NEWSLETTER

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OCEANS PAST INITIATIVE

Oceans Past XI: diverse fauna and shared wisdom

Welcome back to the Oceans Past News, where we are still riding the high of an incredible Oceans Past XI conference in Victoria! In this edition, we are thrilled to share wisdom from our brilliant keynote speakers alongside an exciting Early-Career Researcher Spotlight featuring a chance to get to know **Leah Rubin** better and also about her work on ichthyoliths (you will have to read on to learn more 😉) and an enthralling contribution from **Marios Papageorgiou** on historic shark bycatch in the Mediterranean (a subject matter I am very biased and very keen on!). Amongst all of this are your usual latest research in marine historical ecology and upcoming conferences and workshops!

Rachel M. Winter, *OPN Editor*
Globe Institute, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

OCEANS PAST SPOTLIGHT*

Here we all are, just over a month since the **Oceans Past XI Conference** which was held at the University of Victoria between the 15th and 19th of June 2026. We would like to acknowledge and extend our gratitude to the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples in whose territories the conference was held, and whose historical relationships with the lands and seas continue to this day.



Participants at the Oceans Past XI conference.

Over the conference we were treated to five *excellent* and engaging keynote talks delivered by **Daniel Pauly**, **Cristina Brito**, **Chelsea Wood**, **Hwsyun'yun Skye Augustine**, and **Anna Guasco.** Through these keynote talks a lot of wisdom, and humour (special thanks to Professor Pauly), was shared alongside the captivating research avenues each of them have pursued and shared with us. From Professor Brito's critical reflections on the role colonial trade routes and expansion played in shaping marine ecosystems to Professor Augustine demonstrating how dramatic and impactful community engagement and indigenous knowledge can be in rebuilding ecosystems and Professor Guasco encouraging all of us to explore text, stories, and research in a multilingual fashion – each left us with a more elaborate look into their work and inspiration to carry into our own future endeavours. Professor Wood further opened many of our eyes to a taxonomic group which I reckon many of us have historically not considered but I suspect we will now all be thinking about a wormier

Each issue of Oceans Past News includes a feature article, either as an **Oceans Past Spotlight or as **10 Questions**. If you would like to be considered for either, or to nominate a colleague or mentee, please contact Rachel Winter at rachelwinter@palaeome.*

world and the vast diversity of parasites. Finally, we learned through Professor Pauly's telling of the origin story for the famous 'shifting baselines' paper (Pauly 1995), to say 'yes' more often.

From left to right, the poster session and the whale watching excursion.







Among some of the additional highlights of the OPXI Conference were an evening poster session hosted at University of Victoria's University Club, a ECR-mentor round table lunch, a historic boat tour, a (successful!) whale watching boat tour, and finally, an **ECR Policy Workshop**. For this workshop, ECRs sent in questions in advance which were then discussed among our panelists: Prof. Cristina Brito, Prof. Anna Guasco, Prof. Chelsea L. Wood, Prof. Anne Saloman, and Prof. Nayeli Jimenez Cano. In case you missed it, Prof. Wood and Prof. Guasco have very graciously put into written form some of their insights to share with all of you.



ECR Policy workshop.

Question: Early-career researchers are often advised to "engage with policy," but institutional incentive structures still reward publications over impact. How do you strategically build a science-policy portfolio without compromising your academic career trajectory, and what concrete entry points would you recommend for ECRs with no prior policy experience?

It is true that peer-reviewed publications are the main currency in academia. Things are changing, and efforts to engage communities and inform policy are increasingly recognized in hiring and promotion. But there is one thing that you can do to make sure that all of your outputs are properly recognized **now**, and that is to show - in whatever narrative you're asked to provide, like a research statement - how your research/policy/outreach/education work are part of one grand vision. Resist the urge to throw in the kitchen sink. Do not make long lists. Instead, paint one coherent picture, explain the one core objective that you have, and show how your research/policy/outreach/education efforts are helping you push toward that objective. Show how those efforts reinforce and amplify one another toward your big goal. Simple is better. It takes work and practice to distill down a "vision", so don't get frustrated if it doesn't come immediately. Talk it through with friends, colleagues, mentors. Write and rewrite. Your goal is a simple, unified statement of what you want to accomplish in your career, with each of your activities slotting neatly inside. – **Chelsea Wood, PhD**

