

STELLWAGEN BANK E-NOTES: *sanctuary news & events*

May 2015

World
Oceans Day
is June 8



A laughing gull soars over the sanctuary during an April whale watch. Credit: A. Smrcina

Stellwagen Sanctuary Seabird Stewards (S4) Program Recruiting Volunteers

The sanctuary's volunteer program is looking for experienced birders and data recorders to join the S4 team. The joint effort, with Mass Audubon, strives to document the type and number of birds and record behaviors. In the future, these numbers will be used as the baseline to assess ecosystem changes. Visit <http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/involved/volunteers.html>

Aerial Acrobatics and Soaring Grace of Northern Gannets



This collection of bird photos was taken during the April 12th Whale Watch Naturalists Workshop. The birds were feeding near the southern end of the sanctuary off Cape Cod. Gannets are commonly seen in this area in spring and fall feeding on schools of sand lance. Credit: A. Smrcina

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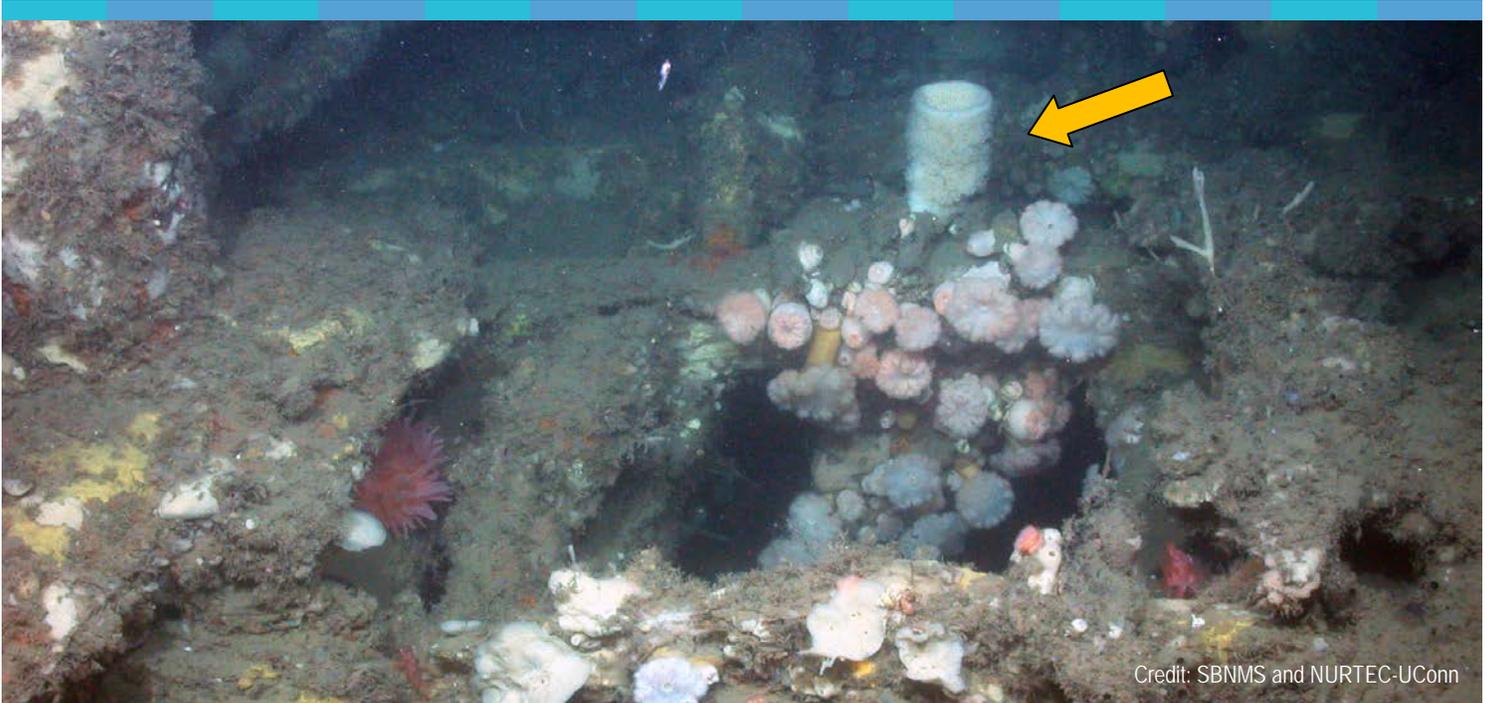


www.youtube.com/user/SBNMS



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<http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/>



Credit: SBNMS and NURTEC-UConn

Glass sponge surprises researchers studying shipwreck biodiversity

Last year sanctuary staff and collaborators at Mystic Aquarium and University of Connecticut initiated a study of the biodiversity associated with shipwrecks in the sanctuary. By reviewing high-resolution video and still images collected by divers and remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) from archaeological surveys, the scientists are piecing together species lists and indicators of these species' relative abundance. The analyses may improve understanding of the ecological role that maritime heritage resources, such as shipwrecks, play as habitats for a diversity of organisms.

