dives can be from a land base. Then once everyone is really settled into the rhythm of the survey dives, we will set off to sail round the island and discover how well the reefs are doing in the North. I'm looking forward to going back next year. ■



Cuttlefish with divers

Sailing to the next dive site



Malaysia info

Malaysia is a federal constitutional monarchy in South-east Asia. It consists of thirteen states and three federal territories and has a total landmass of 329,847 square kilometres. The country is separated by the South China Sea into two regions, Peninsular Malaysia and Malaysian Borneo (also known as West and East Malaysia respectively). The capital city is Kuala Lumpur, while Putrajaya is the seat of the federal government. The population of Malaysia is around 28 million.



Malaysia is a megadiverse country, with a high number of species and high levels of endemism. Two-thirds of Malaysia is forested, with a large amount of lowland forest present below an altitude of 760 metres. East Malaysia, like most of Borneo, was traditionally covered with lowland rain forests although much has been cleared causing wildlife to retreat into the upland rain forests inland. Besides rain forests, there are over 1425 square kilometres of mangroves in Malaysia, as well as numerous coral reefs.

The expedition will begin and end at the chalet resort in Tekek village on Pulau Tioman. During the second phase of the expedition, the research vessel yacht will circumnavigate the main island in the Marine Park and visit most of the other eight islands, enabling the expedition to reach seldom-visited dive sites and conduct surveys at hard-to-reach places.

FRIENDS

Become a member
of the Friends of Biosphere Expeditions

If you can't take part in a full-blown expedition or project yet, or if you have already been with us and would like to stay involved, or if you would simply like to be part of what we are doing, then why not become a Friend of Biosphere Expeditions today. Help us to support critical wildlife conservation and research projects across the globe for a membership fee starting from a monthly £6 | €7.50 | US\$10 | AU\$12.50.

As a Friend of Biosphere Expeditions your benefits will include expedition and event discounts, the Biosphere Expeditions magazine & brochure, first notification and preference for last-minute expedition places, news and updates on how your membership fee is making a difference to our conservation work in the field, and much more.

More information and a joining form at
www.biosphere-expeditions.org/friends

PETER IS IN FOR THE LONG HAUL!

By John Haschak

Most people setting off on their holidays want to get there as soon as possible, but when Peter Pilbeam leaves home he knows it will be four days until he arrives at his chosen destination!

Peter, a retired manager from Cambridge University, has just completed his tenth consecutive trip to the remote Altai Mountains in Central Asia, which sit close to Mongolia, Kazakhstan and China. Once there he takes part in a conservation programme designed to help protect the endangered snow leopard.

A flight from London to Moscow is followed by an internal flight to Novosibirsk, Russia's third largest city, and then it is a two-day drive to the base camp set at 2300 m at the foot of a 3500 m mountain range.

Peter joined Cambridge University in 1969 as a technician and has always been very interested in plants & animals and is secretary and treasurer

of the Cambridgeshire Mammal Group and Warden for a Wildlife Trust nature reserve. So joining a trip to a remote part of the world to help protect snow leopards really appealed to him.

"There are not many organisations that offer projects people can join where you are not just a tourist but are actually playing a crucial role in proper scientific research - rather than just building some steps or a boardwalk or scrub bashing!" said Peter.

"THE ALTAI IS LIKE NOWHERE ELSE I HAVE EVER BEEN, IT'S SUCH A HUGE CONTRAST IN LIFESTYLE."

Like many things in life, Peter's love affair with the Altai Mountains and snow leopards came by chance. He was looking on the website of a company specialising in outdoor clothing and tents when he saw a link to Biosphere Expeditions and just clicked on it.

"The site looked interesting and then I saw this banner saying: 'Where on earth is the Altai?' Having never heard of the Altai, or the faintest idea where it actually was, I was intrigued to find out more so contacted Biosphere Expeditions, and I suppose the rest is history," said Peter.

"The Altai is like nowhere else I have ever been, it's such a huge contrast in lifestyle, very remote and for those who live there it is a hand to mouth existence, and it really is surviving on a dollar a day. But the scenery is just stunning, vast open steppes and snow covered mountains. The Altai is just a fantastic place and I would not want to miss a year there. It has an amazing climate where within 24 hours the temperature can go from below zero to over thirty degrees Celsius."



Peter Pilbeam, member of the Friends of Biosphere Expeditions, back from his 10th Altai expedition (above) and with the Altai expedition team 2011



"It has an amazing range of wildlife. You can easily see up to seven different eagles, but of course you are there to help conserve the snow leopard which unfortunately now ranks with pandas and tigers when it comes to endangered species."

"Being so remote, with no mobile phone signals, means you need to take safety very seriously and that is why each trip starts with a briefing which teaches you the skills you will need, especially navigation and how to use a GPS receiver and compass. You are also taught how to drive the Land Rovers off road and how to identify signs of animals and what they are. This means you may set off from the main base camp for a couple of days and set up another one further up the mountain where there is snow, making it easier to see animal footprints."

The project surveys both snow leopards and their prey animals such as argali mountain sheep,

Altai ibex, marmots and birds to try and find out the exact numbers of these beautiful creatures and to work out a conservation strategy.

But for Peter there are other benefits to making such a trip each year. "You really do feel you are making a difference and putting something back to try and make up for what man has done to the planet. But it's also fantastic exercise and excellent at helping you shed a few pounds and you are meeting and mixing with people from all over the world who are also on the projects."

