

The Real Reason for Aquariums

By Beckett Fox

Noah Chesnin is the Associate Director of New York Seascape, a branch of the Wildlife Conservation Society, who I met at the New York Aquarium. He works hand in hand with the New York Aquarium and their Aquatic Animal Protection Program. Mr. Chesnin is part of a movement to combat the stigma that aquariums treat animals poorly. Aquariums actually help animals and protect them from global warming and the continuous temperature rise in the ocean. They showed me how they are rebuilding habitats for species that have been affected by ocean warming. They also protect areas to make safe environments where aquatic animals can survive.

The National Aquarium of Baltimore is also trying to protect animals affected by climate change. "The aquarium has seen more and more of these sick turtles over the years. With warming waters, says Racanelli, sea turtles are venturing further north.... Sea turtles that follow the Gulf Stream [and] are now ending up trapped in the hook of Cape Cod."¹ People point fingers at aquariums for keeping animals in tanks even if it's for their protection. What people don't realize is that they are somewhat at fault for aquarium protection programs. Aquariums have to protect animals from ocean warming and climate change, which is a problem that the vast majority of people in the world contribute to on a daily scale.

Aquariums have educated the public for nearly forty years about climate change and ocean threats. "Some zoos and aquariums made a big push to emphasize threats like the depletion of the earth's ozone layer, the razing of rain forests by loggers and farmers and the overfishing of the Pacific...Surveys of visitors showed a backlash. 'The institutions tended to approach the issues by talking about the huge scale of the problems,' Dr. Boyle said."² People at the time weren't thinking of climate change on a global scale so they didn't want to listen to what aquariums had to say. Therefore, they only thought of aquariums as a source of entertainment but not as a reliable source.

Meeting Noah Chesnin changed my opinion on aquariums because I too, used to dislike them for keeping animals in tanks. Chesnin taught me about all of the good work aquariums do, and my perspective was transformed. We can all spread awareness about climate change. Everyone can do simple acts like turning off the lights when they leave a room and walking or biking instead of driving. We can all do our part in the fight against climate change.

¹ "At Baltimore's National Aquarium, Climate Change ... - NPR." 5 May. 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/05/720041305/at-the-baltimore-aquarium-climate-change-presents-challenges-both-inside-and-out>. Accessed 26 Feb. 2020.

² "Zoos and Aquariums Struggle With Ways to Discuss Climate" 27 Aug. 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/27/science/earth/zoos-and-aquariums-struggle-with-ways-to-discuss-climate-change.html>. Accessed 6 Feb. 2020.