From a habitat perspective, shipwrecks are often found resting in areas of fine-grained sediments, such as sands or muds, that provide relatively small islands of hard bottom on which attached invertebrates settle and grow. Moreover, the structure of shipwrecks shelters fish from strong currents and predators.

The shipwreck biodiversity study is ongoing but an interesting find has already emerged. An unusual sponge was found on the wreck of the SS *Portland*, a paddle wheel steamship that was lost with all hands in 1898, and now rests on a muddy plain at a depth of approximately 300 feet within the sanctuary. Tentatively identified as *Vazella pourtalesii*, it is a structure-forming glass sponge of the family Hexactinellidae and unique in the Gulf of Maine (see frame grab from video, above).

Vazella has been reported from the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico, the Azores, and Atlantic Canada, where it occurs in dense patches. Since the Stellwagen Bank region links known distributions of the sponge in Canada and the Gulf of Mexico, this discovery is not that unexpected. Conversely, given that more than 40 years of diving with submersibles and remotely operated vehicles in the deep waters of the Gulf of Maine have only yielded a scattering of any glass sponge observations, *Vazella* is a surprisingly new and unique component of the sanctuary.

by Alice Stratton, ONMS and Peter Auster (Mystic Aquarium and University of Connecticut)



Sanctuary Ambassador Caitlin Fitzmaurice compares her hand to the bones drawn on the flipper of the sanctuary's inflatable whale during an education program. See more photos and a story on page 7. Photo: A. Smrcina, SBNMS.

NEWS BRIEFS

Dive mooring installed at *Heroic* shipwreck



Credit: SBNMS

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, in partnership with Northern Atlantic Dive Expeditions, has placed a sub-surface dive mooring on the *Heroic* shipwreck. The wreck lies on top of Stellwagen Bank, north of the Port of Boston shipping lanes, in 100 feet of water. The *Heroic* is a historic shipwreck that began as the USS *Heroic* (AMc-84), an *Accentor*-class coastal mine sweeper launched in 1941.

After World War II, the *Heroic* was sold into the New England fishing fleet. It caught fire and sank in August 1969.

The shipwreck is a sanctuary historical resource and, as such, cannot be damaged or disturbed, which includes the removal of any artifacts from the site. Divers are encouraged to visit the wreck, enjoy its resident marine life and take only photos. Dive boats should avoid anchoring directly on the wreck or using unsecured shot lines, but instead plan on securing their anchor lines to the newly placed mooring. The mooring system consists of two train wheels weighing 1400 lbs. with a trawl float suspending a chain that rises 10 feet above the seafloor. Instructions for using the mooring can be found on the sanctuary dive web page. The mooring was made possible with grant support from the PADI Foundation.

Heroic coordinates: 42-22.346 N x 70-22.229 W

Heroic mooring coordinates: 42-22.351 N x 70-22.214 W



Credit: SBNMS

Cod numbers remain down

According to the 2014 Status of U.S. Fisheries report to Congress from NOAA Fisheries, the Gulf of Maine stock or population of haddock was removed from the overfishing list (a stock is on the **overfishing** list when the annual catch rate is too high; a stock is on the **overfished** list when the population size of a stock is too low, whether because of fishing or other causes). Despite the good news about haddock, the report indicates that the Gulf of Maine stock of Atlantic cod has continued to decline and remains on both the overfished and overfishing lists.



Sanctuary Advisory Council meeting scheduled

The 44th Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 20, from 9:30 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. at the Holiday Inn in Rockland, Mass. The agenda will be published on the sanctuary website (<http://stellwagen.noaa.gov>). The public is invited to attend.

