

Letter to the Editor

2023 AMMPA Annual Meeting

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The Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA) held its 2023 Annual Leadership Meeting on May 2–4 in Destin/Fort Walton Beach, Florida. Hosted by the Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park, 120 AMMPA members and friends from eight countries attended this year's meeting, which featured a special emphasis on marine mammal and conservation research.

The meeting kicked off with a presentation by Kathleen Dudzinski, Ph.D., *Aquatic Mammals* editor and director of the Dolphin Communication Project, on understanding marine mammals from multiple perspectives informed by *in situ* and *ex situ* research. Her presentation was followed by an AMMPA science symposium that included highlights of research conducted at AMMPA facilities. Speakers in the symposium included Jason Bruck, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Biology at Stephen F. Austin State University, who spoke on conservation-focused research in a zoological setting; Tracy Romano, Ph.D., vice president of research and chief scientist at Mystic Aquarium, who spoke about how marine mammal research can inform conservation and management; Andreas Fahlman, Ph.D., senior researcher at the Fundación Oceanográfica, who spoke on lung function testing as a tool to evaluate lung health; Austin Allen, Ph.D., a postdoctoral researcher at Duke University, who spoke on measuring cetacean energy expenditure to determine human disturbance impacts; and Kelly Jaakkola, Ph.D., chair of AMMPA's Scientific Advisory Committee and director of research at Dolphin Research Center, who spoke on mechanisms and strategies of cooperation in bottlenose dolphins and how anthropogenic noise interferes with them.

Later in the program, Kelley Winship, Ph.D., a conservation biology scientist at the National Marine Mammal Foundation, spoke on using technology for welfare enhancement and health monitoring in marine mammals, sharing compelling video footage of animals using various technologies; and Forrest Gomez, director of conservation medicine at the National Marine Mammal

Foundation, spoke about Operation Grace, a global rescue initiative of at-risk cetaceans and ecosystems.

Attendees also heard talks by Keith Mullin, Ph.D., Marine Mammal and Turtle Division, Southeast Fisheries Science Center of the National Marine Fisheries Service, on whale and dolphin research in the Gulf of Mexico; Kelly George, Ph.D., executive director of the Zoological Association of America, on the effect of human–animal interactions on attitudes toward animal welfare; Matt James, chief animal officer at Colossal Biosciences, on how his company is working to leverage innovative technologies to preserve and restore nature; and Mark Simmons, managing partner at OERCA, on how animal behavioral management and training are essential to species conservation.

The meeting included legislative and policy presentations by Robert Meister, managing director of Dolphin Encounters, on the Bahamas and Dominican Republic; Lee Kellar, general curator of Coral World Ocean Park, on the Caribbean; Laura van der Meer, director of MEA Strategies, on the European Union; Fernando Delgado C., DVM, chief of operations and animal welfare officer of Delphinus, on Mexico; Rita Irwin, president & CEO of the Dolphin Research Center, Patricia Nelson, principal with the OB-C Group, Corrine Brindley, corporate vice president of external affairs for SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, Jade Haughian, general manager of Dolphin Quest Oahu, and Laurie Macha, senior director of marine mammals and birds at Mystic Aquarium, on the U.S.; and Tom Albert, consultant, on animal rights legislation.

Mae Wu, deputy undersecretary of marketing and regulatory programs at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and Carolyn McKinnie, DVM, senior veterinary medical officer for marine mammals and exotics at the Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) of the USDA, gave updates on the priorities and work of APHIS and the USDA. Laura van der Meer, director of MEA Strategies, and Michael Kreger,

Ph.D., vice president of conservation for the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, spoke about their experiences at Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) meetings and why participation in CITES is important.

The Clearwater Marine Aquarium was welcomed as a newly accredited AMMPA member, and six prospective AMMPA members made presentations about their facilities: Dolphin Adventure in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico; Cabo Dolphins in Los Cabos, Mexico; Ocean World in the Dominican Republic; Texas State Aquarium; Oceans of Fun in Hershey Park, Pennsylvania; and SeaWorld Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. Four facilities were recognized for earning reaccreditation this year: Chicago Zoological Society/Brookfield Zoo, Delphinus Puerto Morelos, Marineland Dolphin Adventure, and Pittsburgh Zoo & Aquarium.

The meeting was preceded by an Alliance Board and Committee Chair meeting. New incoming board member Doug Warmolts, vice president of animal care at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, was welcomed at the meeting, and outgoing board member Lee Kellar, general curator at Coral World Ocean Park, was thanked for his service.

Presenting AMMPA committee chairs, vice chairs, and board members included Shelley Ballmann, chair of the Membership Committee and president & CEO of Ocean Connections and Oceans of Fun Hershey Park; Patrick Berry, AMMPA treasurer and executive director of Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park; Michelle Campbell, AMMPA past-chair and executive vice president at Dolphin Quest/Quest Global Management; Dennis Christen, vice chair of the Accreditation Committee and senior director of zoological operations, animal training, mammals, and birds at Georgia Aquarium; Fernando Delgado C., DVM, vice chair of AMMPA and chief of operations and animal welfare officer at Delphinus; Kathleen Dezio, AMMPA president & CEO; Eric Gaglione, AMMPA board chair and vice president of zoological operations at Georgia Aquarium; Andy Horn, chair of the Sponsorship Committee and curator of marine mammals, training, and animal interactive programs at Mississippi Aquarium; Meredith Horn, chair of the Communications Committee and vice president of guest experience and education at Mississippi Aquarium; Kelly Jaakkola, chair of the Scientific Advisory Committee and director of research at the Dolphin Research Center; Terran McGinnis, chair of the Education Committee and facility historian and manager of community development at Marineland Dolphin Adventure; Lance Miller, Ph.D., chair of the Animal Welfare Committee and vice president of

conservation science and animal welfare research at the CZS/Brookfield Zoo; Jay Sweeney, DVM, chair of the Veterinary Committee and partner at Dolphin Quest; and Rita Stacey Vondra, chair of the Accreditation Committee and a consultant at Brookfield Zoo.

The meeting also included updates from representatives from other trade associations, including Jessica Fox, DVM, CertAqV, for the American Veterinary Medicine Association; Jill Nizan, director of conservation operations for American Humane; Andy Horn, curator of marine mammals, training, and animal interactive programs at Mississippi Aquarium, for the International Marine Animal Trainers' Association; and Guillermo Sánchez Contreras, DVM, MsC, director of veterinary services and research at The Dolphin Company, for the European Association for Aquatic Mammals.

Sponsors of the 2023 meeting included AMHMAR, Atlantic/Pacific, Birch Horton Bittner & Cherot, Bionic Zoo and Aquarium, Columbus Zoo, DEFI Fiberglass, Dolphin Quest, Georgia Aquarium, Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park, Immotion Group Plc., McRoberts Sales Co., MicroGlass, MIG, Inc., Mike Stahl Seafood, Peppermint Narwhal, PGAV Destinations, Pisces Seafood, RocketRez, and TJP Engineering.

