

# UNESCO Marine World Heritage

Beacons of Hope in a Changing Ocean

## 2020-2021 ANNUAL OVERVIEW



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



World  
Heritage  
Convention

p02

OUR MISSION

p03

MARINE WORLD  
HERITAGE AT  
A GLANCE

p05

THE IMPACT  
OF COVID-19

p06

LOCAL IMPACT  
WITH GLOBAL  
REACH

p09

BUILDING  
RESILIENCE

p11

SCIENCE &  
INNOVATION

p13

OUR PARTNERS

p14

A GLOBAL TEAM  
OF EXPERTS





## OUR MISSION

Since the inscription of the first marine site on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1981, marine sites have grown into a global collection of 50 ocean places across 37 nations. Places of Outstanding Universal Value to humanity. Places that team with marine life and provide food and income for thousands of people.

Protecting this shared marine World Heritage is increasingly difficult. Rising temperatures, ocean acidification and coral bleaching events all compound pressures such as unsustainable fishing or invasive species. The COVID-19 pandemic seriously impacted local conservation budgets and shifted priorities away from conservation.

Protecting these exceptional places is a shared responsibility of us all. We are deeply grateful to our partners and the many talented, dedicated women and men who step up, take action and rise to the challenge. It is thanks to them that marine World Heritage sites are beacons of hope in a changing ocean.

LEARN MORE:  
[Marine Programme General Brochure](#)

We unite the best in science and practice to empower local management and deliver on our shared commitment to preserve the world's most outstanding marine heritage so it will thrive for generations to come.





# UNESCO MARINE WORLD HERITAGE AT A GLANCE

50

marine World Heritage sites in 37 countries, reflecting nearly all major marine ecosystems under national jurisdiction

10%

of all marine protected areas by surface area

OVER  
20%

of the planet's known blue carbon ecosystems are stored in marine World Heritage sites

100%

of marine sites have management systems preventing them from being paper parks

3

marine sites are inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger





# UNESCO MARINE WORLD HERITAGE AT A GLANCE

Marine World Heritage sites cover:

- The world's **last stronghold for iconic species** including the critically endangered Vaquita, the marine iguana, the Royal Bengal Tiger.
- The world's **highest density of ancestral polar bear dens**, largest Pacific Walrus and King Penguin colonies and the largest aggregation of whale sharks currently known to science.
- **Time capsules of earth's history.**
- A kaleidoscope of colour and **breath-taking natural underwater scenery.**



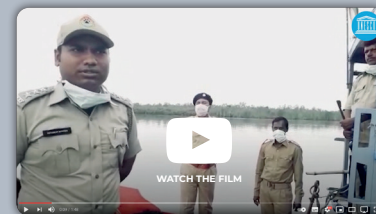




# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic and the wave of lockdowns across the globe had unprecedented effects for UNESCO marine World Heritage sites. The steep decline in tourism revenues left many sites struggling to keep rangers on the payroll, prevent illegal activity or to continue much needed research and monitoring.

While local communities have seen a drastic reduction of their income, managers and their teams find creative ways to respond to the crisis and prepare for a future that allows people and nature to live in harmony.







## LOCAL IMPACT WITH GLOBAL REACH

Despite the unprecedented challenges resulting from COVID-19, UNESCO marine World Heritage has continued to establish major conservation successes. We honor the local guardians and their teams who are at the frontline of protecting our common heritage for future generations.







# KEY 2020 SUCCESSES ACROSS THE MARINE WORLD HERITAGE NETWORK



Giant marine sanctuary and no-take zone now provides additional protection to **Gough and Inaccessible Islands**

© Michelle Risi



© Seychelles Island Foundation

Youth-led expedition removes 25 tons of waste from **Aldabra Atoll**, including 60,000 flipflops



© Nature Reserve « Wrangel Island »

Innovative thermal cameras attached to drones optimize polar bear monitoring in the **Natural System of Wrangel Island Reserve**



