



MARINE SCIENCE

Breaking the Surface

From early navigation, mapping, and seafaring technologies to modern tools like submersibles and sonar, American innovation has pushed the boundaries of ocean exploration. These breakthroughs have enabled scientists to “break the surface,” transforming how we study and protect the ocean resources.

These scientists and innovators are grouped into four categories based on their contributions to the field of marine science, with a focus on ocean exploration:



Powered
Vessels



Mapping
the Oceans



Exploring
the Deep



Ocean Stewardship
and Protection



1. Timothy Folger (1768)

Timothy Folger, a cousin of Benjamin Franklin, was a hydrographer and captain of a merchant ship. Drawing on his years of whaling experience, Folger helped Franklin chart the Gulf Stream in 1768, work that contributed to the first scientific study of the ocean current in 1775.



2. Robert Fulton (1807)

Robert Fulton was an inventor and engineer best known for developing the first successful commercial steamboat service in 1807. His achievement helped launch the era of powered watercraft, reducing dependence on wind-driven water transport.



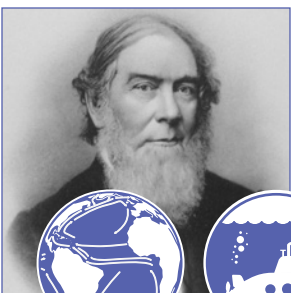
3. Lieutenant Charles Wilkes (1838)

Lieutenant Charles Wilkes was a naval officer in command of the exploratory expedition that discovered the part of Antarctica now known as Wilkes Land. Wilkes' explorations proved Antarctica was a continent, shaping the way we understand Earth's geography.



4. John Ericsson (1843)

John Ericsson, a Swedish American inventor and mechanical engineer, developed one of the first practical screw propellers and oversaw the construction of the U.S. Navy's first screw-propelled ship, launched in 1843. The adoption of the screw propeller marked a major advance in naval engineering. This technology is still used as the primary form of high-speed marine propulsion today.



5. Alexander Dallas Bache (1845)

Alexander Dallas Bache was a scientist and engineer who served as the second superintendent of the United States Coast Survey. In 1845, he issued detailed surveys of the Gulf Stream, building upon the work of his great-grandfather, Benjamin Franklin. The survey's findings not only advanced the understanding of America's coastal waters but also helped contribute to the identification of the continental shelf break and the continental slope.



6. Commander Matthew Fontaine Maury (1855)

Commander Matthew Fontaine Maury was a naval officer and hydrographer who published the first American oceanography textbook in 1855. His book, *The Physical Geography of the Sea*, along with his other contributions, has led to him being widely regarded as one of the founders of modern oceanography.



7. Rear Admiral James Alden Jr. (1857)

Rear Admiral James Alden Jr. was a naval officer that discovered the first known seafloor canyon in 1857. This deep submarine valley, off the California coast, is called Monterey Canyon.



8. Louis François de Pourtalès (1867)

Louis François de Pourtalès emigrated from Switzerland to the United States in 1847. When he joined the United States Coast Survey in 1848, he took an interest in the deep sea and began questioning the previously held notion that life did not exist past 300 fathoms (1,800 feet). His dredging operations through the United States Coast Survey discovered life in depths of over 1000 fathoms (6,000 feet).



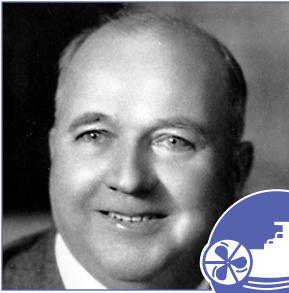
9. Captain Charles Dwight Sigsbee (1875)

Captain Charles Dwight Sigsbee was a hydrographer and inventor who designed several devices to explore the depths of the ocean. His most notable invention, the Sigsbee sounding machine, was the first to measure the deepest point in the Gulf of Mexico and remained the standard instrument for deep-sea measurement for the next 50 years.



10. Rear Admiral John Elliott Pillsbury (1891)

Rear Admiral John Elliott Pillsbury was an engineer and author, publishing *The Gulf Stream: Methods of the Investigation and Results of the Research* in 1891. This book presented foundational information about the Gulf Stream and shared Pillsbury's findings from studying ocean currents using his invention, the Pillsbury current meter.



