

## PERPETUAL PLANET

### ROLEX AND MISSION BLUE

Mission Blue is a partner in Rolex's Perpetual Planet initiative to help key organizations and individuals find solutions to environmental challenges such as protecting the oceans.

#### **THE BEGINNING**

For the founder of Rolex, Hans Wilsdorf, the world was like a living laboratory. From the 1930s, he began to use it as a testing ground for his Oyster Perpetual watches, sending them to the most extreme locations, supporting explorers who ventured into the unknown. As the 21st century unfolds, exploration for pure discovery has given way to exploration as a means to preserve the natural world.

At Rolex, the word "Perpetual" is more than a word on a dial. It encompasses the vision and values of Hans Wilsdorf to always seek to achieve excellence, to break boundaries and help build a better world. By helping to create a sustainable planet – a Perpetual Planet – Rolex is continuing Hans Wilsdorf's legacy.

#### **ROLEX'S PERPETUAL PLANET INITIATIVE**

Through its Perpetual Planet initiative Rolex is joining forces with key individuals and organizations to assist them finding solutions to the Earth's environmental challenges. So far, the initiative embraces National Geographic, the Rolex Awards for Enterprise and Mission Blue.

#### **NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC**

Rolex is supporting National Geographic, a partner since 1954, as it conducts a series of explorations of the planet's least understood environments to document the changes occurring, define the implications for people and wildlife, and catalyse solutions. An expedition to Mount Everest to study the effects of climate change took place from April to June 2019. The team of more than 30 scientists, including some from Nepal's Tribhuvan University, successfully set up a network of automated weather stations, including the world's highest, sitting at 8,400 metres (27,600 feet). The weather stations provide a stream of data, helping to determine projections of snow and ice. The team also collected ice cores and samples of snow and sediment for analysis at the University of Maine in the United States.

The 2019 Everest expedition was followed in 2021 by one to install a weather station – the highest in the Southern and Western Hemispheres – just below the summit of Tupungato Volcano, in the Southern Andes. The National Geographic expedition,

supported by Rolex through its Perpetual Planet initiative, began on 19 February and ended on 5 March. With a population of more than 5.6 million people, Chile's capital city of Santiago relies on the Southern Andes water tower, which includes Tupungato Volcano, for its water supply. The water tower is considered the most vulnerable in South America. At a height of 6,505 m, the new weather station will collect data for weather modelling and water-resource management. It will now function alongside lower stations that were installed in December 2019 with support from National Geographic – one at 4,400 m (at the upper Aconcagua basin 70 km northeast of Santiago); and two on neighbouring volcano Tupungatito at 4,400 m and 5,750 m.

### **ROLEX AWARDS FOR ENTERPRISE**

The Rolex Awards were set up more than 40 years ago to mark the 50th anniversary of the world's first waterproof wristwatch, the Oyster. Through the programme, the company supports exceptional individuals with innovative projects that improve our knowledge of the world, protect the environment – helping to preserve habitats and species – and improve human well-being. The 150 women and men selected as Laureates since the programme was launched have had an extraordinary impact. An estimated 5 million people, in all corners of the globe, have benefited: around 18 million trees have been planted; 34 endangered species and 26 major ecosystems protected, including 57,600 km<sup>2</sup> of Amazon rainforest; hundreds of new species have been discovered; 16 challenging expeditions have been completed; and 48 innovative technologies have been developed for a range of applications.

### **MISSION BLUE**

Sylvia Earle, legendary marine explorer and a Rolex Testimonee since 1982, launched Mission Blue after winning a 2009 TED prize for her "vision to spark global change". In 2014, Rolex became a partner of her organization as part of a commitment to help protect the oceans.

Mission Blue's aim is to create a global network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) called Hope Spots. These are ecologically important areas of the oceans considered vital to the preservation of species or places where communities rely on a healthy marine environment to survive. Key to the programme is the empowerment of local people to make change by creating a global wave of community support for ocean conservation.