Marine art exhibit moves to Salem

On May 4, an exhibit of prize-winning art from the annual Massachusetts Marine Educators annual marine art contest was installed at the Salem National Historic Site visitor center in downtown Salem. The paintings and drawings, created by students in grades K-12, reflect the diversity of species in Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. The exhibit will reside there until June 10. Meanwhile, hundreds of artistic interpretations of sanctuary creatures submitted in the 2015 marine art contest are now being judged. The winning art will replace the 2014 collection and start its regional tour in the summer. (Art: Saiya Rivera, Greater Lawrence Tech HS, Andover)



NOAA General Counsel's Award goes to team including sanctuary's Leila Hatch

Sanctuary marine ecologist Leila Hatch was part of a team that received the 2014 NOAA General Counsel's Award for exceptional performance and significant contributions to the Office of the General Counsel. The work by Leila and the team of scientists and technical specialists from NOAA Fisheries headquarters and the Greater Atlantic Regional Office centered on the impacts of water use and noise from the Northeast Gateway Liquid Natural Gas Port on whales, cod and other resources in the sanctuary and Massachusetts Bay this past winter.

NOAA Fisheries seeks comments on measures proposed for recreational fishing of haddock

NOAA Fisheries is proposing changes for recreational fishing of haddock (one of the important groundfish in the sanctuary and elsewhere in the Gulf of Maine). The rule implements a reduction to the minimum size (now 17 inches) and would limit catches to three fish. The action would ensure that the recreational catch of haddock (and concomitant bycatch of cod) will not exceed the annual catch limits for recreational fishing in fishing year 2015. The intended effect of this action is to reduce discards of cod and haddock by allowing recreational anglers to retain smaller haddock, which, according to NOAA Fisheries, will result in anglers achieving their bag limit more quickly. Comment deadline is June 1, 2015. For more information, contact mark.grant@noaa.gov.

NOAA Fisheries proposes revising humpback whale listing due to conservation successes

NOAA Fisheries is proposing to reclassify the humpback whale into 14 distinct population segments under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), providing a more tailored conservation approach for U.S. fisheries managers. Protection and restoration efforts over the past 40 years have led to an increase in numbers and growth rates for humpback whales in many areas.

The humpback whale is currently listed as endangered throughout its range. The proposed rule finds that ten of those 14 populations do not warrant ESA listing.

While commercial whaling severely depleted humpback whale numbers, population rebounds in many areas result in today's larger numbers, with steady rates of population growth since the United States first listed the animal as endangered in 1970.

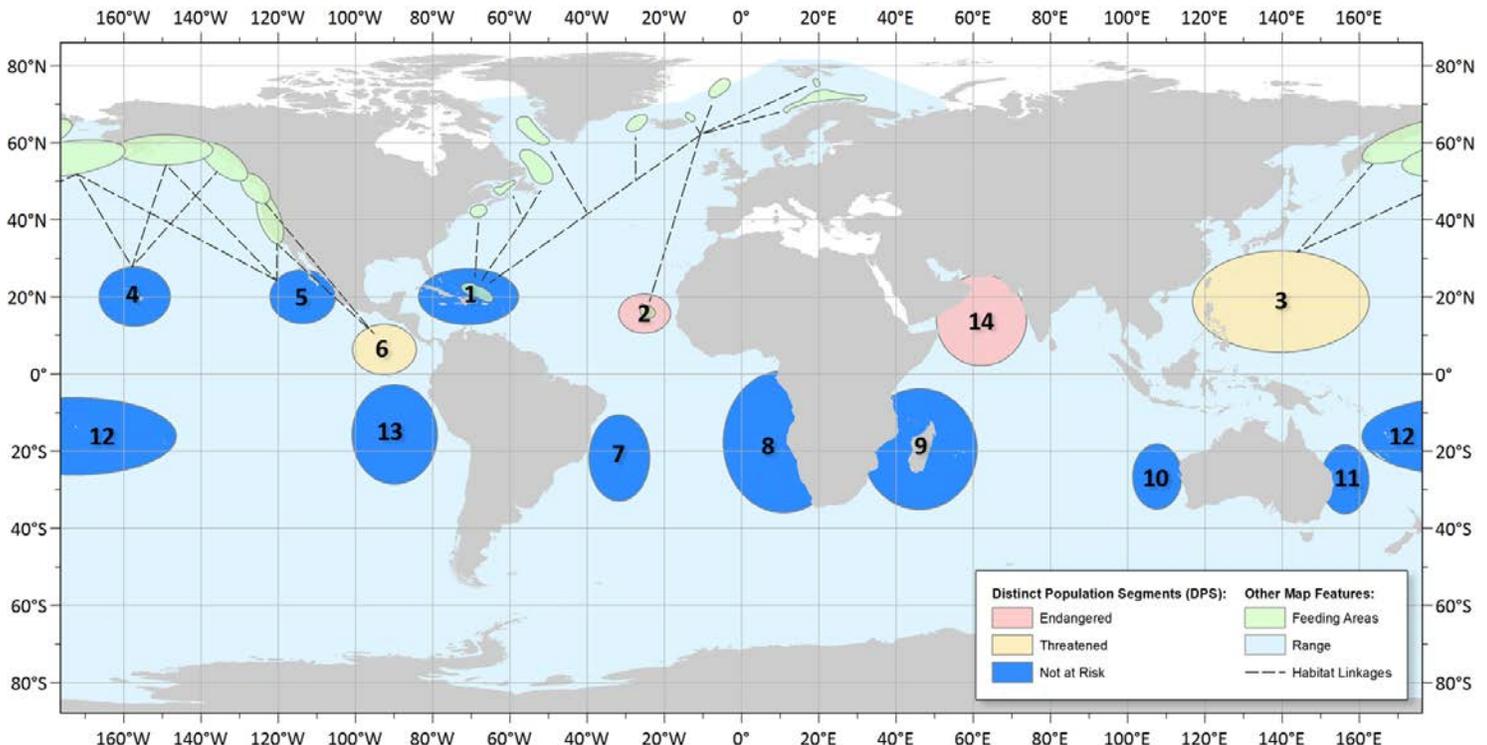
Also under the proposal, two of the other four populations would be listed as endangered and the remaining two would be listed as threatened. If the proposal is finalized, the humpback whale populations no longer listed under the ESA would remain protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