11. Ole Evinrude (1911)

Ole Evinrude was a Norwegian American inventor, engineer, and entrepreneur best known for creating the first commercially successful outboard marine internal combustion engine, which he patented in 1911. His outboard motor revolutionized boat travel and helped make recreational boating accessible to the general public.



12. Ernest Everett Just, Ph.D. (1912)

Dr. Ernest Everett Just was the first Black American to work and study at the University of Chicago's Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. During his time there, he published foundational work on the cell biology of marine invertebrate eggs.



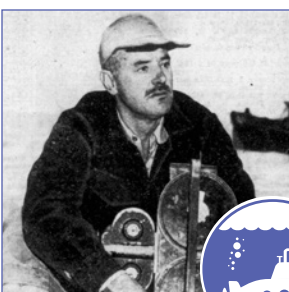
13. Herbert Grove Dorsey, Ph.D. (1923)

Dr. Herbert Grove Dorsey was an engineer, physicist, and the inventor of the fathometer, the first practical water depth measuring device used on ships. The Dorsey fathometer worked by sending a high-pitched sound through the water and measuring the time it took for the sound to travel from the ship to the ocean floor and back.



14. Henry Bryant Bigelow (1930)

Henry Bryant Bigelow was an oceanographer who scientifically described over 100 new marine species. He founded the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in 1930 to fulfill his vision and belief in the importance of taking an interdisciplinary approach to studying our oceans.



15. Frederick Otis Barton Jr. (1930)

Frederick Otis Barton Jr. invented two deep-sea submersibles, the Bathysphere and Benthoscope. In 1934, the Bathysphere descended to a depth of 3,028 feet; In 1949, the Benthoscope, which could withstand more pressure, descended to 4,500 feet below the ocean's surface.

Credit: Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute



Credit: Wildlife Conservation Society



16. Gloria Hollister Anable (1932)

Gloria Hollister Anable was an explorer and scientist who worked for the Department of Tropical Research at the New York Zoological Society. During a 1932-1933 oceanographic expedition in Bermuda, she developed a new method for preparing fish specimens that made the skin and internal organs transparent. This made it much easier for scientists to study the skeletons of both reef and deep-sea fish. In 1934, she set the record for the deepest dive completed by a woman by descending 1,208 feet in a submersible called the Bathysphere.



17. Athelstan Frederick Spilhaus, Ph.D. (1937)

Dr. Athelstan Frederick Spilhaus, a South African American oceanographer, invented the bathythermograph in 1937. This technology allowed scientists to record water temperatures at different depths, leading to the discovery of a rapid change in temperature between the surface and the deep ocean (the thermocline). Scientists still use modified versions of this technology to understand changes in ocean temperatures.



18. Captain Elliott B. Roberts (1938)

Elliott B. Roberts was a captain of the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey. In 1938 he invented the Roberts radio current meter, which allowed ocean current data to be received via radio signals.



19. Martin Wiggo Johnson, Ph.D. (1945)

Dr. Martin Wiggo Johnson was a marine ecologist who used sonar to discover that the deep scattering layer, a region of the ocean's water column that reflected sonar, was due to a large number of marine organisms migrating towards the surface to feed.



20. Marie Tharp (1952)

Marie Tharp was a geologist and oceanographic cartographer who produced the first scientific map of the Atlantic Ocean floor in partnership with geologist Bruce Heezen. In 1952, Tharp used sounding profiles from the research ship Atlantis to map the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, a monumental discovery that ultimately helped scientists accept the theories of plate tectonics and continental drift.



Credit: Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute



21. Allyn Vine (1956)

Allyn Vine was an oceanographer and avid supporter of deep-sea exploration. Vine advocated for the development of submersibles that allowed for human exploration of the deep sea, work that was green-lighted in 1956. He helped design the first deep-sea submersible, which his coworkers named Alvin in his honor.



