

Letter to the Editor

EAAM Symposium

Marine Mammals in Need: Let People Know that We Are Part of the Solution

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At the beginning of March this year, the European Association for Aquatic Mammals held its 51st annual scientific symposium which took place at the Oceanogràfic – Valencia in Spain.

After two consecutive years of digital meetings, more than a hundred participants from different countries had the opportunity to meet in Valencia and were thus able to discuss their respective scientific and educational projects and their actions in favour of aquatic mammals' welfare and protection.

One subject was on everyone's lips: aquatic ecosystems are degrading all over the world and their inhabitants, especially mammals, are facing increasing threats.

Several rescue operations involving institutions housing aquatic mammals were presented such as the successful attempts to bring several killer whales found stranded on the Argentinian coast back to the sea or the widely publicized intervention to save a beluga lost in the Seine. These cases were dramatic illustrations of a general trend. At the population level, several presentations confirmed the increasing difficulty of numerous species of aquatic mammals to cope with the modification of their habitats, epidemics, and many factors of anthropic origin.

In such a situation, it is obvious that anyone with expertise in marine mammalogy has a role to play and must focus their action to better understand what precisely is happening, to what extent animals are affected, and on how to put in place tested and efficient measures, but also on how to convince a larger part of society to adopt conservation-oriented behaviours. As our host summed it up so well, "The ocean is in our hands."

The diversity of topics covered over these five days reflected the vitality of aquatic mammal science and demonstrated how the scientific potential of many accredited zoological institutions is key to protecting animal welfare and supporting effective conservation actions both *in* and *ex situ*.



Veterinarians, ethologists, zoologists, educators, and engineers, through informal exchanges (a conference without a coffee break is not a conference), presentations, and round tables, agreed on a key idea: the link between research and actions *in* and *ex situ* must be further strengthened. The potential for additional collaborations is there and must be harnessed in the best interests of aquatic animals' welfare and protection.

The quality of this conference also owes much to all the invited specialists who brought so many innovative ideas to our community in terms of scientific and conservation initiatives.

Summarizing what happened during this week of March would be too difficult, which is why the proceedings are available on the EAAM website (www.eaam.org), and everyone is invited to discover several of the participants and their interventions on our social networks: Instagram (@eaam_org) and LinkedIn.

If you are a researcher, environmental defender, ethologist, animal caretaker, veterinarian, or

pedagogue and you missed this event in 2023, prepare yourself for the next edition of our scientific symposium, which will be held from 11 to 17 March 2024 in Loro Parque, Tenerife, Spain.

The EAAM would like to thank all those who made this conference an inspiring moment and, more specifically, the enthusiastic team of Oceanografic.



Managing Editor's Note

Willem Dudok van Heel was the fire behind launching the *Aquatic Mammals* journal in 1972 (see his Historical Perspectives essay: Dudok van Heel, 2009). He did so under the auspices of EAAM, which makes the

European Association of Aquatic Mammals the original parent and long-term supporter of the journal. We thank EAAM for their continued support of the journal and the peer-review process.