continued on next page



Dramatic behaviors, like this breach, make the humpback whale a popular subject for whale watching. Credit: Ari Friedlaender. Taken under NOAA Fisheries Permit #14245.

Distinct Population Segment: A population or group of populations that is discrete from other populations of the species and significant in relation to the entire species. The ESA provides for listing species, subspecies or distinct populations segments of vertebrate species.



Approximate locations of proposed humpback whale distinct population segments: 1. West Indies, 2. Cape Verde Islands/Northwest Africa, 3. Western North Pacific, 4. Hawaii, 5. Mexico, 6. Central America, 7. Brazil, 8. Gabon/Southwest Africa, 9. Southeast Africa/Madagascar, 10. West Australia, 11. East Australia, 12. Oceania, 13. Southeastern Pacific, 14. Arabian Sea. (Credit: NOAA)

Humpback Listing *(continued from page 4)*

NOAA Fisheries initiated an extensive review of the status of humpback whales in 2010, the results of which support separating the species into distinct population segments. The review also finds that many of the populations are not in danger of extinction (endangered) or likely to become so in the foreseeable future (threatened).

“The return of the iconic humpback whale is an ESA success story,” said Eileen Sobeck, Assistant NOAA Administrator for Fisheries. “As we learn more about the species – and realize the populations are largely independent of each other – managing them separately allows us to focus protection on the animals that need it the most.”

The two populations proposed as threatened – the Central America and the Western North Pacific – at times enter U.S. waters. Two other populations that do not enter U.S. waters – in the Arabian Sea and off Cape Verde Islands/Northwest Africa – would remain listed as endangered.

NOAA Fisheries opened up a 90-day public comment period beginning April 20 for this proposed rule.



A humpback whale feeds in the sanctuary. Credit: Ari Friedlaender. Taken under NOAA Fisheries Permit #14245.

Interested in submitting comments? Here's how!

You may submit comments, information, or data on the proposal to reclassify the humpback whale under ESA, identified by the code NOAA-NMFS-2015-0035, by either of the following methods.

Electronic Submissions: Submit all electronic comments via the Federal eRulemaking Portal. Go to <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2015-0035>, then click the “Comment Now!” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

Mail: Submit written comments to Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

Deadline for submissions: July 20, 2015

Sanctuary Enforcement Officer Named Officer of the Year

The Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife has named Timothy Wilmarth, the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) officer assigned to Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, as its Officer of the Year. In addition to the sanctuary, Tim's region covers Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, including the nation's largest fishing port (in terms of value of catch landed).



Wilmarth has more than 13 years in the law enforcement industry, beginning shortly after graduating from the University of Maine in 1997 when he started with the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol. After a short sabbatical, he rejoined the uniformed services after the 9/11 attack reignited his desire to serve.