22. Captain George Foote Bond (1957)

Captain George Foote Bond was a United States Navy physician known as the “Father of Saturation Diving.” In 1957, Bond began the Genesis project to research whether humans could breathe different gases under increased environmental pressure for an extended period of time. This project led to the Navy’s Man-in-the-Sea Program. In 1963, three participants in the Genesis project successfully completed the world’s first saturation dive, staying 100 feet underwater for 6 days straight.



Credit: Wildlife Conservation Society



23. Jocelyn Crane (1959)

In 1959, Jocelyn Crane was the first woman to receive a National Geographic Society grant. This grant was awarded to Crane because of her extensive and thorough research on over 200 species of fiddler crabs. She also worked alongside Gloria Hollister at the New York Zoological Society Department of Tropical Research.



24. Harold Eugene “Doc” Edgerton, Ph.D. (1960)

Dr. Harold Eugene “Doc” Edgerton was an electrical engineer known for his work with French inventor Jacques-Yves Cousteau. By the 1960s, his developments in sonar technology, including the “thumper” and “boomer,” enabled scientists to observe the locations and shapes of objects and geological structures on the ocean floor.



25. Harold “Bud” Froehlich (1964)

Harold “Bud” Froehlich was an American engineer who helped design the deep-sea submersible Alvin. With Froehlich as project manager, Alvin was a success, capable of carrying up to three people and diving over 14,000 feet. Alvin expanded the field of deep-sea research and is still being used today.



26. Emmett W. Chappelle (1966)

Emmett W. Chappelle was a NASA scientist and the first person to identify the chemical reaction behind bioluminescence. He was inducted into the Inventors Hall of Fame in 2007 and held numerous patents for his work on bioluminescence and fluorescence.



27. Robert Treat Paine III, Ph.D. (1966)

Dr. Robert Treat Paine III was an ecologist who first described the concepts of keystone species (1966) and trophic cascades (1979). His work revealed why some species have a huge impact on the biodiversity and health of their ecosystems and remains foundational for the field of ecology today.



28. Patricia Louise Dudley, Ph.D. (1968)

Dr. Patricia Louise Dudley was a marine biologist who used electron microscopy to research copepods. The electron microscope allowed Dudley to study the eyes, sensory receptors, and other organs of copepods in new detail, among the first to do so. Copepods are an important food source for many marine species, including Right and Bowheadwhales.



29. Edwin Albert Link Jr. (1970)

Edwin Albert Link Jr. was an aviator and inventor who focused on making underwater exploration safer. In 1970, he invented the Johnson Sea Link submersible for deep-sea diving and research. In 1973, Link lost his son in a submersible-related accident. This tragedy led Link to invent the CORD, or Cabled Observation and Rescue Device, which had lights, cameras and cutters to rescue a trapped submersible.



30. Roger Payne, Ph.D. (1970)

31. Katy Payne (1970)

Dr. Roger Payne and Katy Payne (husband and wife) were recording whale sounds with a hydrophone in Bermuda when they discovered that humpback whales were singing complex songs. They recorded these whale songs and released them on an album titled *Songs of the Humpback Whale* in 1970. This LP is the bestselling nature sound recording of all time.

Credit: Ocean Alliance



Credit: Mote Marine Laboratory



32. Eugenie Clark, Ph.D. (1973)

Dr. Eugenie Clark, also known as the “Shark Lady,” was an ichthyologist who discovered sharks sleeping in caves, disproving the long-held myth that sharks had to keep swimming to breathe. She also became the founding director of Cape Haze Marine Laboratory, now known as Mote Marine Laboratory, in 1955.



Credit: Para la Naturaleza



33. Álida Ortiz Sotomayor, Ph.D. (1976)

Dr. Álida Ortiz Sotomayor founded the Coastal Marine Biology Program at the University of Puerto Rico in 1976 after becoming the first Puerto Rican woman to receive a Ph.D. from the university. Since then, Sotomayor has trained and mentored hundreds of educators and marine scientists, making immense contributions to marine conservation programs across Puerto Rico.



34. Robert Duane Ballard, Ph.D. (1977)

Dr. Robert Duane Ballard is an oceanographer and ocean explorer who, in 1977, was the first person to discover active hydrothermal vents, revealing entire new communities of organisms to science. Ballard also developed the Argo, an uncrewed, towed, underwater sled outfitted with cameras and lighting that allowed scientists and explorers to view footage of the sea floor in real-time. Ballard used the Argo to find the Titanic in 1985.



