

# The Yachting Community's Charity

An Amazing Year: Honoring Fabien Cousteau. Celebrating the DISCOVERY Yachts Fleet. Launching E3 Cuba and More...

Written by DEVIKA BOODHOO



Fabien Cousteau, recipient of the 2015 SeaKeeper Award, poses with his father, Jean-Michel Cousteau, the 1996 recipient, at the 2015 Founders' Dinner.

Photo by Yanni Georgoulakis

Founded in 1998 by a small group of yacht owners, The International SeaKeepers Society is a not-for-profit organization that focuses on the health of the world's oceans. SeaKeepers works with the boating and yachting community to take advantage of its unique potential in order to further marine research and raise awareness about the issues our oceans face. The International SeaKeepers Society acts as a global catalyst working with governments, scientists, industry, and other marine organizations to achieve its mission and support sensible and sustainable marine protection and restoration.

On Thursday, November 5th 2015, The International SeaKeepers Society hosted the Bal de la Mer and Founders' Dinner event to honor the 2015 award recipient, Fabien Cousteau, and recognize the 2015 DISCOVERY Yachts Fleet, at a private home in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Guests were treated to a beautiful waterfront backdrop while enjoying an incredible evening of cocktails, dining, and entertainment.

The evening celebrated, Fabien Cousteau, third generation explorer, environmental activist, and documentary film producer, as he became the 21st recipient of The International SeaKeeper Award. His father, Jean-Michel, who was the first ever recipient of the award in 1996, was also in attendance. Fabien's extensive achievements were highlighted with a particular focus on his 2014 Aquarius mission in which he and six crew members descended into the undersea laboratory Aquarius in the Florida Keys. Cousteau's team conducted extended scuba diving expeditions to collect scientific data and IMAX footage over the course of 31 days. Mission 31 was a tribute to his grandfather, Jacques Cousteau, who spent 30 days living underwater in 1963.

In addition to Mission 31, Fabien founded Plant A Fish, in 2012 a nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring our water planet and educating the youth about the importance of conservation and restoration. In 2016, The Fabien Cousteau Ocean Learning Center will be

opening. The center's virtual STEAM platform will give children and young adults around the world the opportunity to learn about the ocean while engaging with aquanauts, ocean explorers, and marine biologists through social media and interactive videos.

Fabien Cousteau joins an elite and influential group of leaders in marine conservation including: Monaco's own H.S.H. Prince Ranier III and H.S.H. Prince Albert II; Canadian film director/producer and deep-sea explorer, James Cameron; American marine biologist, author, lecturer and National Geographic explorer-in-residence, Dr. Sylvia Earle; and most recently, the 2014 recipient Wendy Benchley.

This year's SeaKeeper award was designed by Courtney Mattison, SeaKeepers featured 2015 Artist of the Year. Each year SeaKeepers selects an artist whose work is influenced by marine life, science or ocean conversation and showcases their work in connection with the mission.

The 2015 DISCOVERY Yachts Fleet was also recognized at the event to commend their efforts as pioneers of the yachting community. The DISCOVERY Yachts program was started by SeaKeepers as the foremost initiative to accomplish their mission and goals. The program is comprised of scientific expeditions, instrument deployments, and educational outreach events. SeaKeepers collaborates with numerous organizations, academic institutions, and government agencies in order to accomplish its DISCOVERY Yachts missions. SeaKeepers staff work closely with yacht owners and crew to coordinate research and outreach activities that reflect the yacht owner's ocean-related interests.

Over the past year, SeaKeepers has organized 21 missions through the DISCOVERY Yachts Fleet Program. Additionally, program time on the water for conservation and research projects has increased by more than 80% every year since 2012.