© UNESCO / Fanny Douvère

**Belize's** new Fisheries Resources Bill makes paradigm shift towards ecosystem-based management



© Brian Sullivan

Palau first country to ban sun cream with chemical components that are harmful to the reefs of the **Rock Islands Southern Lagoon**



© CEN Nouvelle-Calédonie

Local communities from all segments of society jointly chart a climate future in which both people and nature thrive in **New Caledonia**



© DBCA

**Ningaloo Coast** local community joins forces to design their future climate strategy





# EMPOWERING LOCAL MANAGERS THROUGH A NEW DIGITAL KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM

In April 2020, we launched a new digital knowledge platform that brings local managers from across the 50 marine World Heritage sites together to share best practices and success stories. The goal is to bring the best of expertise, scientific innovation and conservation solutions within reach of local management teams.

READ MORE:  
COVID-19 and marine World Heritage 

LEARN MORE:  
Managers Network 







# BUILDING RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is now the biggest threat to UNESCO-listed natural World Heritage sites. Under a business-as-usual scenario, nearly 90% of the 29 World Heritage listed coral reefs are expected to severely bleach twice-per-decade by 2040 eliminating every chance of survival. Building resilience and helping local communities to adapt to the changing climate is at the heart of our work.

Central to World Heritage is a system of international oversight and conservation decision-making. Listed sites are monitored annually to determine their state of conservation and a dedicated team of experts works together with nations to address stressors and build resilience.

Since 2018, we partner with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation on an ambitious Resilient Reefs initiative to empower and equip local communities to take action and create sustainable jobs and income in a changing climate reality. The initiative is piloted in marine World Heritage sites in Palau, Belize, France and Australia.