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Learning the policy landscape not only of your topic/subject but of *where you are* is crucial. That includes the place you're located, the communities you're interacting with, and the institutional context in which you work. Ask colleagues for recommendations on who you need to be talking to in your institution and in the broader community. I also recommend learning as much as you can about what's already happened/what's already happening, so that you don't try to reinvent the wheel or go down paths that have already been exhausted. These steps will help you find out what the need is and see how you can help meet that need through your research and other endeavours. – **Anna Guasco, PhD**

Question: How can marine historical ecology research that is more qualitative, archival, or narrative-based be made legible/useful to policymakers who may be more accustomed to ecological data that is quantitative?

It can be hard to argue for the validity and importance of qualitative research in quantitative settings. However, I'd suggest that even those spaces that purport to want "just the numbers" actually are in need of *narratives* — of understanding how the current context came to be, what we can do about it, and where we can go from here. That's where qualitative researchers can shine, and part of doing that work is ensuring that your descriptions of that work are accessible. As interdisciplinary qualitative researchers, we may often find ourselves needing to explain and justify our work in spaces that do not know about or care about our work. In my experience as an ECR, I've found that practicing doing so in an open, approachable, and efficient way is really helpful for being able to then convey the importance of the work and how it puts the pieces together in a way that purely quantitative approaches often can't on their own. – **Anna Guasco, PhD**
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Oceans Past Initiative Governing Board and OPXI Local Organising Committee. From left to right: Ian McKechnie, Loren McClenachan, Youri van den Hurk, Rachel Winter, Ruth Thurstan, Ben Fitzhugh, André Carlo Colonese, Madison Bowden-Parry. Not pictured but one of the local organisers, Jason Colby.

Last but not least, the outgoing OPI Governing Board and local organizing team extend our innumerable thanks to everyone, especially the funders, who helped make the conference what it was and supported the participation of many ECRs!

We acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

EARLY CAREER RESEARCHER SPOTLIGHT



Leah at the New Bedford Whaling Museum in MA in front of a model of the 1800s whaling ship Lagoda.

*With our ECR Spotlight in this volume, you all have the absolute privilege of getting better acquainted with **Leah Rubin**, a **PhD candidate** at the **State University of New York College** and a **visiting student** at **Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution**, and her work, in case you missed her talk or poster at our recent Oceans Past XI conference! ~RMW*

Some of my earliest memories take place along the Mystic River in Massachusetts, standing at my father's heels as he took buckets of alewives from one side of a dam to another. It wouldn't be until two decades later that I tasted my first alewife, smoked in the back of a van in Columbia Falls, Maine. As a born and raised coastal New Englander, I grew up with a deep appreciation of the cultural importance of various marine species to our regional culture and especially to our local tourist economy, but with only surface-level knowledge of the Indigenous peoples whose homelands I lived on. My connections to the land, now called New England, in the Northeast of the USA, the fish in this region, and the Indigenous communities who have lived in this region since time immemorial, are the guiding forces of my research.

In 2021, I joined Dr. Joshua Drew's Coupled Human and Organismal Systems (CHAOS) lab at The **State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry**. I'm currently a PhD candidate in the CHAOS lab and a visiting student in **Dr. Elizabeth Sibert**'s Paleo-FISHES lab at **Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution** where I'm studying past human and fisheries dynamics through ichthyoliths – "fish rocks" – i.e., the hard bits left behind as a fish lives and when a fish dies (including dermal denticles, otoliths, and teeth). I'm interested in how these remains can illuminate important trends in fisheries and can help scientists develop a more temporally expansive, useful, and more holistic understanding of human ecological dynamics in coastal communities. My work, and the work of the CHAOS lab, looks at tourism and colonization as forces which, among many impacts, also tends to flatten the diversity of relationships (and perhaps limit resilience to change) that coastal communities have had with marine systems through time.

