



SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION

SHARK EDUCATION CENTRE

ANNUAL REPORT 2016

Extracted from the Save Our Seas Foundation Annual Report 2016



save our seas
shark education centre





SOSF SHARK EDUCATION CENTRE

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The annual South African Marine and Coastal Educators Network (MCEN) meeting was held in early January 2016, this time in Hermanus, Western Cape. Educator Paul Millar and assistant educator Zanele Mayiya joined me as we spent the week with a host of other environmental educators. We were all able to share lessons learnt during the course of our work and give examples of activities and lesson plans that we run, and we enjoyed some very interesting field trips. This week is always a time to recharge our batteries, re-connect with colleagues and be re-inspired about what we do and why we do it. It's also a chance to pick up some new tips and tricks, and we spend much of our time frantically writing down ideas to use in our own contexts throughout the coming year. This was also the first year that I served as the Western Cape representative on the national steering committee, so I was able to contribute to the running of this network that is such a vital support to those of us in the field. In addition, the Shark Education Centre hosted the Western Cape Regional MCEN conference in November 2016. It was a very successful day and the positive feedback on the proceedings and the venue was encouraging.

After the national conference in January it was back to the centre in Kalk Bay to plunge headlong into getting 2016 well and truly under way. The first item on the agenda was to get the front room, formerly used as an office, transformed into its new identity as 'Shark Central' – a space for exhibits dedicated to everything about sharks. The talented Chantal Ely, who has painted some of the spectacular murals around the centre, came back on board to create a shark-focused timeline, showcasing just how ancient sharks are. We relocated our fragile bio-facts to custom-made artefact stands that protect them from inquisitive little fingers and set up the other exhibits in the room. Some of these were specially designed to ensure that all the different learning senses, as well as a range of different technologies, are used when engaging with them. A physical egg-case match-up game has little surprise pictures of the baby sharks and rays. A light-up 'wheel of fortune' shows the different shapes of shark teeth and how they compare to human tools, as well as what prey they are designed for. Highly detailed and realistic 3D models of some of the world's most amazing sharks are mounted on

2016 was the year that the new incarnation of the Save Our Seas Foundation (SOSF) Shark Education Centre really came together. It was a very busy year, full of hard work (and lots of fun), and by the time it drew to a close there was finally an end in sight to all the changes we've been making ... and a beginning to ensuring that we get the very best out of these changes in the future.

the 'Wow!' wall. And then there's the high-tech touch table with a custom-built 'shark game' that was relocated to Shark Central from the foyer.

The cherry on top of the Shark Central cake, however, was most definitely the arrival of the Shark Senses virtual reality exhibit in mid-2016. This was commissioned to enable the user to understand at first hand what it feels like to be a shark in search of its prey and to use all the senses that sharks deploy in their hunts, which are different and more powerful than the senses that humans use every day. The user is positioned inside a life-size model of a shark's head, which enables them to see through the eyes of the shark. They hear, see and smell as a shark would, feel the electrical impulses given off by their prey, and swim through the environment until they have caught it. This was a real breakthrough for us and is very different from anything else on offer anywhere in the world. It has been awarded an internationally acclaimed 2016 Red Dot Award for Communication Design. We are extremely proud of our one-of-a-kind, immersive, cutting-edge interactive. With signage up, everything in place and the door removed, Shark Central was a go!

Also inside the building, the final additions were made to the renovated exhibits. Dial-an-animal is a new, themed, wall-mounted telephone with five 'animals' to call. When called, each one spends a minute or two talking about its life, what it eats, where it lives, etc. – a real hit with our learners! A peep-hole viewing station, with secret drawers containing information about what we can do in our everyday lives to help the oceans and with brochure holders containing information pamphlets, was built around a TV screen showing an animation loop about the threats that sharks are facing. This animation was made especially for the Shark Education Centre. A new artwork, made from Perspex, of a shark swimming through a shoal of sardines was mounted onto the Seashore classroom wall. Then the final signage was installed, some additional touch panels were added, and we were just about ready to go.

