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Global Marine Mammal Scientists Gather in Puerto Rico for SMM2026

More than 1,500 researchers and experts will meet in San Juan to share new science on marine mammal conservation, climate change, health, ecology, communication, and emerging technologies

SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO – More than 1,500 marine mammal scientists, conservation practitioners, students, and experts from around the world will gather in San Juan next week for the 26th Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals (SMM2026), taking place 19-23 October 2026.

Organized by the Society for Marine Mammalogy, SMM2026 will bring together the global marine mammal research community for five days of scientific exchange, with more than 1,000 presentations spanning some of the most pressing questions facing marine mammals and their ecosystems.

Research presented during the conference will examine how climate change and marine heatwaves are reshaping populations, how pollutants and other human pressures affect marine mammal health, how new technologies are transforming the way scientists study animals at sea, and how communication, behaviour, ecology, and evolution can inform conservation and management.

The scientific program includes ten broad research themes covering acoustics and communication, anatomy and physiology, behaviour, conservation, ecology, evolution, health and contaminants, human interactions, population biology, and emerging research technologies.

Among the studies being presented are new approaches to monitoring marine mammal populations, research on fisheries interactions and bycatch, investigations of contaminant exposure and animal health, advances in bioacoustics and artificial intelligence, and studies examining how marine mammals respond to rapidly changing ocean conditions.

Five plenary speakers will highlight the breadth of the field. Laura May-Collado will explore the evolution of toothed whale communication; longtime manatee biologist Bob Bonde will reflect on nearly five decades of conservation research; Joanna Alfaro will examine mentorship and the future of marine mammal conservation in South America; Fernando Elorriaga-Verplancken will discuss Mexican pinnipeds as sentinels of environmental change; and paleontologist Jorge Vélez-Juarbe will trace approximately 45 million years of sirenian evolution across the Americas.

The conference will conclude on Friday, October 23 with the Society's Norris and Wood Award Presentations. Dr. Sue E. Moore, recipient of the 2026 Kenneth S. Norris Lifetime Achievement Award, will present "Chasing inter-species communication: what marine mammals are telling us about our oceans," drawing on a 45-year career studying cetacean behaviour, ecology, and environmental change. Bridgette O'Shannessy will present three decades of research on the recovery of southern right whales in Australian waters.

For journalists, SMM2026 provides an opportunity to hear new research as it is presented, connect directly with scientists working around the world, and explore emerging stories across marine mammal science, conservation, technology, and ocean change.

About SMM2026

The 26th Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals will take place 19-23 October 2026 at the Centro de Convenciones Pedro Rosselló González in San Juan, Puerto Rico, with pre-conference workshops on 17-18 October.

The conference theme, "One Ocean, One Future: Advancing Marine Mammal Science for Ecosystem Health," reflects the need for international collaboration, innovative science, and evidence-based approaches to understanding and conserving marine mammals and the ecosystems they inhabit.

The full scientific program is available online, with more than 1,000 presentations from researchers around the world.

For more information, visit www.smmconference.org.

About the Society for Marine Mammalogy

The Society for Marine Mammalogy is an international professional organization dedicated to advancing the science of marine mammals. The Society promotes research, education, collaboration, and conservation and publishes the peer-reviewed journal Marine Mammal Science.