35. Sylvia Earle, Ph.D. (1979)

Dr. Sylvia Earle, also known as “Her Deepness,” is an oceanographer and marine biologist who holds the world record for the deepest untethered dive. In 1979, she used the JIM diving suit to descend 1,250 feet and walk along the sea floor. She was also the first woman to serve as chief scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.



36. Joan Murrell Owens (1986)

Joan Murrell Owens, who grew up in Miami and graduated from Booker T. Washington High School, was a coral biologist and expert on button corals. Despite being unable to dive due to a sickle cell anemia diagnosis, Owens identified a new genus of button corals, Rhonbosammia, through meticulous study of specimens in the Smithsonian collections in 1986.



37. **Cindy Lee Van Dover, Ph.D. (1989)**

Dr. Cindy Lee Van Dover is a deep-sea biologist and was named the first woman director of the Duke University Maine Laboratory in 2006. She made history in 1989 as the first female pilot of the deep-sea research submersible Alvin. During her many dives as pilot-in-command of Alvin, she discovered numerous new species of mussels, shrimp, tube worms, and bacteria.



Credit: Doug Perrine

38. **Samuel Harvey Gruber, Ph.D. (1990)**

Dr. Samuel Harvey Gruber was a shark biologist, long time professor at the University of Miami, and an avid lover of sharks, which he studied for over 50 years. Gruber also founded the Bimini Biological Field Station in 1990, which is still used to study sharks and rays.



Credit: ESRI

39. **Dawn Jeannine Wright, Ph.D. (1991)**

Dr. Dawn Jeannine Wright is an oceanographer and the current chief scientist of the Environmental Systems Research Institute, a global leader in the application of geographic information systems (GIS) to understanding our planet. In 1991, Wright was the first black woman to dive to the seafloor in the submersible Alvin, where she used GIS to map the sea floor. Wright has since mapped significant areas of the deep-sea, including the Tonga Trench and the Juan de Fuca Ridge. In 2022, Wright also became the first Black person to dive to Challenger Deep, the deepest point in the Mariana Trench.



40. **Isabella Abbott, Ph.D. (1997)**

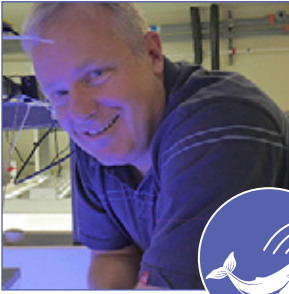
Dr. Isabella Abbott was an ethnobiologist who grew up in Hawaii learning about culturally-relevant, edible species of marine algae. The first native Hawaiian to earn a Ph.D. in science, Abbott discovered over 200 species of marine algae and is internationally recognized as an authority on marine plants. In 1997, she received the Gilbert Morgan Smith Medal from the National Academy of Sciences, the highest award for marine botanists.



41. **Barbara Block, Ph.D. (2000)**

Dr. Barbara Block is an oceanographer and Stanford University professor recognized for her pioneering work in wildlife telemetry. Since the late 1990s, Block and her team have developed and deployed innovative tracking and tagging technologies. These include advanced electronic tags for tuna, sharks, and other pelagic species, revealing important information for the conservation of these iconic animals.

Credit: Peter Benchley Ocean Awards



42. Chris Langdon, Ph.D. (2000)

Dr. Chris Langdon is a coral biologist, oceanographer, and professor in the Department of Marine Biology and Ecology in the Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric, and Earth Science at the University of Miami. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, he demonstrated that changes in pH significantly affect coral growth. This foundational work helped identify ocean acidification as a major threat to coral reefs.



Credit: The Nature Conservancy



43. Nancy Knowlton, Ph.D. (2001)

Dr. Nancy Knowlton is a coral reef biologist whose research focuses on marine diversity and conservation. In 2001, she founded the Center for Marine Biodiversity and Conservation at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego. Knowlton also wrote *Citizens of the Sea* in 2010, a National Geographic book which highlights marine organisms discovered during the decade-long Census of Marine Life project.



