



SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION

# SHARK EDUCATION CENTRE

ANNUAL REPORT 2014

Extracted from the Save Our Seas Foundation Annual Report 2014



save our seas  
shark education centre









# SOSF SHARK EDUCATION CENTRE

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Over the past few years the Shark Centre at Kalk Bay in South Africa found itself in a unique situation, able to contribute to conservation education both physically, by immersing children in experience-focused activities, and financially, by accommodating schools that could otherwise not afford to offer their students such opportunities. With the emergence of this advantage, the decision was made to re-invent the centre as the Save Our Seas Foundation's Shark Education Centre, which would focus specifically on school-level education – although adults would also be welcome! In order to do this, educational staff would have to be appointed and new and exciting programming would have to be implemented. The position of education centre manager was created and I took it up on 1 April 2014. The next step was to confirm the appointment of Ntombizanele Mayiya as the assistant educator and she, along with the educator Paul Millar and the facilities administrator Heidi Thormählen, comprised the Shark Education Centre team for 2014.

With education now being not only the centre's primary focus but also the name of the game, the time had come to strategically develop its programming, exhibits, capacity and direction. Our goals are to ensure that the SOSF Shark Education Centre becomes a place of interest in Cape Town not to be missed, and that our marine education and conservation messages are spread far and wide.

As part of the vision for the SOSF Shark Education Centre, the building now also houses the Save Our Seas Foundation's Conservation Media Unit (CMU), a small, dynamic team that is dedicated to showcasing the foundation's marine conservation activities. Working in the same building gives the education staff and the CMU wonderful opportunities for collaboration, particularly by sharing knowledge and exchanging ideas. Moreover, the presence of people with these diverse backgrounds and interests, along with our researcher-in-residence (currently Lauren De Vos, who is doing PhD research funded by the Save Our Seas Foundation), enables visiting children to see examples of the different career opportunities that are available in marine science and conservation, and the various avenues there are for getting involved in the field.

The past 12 months have been full of change for the Shark Education Centre, with new decisions, new direction and new leadership – all of which have made it a very exciting year!

Looking back at 2014, the achievements and developments have been many and varied. We have reached more than 3,570 learners, even though there was so much else going on, such as building alterations, staff changes and the centre being closed to the public. This is a huge achievement and very promising for what lies ahead in 2015 and beyond.

Under the leadership of Paul Millar, the educational programming over the past year has comprised group visits to the centre, outreach, educational events and the very popular Marine Awareness Camps and Marine Explorers programme.

More than 1,500 schoolchildren in over 40 groups visited the centre and took part in a variety of programmes, most of which were tailored to the requirements of each group. The students ranged from Grade R to Grade 7 and they learned about sharks, rocky shores, False Bay's marine ecosystem, choosing sustainable seafood, and scientific method and hypothesis, among other subjects. Each programme has an in-classroom lesson component, which includes the use of multimedia and film, and an in-field expedition, during which learners are given the opportunity to experience the marine world by exploring, carrying out specific tasks, ask questions and generally get as 'hands-on' as possible.

As well as welcoming learners into the centre, our staff travelled regularly to different venues to give talks and present educational programming, either as part of an event or when groups were not able to visit us. The team did more than 10 of these outreach projects, which ranged from workshops with teenagers to discussion sessions with primary school learners. The topics of talks included careers in marine science and conservation; sharks; whales and dolphins; False Bay's marine ecosystem; rocky shores; choosing sustainable seafood the WWF-SASSI way; and marine conservation in general.



Among the educational events the centre organised, its holiday clubs proved very popular and catered for between 15 and 21 participants every day. The clubs provided 'edutainment' during the school holidays for children aged between five and 12 years who want to have fun and learn about the marine environment at the same time. We ran two clubs in 2014: a two-day club in the July school holidays and a three-day club during the summer break in December. Holiday club activities included rock-pooling, beach walks, harbour tours, baking, craft making, films and swimming. We have had wonderful feedback from children and parents alike.

As part of National Marine Week in October 2014, and in collaboration with BirdLife South Africa and its Celebrate Our Seas Festival, we ran an event called the 'Amazing Beach Race' on Fish Hoek beach. We had 19 participants, which was encouraging for an inaugural event of this nature, and the feedback was very positive. We plan to make this an annual event and expect that it will become a real highlight on the calendar.

Another feature of 2014 were the two Marine Awareness Camps that took place at the beautiful Soetwater Environmental Education Centre in front of Slangkop Lighthouse. Situated on the coast near Kommetjie, this site forms part of the Table Mountain National Park and is an excellent setting for our three-day residential camps. The camps are run free of charge for economically disadvantaged and coastal schools, with which we have already established a relationship in order to offer other programming, such as Marine Explorers. One was attended by 30 Grade 5 learners from Capricorn Primary School (which is located in an informal settlement close to Muizenberg beach), and the other by 22 Grade 5 pupils from Simon's Town Primary School.

Both camps provided team building, birding, hiking, recycling and litter collection, swimming, drama and cooking activities, as well as presentations by researchers and lessons about sharks and rocky shores. These pursuits were interspersed with many hours of field-based exploration and discovery. The camps are a real opportunity to introduce the marine environment to children who are







inherently unconnected to nature, even though they live so close to the sea. Once again, we have had wonderful feedback from the learners, educators and schools involved.

The final component of the 2014 educational programming was Marine Explorers, a 14-week in-water course that enables Grades 5 and 6 learners not only to experience the wonders of the ocean environment, but also to learn just how important the oceans are in maintaining the health of the planet – and just how much fun the sea can be! During the past year two groups from Capricorn Primary School took part, each consisting of 12 learners. One group participated from 2013 into early 2014 and the second from October 2014 into the first quarter of 2015.

