

GLOBAL OUTLOOK | Safeguarding natural assets

World Heritage program offers a model for marine protected areas and global conservation efforts

As a young child in Ajaccio, Corsica, Napoleon Bonaparte was surrounded by the beauty of the Mediterranean, as well as the economic activity it generated. As an adult, he was to observe, “Riches do not consist in the possession of treasures, but in the use made of them.”

Last month in Ajaccio, managers from World Heritage marine sites all over the world gathered to discuss the best use of the treasures for which they are responsible — 46 sites that represent the crown jewels of the ocean. The purpose of the meeting was to encourage a stronger and more consolidated network of site managers, explains Fanny Douvère, coordinator of the World Heritage Marine Program. Given their role-model status in the realm of ocean conservation, they wield significant influence in the protection of marine areas worldwide, she explains. Strengthening their network will better prepare them to lead the charge for many international biodiversity and conservation efforts, such

as the biodiversity targets set by the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity for 2011-20.

The challenges site managers face are similar, in spite of the differences among the sites. Many have to deal with pollution, commercial interests, overfishing and invasive species. Ibiza in Spain struggles with its popularity as a travel destination, and the West Norwegian Fjords must manage large cruise ships during peak tourist season.

The challenges for Australia’s Ningaloo Coast include the management of recreational activities, threats from nearby mining and energy companies, feral animals and bushfires. Overdevelopment is a big issue in locations such as the Florida Everglades, northern Europe’s Wadden Sea and Australia’s Great Barrier Reef.

The Galápagos Islands have too many visitors, including feral animals that threaten indigenous wildlife.

The Aldabra Atoll in the Seychelles also has invasive species, as well as pirates who sometimes land on its remote beaches.

Climate change is another common problem. Every site with a coral reef must confront the phenomenon of coral bleaching as a result of global warming. Every site used as a breeding ground for sea turtles is becoming warmer, and higher sand temperatures lead to more female hatchlings, threatening turtle viability over the long term. What is bad for turtles and marine ecosystems in general may sometimes be good for whales, however: the higher temperatures and increased salinization of the seas make it easier for newborn whales to reach the surface and take their first breaths, so the Whale Sanctuary of El Vizcaino in Mexico notes happier babies and less-stressed mothers.

Remoteness makes management difficult on

Wrangel Island, a Russian site in the Arctic Sea so removed from the rest of the world that woolly mammoths were roaming there long after they had died off elsewhere. Gough Island and Inaccessible Island — in the South Atlantic about 2,600 kilometers (just over 1,600 miles) from Cape Town, South Africa, and about 2,500 miles from Montevideo, Uruguay — see a South African polar research vessel pass just once a year.

Managers of World Heritage marine sites have faced these challenges with a variety of programs as creative as the problems are complex. The Ajaccio meeting was valuable in enabling colleagues to share their solutions face to face, in formal presentations and informal conversations. Some sites emphasize community outreach. Others work intensively with the local political infrastructure. Still others stress educational activities with nearby schools or with distant university research institutes. One site’s focus is a mapping of habitats; another may concentrate on long-term

monitoring; a third stresses site integrity through patrolling and protection. Sites invariably have a combination of these initiatives, as well as an assessment mechanism in place to adjust them periodically.

The experience of World Heritage marine site managers benefits conservation efforts globally, says Douvère. “By bringing together their success stories,” she says, “we can also translate them in ways that make them suitable for replication in other marine protected areas.” ■

UNESCO | World Heritage Marine Program

Network helps strengthen management practices

Corsica’s ruby-red cliffs and sparkling sapphire waters formed an appropriate backdrop to a meeting last month of the keepers of the ocean’s crown jewels: managers of marine sites on Unesco’s World Heritage List.

There are 46 such sites in 35 countries, and 43 of the site managers came together in Ajaccio, Corsica, Oct. 18-20. The meeting place was chosen in part for its proximity to Scandola Nature Reserve, rich in natural beauty and itself a World Heritage site since 1983. The timing was planned to precede a major gathering of marine conservationists, the International Marine Protected Areas Congress, held in nearby Marseille, Oct. 21-27.

All World Heritage marine sites are by definition protected areas, but their impact among marine protected areas is disproportionate to their numbers. There are about 6,000 such protected marine areas, but only 46 of them have the highest international status for conservation, a place on the World Heritage List, recognized for their “outstanding universal value” and iconic importance to the world — not only to ocean advocates but to all of humanity. The World Heritage marine sites account collectively, by surface area, for a quarter of all marine protected areas.