"I really do believe these trips do make a big difference both helping individual animal species but also making those who go on these projects ambassadors to the concept of conservation holidays. I also now regularly give lectures to groups of people about the snow leopard and its environment and am happy to pass on what my ten trips to the Altai have taught me." ■

Peter at work within the stunning scenery of the Altai mountains



OMAN

DIVE AID: REEF CONSERVATION IN MUSANDAM

By Homa Khaleeli

I was six metres under the sea when Dr. Matthias Hammer tucked me firmly under his arm. I wasn't about to argue – mainly because I couldn't speak – but also he was bigger than me and a former soldier in Germany's parachute regiment. A biologist, international rower, ski instructor, wilderness medical officer and survival expert, Matthias – luckily for the world – has decided to use his powers for the good and set up Biosphere Expeditions.

I had arrived four days earlier to join a diving trip run by the organisation. My group would be assessing the state of the beautiful coral reefs that fringe the Musandam peninsula. Here, alongside diving enthusiasts from countries such as Brazil, the UAE, the US, Britain and Germany, I would be collecting data in a bid to persuade the Omani government to protect the reef.

For the first three days we breakfasted at 6.30 am, and as our dhow sailed past the towering limestone mountains that plunge straight into the sea, creating the area's fjords, we had classes with Rita Bento, of EDA, a marine NGO based in Dubai, the expedition's marine biologist. She taught us to recognise the fish, invertebrates and sea-bed terrain, to qualify to start Reef Check, an international reef-monitoring scheme that allows scientists to compare the state of the reef eco-systems around the world. And the first time we sank below the sea's surface the hard work seemed worth it. The landscape above was endlessly arid and unrelieved by vegetation, but underwater everything was in glorious technicolour.

We spotted a combative lionfish displaying its stripes and psychedelic parrotfish grazing on coral. Floating past rocks studded with black, spiky urchins were Arabian angelfish, larger than dinner plates. And to my excitement, I was suddenly surrounded by a fast-moving stream of silver fusilier fish. The corals themselves were beautiful – intricate structures in primary colours.

Rita explained that coral reefs provide a habitat for 33% of the world's fish, and generate income for 20 million people – but they are vanishing at an alarming rate. While Musandam has no heavy industry to pollute the water, and no huge fishing companies, spearfishing is a problem in the region, and a recent cyclone by the name of Gonu and algae bloom have affected the reef. Climate change also damages the coral, and our job was to track the health of the Musandam reef.

It took hours of staring at pictures, but eventually I learned to spot the differences between grouper fish (grumpy looking) and sweetlips (they pout like Angelina Jolie); urchins and sponge; hard coral and soft coral.

Sadly, when it came to diving, I was a wobbly eco-warrior. The minimum requirement for the expedition is the basic open-water PADI qualification, which I have – just. I was a bit embarrassed when my logbook showed I had completed just five dives, compared to the hundreds notched up by my companions. Luckily for me, the group was sweetly encouraging, and Conny, a certified dive instructor, took me in hand and offered some one-to-one tuition when I free-fell through the water, scaring off the fish.

“YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A JACQUES COUSTEAU TO HELP CONSERVE THE CORAL REEFS - EVEN NOVICE DIVERS CAN DO THEIR BIT.”

Although Biosphere Expeditions makes it clear that volunteers shouldn't expect luxury, the expedition was definitely not a hair-shirt experience. The dhow's cabins were small but all had air conditioning, and some private bathrooms. Its two decks were covered in comfortable rugs and scatter cushions, and Polly, a wonderful Keralan cook, created food so delicious it almost sank me. Eventually, everyone gave up the cabins for sleeping on the deck under the stars.

The people the expedition attracts also made the trip a laid-back, cheerful one. Leisure time was spent swapping tales of swimming with sharks or giant squids.

After our work has been turned into a scientific report by Rita, who will use it to discover what measures are needed to defend the reef, the information



Fjord landscape of the Musandam peninsula

will be handed to local environmental groups so they can use it to lobby the government. And lobbying work there is to be done. With the data we all helped to collect, the first time since the 1970s that anyone had done any surveys at all in the area, Rita in her report was able to argue that in stark contrast to many other reefs in the Middle East, impacts on the Musandam reef were low and biodiversity is high. It's a treasure trove in need of protection and Rita's recommendation is to make the Musandam a marine protected area, and perhaps in time even a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This is a great result and a step in the right direction has been taken.

But let's step back again. Before we could collect the data, we needed to prove to Rita we were safe to hover above the reef, swim upside down looking under rocks for invertebrates, and write on our underwater slates without touching the reef. In the afternoons she set us underwater tasks from playing rock, paper, scissors to passing weights between us – all to assess and improve our buoyancy control. I'll admit that by this time I was so terrified of hurting the coral, I kept bobbing to the surface like a helium balloon in a wetsuit. But I was at least able to help mark out the measuring tape along the seabed that indicates the section of reef the group will be studying. Volunteers swam slowly along it in pairs, marking down the species they saw. And noting the coral damage and what had caused it: disease, litter, bleaching or predators such as the crown-of-thorns starfish.

Each expedition made three dives a day for the final three days to make sure as much of the reef as possible was looked at. It took a few attempts to learn to move slowly and carefully enough to be able to count the fish and sea creatures without disturbing them. And this was when Matthias, anxious that I shouldn't miss out on seeing the reef, and even more anxious that I shouldn't hurt it, decided to take me on a roller coaster ride above the coral.