The Shark Education Centre has partnered with the University of Cape Town Underwater Club, Pisce Divers PADI instructors and Xpression on the Beach Surf Shop to offer the learners a range of activities, equipment and instruction, as well as plenty of adult supervision! The centre provides wetsuits, masks, snorkels, fins and weight belts for the children, as well as transport. The course currently focuses on seven weeks of surfing and seven weeks of snorkelling, with the children being instructed and ultimately awarded a PADI Skin-Diver certificate. Additional marine education sessions are held at the Shark Education Centre and at the Two Oceans Aquarium.

All the programmes have been stand-out successes and have proven the Shark Education Centre's achievements in experiential environmental education.

The Shark Education Centre participated in many collaborative events in 2014, including Mandela Day, in which the centre and the CMU provided food, entertainment, activities and education to a crèche in Masiphumelele informal settlement; International Coastal Clean-up Day (administered through Plastics SA in partnership with the Ocean Conservancy), when we cleaned up the beach at Kalk Bay harbour and documented all the rubbish collected; and BirdLife South Africa's Celebrate Our Seas Festival during National Marine Week, in which we ran a beach event and participated in the Quest online competition. The centre



also sponsored a double-page spread (and provided a two-page article, with pictures) for the Wildlife and Environmental Society of South Africa's *EnviroKids* magazine.

The Wavescape Surf Film Festival, in December 2014, was a highlight. Although the CMU was the major SOSF participant in the main film festival, the Shark Education Centre featured in the Wavescape Fish Fry by providing children's edutainment, and produced marketing and other material to promote awareness of its activities. As the manager of the centre, I was also able to offer input into the planning and strategic direction of the festival. Our researcher-in-residence, Lauren De Vos, was the MC for the festival's Slide Night (of which the SOSF was a title sponsor) and she and I, as one of the invited speakers, created much exposure for the foundation and the centre.

Internally, the centre played host to four high-school work-shadow students as part of their Life Orientation curriculum. We also ran a very successful Documentaries and Debate series with the CMU.

With the Shark Education Centre's new approach in 2014, the interior of its home needed an upgrade to match. In May the renovation of the centre's exhibits got under way and after a number of workshops and brainstorming sessions we had a clearer idea of what was required of the exhibits and how best they could fit in with our mission. At this stage we needed the help of experts and Sunfish Consulting, spearheaded by Heidi De Maine, was contracted to lead the redesign process.

Although much of 2014 was taken up with planning, designing, and sourcing contractors and suppliers, a great deal has still been achieved and it feels that we have taken a huge step forward. The garage on the property, previously used for storage, was cleared out and is in the process of being turned into a ship-themed classroom space. As well as having a separate entrance for schoolchildren and secure storage for school bags and possessions, it will be furnished with seats, a table, a teaching screen and an area suitable for wet-work and arts and crafts. It has been exciting to watch the garage being transformed into the interior of







a ship, complete with curved wooden walls, portholes looking out onto the sea, a mast and ship's tables. The bulk of this work was completed in 2014.

The large fish tank on the premises will be upgraded and will have a touch-pool attached to it so that learning about rock pools will not be limited by tides, weather and capricious rock-pool creatures! The touch pool was commissioned in 2014 and will soon be ready. A new stand has been made for the tank and was put in place in December in readiness for the tank to be plumbed in with the touch pool.

Other plans approved in 2014 are gradually becoming reality. Two large murals for the centre have been commissioned, one depicting a pelagic shark and the other a kelp forest, complete with realistic 3D, touchable kelp and other living organisms found in the kelp ecosystem. All the visitor needs to know about the Save Our Seas Foundation and the Shark Education Centre will be found in the entrance lobby, along with context for Kalk Bay and False Bay, a digital poll and a visitor feedback section. The front room is being made over into 'Shark World' and will contain a large interactive table, a shark senses game and a wheel-of-fortune tooth match-up. A microscope, a camera and a large viewing screen will be set up next to the tank and touch-pool exhibit. There will also be an on-the-beach 'scratch patch', an interactive phone booth with information about marine creatures, touch panels representing the different skin textures of various sea animals, and a peep-through cartoon wall depicting the threats to the marine ecosystem and sharks. All in all, it's a huge body of work that has made every member of the team very excited about the future of the Shark Education Centre.

While all this goes on, the basic fabric of our building has needed attention too and a great deal of work has been done – and is continuing – under the supervision of Heidi Thormählen. The Shark Education Centre and CMU are housed in a beautiful old heritage building whose location in the seaside village of Kalk Bay makes it ideal for the purpose of marine education. However, it comes with the challenges associated with old buildings and heritage restrictions. In 2014 most of the house was rewired, 10 air conditioning units were installed, the tank

was upgraded and re-plumbed and the entire building was repainted. We have also started to install solar panels on the roof to generate enough electricity for our requirements, a process that is ongoing. Other work to facilitate our operations has included the installation of a switchboard and separate telephone lines as well as a new intercom system for security, and the custom manufacture of office furniture. All the while, general maintenance is carried out by our gardener and housekeeper.

Finally, in November and December 2014 the Shark Education Centre was thrilled to play host to the two winners of the Save Our Seas Foundation's Photo Grant competition, Joris van Alphen and Mac Stone. They were working on different projects in the False Bay area and, despite some challenging conditions for marine work (this is the peak season for the south-easterly wind, with very rough seas and poor visibility), they managed to achieve some wonderful results. It was a pleasure to collaborate where we could.

## **CREDITS**

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