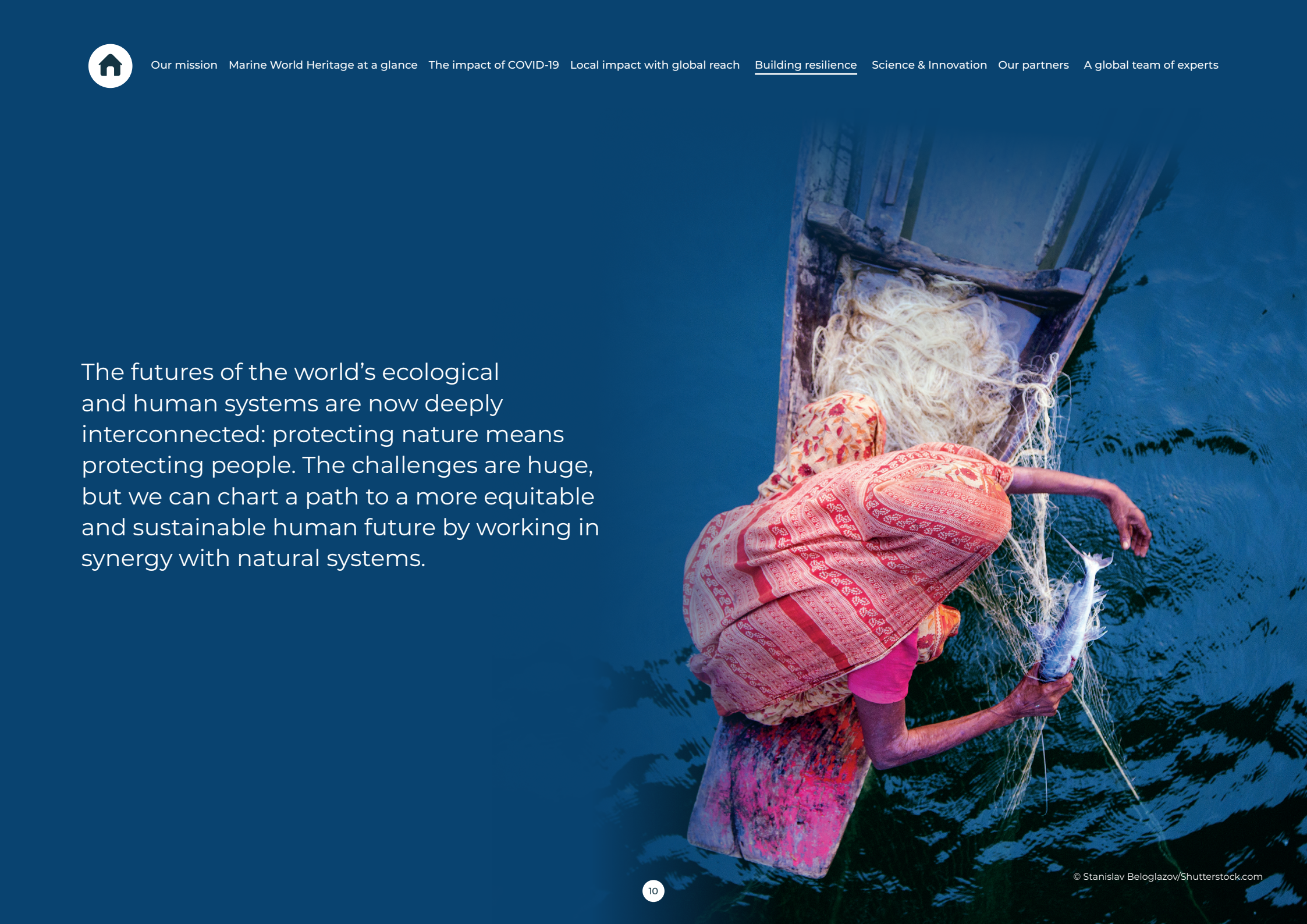
LEARN MORE:  
Resilient Reefs







The futures of the world's ecological and human systems are now deeply interconnected: protecting nature means protecting people. The challenges are huge, but we can chart a path to a more equitable and sustainable human future by working in synergy with natural systems.



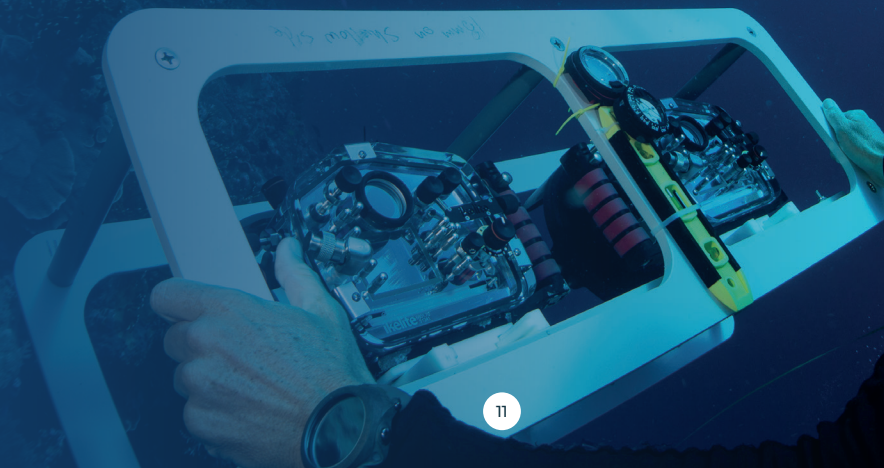




# SCIENCE AND INNOVATION

While UNESCO's marine World Heritage sites are best known for their outstanding ecosystems and biodiversity, it is their capacity to turn science and innovation into policy and decision making that is at the heart of their conservation leadership.

From drone wildlife tracking in Russia's [Natural System of Wrangel Island Reserve](#) to the use of artificial intelligence in Australia's [Great Barrier Reef](#), sites spearhead scientific innovation in ways that are rapidly transforming the future of ocean conservation.