Musandam info

The Musandam peninsula (sometimes also called the Norway of Arabia) is the northernmost part of Oman jutting out into the Strait of Hormuz at the entrance to the Arabian Gulf. The province, or Governorate of Musandam as it is officially known, is separated from the rest of Oman by various parts of the United Arab Emirates including Ras al Khaimah and Fujairah. The Musandam more or less begins where the mountains rise from the plains of Ras al Khaimah.



The remote and rugged mountains, which rise straight out of the sea creating fjords and stunning landscapes, have had isolated communities for centuries. Many coastal villages can be reached only by boat, as there are no roads on much of the peninsula. Pockets of flat land support subsistence agriculture. The population of approximately 29,000 is concentrated in the capital, Khasab (18,000 in 2004) in the north and Dibba (5,500) on the east coast.

Biosphere Expeditions is pushing for a Marine Protected Area and eventually perhaps even a UNESCO World Heritage Site at Musandam. Biosphere Expeditions has been involved in the creation of protected areas before:

- From 2001 – 2004 Biosphere Expeditions helped a Regional Landscape Park in the Ukraine to collect data to support their push towards an upgrade to National Park status, which had to be approved by a parliamentary decision. After four years of data collection and six years of lobbying, the National Park upgrade was approved in 2010. The park now protects a unique steppe area jutting into the Black Sea and a stop-off point for many migratory birds, as well as a haven for fauna (e.g. birds & wolves) and flora (it boasts amongst other things Europe's biggest orchid field).

- Data collected by our expeditions in the Caprivi, Namibia in 2008 and 2009 have helped our local and international partners make arguments that have led to the declaration of the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, or KAZA TFCA. The KAZA TFCA is the world's largest conservation area, spanning five southern African countries; Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, centred around the Caprivi-Chobe-Victoria Falls area.

- Data collected by our expeditions in the Altai since 2003 have helped our local and international partners make arguments that have led to the declaration of a protected area in the Altai Republic, Central Asia. This area now provides protected habitat for a number of endangered species, including the snow leopard.

Under his control, my face was inches from waving sea anemones, and for the first time I saw the coral flicker as the tiny creatures that build it retracted at our presence. Before I knew it, I was dangled upside down to peer under rock ledges, looking for coral-banded shrimp and lobsters, and I spotted a moray eel. With my flailing arms finally calmed, I could swim without terrifying the snub-nosed butterfly fish, bright snappers and sulking groupers.

This exciting experience taught me an incredible amount about the reef. When I got back to my desk, one of the first parcels I opened contained a promotional gift of a dried starfish – and I was horrified. Naturally, they will be getting an outraged letter from this conservation convert. ■

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CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN NAMIBIA

Putting corporate money to good use
by *Michael Farnsworth*, managing director of Stormsaver Ltd. (UK)



I visited Namibia with Biosphere Expeditions during January-February 2011 as a conservation volunteer. Having worked within the sustainability sector for over a decade, I was interested to see and experience first-hand problems in other areas of the world, and see what I could do to help.

Having spent 12 years setting up my own business and dedicating everything to this, I felt it was time to open my eyes to the bigger picture and Biosphere Expeditions' Namibian trip caught my attention.

I was actively put to the test during my time in Namibia being involved in a variety of activities including data collection for research, wildlife tracking and conservation and community work in the township of Katutura. Prior to the expedition my company, Stormsaver, had agreed to provide funding support for a new educational programme, which was launched whilst I was there. Our funding paid for a sustainability educational

package and visits for school children to the Ongos study site to understand more about the importance of looking after the environment. 450 children from one of the driest countries in the world have had the opportunity to learn about sustainable living, thanks to Stormsaver and Biosphere Expeditions. Many of these children had not left the township in their lives and it was astounding to see them calling an oryx a donkey! I had expected that, like my children, they would recognise their native animals and I began to understand that if they did not know and appreciate the animals in their environment, how could conservation be important to them? This is one of the many reasons why the work of Biosphere Expeditions is so important.

From now on all expedition volunteers will have a chance to take the children from Katutura to the Ongos study site, enabling them to see the school and poverty first hand, meet the children, the teachers and those involved in using our money wisely.

For me this was one of the highlights of the trip... seeing our money being used so effectively, and actually having a real impact on the community. I was immensely impressed by the speed and efficiency with which Biosphere Expeditions set up the programme and have continued to be overwhelmed by their dedication to their conservation work.

One of the key lessons for me during my experience was the conflict between conservation in its broadest effect on the local 'environment' and conservation in respect of animal preservation, habitat loss and the interaction between rapid population growth. This combined with cultural attitudes towards animals and the conflict for survival of the people of Katutura makes conservation in this area a huge challenge to ensure both acceptable living standards for the community as well as survival of the animal species. It seemed to me that the work being done here was definitely for the long term and with that in mind, if my involvement was to have a real effect, then our support to Biosphere Expeditions also had to be long term.

As a result, 2011 has seen further funding from Stormsaver put to good use as sponsorship for two Namibian nationals to spend two weeks with the conservationists at the Ongos study site. The aim

of this second project is to enable people from the country itself to have the opportunity to further their careers in conservation and in turn influence and educate the Namibian community which they are from.

I am delighted to be involved with these projects and we are confident that they will really help to improve the lives of the families in the Katutura township. Conservation in this area is key to improving the lives of the community there and preserving the wildlife and the environment they have around them. Teaching children about sustainability will make a real and positive difference.