Scientific expeditions conducted by SeaKeepers allow yacht owners, guests, and crew, the opportunity to participate in ongoing research while engaging with influential, well-known marine scientists. Using member yachts, SeaKeepers promotes and facilitates ground-



breaking research in the fields of marine science and oceanography. One of the highlights occurred in October 2015, with a team of University of Florida researchers, aboard the DISCOVERY Yacht *Penny Mae* as part of a global initiative to survey the biodiversity of the world's oceans. Under the guidance of Dr. Leonid Moroz, a distinguished professor of neuroscience, genetics, biology, and chemistry, the research team conducted plankton sampling along a transect from New York to West Palm Beach, Florida. In the same month, SeaKeepers partnered with the United States Geological Survey to study coral bioerosion

current velocity, and pressure/depth profiles. The collection of consistent and accurate data is extremely important for oil spill and marine debris accumulation analyses, weather and hurricane prediction models, quality control tests on satellites, and an overall better understanding of the marine environment.

The 2015 Barcelona Yacht Rendezvous hosted by SeaKeepers on May 8th 2015, was to celebrate DISCOVERY Yachts and announce plans for expanding SeaKeepers missions in Europe. Since that time SeaKeepers has begun talks around a Baltic Sea clean-up program and DISCOVERY



Photo by Cat Schulz

on the DISCOVERY Yacht *Vigilante*. During the expedition, researchers dived several reefs off Islamorada, Florida.

SeaKeepers works with institutions such as the NOAA, World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and Argo, to make ongoing oceanographic measurements with SeaKeeper Drifters and Argo floats.

The SeaKeeper drifter is an environmental monitoring device that sits on the ocean surface and extends 15 meters deep into the water column. As the drifter floats along local and global currents, the instrument measures sea surface temperature, current velocity, latitude and longitude, and time. This data is then transmitted directly to NOAA and WMO databases. Argo floats are technologically advanced water monitoring devices that are programmed to move up and down through the water column while traveling with the ocean currents. These floats sink down to 2000 meters and then rise to the surface, recording salinity, temperature,



**Top:** Members of SeaKeepers participated in a University of Miami Shark Research Center shark tagging event in Biscayne Bay.

**Bottom:** Beneath the Waves' co-founder, Erica Staaterman, inspects a coral core during an outreach event with award recipients from the Youth Making Ripples Film Festival onboard the *D/Y Defiance*.



Crewmembers of *D/Y Fugitive* deploy a drifter as guests look on.

Yachts *Alegria* and *Morning Glory* deployed SeaKeeper drifters into the Mediterranean.

During 2015, SeaKeepers conducted three educational outreach trips. In April, SeaKeepers hosted Youth Making Ripples Film Festival award winners, researchers, and film makers onboard DISCOVERY Yacht *Defiance*. In November, SeaKeepers worked with CARTE researchers and students from the IMPACT program at the Patricia and Phillip Frost Museum of Science. Fleet Miami hosted the event onboard DISCOVERY Yacht *Julia*. In December, onboard the DISCOVERY Yacht *Vigilante*, SeaKeepers partnered with researchers from the Whitney Laboratory for Marine Bioscience at the University of Florida. The purpose of the outreach was to give MacArthur Beach State Park educators a hands-on day collecting and studying planktonic organisms in West Palm Beach, Florida.

In late 2015, SeaKeepers developed the E3 Cuba Experience: Ecology, Environment & Education. The educational program offers a blend of activities covering these three vital areas of focus while actively engaging with Cuban people and scientists. Over twenty percent of Cuba is already protected including a significant portion of its waters. To this end, SeaKeepers aims to advance and support the efforts of scientists in Cuba through a collaborative agenda.

The cornerstones of the SeaKeepers Cuba E3 Experience are: direct engagement with students and scientists of marine research and protection efforts, deployment of SeaKeeper drifters, and documenting the marine environment through the use of a DISCOVERY Detective Kit.

As we move into 2016, SeaKeepers hopes to continue doubling its efforts to activate many more DISCOVERY Yachts for research, exploration, and education, in conjunction with furthering its mission to advance marine sciences and raise awareness about global ocean issues. □