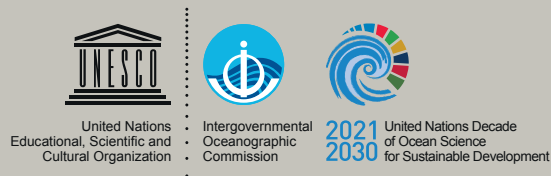
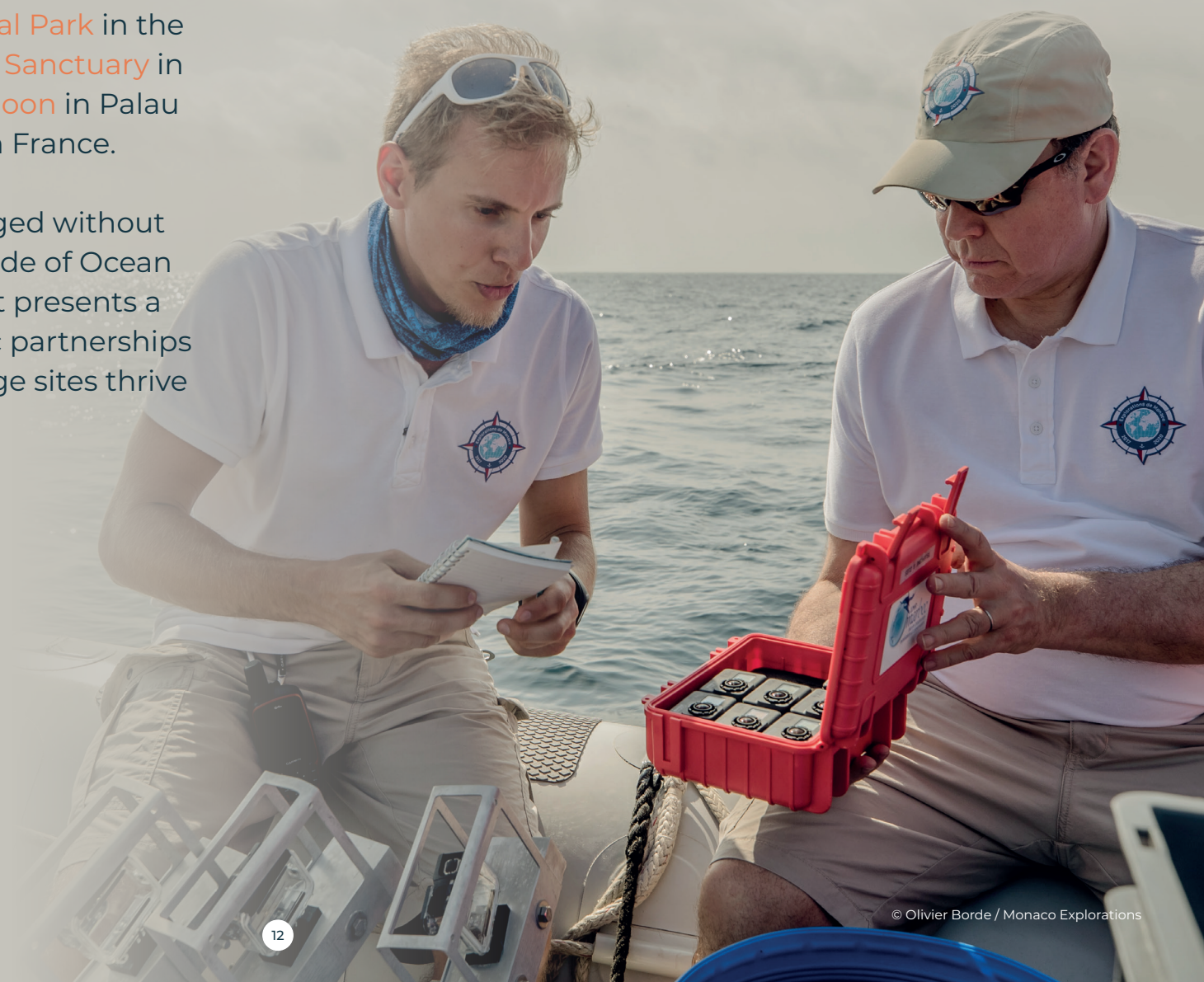






In collaboration with the principality of Monaco and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, we shed light on the women and men who drive innovation at **Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park** in the Philippines, **Malpelo Fauna and Flora Sanctuary** in Colombia, **Rock Islands Southern Lagoon** in Palau and the **Lagoons of New Caledonia** in France.