I can honestly say that on behalf of all of the staff and customers involved with Stormsaver that I am truly proud of the work we have started with Biosphere Expeditions in Namibia. Although we cannot change the social status of the area, our work did make a difference to disadvantaged children, and that is important to me, so we intend to continue to support financially the work we have started. ■

The author (spot the tall white bloke) with children from Katutura township



LOOK AHEAD

LOOK AHEAD and spread the word!

We created the "Look Ahead" campaign early in 2010 to harness the great potential we saw in people offering their help after they had come across Biosphere Expeditions or had been on expedition with us. "What else can I do" was a question often asked and Look Ahead was our response. After a couple of years, the results have surprised even us. We are building an amazing network of people as we speak. Here is a story of how one person has become involved - we hope it gives you some inspiration. Then come and join our Look Ahead network.

More at www.biosphere-expeditions.org/lookahead

WINNING HEARTS & MINDS

AND TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF CONSERVATIONISTS

A look at Biosphere Expeditions' education and capacity-building work by *Dr. Matthias Hammer*

Conservation cannot work in isolation. Hearts & minds of local people need to be won, because without the cooperation of local people, conservation measures are most likely doomed to failure. Long gone are the days when people thought declaring a national park meant throwing people out and posting guards with guns on its borders. This just does not work. Today the parks that work best are the ones that generate tangible benefits for people living in and around it - and that usually means jobs and other sources of income and empowerment.

Creating benefits is one aspect. Training the next generation of conservationists, wherever possible from local communities, is another. In doing this Biosphere Expeditions works on the premise of "get them while they are young", so much of our work is with schools and universities, creating educational programmes, scholarships and bursaries, and integrating local youngsters into our expedition work. This also allows us to identify those with the greatest potential and provide targeted support so that they can further their careers.

Here are just a few examples of Biosphere Expeditions' activities all over the world.

*Talking through an educational booklet about Arabian leopards with local people in Oman (below)
Handing over an educational booklet about coral reefs to a Ministry of Education official of the Musandam peninsula governorate, Oman (top right)
Visiting a school in the Atlantic rainforest as part of a jaguar road show in Brazil (bottom right)*



EDUCATION & CREATING AWARENESS

In many of our expedition countries we have designed educational booklets and accompanying teaching materials. These we distribute with the help of partners such as ministries of education, schools or through road shows or community visits.

In Oman, for example, we have produced educational materials on Arabian leopards and coral reefs. In Honduras we have produced an educational booklet about coral reefs, their value and how to protect them. These are distributed to schools by our local partners and during our expeditions as part of educational school visits.

In Namibia we have several educational programmes. One is hosting local school children at our expedition base, teaching them about local wildlife and conservation. Another project is sending local school children on week-long educational courses about sustainable living - and we have produced a book to go with this course. We also have a scholarship programme with local universities and high schools to train the next generation of conservationists. Finally, we work with the local farmers association, the media and other bodies, delivering talks and lectures on how humans and carnivores can coexist and also promote this topic to journalists and the local media.

The importance of this type of media work must not be underestimated in creating awareness amongst people locally and nationally, so holding press conferences on our expedition work, the animals and habitats we work on and their struggle for survival is something we do regularly on many of our expeditions.



Hosting local children on the expedition for a day, Namibia

Press conference in Bratislava, Slovakia





Central building (above) and two-person tent of a field research station Biosphere Expeditions has helped put in place in Namibia

SCHOLARSHIPS AND BURSARIES

In Oman, the Maldives, Namibia and the Altai we have scholarship programmes enabling local students to take part in our expeditions. In doing so they are exposed to a team of international scientists and volunteers, can practice and improve their English skills, and receive training in survey and other conservation and research techniques.

We also have bursaries for our existing expedition scientists to support their professional development or to support them in generating publications or attending conferences in order to present and distribute their findings. It also greatly enhances the expeditions having local students as part of the teams.

CAPACITY-BUILDING

In several of our expedition locations we have co-financed field research stations, which provide employment for the local community, stimulate sustainable tourism and function as centres for conservation, providing training and a hub for researchers. ■

SOME FEEDBACK

"My uncle used to work as a look-out for the whaling industry, spotting whales for the whalers and he taught me how to spot them. With whaling now banned around the Azores, I can do this job of spotting whales for Biosphere Expeditions and its research teams. It's a great way to use my skills, keeping them alive for future generations and helping the whales."

Miguel Vargas, Cedros, Faial Island, Azores



"I was born and raised in Cayo Cochino Menor. The island I once played on as a boy, I now work on to protect as a boat captain for the Honduran Coral Reef Foundation. I know these waters like the back of my hand and enjoy sharing our marine treasures with the team members from Biosphere Expeditions. I am a certified rescue diver, in large part inspired by watching the teams work here. I am proud of my country and these islands and feel very lucky that researchers from Biosphere Expeditions are helping to conduct research that help in the conservation of the area. Thank you!"

Alex Solis, Cayos Cochinos Islands, Honduras

THANK YOU • DANKE • MERCI

Much of the work described in the article would not be possible without the help from local partners, grant-giving bodies and corporate sponsorship. Thank you to all of them.

