

A Call for a Day of Peace with the Oceans

On the occasion of the Blue Frontier/Peter Benchley Awards

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For the past decade I have had the privilege to share in the leadership of the first Census of Marine Life, a cooperative scientific program involving thousands of scientists from more than 80 countries. The program addresses three grand questions: What lived in the oceans before humans themselves became important marine animals? What now lives in the oceans? What will live in the oceans a few decades hence? The program has launched hundreds of expeditions as well as aggregated information from thousands of existing sources and partners. The summing and sharing of the findings will reach a crescendo the week of 4 October 2010 in London.

Prior surveys focused their attention on a thousand or so forms of sea life that become seafood and a few score of charismatic megafauna. The Census of Marine Life concerns all the more than 200,000 known, named marine species, their distribution, and abundance. It also concerns the million or more species of marine animals yet to be discovered, described, and named and even the tens of millions of types of marine microbes. Census researchers believe that all marine life counts.

Concerned by the mobility and fertility of marine life, people have wondered whether the scientific community chose some single day to make a global count. We did not. Polar experts judged that they could accurately assess Antarctic sea cucumbers during a different day, indeed a different year, from when Sargasso Sea experts assessed mid-water crustaceans. Moreover,

harmonizing an international day of ocean observation in addition to federating the experts from cucumbers to crustaceans appeared too hard.

I would like to take the occasion of receiving the Blue Frontier / Peter Benchley award for science to call for an international day of ocean observation. In fact, let's call for more. During the past one hundred fifty years, humanity has come to add about as much noise to the oceans as the oceans themselves harbor naturally. Let's call for an International Quiet Ocean Experiment, an interval of perhaps 6-8 hours when humanity would sharply cut its additions of noise to the oceans. Before, during, and after this interval, scientists would observe the oceans, not only its life, in unprecedented detail with the marvelous tools now rapidly evolving.

In the spring of 1979 humanity implemented the Global Weather Experiment when satellites from several nations first girdled the globe together providing endlessly connected images of clouds from space and other valuable data that now improve weather forecasts. An International Quiet Ocean Experiment could provide a practical deadline five or six years hence for implementation of an integrated Global Ocean Observing System that has been emerging too slowly to answer our questions about changes in marine life as well as pollution, storms, and other concerns.

Indeed, through partnerships with the kinds of organizations joined by Blue Frontier, the International Quiet Ocean Experiment could be even more. Perhaps it could become the first international Day of Peace with the Oceans, when we listen to the oceans and the oceans are spared humanity's din and hunger.

On behalf of the entire Census of Marine Life community, thank you for the honor of the Blue Frontier / Peter Benchley award.