No World Heritage site can be managed without science and the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development presents a unique opportunity to forge strategic partnerships that will ensure marine World Heritage sites thrive for generations to come.



**READ MORE:**  
Scientific research at UNESCO Marine World Heritage sites

**WATCH THE FILM**

**VISIT THE EXHIBITION**





# OUR PARTNERS

We thank the governments, charitable foundations and individuals who have supported our conservation work during 2020.



French Biodiversity Agency,  
Government of France



Government of Flanders,  
Belgium



Great Barrier Reef  
Foundation



Prince Albert II of Monaco  
Foundation



Princely Government,  
Principality of Monaco

In cooperation with the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**, official advisory body for natural heritage under the 1972 World Heritage Convention.

We wish to thank the anonymous donors whose generous support enables the World Heritage Marine Programme to fulfil its mandate.





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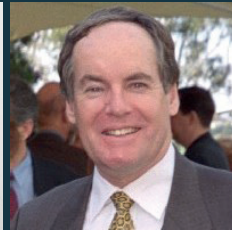
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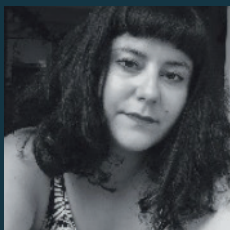
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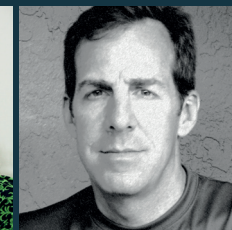
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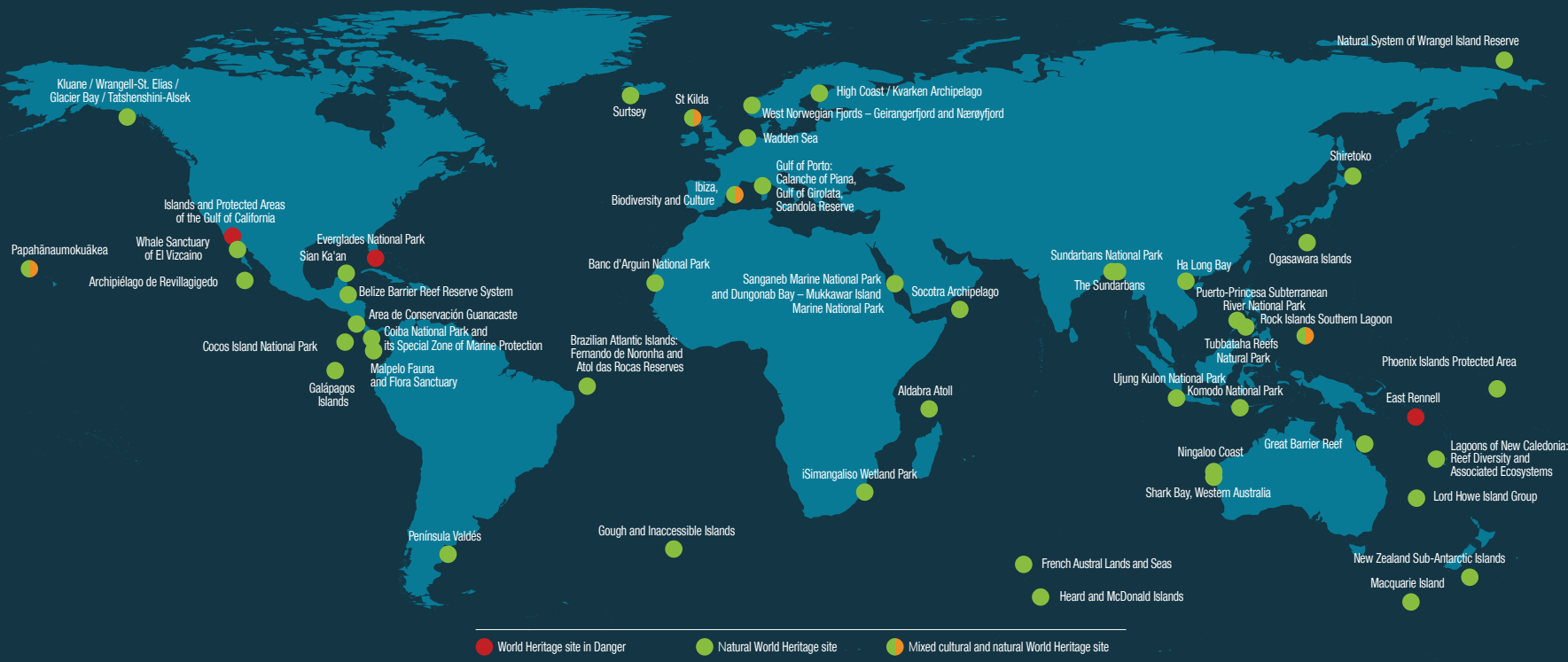