More information

www.biosphere-expeditions.org/achievements > Education tab

www.biosphere-expeditions.org/feedback > Locals tab

www.biosphere-expeditions.org/scholarships

for an overview of our scholarship and bursary programmes



"I really learnt a lot from taking part in the Musandam coral reef expedition as part of a scholarship. Even though I am a Divemaster, I discovered a lot of new things about Musandam and its marine life. This has helped me a lot in my professional development and I would love to be part of an expedition again."

Badher Al Shehi, Musandam, Oman



"My name is Alexandra Grigorieva; I'm 19 years old and I study biology in Novosibirsk State University. I was lucky to participate in a research expedition to the Altai mountains, organised by Biosphere Expeditions. The expedition was a great experience for me and gave me many impressions. For example, it was great to meet new people, especially from different countries. Getting the scholarship also gave me confidence in myself - that was really important for me, I now feel like I can achieve a lot. I also had a great experience communicating in English and after the expedition I also started to learn German as there were quite a lot of German-speakers on the expedition too. I also liked a lot the way the research was conducted - hiking all day, recording animals and their signs - it's so different from living in a city. I am very thankful to Biosphere Expeditions for providing me with such an opportunity."

Alexandra Grigorieva, Novosibirsk, Russia

NEW UK WILDLIFE EXHIBITION

By Kathy Gill

Biosphere Expeditions supported a new venture in 2011 that sought to bring everything to do with wildlife under one roof for a two day event in London. The event included workshops, panel discussions and speakers plus exhibits from areas such as wildlife art, to holidays, to magazines and bookshops, and to us – taking centre stage at the venue doors talking about how people can get involved in real wildlife research in their normal holiday time. Dr. Matthias Hammer, our Executive Director, gave a fun and informative talk about what we do around the

world, including showing some great photos from animal encounters and from the camera traps that we use on many expeditions.

On the Saturday we hosted an expert panel who gave their advice on how to choose a good wildlife volunteering holiday. We had organised for the panel to discuss the issues between themselves before the event and so we were able to publish the panel's Top Ten Tips (see page 42). A wide-ranging discussion on the day highlighted how many issues people need to consider when looking to put their time and money into conservation volunteering abroad – and along with all of the interesting feedback came the message that people need more information on what to look out for. The appearance of so many different companies trying to sell these experiences for a profit has muddled the market and left everyone a bit confused. Have a look at the line-up of our panel and see what you think of the tips that their combined knowledge and experience has come up with.

world, including showing some great photos from animal encounters and from the camera traps that we use on many expeditions.



Alexandra Palace (left), venue for the exhibition and the exhibition stand (right)



THE PANEL

Dr. Matthias Hammer, Biosphere Expeditions
Tricia Barnett, Tourism Concern
Dr. Angela Benson, University of Brighton
Alex Tozer, Operation Wallacea
Chris Wright, Born Free Foundation
(left to right)



Dr. Matthias Hammer founded **Biosphere Expeditions** in 1999 and is now its Executive Director. With Biosphere Expeditions he has led teams all over the globe. He is a qualified wilderness medical officer, ski instructor, mountain leader, divemaster and survival skills instructor. Once a rower on the international circuit, he is now an amateur marathon runner and Ironman triathlete.

Tricia Barnett has been Director of **Tourism Concern** since 1991, working initially from an office hosted by Roehampton Institute in South West London. Tricia developed the new organisation into a globally respected campaigning and education body, heading a team of staff and volunteers that has been based since 1998 at the London Metropolitan University on Holloway Road. Tourism Concern has been working on a standard for Gap Year and International Volunteering, talking to many players in the industry and working through a respected advisory group.

Dr. Angela Benson is a Principal Lecturer in Tourism at the **University of Brighton**. Her doctoral research strategically reviewed the research volunteer tourism sector from the supply (the providing organisations) and demand (the volunteers) perspectives, enabling the dynamics of the sector to be determined. She was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in 2007 and is a member of the editorial board for the Journal of International Volunteer Tourism and Social Development. She has given several keynote addresses on volunteer tourism and is the Founding Chair for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) Volunteer Tourism Research Group.

Alex Tozer is the Director of Operations for **Operation Wallacea**, an organisation that takes paying volunteers to work on conservation programmes around the world. Operation Wallacea is a network of academics from European and North American universities, who design and implement biodiversity and conservation management research programmes. Research is supported by students who join the programme to strengthen their CV or resume, gain course credit, or collect data for a dissertation or thesis.



The **Born Free Foundation** is a dynamic international wildlife charity, devoted to compassionate conservation and animal welfare. **Chris Wright** its Senior Programmes Officer and is involved in several aspects of Born Free's campaign activities; helps to manage a range of field conservation projects, including the Satpuda Landscape Tiger Programme. Chris works with David Jay to implement the UN-led Great Apes Survival Project (GRASP), and coordinates logistics for Born Free's captive animal rescues.