The oceans represent nearly three-quarters of the Earth's surface and harbour most of the world's biodiversity, but they are in trouble. Many commercially exploited species of fish have declined by 90 per cent; about half of the coral reefs have disappeared or experienced serious decline; and hundreds of coastal "dead zones" have developed.

Mission Blue's goal is to help protect 30 per cent of the oceans by 2030, which is the IUCN's (International Union for Conservation of Nature) recommended target for safeguarding ocean health. With the support of Rolex, Mission Blue is trying to ensure that marine ecosystems in all their teeming diversity are not lost to future generations.

### **HOW MISSION BLUE WORKS**

Individuals, local governments or community organizations can nominate an area for Hope Spot status by filling out a detailed form on [mission-blue.org](http://mission-blue.org). Applications are assessed by a team at Mission Blue and then put to the Hope Spot Council, which is comprised of marine scientists and policy experts. The council sits three times a year.

Essential to a successful application is evidence of support from community and conservation organizations, as well as a "Champion," a person or organization who can represent the area nominated on a scientific and policy level. The Champion conducts research projects and coordinates action in a Hope Spot by meeting government, business and community leaders, running advocacy events and working with children of all ages.

Once applications for Hope Spot status are approved by the council, work begins on a launch plan with local communities intended to put the area on a global stage, raise awareness about the issues at hand and provide bottom-up pressure on policymakers to create and enforce MPAs.

Hope Spots can be established in areas where no formal protection exists or in MPAs where more action is needed. Furthermore, a legal framework is not necessary as long as the community comes together to protect the area. The ultimate goal, however, is to have a legally enforced MPA.

From just a concept of preserving the oceans 12 years ago, Mission Blue now comprises a California-based staff, a diverse board of directors, a scientific advisory council and a wide coalition of partners.

### **HOW MISSION BLUE CREATES IMPACT**

Since 2009, more than 130 Hope Spots have been recognized around the world, with 21 created in 2019 alone. Mission Blue now works directly with communities in more than 69 countries to restore and protect their unique ocean environments. It implements communications campaigns through documentaries, social media, traditional media and tools like Esri ArcGIS for visualizing maps.

Over the past 12 years, the organization has also undertaken 30 expeditions with local partners and scientists to gather data and to create visual content that highlights discoveries, conservation challenges and cutting-edge science that will assist in ocean advocacy with stories and findings shared on Mission Blue's digital platform.

In 2019, three expeditions took place to the Gulf of California, Malpelo Island and the Galapagos Islands. A great many hours were spent observing and filming underwater along with scientists, community leaders and donors. During expeditions, Mission Blue typically meets with government and community leaders, views scientific projects and co-hosts community events.

## **Examples of Hope Spots**

### **Gulf of California**

In 2009, the Gulf of California became one of the first Hope Spots. Earle's team investigated the state of its marine resources, studied the effects of conservation reserves on shark numbers and developed close ties to local fishers, community groups and policymakers to advance the work of recovery. Through the establishment of managed fishing, the marine ecosystem at Cabo Pulmo Marine Park has spectacularly rebounded. "There has been a 400 per cent improvement in shark numbers since the area was first closed to fishing in 1995," reports James Ketchum, Mission Blue's Hope Spot Champion for the area. Ketchum has studied sharks in the Gulf for more than 20 years and is research leader of non-profit Pelagios Kakunjá that supplies technical information for the design and extension of marine parks.

"More importantly, local Mexican artisanal fishers – whose livelihoods have been vanishing before their very eyes, along with sport fishers and conservation groups – are now lending their support to a far-sighted programme that can ultimately rebuild fish numbers and fisheries within the Gulf and worldwide," Ketchum says.