**JOSEPH  
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# 50 Marine World Heritage Sites Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List



## ARGENTINA

Península Valdés, 1999

## AUSTRALIA

Great Barrier Reef, 1981  
Heard and McDonald Islands, 1997  
Lord Howe Island Group, 1982  
Macquarie Island, 1997  
Ningaloo Coast, 2011  
Shark Bay, Western Australia, 1991

## BANGLADESH

The Sundarbans, 1997

## BELIZE

Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System, 1996

## BRAZIL

Brazilian Atlantic Islands: Fernando de Noronha and Atol das Rocas Reserves, 2001

## CANADA/USA

Kluane / Wrangell-St. Elias / Glacier Bay / Tatshenshini-Aleek, 1979

## COLOMBIA

Malpelo Fauna and Flora Sanctuary, 2006

## COSTA RICA

Area de Conservación Guanacaste, 1999  
Cocos Island National Park, 1997

## DENMARK/GERMANY/NETHERLANDS

The Wadden Sea, 2009

## ECUADOR

Galápagos Islands, 1978

## FINLAND/SWEDEN

High Coast / Kvarken Archipelago, 2000

## FRANCE

Gulf of Porto: Calanche of Piana, Gulf of Girolata, Scandola Reserve, 1983

Lagoons of New Caledonia: Reef Diversity and Associated Ecosystems, 2008  
French Austral Lands and Seas, 2019

## ICELAND

Surtsey, 2008

## INDIA

Sundarbans National Park, 1987

## INDONESIA

Komodo National Park, 1991  
Ujung Kulon National Park, 1991

## JAPAN

Ogasawara Islands, 2011  
Shiretoko, 2005

## KIRIBATI

Phoenix Islands Protected Area, 2010

## MAURITANIA

Banc d'Arguin National Park, 1989

## MEXICO

Islands and Protected Areas of the Gulf of California, 2005  
Sian Ka'an, 1987  
Whale Sanctuary of El Vizcaino, 1993  
Archipiélago de Revillagigedo, 2016

## NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand Sub-Antarctic Islands, 1998

## NORWAY

West Norwegian Fjords – Geirangerfjord and Nærøfjord, 2005

## PALAU

Rock Islands Southern Lagoon, 2012

## PANAMA

Coiba National Park and its Special Zone of Marine Protection, 2005

## PHILIPPINES

Puerto-Princesa Subterranean River National Park, 1999  
Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, 1993

## RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Natural System of Wrangel Island Reserve, 2004

## SEYCHELLES

Aldabra Atoll, 1982

## SOLOMON ISLANDS

East Rennell, 1998

## SOUTH AFRICA

iSimangaliso Wetland Park, 1999

## SPAIN

Ibiza, Biodiversity and Culture, 1999

## SUDAN

Sanganeb Marine National Park and Dungonab Bay – Mukkawar Island Marine National Park, 2016

## UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

Gough and Inaccessible Islands, 1995  
St. Kilda, 1986

## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Everglades National Park, 1979  
Papahānaumokuākea, 2010

## VIET NAM

Ha Long Bay, 1994

## YEMEN

Socotra Archipelago, 2008



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