

Visitor Center

We opened the Visitor Center's doors on August 1st after being closed for a year and a half. It has been such a joy to connect with the public and hear the buzzing of energy around the center again. Visitors were very appreciative to come in and explore the exhibits in a safe way. As they enter the center, they start their visit by the octopus tank and end their one way loop with the new R/V Taani Simulator. Most of the reserved spots have filled up daily! Thank you to all of the amazing volunteers that signed up for shifts in August. We could not do it without you!



Photo by Jaimie Hart



Photo by Trav Williams/Broken Banjo Photography

New Volunteer Highlight Eggi Kochta

Eggi is an engineer born and raised in Germany. She moved to the Silicon Valley in 1989 and worked in the chip design space. In 2006 she joined an environmental startup and learned more about sustainability and the human impact on our precious resources. After leaving the bay area in 2016, she traveled around the country in an RV and visited many of the beautiful sites and parks like Yellowstone and Glacier National Park.



She always dreamed of living near the ocean and settled in Nye Beach last year. She enjoys hiking, walking on the beach and playing fetch with her dog. Eggi is excited to be volunteering at both the Oregon Coast Aquarium and the Hatfield Visitor Center! She is looking forward to learning more about the ocean and the ecosystems in and around it.

Sea Star Wasting Disease Update

By Emily Bjornsgard

Sea Star Wasting Disease has been a topic of interest since the large outbreak on the US west coast in 2013. In a short period of time, days to weeks in some areas, sea stars began to disappear off the coast from Alaska to Mexico. The outbreak affected over 20 species of sea stars, including two notable species, the Sunflower Star (*Pycnopodia helianthoides*) and the Ochre Star (*Pisaster ochraceus*), which saw losses of 95-100% of individuals in some areas. Symptoms of Sea Star Wasting continue to persist in wild populations along our coastline, though in relatively low concentrations, according to MARiNe a multi-agency organization that monitors the coastline from Southeast Alaska to Mexico.



An Ochre Star showing sea star wasting symptoms, a missing arm and a white lesion at Seal Rock State Park, 2021.

These symptoms include white lesions developing on the aboral side (top, opposite of mouth), a generally deflated look, and in severe cases the loss of arms and often degeneration into a white goo-like material.

Since 2013, there have been several hypotheses proposed to explain this phenomenon including viral and bacterial infections, climate change, and others. Current research points to a build-up of microorganisms that cause suffocation. Sea stars respire through skin gills, called papulae. When these microorganisms build up on the skin, they use up the oxygen near the skin gills. The sea stars are unable to get enough oxygen and eventually die.

In the past year, there have been some really exciting developments in this research. Scientists at the University of Washington have observed the decline in the Sunflower Stars, and have begun to study them in the hope of reintroducing them to the wild in the future. Fourteen one-year-old Sunflower Stars currently live in the UW Friday Harbor labs, with goals to eventually raise 1,000. This research gives hope that the Sunflower Stars may eventually make a comeback.

What does this all have to do with our Visitor Center? There is a very special Ochre Star, currently living in Touch Pool 3 that has survived Sea Star Wasting not once, but twice! During the initial outbreak in 2013-2014, this sea star developed symptoms and lost one of its arms. A year later it developed symptoms again and lost a second arm. However, since then it has been in the process of regenerating the limbs it lost, and is thriving here in the care of the aquarists. This sea star, as well as the juveniles growing in human care in Washington, offers hope for the future discoveries regarding this interesting topic.



A two-time Sea Star Wasting survivor, currently living in Touch Pool 3.