



EDITION 4: MARCH 3, 2021

During these challenging times, it is easy to feel a little disconnected from our communities. We are hoping this newsletter will help to reconnect people with nature through a common goal of a healthy Sound.



FEATURED VOLUNTEER

Here is where you can learn about a featured volunteer that is championing the Sound's protection - Alex Arboleda



Alex at the edge of the Stawamus River.

My name is Alex and though I have not always lived near it, I have a lifelong relationship with Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound in the unceded territory of the Squamish Nation.

My childhood was spent living mostly in the U.S., Mexico, and France but every year I would visit my aunt and uncle in Squamish. Even as a child, I remember thinking that it was one of the most beautiful places in the world.

Fast forward a couple of decades and now I find myself living in Vancouver and working with Ocean Wise as a Manager for the Ocean Bridge Pacific program. This position provides me tools to help empower Canadian youth to protect environmentally and culturally significant waterways such as Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound. This has led me to work with different volunteers on developing community service projects in the area. Most recently, we are helping one of the groups of volunteers to update the signage in marinas around whale sighting protocols.

The highlight of my last year in this position was the 30 days that I spent in and around Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound as a leader of the Ocean Bridge program. We worked with the Indigenous education team at the Cheakamus Centre for two days to teach folks about the interconnectedness of the water and land and how it is important that neither can thrive unless both are preserved. I am excited to continue working towards preserving the ecology and culture of Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound.

GOOD NEWS

Here is where you can read about a positive story in Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound



Iconic local species receives international conservation status

The largest and one of the fastest sea stars in the world has 20+ arms and grows as big as 1m across! The sunflower sea stars' (Pycnopodia helianthoides) conservation status was officially listed as Critically Endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) back in December. Achieving a Red Listing is encouraging and is definitely a conservation win because it is a powerful tool to raise awareness, inform protection policies and promote recovery. The global population of the sunflower sea stars has declined by over 90% due to the sea star wasting syndrome – believed to be the largest marine wildlife epidemic on record.

“The listing process was a collaborative effort among dozens of researchers and involved thousands of surveys from Canada, the US and Mexico. It was inspiring to see so many people come together to try and save the humble sunflower sea star, an animal that so many of us took for granted when it was hyper abundant. I remember diving at Whytecliff when the walls were just carpeted with them, and moving them aside so I could look at the ‘interesting stuff’ underneath them,” says Jessica Schultz, sea star researcher.

“It’s a good sign, in my mind, that non-commercial species are beginning to be recognized internationally as they are critically important to ocean health and ecosystem function,” Jessica highlights.

“It’s a reminder how easy it is to take something for granted when it is in abundance. Marine species are really hard to list on the IUCN Red List since it’s hard to definitely prove population abundances due to the nature of, well, being underwater,” says Fiona Beaty, lead of the Marine Reference Guide.

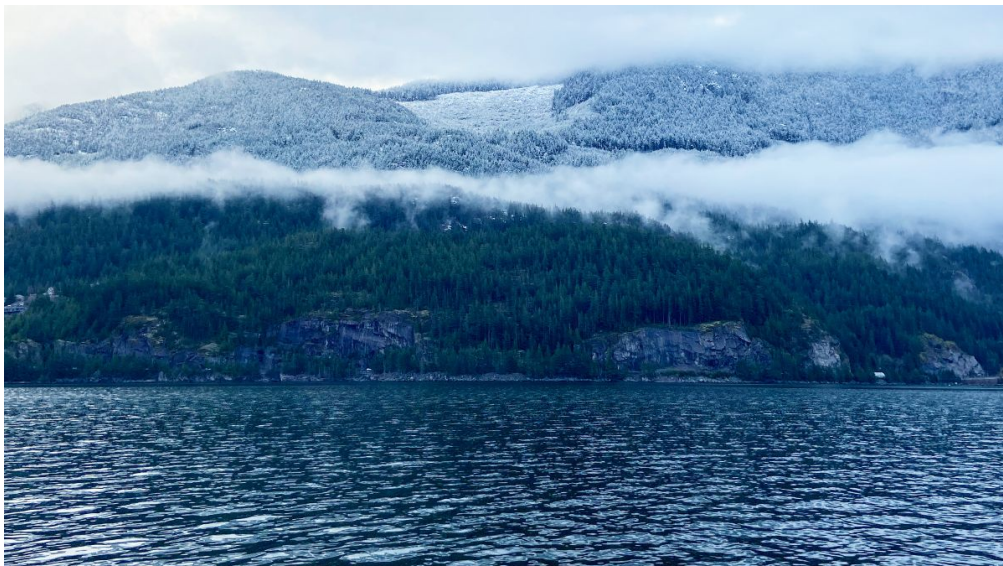
When sea stars get sea star wasting syndrome they become “zombies” - their arms turn to mush, leading to them falling off. There’s no clear reason why this is happening. Because sunflower sea stars are a key predator of sea urchins who munch on kelp forests, this forms a chain reaction. Without sunflower sea stars in Átl’ka7tsem/Howe Sound, urchin populations have dramatically exploded and kelp forest ecosystems have declined.

That's why long-term monitoring efforts are critical and many conservation and recovery efforts are underway. For example, the Howe Sound Conservation and Research Team conducted ~1000 dive surveys in Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound during the last decade, and contributed critical information for the listing process. We know very little about how long sunflower stars live, how fast they grow, and how they breed. Jessica and other researchers are conducting more sea star surveys at McNab Creek this spring to help learn more!

For more on sea stars in Howe Sound/Átl'ka7tsem and what you can do, check out an article in the [2020 Ocean Watch](#) [Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound](#).

GET INVOLVED

Here is where you can learn about some opportunities to help contribute to a healthy Sound



Majestic clouds at freezing level above the Sound

Photo credit: Bridget John

- **Abandoned Boats Program - Transport Canada: [5th call for proposals](#)**
- **Ocean Bridge: [Apply to be an ambassador](#)**
- **Howe Sound Biosphere Region Initiative: Check out the [Ocean Watch Action Tracker](#)**

- Squamish Atlas: Learn some [Skwxwú7mesh \(Squamish\) place names](#), project of Kwi Awt Stelmexw
- Ocean Wise Research: Search for lingcod egg masses and [report your survey](#)

For more ways to get involved check out this [list from Ocean Watch](#).

EVENTS

Here is a place to learn about some of the events happening around the Sound

Ocean Watch Education Kit: Teacher Workshop

- March 5th 2:20pm hosted by the Ocean Wise and the HSBRI [click here](#)

Ocean Storytelling Showcase

- March 6th 2pm hosted by Tales for Gaia and Ocean Bridge [click here](#)

Monthly Bird Counts

- March 7th 8:30am hosted by the Lighthouse Park Preservation Society [click here](#)
- March 14th 8:00am hosted by the Squamish Environment Society [click here](#)

Spring - Observing Nature in your own Backyard (self guided activity)

- Hosted by Bowen Nature Club [click here](#)

**Thank you for reading and loving
Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound as much as we do!**

Edition 4 of the Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound Volunteer Newsletter will be out June 2nd 2021.

We want to hear from YOU! Know about something or someone that you would like to be featured? [Contact here](#)

Newsletter by - Bridget John

A warm thank you to our partners listed below



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Howe Sound Biosphere Region Initiative Society
howesoundbri.org

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