In his keynote address to the group, Kishore Rao, director of Unesco’s World Heritage Centre, emphasized that outstanding universal value pertains not only to biodiversity, but also to the beauty, geology, ecosystem processes and/or habitats of the sites.

For example, 16 World Heritage marine sites are key points in the global phenomenon that is bird migration (up to 40 percent of the planet’s hundreds of billions of birds migrate annually). Whales also migrate: the Whale Sanctuary of El Vizcaino, Mexico, is the world’s major breeding area for the North Pacific gray whale and is important for migrating blue whales, seals and sea lions as well. Other marine sites contribute to the survival of sea turtles and sharks.



Fanny Douvère, coordinator of the World Heritage Marine Program, which includes 46 sites.

They also dazzle with their superlative beauty above and beneath the waves. Tropical rain forests interact with aquatic ecosystems, active volcanoes spill red lava into azure waters, isolated islands like the Galápagos give rise to indigenous species that have changed our understanding of human development. All underscore the interconnectedness between earth’s green and blue dimensions.

Fanny Douvère, coordinator of the World Heritage Marine Program, notes that “management actions focused on exceptional places like these are among the best tools we have to make a difference. Marine World Heritage lies at the heart of that solution; they truly are the crown jewels of the ocean.”

The site managers meeting was designed to strengthen management skills through presentations and shared experiences. During their working sessions, managers had the opportunity to discuss common problems, practice communications and marketing techniques, and analyze management success stories drawn from their ranks.

This was the second get-together for

marine managers since the marine program was launched by Unesco in 2005; the first was held in Hawaii in December 2010. On both occasions, attendees also included representatives from the International Marine Protected Areas Congress, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the World Wide Fund for Nature. Sponsors of the World Heritage Marine Program include the Swiss watchmaker Jaeger-LeCoultre, the International New York Times, the Netherlands and the region of Flanders, Belgium, the territorial collectivity of Corsica, the France-Unesco Cooperation Agreement, the Agency of Marine Protected Areas of France, the World Wide Fund for Nature, the non-profit public relations company Resource Media and the German Federal Environment Ministry through its Blue Solutions Initiative.

Since the first meeting, the World Heritage marine strategy has included a greater focus on public and political attention, the creation of a qualified management community around each site, the development of good management practices and the identification of gaps in coverage.

What is needed now, says Douvère, is to bring the entire network up to speed with a sustainable funding mechanism in support of it. She told the International Marine Protected Areas Congress that 35 countries collectively spend about \$200 million each year to manage the 46 sites, but a handful of high-income countries account for most of that funding, while more than two-thirds of sites are woefully underfunded. She called for a fourfold increase in funding, especially to low-income countries. “We need to get this right to change the direction of marine management globally,” she said. “This is our responsibility to the world today, and to our children and grandchildren. If we can’t protect these special 46 World Heritage marine sites, designated for their outstanding natural values, what hope is there for the rest of the oceans?” ■

The art of knowledge transfer

The kinds of artisanship applied in the creation of Jaeger-LeCoultre timepieces are myriad, and not all of them can be learned at school. For example, producing the simplest Reverso watch calls for 1,434 different operations, over 90 percent of which involve manual dexterity. The tiny lever in the escapement device that marks off the ticking of a Jaeger-LeCoultre watch involves 31 operations alone.

To ensure that such expertise — both intellectual understanding and technical skill — is passed on in a consistent way, the manufacture created a training center for apprentice watchmakers. It also holds regular workshops for them and other collaborators eager to

hone their knowledge or learn specialized skills.


In the Vallée de Joux, where Jaeger-LeCoultre is headquartered, there is a school for fledgling watchmakers and students of micromechanics. During three years of training, practice is acquired at the Jaeger-LeCoultre manufacture. Students have the opportunity to refine traditional watchmaking skills, work with new technologies or rediscover ancient crafts such as miniature enameling.

Newly hired employees work with established masters to perpetuate the knowledge that Jaeger-LeCoultre has built up over 180 years.


According to Janek Deleskiewicz, the company’s artistic director: “Managing a team of designers from

all around the world is exciting but also challenging. Each morning can be compared with a rehearsal of an orchestra. They all approach me with different ideas for the projects they are working on. I try to guide them through their own thought process in their daily work of designers combining tradition and innovation in the spirit of Jaeger-LeCoultre.”

The manufacture devotes an entire department to the conservation and perpetuation of its corporate history — enriching, preserving, studying and sharing knowledge relating to Jaeger-LeCoultre since 1833. A Heritage Gallery, traveling exhibitions and various publications are among its ongoing projects.



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