### **Cocos-Galapagos Swimway**

What could become one of the first bilateral MPAs in the world was recognized as a Hope Spot in 2020. Mission Blue and other partners are working with the governments of Ecuador and Costa Rica to create a protected swimway allowing animals to swim between two protected marine reserves in the Cocos and the Galapagos. The area is rich in biodiversity, and recent studies have demonstrated that at least five endangered marine species – whale sharks, leatherback sea turtles, green sea turtles, silky sharks and scalloped hammerhead sharks – use this swimway to migrate between the reserves. When these species currently leave the protected areas, however, they enter open ocean where they are at grave risk from industrial fishing, poaching and by-catch.

Hope Spot Champion and Executive Director of the Turtle Restoration Network Todd Steiner hails the possibilities that a bilateral agreement would create. "This advances our thinking about how to protect highly endangered migratory species which do not stay put in a single locale like the Galapagos or Cocos marine reserves. By expanding

these marine reserves and working with the governments of Costa Rica and Ecuador along with additional partners to create the first bilateral agreement, we will allow endangered species to migrate safely outside the small MPAs and connect two sovereign nations' marine national parks, something we hope will be a blueprint that is copied across the globe."

### **Bunaken Marine Park, Indonesia**

Recognized as a Hope Spot in 2019, the Bunaken Marine Park, which became a national park in 1991, is a flourishing example of how diving communities can bring about change and ensure that their regions continue to thrive. Located in the centre of the Coral Triangle, the park has seven times more genera of coral than Hawaii, as well as more than 70 per cent of all the known fish species of the Indo-Western Pacific. Within the park are more than 8,000 hectares of coral reef, extensive seagrass beds and vast mangrove forests. Through active protection and local support, Bunaken has become a haven for green and hawksbill sea turtles. They are protected in Bunaken, and the turtles nest on Bunaken Island and nearby islands Siladen and Manado Tua.

Hope Spot Champion Alex Rose, Science Editor at *Ocean Geographic*, explains: "Providing havens for fish and marine mammals will bolster their surrounding populations. By expanding the boundary of protection for the park, there is enormous potential for additional positive spillover effects in neighbouring areas that are equally as dependent upon these marine resources as are the people who live within the current park limits."

### **SYLVIA EARLE – A VISIONARY**

Sylvia Earle has been involved with Rolex through exploration since 1970.

As President and Co-Chairman of Mission Blue, Earle lives up to the name of "Her Deepness", bestowed on her by *The New York Times*. Oceanographer, explorer, author of more than 225 publications and lecturer, she has a lifetime of experience as a field research scientist, government official and director for corporate and non-profit organizations. Armed with a PhD from Duke University and 30 honorary degrees, Earle, among her many prestigious positions, was formerly Chief Scientist of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, a National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence and founder of Deep Ocean Exploration and Research Inc (DOER). In 1970, Earle led a team of aquanauts who lived for two weeks in an underwater laboratory as part of a US government research project, Tektite II, to study ocean life and the effects of living underwater on the human body. In 1979, she set the world untethered diving record, descending 381 metres (1,250 feet) beneath the surface of the Pacific Ocean in a pressure-resistant JIM diving suit.

**A COMMITMENT TO OCEAN CONSERVATION**

Rolex is also helping to protect the oceans through a variety of partnerships and grants. These include individuals such as Rolex Laureates Barbara Block, Emma Camp, Vreni Häussermann and Brad Norman, as well as global networks of marine scientists such as Our World-Underwater Scholarship Society®. The company also partners the Monaco Blue Initiative that brings together experts, policymakers and business entrepreneurs along with local and international NGOs, to discuss and highlight solutions to current and future challenges of ocean management and conservation. It has also supported individual expeditions such as Deepsea Under The Pole by Rolex in 2010 and Under The Pole III in 2017. The team is exploring the oceans from the Arctic to the Antarctic, to improve understanding of climate equilibrium, biofluorescence and, particularly, the mesophotic coral ecosystems that exist between 30 and 150 metres, in addition to underwater exploration techniques.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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