Another great achievement of 2016's finishing touches to the renovations was the addition of an outdoor sustainable living courtyard. The back garden, where visiting groups take their snack breaks, has been turned into a showcase

of upcycling, recycling and re-using. The pool is now covered with a removable deck, which serves as a safety device and provides an extra seating area. The walls feature all sorts of ideas for how to use space and create new items from waste: a mural made from glass bottles; two vertical wall gardens with water-wise succulents planted in plastic cool-drink bottles and old coffee sacks; pallet gardens; and painted car-tyre planters.

A seascape mosaic path, made of plastic bottle caps set in clear resin, has been inlaid into the paving stones leading from the back door of the centre to the large new recycling station, from which metal, plastic, paper and glass are collected weekly. As a gesture of goodwill and an incentive to get more people recycling, we have made the station available to the local community to dispose of their recyclables. Also found in the back garden are a smack of jellyfish, a large turtle, an orca, a number of crabs, a baby seal and a hammerhead shark – all made from upcycled trash objects!

The front garden has been entirely replanted with water-wise indigenous plants and is now thriving. Plants that resemble a coral reef were allocated to a special section in preparation for the arrival of one of our most spectacular commissions: a four-metre-long (13-foot), anatomically correct sculpture of a great hammerhead shark made entirely out of recycled tyres. This was created to our specifications by Cape Town artist Jules Armstrong. In pride of place on the corner of Main and Dalebrook roads, the huge shark has become a major visitor attraction. It replaces the sculpture of a white shark, which is now prominently positioned next to the front door, perfectly highlighted against the building's white walls. The blue entrance gate has been replaced with a beautiful custom-designed metal gate featuring sharks and rays, and a welcoming mural has been created on the wall facing the gate. Now learners coming to the centre really do feel welcomed and excited about their experience right from the start!

Looking forward, only a few small additions are still to be made before we can finally say 'We've finished!'

Unfortunately, we also had a major setback in 2016 in the form of a burst geyser in the roof, which flooded the building and caused major damage. Because



Photo by Grant Atkinson



Photo by Michael Scholl



of the complications that accompany heritage status as a listed building in terms of structural repair and methodology, as well as the very old building itself (which has clay bricks and oregon pine floors more than 100 years old, for example), this proved more of a setback than might have been expected. Very fortunately, none of the new exhibits were damaged, but it took six months to fix the structural damage to the building and the work was finished only just in time for the end of the year. Thanks to the completed Ship Classroom (formerly the garage), we were able to shift most of our teaching across and still managed to accommodate our group bookings during this period.

During 2016 more than 60 groups visited the Shark Education Centre for a day out to explore the rock pools and to learn about sharks and what we can do to help conserve our oceans and marine environment. Ranging from Grade R through to Grade 12 and beyond to tertiary level, a total of approximately 2,000 learners from a wide range of economic, social and cultural groups came from all over Cape Town. There were also occasions when learners were not able to visit the centre, and then the education staff went out to the schools, making about one visit every two months during the course of the year.

In addition, we gave many successful public talks to clubs and associations, quite a few of which were followed up with bookings for excursions to the centre. One highlight for all was the collaboration between the Shark Education Centre, Metrorail and the Mary Kihn School for the Hearing Impaired and Deaf, an educational day out to celebrate Mandela Day (held annually in July to honour Nelson Mandela); another was the visit from 10 young people involved in the Pangaea/Pole2Pole Project with Mike Horn, the well-known explorer.