TOP TEN TIPS Choosing a wildlife volunteering experience This is what you should look out for

- 1. Reputation, reputation, reputation:** has the organisation won awards or accolades, who are they associated with, what is their philosophy, do they write & publish their results and what's their safety record.
- 2. Qualified staff:** work should be led by qualified & proven experts, group leaders should be well qualified and all staff should be well briefed on risks and safety issues.
- 3. Where does your money go:** good organisations will always publish clear information that shows how your money is spent.
- 4. Proper follow-through:** a good organisation will, through updates and reports, keep you informed about how the project progresses even after you've left.
- 5. What will you get out of it:** be clear about what you want to get out of the experience - training, self-development, an adventure - then check whether the organisation is clear in communicating what's on offer for you.
- 6. Community involvement and benefit:** understand a project's relationship to the local community and make sure that the organisation is properly embedded with local efforts and people

- does the community benefit, have they given consent for work to be carried out, how have they been involved. Is there training for locals, scholarships, capacity-building, education, etc.
- 7. Your fellow participants:** understand the profile of the people that will share your trip by checking the organisation's website and social media sites.
- 8. In the field:** check that the organisation is clear & transparent about what will be happening day to day, the accommodation, food and other logistics, and also what is expected of you.
- 9. Captive animals:** if the experience involves captive animals, be very clear on the purpose of the captive facility, where the animals come from and whether it is part of a reputable programme.
- 10. Handling animals:** steer clear of organisations that encourage handling of captive wild animals for anything other than essential veterinary or neo-natal surrogate care. If wild animals are handled, it should only be for essential research & conservation work and following strict animal welfare guidelines.



More details at www.biosphere-expeditions.org/toptentips

TOP TEN TIPS AND HOW THEY APPLY TO BIOSPHERE EXPEDITIONS

In terms of **reputation**, Biosphere Expeditions is one of the most highly awarded and lauded volunteer organisation out there. Just have a look at the plethora of awards on the right. We work with local scientists, universities and organisations, as well as international NGOs such as the WWF, Born Free and Tourism Concern and we always publish our results in expedition reports, the scientific literature and in the mainstream media. Have a look at www.biosphere-expeditions.org/reports or www.biosphere-expeditions.org/mediacoverage for details.

The reports also show clearly **where the money goes** that participants pay and once you've been



on an expedition we will always keep you informed about what is happening on the ground; successes, failures, findings and all, as part of a **proper follow-through**.

Before you come on an expedition, we make every effort of communicating clearly **what you will get out of it**, what we are (a not-for-profit conservation organisation involving laypeople) and what we are not (a safari company driven

by profits and satisfying people's need to see and touch animals), **who your fellow participants will be** (well educated 30+ professionals who are seeking to be immersed and involved in local conservation efforts for a week or two), and what it's going to be like **in the field** (see our website and briefings for detailed descriptions of field conditions).

Next to the things about you, we also communicate clearly the **community involvement and benefits**; what local people get out of it all and how they are involved and empowered; whether it's through the local scientist, employment, training, or scholarship places that we have created.

If you've been on an expedition with us before, you will know that we always have **highly qualified staff**, whether they are our expedition leaders or the expedition scientists. They and their qualifications are always detailed in our literature and you can see who they are on www.biosphere-expeditions.org/about. We do not work with **captive animals**, so this point on the list is not relevant to Biosphere Expeditions, but we are involved in capturing and **handling animals** on many expeditions. When we are, we follow strict animal ethics & welfare guidelines and any capturing and handling is only done when strictly necessary for our research and conservation work.

SOME AWARDS & ACCOLADES WE HAVE WON OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS

Responsible travel
Best for Protection of Endangered Species
Highly commended
(International award scheme based in the UK)

Association for Conservation
Conservation Award
Award by the European Outdoor Group for conservation projects involving direct citizen action. (European award scheme based in Switzerland)

Umwelt-Online-Award
(Environment-Online-Award)
German government prize awarded to businesses and organisations with an online presence who have displayed excellence and best practice for the environment. (International award scheme based in Germany)

BBC Wildlife
Top Ten Conservation Holidays
Listing for Altai expedition (UK magazine)

National Geographic Traveler
Tours of a Lifetime Award for Altai expedition
(International award scheme based in the USA)

Merian
Unforgettable travel adventures
Listing as one of "100 unforgettable travel adventures" (*100 unvergessliche Reiseabenteuer*) for our taster weekends and our Honduras expedition. (German travel book publisher).

P.M. Magazin
Top Holiday For Nature
Listing in the category "Where can I do something for nature during my holidays?" (*Wo kann man im Urlaub etwas für die Natur tun?*) (German magazine)



More awards & accolades at www.biosphere-expeditions.org/awards



Frequently Asked Questions

Before people join one of our expeditions, they naturally have many questions. Here are some of the more common ones with our answers.

More FAQs, including video FAQs at www.biosphere-expeditions.org/faq



Radio-collared leopard, Namibia

What is Biosphere Expeditions?

see also: www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRMYxVdykeA

Biosphere Expeditions is an award-winning wildlife conservation organisation that involves people in hands-on conservation work all around the planet and gives them a real insight into how conservation works in the field. Biosphere Expeditions is also a not-for-profit organisation and we guarantee that at least two-thirds of your expedition contribution will go into the project, funding it long-term and sustainably.

We only have about a dozen projects in our portfolio, and these we do well and know intimately. We are thus not a brokering agency. Instead we are involved long-term, taking charge and sending our staff with you on the project, making sure you get the quality experience we stand for and that you, local people and the wildlife benefit, and that there are results in terms of research and conservation, local involvement and capacity building – for example through the creation of protected areas or jobs and scholarships for local people. We also guarantee to write up our finances, our results and our achievements in annual expedition reports so that the expedition comes full circle for our expedition participants and we are fully transparent for everyone else.

Our three key themes are safety, science, satisfaction, because our core belief is that you will work best when you are safe, well looked after, well rested and having fun. Our projects are open to all, there are no special skills (biological or otherwise) required to join as all necessary skills will be taught on the expedition, and there are no age limits whatsoever.