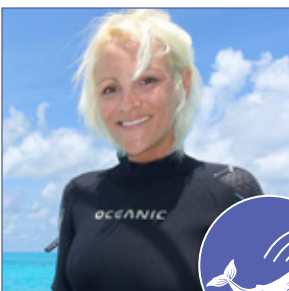
44. Frances Gulland, Ph.D. (2001)

Dr. Frances Gulland is a marine mammalogist who co-authored the CRC Handbook of Marine Mammal Medicine in 2001, setting the standard for marine mammal medicine and health. Gulland was appointed as one of three commissioners on the Marine Mammal Commission by President Obama and continues to serve in this role, providing oversight on the protection and conservation of marine mammals.



45. Dean Grubbs, Ph.D. (2007)

Dr. Dean Grubbs has worked at Florida State University since 2007, studying the smalltooth sawfish, an endangered species that lives primarily in Florida's coastal waters. Grubbs's research focuses on protecting smalltooth sawfish by designating critical habitat in the United States and the Bahamas and reducing sawfish bycatch.



46. Jillian Morris (2012)

Jillian Morris is the founder and president of Sharks4Kids. Sharks4Kids is a non-profit organization that cultivates hands-on learning experiences for children with the goal of inspiring them to be shark advocates. Morris resides in Bimini, Bahamas where she works as an educator, sharing her love and knowledge of sharks. (icon: Ocean Stewardship and Protection)



47. Mya Breitbart, Ph.D. (2013)

Dr. Mya Breitbart is a professor of biological oceanography at the University of South Florida who specializes in virology. Breitbart and her team were the first scientists to discover evidence of viruses infecting marine zooplankton. (icon: Ocean Stewardship and Protection)



48. David Gruber, Ph.D. (2015)

Dr. David Gruber is a marine scientist and conservationist whose research led to the 2015 discovery the first biofluorescent sea turtle, a hawksbill turtle in the Solomon Islands. In 2020, Gruber founded Project CETI (Cetacean Translation Initiative), an interdisciplinary initiative to decode whale song. (icon: Ocean Stewardship and Protection)



49. Michael Ford, Ph.D. (2015)

50. Allen Collins, Ph.D. (2015)

Dr. Michael Ford and Dr. Allen Collins, NOAA Fisheries scientists, were leading an expedition off the coast of Puerto Rico using the remotely operated vehicle Deep Discoverer when they spotted a never-before-seen comb jelly. This was the first time NOAA scientists used high-quality video to identify a new species. This comb jelly was 4,000 meters down and bringing it to the surface to study was not possible, making video and imaging crucial in the identification process.



51. Kakani Katija, Ph.D. (2015)

Dr. Kakani Katija is a Hawaiian bioengineer who was integral in the development of DeepPIV in 2015. The DeepPIV uses lasers to illuminate particles in the water and find small currents around tiny, deep-sea marine animals called larvaceans. This made it possible for scientists to study larvaceans and how they feed. (icon: Exploring the Deep)



52. Ruth Gates, Ph.D. (2015)

Dr. Ruth Gates was a marine biologist and director of the Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology where she was one of the first scientists to attempt to improve coral resilience through selective breeding. In 2015, Gates selected corals who had thrived during a local heat wave to reproduce, with the hope that they would produce baby corals more resilient to a warming ocean. She was successful in breeding coral offspring with a higher thermal tolerance and laid the foundation for future scientists to continue with this work.



53. Cristiana Castello Branco, Ph.D. (2017)

Dr. Cristiana Castello Branco has discovered several new species of sponges, including a deep-sea sponge called the "Alien Sponge." This sponge was discovered more than 6,500 feet beneath the ocean's surface with the remotely operated vehicle Deep Discoverer.



Credit: Marcus Branch

54. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, Ph.D. (2018)

Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson is a marine biologist, policy expert, and writer. In 2018, she co-founded Urban Ocean Lab, a think tank focused on creating and implementing policies for coastal cities to help improve climate resilience.



