

Malibu nonprofit helps lead the charge for protection of threatened marine species



Sea Save Foundation Director Georgienne Bradley examines fins and gill rakes from threatened species. Photo by Jay Ireland



Lauren Coughlin, Editor
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Malibu resident Georgienne Bradley runs a lean nonprofit out of Malibu, but that hasn't stopped her from blazing an international trail of impact.

And while those she has helped aren't quite able to thank her, she's quite certain that her work will have a long-lasting impact for many years to come.

Bradley, director of Sea Save Foundation, was one of many attendees at the 17th Conference of the Parties in Johannesburg, South Africa, held Sept. 24-Oct. 5, and she made it her personal mission to advocate for threatened marine animals that were part of a policy consideration at the global conference.

In speaking to representatives from the voting nations, Bradley rallied for increased protection of thresher sharks, silky sharks all species of mobula rays and nautilus during the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, also known as CITES.

“If we cant have all the nations that implement these policies on the same page ... we are not going to be able to protect keystone species in our oceans,” Bradley said.

And for that reason, CITES is “critical,” she emphasized.

“Based upon extremely rigorous scientific data and analysis, these animals were identified and this proposal was put forward by different countries,” Bradley explained.

While Bradley certainly wasn’t the lone advocate for the cause, that’s not what matters. What matters to Bradley and so many others is that these species are now considered “Appendix II” species.

This classification means the species are not necessarily threatened with extinction. However, the appendix signifies, trade must be controlled in order to avoid overutilization that could result in extinction.

“Most people at the end of the day really do want to do the right thing, and that helped us win,” Bradley said.

Bradley added that the decision doesn’t impact what communities are able to fish and eat locally, but rather restricts trade of the fish. But its impact extends beyond just the species that are now Appendix II, Bradley explained.

“The decision absolutely affects what’s going on at Nobu, it affects what’s going on on an international stage,” Bradley said. “I think it has far-reaching effects, and it also affects every one of us in several ways.”

Particularly in the case of “keystone species” such as sharks, Bradley said, the ocean would not be the same without them.

“Sharks are basically the cleaners of the ocean,” she explained, noting that they help stop the spread of illnesses and more.

“Without sharks playing their part in the ecosystem, our fisheries are going to collapse,” Bradley explained.

Further, she added, certain sharks offer a greater value as a tourist attraction than they would as a one-time trade.

“Crazy people like me seek out sharks and we’re willing to pay a premium to have the privilege [to interact with them],” Bradley explained, adding that she shared this perspective with Cuba and believes it contributed to winning their vote at CITES.

CITES allows nations to gather and make a difference in protecting marine species, and the Appendix II classification will allow scientists such as Bradley to keep a closer eye on data surrounding crucial species.

“Placing them on Appendix II, you would think, wouldn’t be such a difficult thing to convince the international population, but it is,” Bradley said. “It’s like pulling teeth.”

While Appendix I is the highest classification, Bradley notes that any species that are placed there truly belong, as it’s a rigorous process. Appendix I includes protection of elephants, their ivory and ivory products.

CITES takes place every three years, but Sea Save Foundation won’t be resting on its laurels in the meantime. Bradley said she already has her eye on a new species she’d like to work to protect: the humphead wrasse.

The species was discussed at CITES, but adding it to Appendix II was tabled.

Beyond taking a closer look at the humphead wrasse, Sea Save is keeping busy with various fundraising efforts. One, to be held Oct. 29, is a fashion show fundraiser at Alice + Olivia located at B100, 3939 Cross Creek Road in Malibu.

Another more hands-on opportunity awaits ocean lovers in the form of a Feb. 15-25 expedition to Cocos Island, also known as “Shark Island,” which is located near Costa Rica. The organization will be leading a boating trip to the unique uninhabited island that is home to 50-foot whale sharks, hammerheads, pods of dolphins and more. As of the writing of this article, roughly 10 spots remained. Bradley said that anyone can go, but those with scuba certifications are particularly encouraged. Details on the trip can be found at seasave.org/how-to-help/join-an-expedition/cocos-island-expedition/.

Sea Save Foundation is a volunteer-run organization which was founded by Bradley in 2004. Bradley, a diver and scientist, aims to educate through photography and outreach.

The organization is always seeking volunteers, and Bradley noted a particular need for attorneys who can read over policy papers.

For more information on Sea Save at CITES, visit seasave.org/what-we-do/cites/2016-cites-cop17/.

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