And don't fall prey to the common misconception that these kinds of volunteer expeditions are just for students and teenagers who want to rough it. In fact our participants are people from all walks of life, of all ages, looking for an adventure with a purpose. Most of them are highly educated, well-travelled professionals starting in their mid-30s and from all over the world.

Finally, we have a wide variety of projects from rustic to high comfort level, so there should be something for everyone. So it's not about roughing it, but about making a difference within a well-organised project and a quality experience with real outcomes at the end.

How does Biosphere Expeditions select its projects?

see also: www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFKNXhdtXNs

In a sense they select themselves. We receive about 50 approaches a year from scientists, NGOs or companies. All of them are sent instructions on how to put in a 2-page proposal, fitting their project into our format. 90% don't reply. Of the five that do, a few fall by the wayside more or less straight away, because they are too expensive, lack the scientific skills or credibility or take place in dangerous, unstable locations.

The one or two who make it past stage 1, go onto stage 2, which entails a very detailed proposal –

much like putting in a grant proposal, the instructions for which are 18 pages alone. We ask for samples of previous research work, CVs, how volunteers can be used effectively, proposed outcomes, community involvement, a detailed draft budget, health & safety information and many other details. If a project still looks feasible after all that, then we go and look at things on the ground during reconnaissance visits, becoming guinea pigs ourselves. If the research, safety, logistics (such as board & lodging), community involvement, possible outcomes are all ok, then we enter into a formal agreement with our partners and put the expedition online.

As you can see, it's a very involved process designed to ensure that we can achieve maximum benefit for our participants, local wildlife and people and that our expeditions have a genuine impact and generate real conservation outcomes. We then stay intimately involved with the project in the long-term, sending our staff on it each year and supporting our partners on the ground.

Is Biosphere Expeditions a brokering agency?

see also: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bld81ov5_cl

We know that with the proliferation in volunteering opportunities it's hard these days to tell quality, involved experiences from mere brokers. Biosphere Expeditions only does a handful of projects – about a dozen or so – and these we do well, know intimately and are heavily involved in. And that means that we take responsibility, working very closely with the expedition scientists, the local community & stakeholders. For example, next to our core research & conservation work, on many expeditions we have scholarship and educational programmes for local people or other community engagement and capacity-building activities.

We also send an expedition leader with every expedition. His or her function is to ensure the smooth running of logistics and that our core values of safety, science, satisfaction (in that order) are adhered to. He or she is also there for quality control, making sure you are properly integrated into the research & conservation work, that you get to do what we say you get to do and that you know your role within the bigger picture and understand the contribution you are making. We also make sure the expedition comes full circle for our participants by publishing a report after each expedition, which details exactly where your money went (and how we put at least 2/3 of it to-

wards the project) and what your contribution in terms of labour achieved in conservation.

There are very few organisations who send their own staff on the projects, let alone write up detailed reports – we do and that is one thing that really sets us apart from the many brokering agencies that are out there.

Can't locals do the work instead? How do they benefit?

see also: www.youtube.com/watch?v=foZBQ5FhOq8

Of course often they COULD, but often they lack equipment, skills, funding or the logistical framework to be able to run a conservation project. So Biosphere Expeditions comes and sets one up, but whilst doing so we also think of the future and capacity-building. We create educational & training programmes, scholarships and placements on our expeditions, thereby training up locals, building capacity and training the next generation of conservationists, wildlife guides, educators, etc. Local governments, NGOs & decision-makers also benefit from our work, because we make management recommendations, propose protected areas, species action plans, etc. Local people and communities benefit from job creation and training programmes. Poachers can become conservationists, because we offer alternative employment. Finally, we build capacity by putting facilities in place – for example research stations.

How likely are you to see animals?

see also: www.youtube.com/watch?v=pP2flkV9HE

First – Biosphere Expeditions is not a safari company, so with us you won't find the animals by spotting where the air-conditioned tour buses congregate. The likelihood of seeing animals varies from project to project.

In Africa, for example you are very likely to see many prey antelope and other species. In Western Australia, you will get very close and personal with turtles, measuring & tagging them, counting the eggs they lay. On the diving expeditions you will be right in the thick of it, floating weightlessly surrounded by reef life. If there is live trapping involved and we catch a cheetah or a leopard for example, people will have a unique experience with a truly wild animal. But you are unlikely to stumble across a snow leopard or a jaguar or a wolf or a bear in the wilderness. If it does happen, and it has, then you should consider yourself very lucky indeed.

What's this "conservation princess" stuff?

see also: www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKl8XSPWbMA

It just means that to join one of our expeditions you don't have to be a teenager wanting to rough it in the jungle. Our work is all about research and conservation, and we realise, of course, that well looked after and well fed people who have had a good night's sleep make for much better research assistants in the morning. So we try to make this happen wherever we can and our portfolio is so varied that there should be something for everyone, including for those who want to be "conservation princesses", or princes for that matter!

For example in Western Australia, a top-end resort has asked us to conduct turtle research on its stunning beach location. So we do this for them and the kickback is that we stay in a very swish resort for the expedition. Or on the Maldives, where we have a very luxurious liveaboard, which serves as our home and research base for our coral reef and whale shark expedition there. Or a bit further down the flagpole, on our Azores whale & dolphin project where we stay in a very cosy & comfortable manor house at night – and on a comfortable twin hull catamaran research vessel during the day when we are out at sea conducting our research work.

