PRESS RELEASE

An Ocean of Thanks
Dr Andrea Marshall receives recognition in the inaugural Ocean Awards for her important contribution to ocean conservation.

On January 13th, Andrea Marshall, cofounder of Marine Megafauna Foundation (MMF), a US 501c3 non-profit organization formed to research, protect and conserve ocean giants in developing nations across the world, was honored with a conservation award for her efforts to protect manta rays.

The Blue Marine Foundation, the UK’s most dynamic marine conservation charity, and Boat International, the world’s leading superyacht media company, teamed up to create a series of awards to celebrate individuals, companies, legislators and projects that have made an outstanding contribution to the health of the oceans. They have chosen to recognize Andrea’s work to protect manta rays globally, most notably her team’s research efforts and campaign work that led to the listing of reef mantas on the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS) in 2014 and the listing of all Manta species on CITES (Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species) in 2013. Andrea and Guy Stevens from the Manta Trust were honored at the inaugural awards ceremony in the category ‘Piece of science or paper that made the most original, important or insightful contribution to ocean conservation’.
Over the last decade, Andrea and her team have produced some of the first scientific studies on manta rays, many of which highlighted how vulnerable these animals were to overexploitation and how fast wild populations were declining. A landmark study conducted at MMF’s research base in Mozambique, Africa documented a swift and significant 88% decline in observational sighting records of *Manta alfredi* at one of the most important aggregation areas for this species in the Indian Ocean. Population declines are now been observed globally as a result of unsustainable fishing pressure for their body parts, which are used in Chinese health tonics.

Andrea’s team were also the first to demonstrate the impressive migratory abilities of these rays having conducted the first satellite tracking on giant manta rays globally. They also monitor populations of these gentle giants via the first global online database for manta rays. Manta Matcher, the brainchild of Dr. Marshall’s which operates like “facebook” for manta rays, allows scientists to identify individual mantas through a pattern-matching algorithm (think facial recognition software) and track their movements and behavior over time. This unique open source database is connecting research groups around the world and allowing larger picture questions to be answered for the first time, including how large populations are, how far they travel and how long they live.

The inclusion of all *Manta* species on the appendices of CITES and CMS is helping to secure increased protection and management for these threatened ocean giants across the globe. These landmark victories represented a 10-year struggle by Andrea and her team, who as conservation biologists were determined to protect manta ray populations before they went regionally extinct throughout much of their range.
To further the research and impact of Andrea's work, MMF welcomes your support of our 2016 manta research projects. One such project aims to increase our understanding of the migratory manta ray populations in southern Africa in order to help safeguard these vulnerable species in one of their most important regional habitats in the world.
https://www.givengain.com/cc/mantarayresearchexpedition/

“I am honored to receive this inaugural Ocean Award from Blue Marine Foundation and Boat International. My team and I continually strive to push the envelope and hope that by contributing original research with clear conservation angles we can help to support effective management plans for these iconic and economically important species. Being involved in this type of work is so rewarding and we look forward to continuing our research efforts globally.” – Dr. Andrea Marshall, principal scientist of MMF's Global Manta Ray Research Program

Marine Megafauna Foundation, is a tax-exempt non-profit charitable organization under section 501(c)(3) of the US tax code. To support Andrea and her team in saving ocean giants from extinction, please visit: http://www.marinemegafauna.org/support-us/.