“I wanted to be involved,” Wilmarth said. “I felt very frustrated sitting at a cubicle and wanted to do my part.”

He enlisted in the Coast Guard Reserve and served as a ranger for the National Park Service for seven years before landing at NOAA in 2011. Wilmarth explained that he thoroughly enjoyed the “natural resources aspect” to his job with the park service, so the transition to NOAA was simple.

OLE officers have large areas of responsibility, which can be challenging. Each community within that area faces different hardships and has a wide variety of concerns and views of the law enforcement field. “In covering a three state geographic area, I rely heavily on my counterparts at state and local enforcement departments to accomplish the mission,” he said.

Wilmarth works hard to build relationships throughout the community through education. He notes that it is no simple feat to navigate the regulations and ever-changing climate of fisheries. Wilmarth believes that building stronger relationships and maintaining an approachable character will make for more collaborative and responsive working environments for all parties, including fisher-men, state partners, scientists and the ocean-going public.

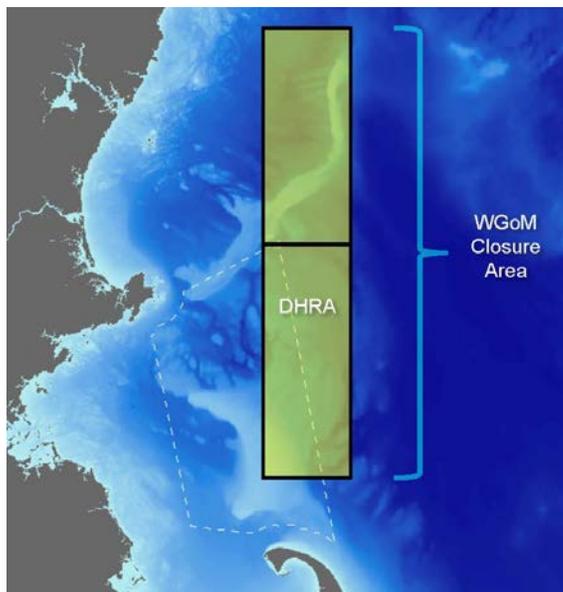
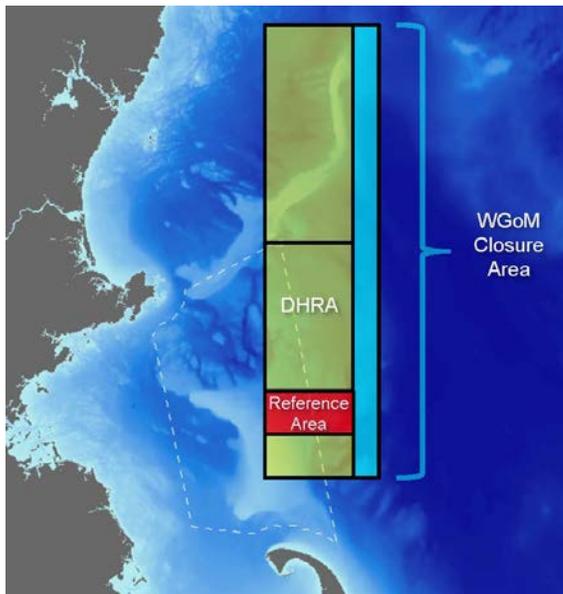
Adapted from a NOAA OLE story by Ally Rogers

The Federal Register Notice about reclassifying the humpback whale under the Endangered Species Act can be found at

<https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2015/04/21/2015-09010/endangered-and-threatened-species-identification-of-14-distinct-population-segments-of-the-humpback>

Endangered Species Day is May 15

Stellwagen Dedicated Habitat Research Area approved; Reference Area rejected



On April 23, the New England Fisheries Management Council voted to approve a Stellwagen Dedicated Habitat Research Area but declined to support the small Reference Area, which would have restricted recreational and party boat ground-fishing (along with restrictions on commercial groundfishing already in place) to create a 55 square mile scientific control area for essential fish habitat studies.

The Council's final action in this case reduces the amount of seafloor previously protected from commercial groundfishing by removing the eastern portion of the Western Gulf of Maine (WGoM) Closure Area. The top image shows the original WGoM Closure Area in green and blue and the proposed Reference Area in red; the bottom image shows the new WGoM Closure Area in green, including the Stellwagen DHRA without the Reference Area. Recreational groundfishing (for allowable species) will continue throughout the entire WGoM Closure Area. Within the DHRA, commercial groundfishing may be allowed under research permits.