So there should be something there for everyone from conservation princess to hardcore conservation adventurer.

Is it for me?

First of all, if you are not sure, then simply join one of our taster days, which are for those who would like to dip into expedition life at home first, before committing to the real thing. Taster days will give you a unique insight into what it's like to be in the field with Biosphere Expeditions assisting scientists with wildlife research and conservation. Or come to one of our events to speak with us in person.

The people who then commit to join us in the field are those who care enough to become actively involved, those who want to come home and tell their friends not just what they saw, but also what they have done about it. Our experiences are real scientific research expeditions, not package holidays, and the way they are run reflects this. You will be living, breathing and sleeping on expedition air, working and sharing in our vision. And if you go to your bed tired out after a day's work, then that will only make the experience more enriching,

the memories stronger, and the sense of fulfilment more real. So if you are looking for an adventure with a conscience and a sense of purpose, unlike any tourist or ecotourist will ever have, then Biosphere Expeditions is for you.

Am I too old/young/unfit?

Not in a million years! We are all about being inclusive, so you are never too old or too young, or not fit enough. Have a look at the experiences we offer and pick one that you think is realistically achievable for you. If you are in any doubt, contact us for more details on what it's going to be like and for advice on whether it will be right for you. Oh, and just to put your mind at rest, our oldest expedition team member so far is 87.

Do I need special skills and/or fitness?

There are no special skills (biological or otherwise) at all required to join our expeditions and there are no age limits whatsoever. If you are disabled, please contact us to find out about the suitability of the experience of your choice. If you are healthy and enjoy the outdoors, your fitness level will be sufficient in most cases.

What's the accommodation and level of comfort like?

On our projects and expeditions across the world, the accommodation we use is always locally owned and varies between very comfortable African guest farms, to Amazon lodge research centres, to full blown expedition base tent camps. Whatever the accommodation, we never run 'hardcore' survival courses or anything of that sort. We feel strongly that our team members need to be well fed and comfortable in order to be motivated and efficient research assistants!

Will I be safe?

Yes. Although we are not in the business of controlling nature and expect you to take some responsibilities, safety is our top priority. Our three key watchwords are 'safety, science, satisfaction', in that order. We always have emergency procedures and backup systems in place and each new proposal we receive is put through a stringent safety test before it is added to our portfolio. Biosphere Ex-

peditions has an excellent safety record and it may also come as a surprise to you that statistically expedition life is no more dangerous than normal life at home and certainly far less dangerous than doing DIY! Achieving the expedition's research aims is important, but it cannot be considered successful unless it is also conducted responsibly, safely, harmoniously, and with regard for the environment.

Where does my money go?

The contribution you pay towards your 1-week project or 2-week expedition will go towards advance planning (reconnaissance, team recruitment and logistical support), direct field costs (such as your transport, board and lodging, paying the local scientists and helpers such as cooks and porters, and paying your expedition leader), post-expedition work (the expedition report, scientific publications and other means of making the results known to science and the public), towards supporting the research project itself (which without your help could not be long-term and sustainable), and towards administrative and communication backup.

On average at least two-thirds of your contribution will benefit the project directly and locally, the rest will go towards administrative back-up, as well as researching and setting up new expeditions. Within six to twelve months after your expedition you will receive an expedition report with full details on how your expedition contribution was spent on running the expedition and supporting its research work. The expedition report will also show you the fruits of your labour by detailing scientific findings, conclusions and resulting actions. You can see examples of expedition reports at www.biosphere-expeditions.org/reports.

How much does it cost and when do I pay?

Contributions vary between expeditions, projects and taster days, so please check the ones you are interested in by looking at our website. To reserve your place on an expedition or project, you need to send us a £300 deposit. To take part in a taster day a contribution of £65/€65/AU\$95 is due to reserve your place. It's as easy as that and the quickest way of doing it is online via www.biosphere-expeditions.org/join. For expedition and projects, the balance of your contribution will be due four weeks before the expedition or project starts.

What happens to the research data I collect and the conservation work I do?

We pride ourselves in our scientific output. Within six to twelve months of the end of your 2-week expedition or 1-week project, you will receive a report with full details on all conservation work done, the data collected, how this information was used and what the results were. This report will be made available to the public, the scientific community and relevant decision-makers in an effort to let the objects of your study and as many people as possible benefit from the work you have done. Where applicable, results will also be published in scientific journals. The report will also contain a detailed budget on how exactly your contribution was spent. So within a year at most, everything will come full circle for you and you will be able to see how your support on the two main levels of data collection and funding has made a difference.

How do I join a team and how do I pay?

Select an experience and a date, check availability on www.biosphere-expeditions.org/availability, then send us your deposit (£300 for a 2-week expedition or 1-week project) or full payment (£65 | US\$95 | AU\$95 for a taster day) to reserve your place. It's as easy as that and the quickest way of doing it is online via www.biosphere-expeditions.org/join. For 2-week expeditions or 1-week projects the full balance will be due four weeks before your experience starts (or immediately if it does within four weeks).

If you have any other questions please do not hesitate to contact us and we will be happy to help!

Research team, Namibia.



Cover picture:
sperm whale breaching,
taken in the Azores
© Lisa Steiner

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Biosphere Expeditions is a registered
not-for-profit organisation in England,
Germany, France, the USA and Australia

See www.biosphere-expeditions.org/nonprofit