We also continued with our very successful Marine Explorers initiative, operating two six-month programmes in 2016. Once again, these were run with Capricorn Primary School and Muizenberg Junior School, both of which are within easy reach of Muizenberg beach and False Bay. In each programme, 12 Grade 5 learners were introduced to surfing for three months, followed by snorkelling for three months. Our supporters were as generous as ever. Xpression on the Beach sponsored board rental for the programmes. Pisces Dive Centre and



Photos by Bernadette Vriens



PADI provided a dive instructor and dive master to teach the necessary skills, supervise pool and sea dives, and make sure that by the end of three months every participant was awarded PADI skin diver certification. The University of Cape Town's (UCT) Underwater Club volunteers provided weekly in-water supervision and help that was absolutely critical to the programmes' success. And Reef Wetsuits sold us all the equipment for the programmes at generous rates.

Following on from the Marine Explorers programmes, we once again ran two Marine Awareness camps at the Soetwater Environmental Education Centre in Kommetjie during the year, one in the mid-year school holiday and one at the end of the year. These camps were run for the same schools as the Marine Explorers, and also with Grade 5, but because 30 children attended each camp, those who were not able to participate in the Marine Explorers programmes could still be exposed to some of the wonders of our coastline. For three days they were immersed in the best sort of learning – experiential, field-based, active and fun! The residential camps were fully sponsored by the SOSF and the Shark Education Centre, and this meant that those who normally would never have the opportunity to experience activities like these were given a chance to do so. UCT's Underwater Club volunteers joined us on both camps, making our job easier and enriching the experience for the participants.

In the South African school holiday periods we again offered our Holiday Clubs for children aged 6–11 who want to have fun and learn about the ocean. Due to popular demand, in 2016 we offered four of these, one in each holiday. As in the past, they proved extremely popular and were fully booked long in advance, with up to 20 children attending each day. Each Holiday Club lasted for between two and four days and included such activities as shark lessons, rock-pooling, science experiments, beach hunts, coastal walks, harbour tours, arts and crafts, baking and, of course, a lot of swimming! 2016 saw the start of a great collaboration between Shark Spotters and the Shark Education Centre, with Shark Spotters participating and running several activities as part of the Holiday Clubs.

Towards the end of the year we participated once again in the annual Wavescape Film Festival, of which the SOSF is a key sponsor. This year our



involvement took a slightly different form as, together with the SOSF media team, Shark Spotters and the National Sea Rescue Institute, we played a role in the new event 'Beach Reach', running an activity for young beach-goers to learn more about sharks and the oceans around us and how to look after our marine environment.

We also hosted a scientific mini-conference, the National Underwater Imagery Science workshop, which was attended by about 45 delegates daily over a three-day period. The delegates were scientists from different spheres in South Africa: government, academic, NGO and parastatal. This was a double-edged opportunity: for us to stay linked into the South African marine science network, and to introduce to the scientists the work we are doing. The revamped Shark Education Centre and all its exhibits were a huge hit with all, as were the SOSF magazine and calendar that each delegate received.

A highlight of the year was the visit of Daniela Vilema, environmental communicator with the Darwin Foundation in the Galápagos. She stayed with us for three weeks over November and December, giving us a wonderful opportunity to collaborate, share ideas and learn from one another – and, of course, for the groups that we had during that time to learn a little more about the Galápagos' unique and iconic marine ecosystem. Her visit was timed to coincide with a large variety of our activities: Marine Explorers, Marine Awareness Camp, Holiday Club, Wavescape Film Festival and some school group visits. Collaboration is vital in so many ways, and it was so valuable to us all to be able to work together.

Our small team had a bit of change in 2016 when Heidi Thormählen, our facilities administrator, left at the end of February and was replaced by Claire Metcalf, who arrived at the beginning of May. Claire immediately fitted into the team and has been a wonderful addition.

Looking back over the year, the theme that stands out for me is that of collaboration. There have been so many new collaborative initiatives that we have been part of or have started: we have had visits; we have attended networking meetings; we have collaborated on events. There are longstanding collaborations that continue to run and grow from strength to strength, proving what a powerful

tool this can be. And there are new collaborations that we are very excited about starting. One of my favourite quotes from Aristotle, 'The whole is more than the sum of its parts', is key to this, I believe, and will hopefully set the tone for the exciting year to come!



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