55. Catherine MacDonald, Ph.D. (2018)

Dr. Catherine Macdonald is a marine biologist and the Director of the Shark Research and Conservation Program at the University of Miami's Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric and Earth Science. In 2018, she led research surveys documented the first-known great hammerhead nursery on the east coast of the United States, a breakthrough that continues to provide vital guidance for protecting this critically endangered species.



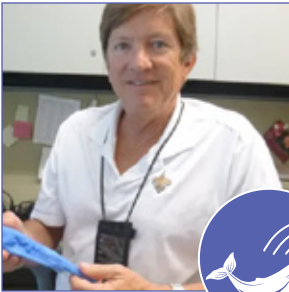
56. Jeanette Davis, Ph.D. (2019)

Dr. Jeanette Davis, a marine microbiologist and assistant professor at Hampton University, Virginia, is known for studying bacteria in sea slugs. Her 2014 research laid the foundation for discovering the connection between marine bacteria and anticancer compounds. This could lead to the sustainable production of anticancer compounds for medical use.



57. Anela Choy, Ph.D. (2019)

Dr. Anela Choy is a biological oceanographer and assistant professor at Scripps Institution of Oceanography. In 2019, Choy discovered plastics in the stomachs of lancetfish, a species that lives around 1,000 feet below the surface. She also led a team of scientists in designing a remotely operated vehicle to track microplastic pollution in Monterey Bay. They found that the highest concentration of microplastics occurred between 650 and 1,000 feet deep.



58. Mark Grace (2019)

Mark Grace was a fisheries biologist with NOAA in 2019 when he found an unusual-looking specimen of small shark. After confirming it was a previously undescribed species—known only from one other specimen found in Peru in 1979—the shark was aptly named the American Pocket Shark for its small size and tiny ‘pockets’ near its gills.



59. Tiara Moore, Ph.D. (2020)

Dr. Tiara Moore is the Founder and CEO of Black in Marine Science (BIMS). Moore’s career goals focus on enhanced equity in the marine science field, and BIMS aims to foster diversity and inclusion in the marine science world by providing community and resources to scientists around the world.



60. Amy Phung (2021)

Amy Phung is an Asian American roboticist who developed a VR app that may help improve the piloting of underwater remotely operated vehicles. Phung worked with pilots to get feedback on the project and is now in the process of collecting data to demonstrate the app’s utility.



61. Alicia Bitondo (2022)

Alicia Bitondo was a senior aquarist at the Monterey Bay Aquarium in 2022 when the institution was preparing for its groundbreaking “Into the Deep” exhibit. She was the first aquarist to breed salmon snailfish, a species of deep-sea fish. The offspring of these salmon snailfish would go on to be featured in the exhibit, along with other deep-sea species that had never been on exhibit before.



62. Paul Melovidov (2023)
63. Dallas Roberts (2023)
64. Aaron Lestenkof (2023)

Paul Melovidov, Dallas Roberts, and Aaron Lestenkof are Unangan (an Indigenous group in the Aleutian Islands) scientists who have been working since 2022 to save entangled northern fur seals. The disentanglement program they work for is run by the Tribal Government of the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island, in partnership with the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Melovidov, Roberts, and Lestenkof disentangle about 50 of these protected seals from fishing nets and other marine debris every year.

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1838	Lieutenant Charles Wilke
1843	John Ericsson
1845	Alexander Dallas Bache
1855	Commander Matthew Fontaine Maury
1857	Rear Admiral James Alden Jr.
1867	Louis François de Pourtalès
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1891	Rear Admiral John Elliott Pillsbury
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1912	Ernest Everett Just, Ph.D.
1923	Herbert Grove Dorsey, Ph.D.
1930	Frederick Otis Barton Jr. Henry Bryant Bigelow
1932	Gloria Hollister Anable
1937	Athelstan Frederick Spilhaus, Ph.D.
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1945	Martin Wiggo Johnson, Ph.D.
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2007	Dean Grubbs, Ph.D.
2012	Jillian Morris
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2017	Cristiana Castello Branco, Ph.D.
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2019	Jeanette Davis, Ph.D. Anela Choy, Ph.D. Mark Grace
2020	Tiara Moore, Ph.D.
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MARINE SCIENCE (by category)

Breaking the Surface

Exploring the Deep



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Ocean Stewardship and Protection



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