You Said It!

"You Said It!" – an interactive activity in two parts.

1. Readers are invited to submit their captions for the selected photo of the month. The caption can reflect the "real" description of the item, event or place or the caption can be a "humorous" interpretation of the image. email us the correct answer will receive a sanctuary poster.
2. Please refrain from crude, sexist or other inappropriate language. Sanctuary staff will vote for their favorite selection; the winning entry will be posted in the following issue of *E-Notes*. Winners in each category get a sanctuary poster; names will be included if desired. If no entries are received, sanctuary staff will provide answers.

May 2015 Photo



Submit your entries to: stellwagen@noaa.gov. In the subject line of your email write: May 2015 (real or humorous) caption. Include your name and mailing address in the body of the email text along with your caption.

REAL:

This painting was created by Plymouth South High School Senior Coleman Barnes, who took 6th place in the 2014 Mass. Marine Educators marine art contest. Recreational fishing rules prohibit humans from taking Gulf of Maine cod and white sharks, but in the animal world, human rules don't apply. Prey must always be on the watch for predators.

March 2015 Answers



HUMOR: "Guess who's coming to dinner?"

"I'm not sure if 'Follow the Leader' is a great game to be playing right now."

"Hmm ... Do I want sushi tonight or just go with tacos?"



“Whales in Your Backyard” splashes into YMCA

The Stellwagen Bank “A Child’s Sanctuary” program, “Whales in Your Backyard,” was one of the April vacation week programs at the Emilson YMCA in Hanover, Mass. An obstacle course in the pool let young swimmers navigate hazards that whales might encounter in their travels (like simulated boats, debris, nets, etc.). The sanctuary’s life-sized inflatable whale was the setting for talks on whale biology by volunteers Caitlin Fitzmaurice and Heather Gaughan, while other children participated in a variety of hands-on activities, including learning about blubber with blubber gloves, trying different whale feeding techniques, and making humpback whale hats.



Photos (clockwise from top): swimming through “whale hazards;” coloring whale hats; trying on a survival suit; using tongs (like the teeth of a toothed whales) to catch fish; trying the insulating effects of a blubber glove; sanctuary Ambassador Caitlin Fitzmaurice teaching about whales from inside “Lefty,” the sanctuary’s life-sized juvenile right whale. All photos by Anne Smrcina, SBNMS.

Caitlin Fitzmaurice – 2014 Volunteer of the Year

Each year Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary and National Marine Sanctuary Foundation honor the Volunteer of the Year. The 2014 recipient is Caitlin Fitzmaurice. Caitlin began volunteering for the sanctuary in 2011 during her sophomore year at Scituate High School. Since then she has watched for whales on research cruises and run community events. She encourages others to get involved with sanctuary stewardship.

Caitlin has created a model for sanctuary partnerships with Girl Scouts. While still in high school she chose Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary as the focus for her Gold Award project, developing activities to teach children about local marine life and how they can take a role in protecting these living resources. She helped create the whale version of the “A Child’s Sanctuary” program (the original sanctuary program featured shipwrecks) and created a local version of a Marine Animal Emergency Contact Card. Caitlin helped to further strengthen the collaboration between sanctuaries and Girl Scouts by working to create an oceanography badge that incorporates sanctuary content, and is now working with sanctuary staff and the Scouts to propose a National Marine Sanctuaries badge.

Caitlin will be a sophomore at the University of Massachusetts, Boston in the fall with a planned major in marine science. In addition to her volunteer activities with the sanctuary, Caitlin enjoys playing the flute and baking – the products of which have been tempting the palates of sanctuary staff over the years.

Photo courtesy of Fitzmaurice family



Get ready for Get into Your Sanctuary Days June 27-28

On the last weekend of June, ocean lovers across the nation will go whale watching, fishing, boating, kayaking, surfing, and participate in a host of other ocean-related activities during the first national celebration of “Get into Your Sanctuary” days.

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary will be working with the whale watch industry, fishermen, bird watchers, and our education partners to get the word out and encourage the public to visit New England’s only national marine sanctuary.



View a new collection of fascinating photographs and an intriguing video every week from your national marine sanctuaries at <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/earthisblue.html>

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY SYSTEM



Scale varies in this perspective. Adapted from National Geographic Maps.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration

National Ocean Service

Office of National Marine Sanctuaries

Gerry E. Studds Stellwagen Bank
National Marine Sanctuary



<http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/>