My current research focuses on two geographically disparate but in some ways similar places, **Fiji** and **Maine**. The economies of Fiji and Maine rely heavily on tourism and manufactured simulations of returns to "simpler/natural" times - people flock to resorts and beaches in Fiji and Maine, eager to participate in activities ranging from swimming with sharks to eating local seafood. I've followed in Dr. Erin Dillon's footsteps, looking at dermal denticles as a tool to understand modern and historical ecology at a shark diving site in Fiji. I'm also currently working on an archaeology project in the Southern Gulf of Maine looking at otoliths to measure shifts in groundfish growth rates from an early period of rapid colonization in the region through modern times. My biggest goal for my future work is to get a job (5th year PhD humor), but additionally I'm hoping to ground myself in local place-based fisheries research, restoration, and conservation projects in New England, so I'm able to shape my research to best fit community research priorities and needs!

1. ***Was there a particular book, course, or life experience that profoundly impacted you and contributed to your current research interests?*** - So many and as a historical ecologist I refuse to pick just one (of anything!) so I'll offer a few –

   Books: Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods by Shawn Wilson, Dispossession, Dispossession and the Environment: Rhetoric and Inequality in Papua New Guinea by Paige West, **and** Plundered Paradise The Puerto Rican Struggle against Environmental Colonialism By A. J. Hudson in the book Environmental Justice in North America.

   Courses: Fisheries, Fishermen, and Fishing Communities at College of the Atlantic with Chris Petersen and Natalie Springuel - this course was my introduction to historical ecology via guest lecture by Loren McClenachan, conversations with fishermen, and archival research on historical recipes ***and*** Indigenous Issues and the Environment at The State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF) with Robin Wall Kimmerer - this course deepened my understanding of Traditional Ecological Knowledge, the ways colonization has tried to disconnect Indigenous Peoples from their lands, and how Indigenous Peoples are resisting these ongoing efforts across the globe and locally in the USA.

   Life Experiences: Eating around tables in Fiji with fishermen, farmers, and scientists through field work with students from the University of the South Pacific and Joshua Drew's Coupled Human and Ecological Systems (CHAOS) Lab at SUNY ESF and helping middle school students move alewives above dams during my two alewife seasons with the Passamaquoddy Tribe at the Sipayik Environmental Department under Chris Soctomah and Ralph Dana in Downeast Maine.



Leah moving eels over a dam in Sipayik (Maine) with the Passamaquoddy Nation's Sipayik Environmental Department.

2. ***What do you think more senior researchers can be doing to support and mentor early career researchers?*** - I have been, perhaps, uniquely blessed with two incredible advisors who I met as ECRs! One of the biggest lessons of my PhD has been that five years is really short! If you want to conduct community based participatory research the success and benefits of the work rely heavily on your advisors having long term relationships with the communities you plan to work with. Historical ecology also relies on highly collaborative teams so having advisors who have fostered networks of collaborators and who have good working relationships across disciplines is a huge help. My research is pretty different from both of my advisors but their methodological knowledge and skills, world views, and working relationships with scientists and coastal communities have been vital to my research.

3. ***What is a practice or tradition that you have seen in your research thus far that you have cherished and think should become more widespread?*** I'm a huge fan of lab meetings and I am so thankful both of my labs have weekly meetings for folks to check in, ask for advice, and share resources. I'm also a big believer in food being a great way to build community so having a carby-treat at lab meetings is one of my favorite CHAOS lab traditions.

4. ***What areas of research are you interested in further exploring but perhaps are not yet sure where to start or have not yet had the opportunity to dabble into?*** I am really interested in getting experience in Ichthyoarchaeology and fish remain ID! I had planned to do some of this work during my PhD but it turns out trying to ID species from an assemblage of partially broken vertebrae, tiny rib bones, and a million head bones is a seriously complex skill that I am going to need way more time and teachers to learn!

5. ***If you could recommend one paper/book/piece of media that pertains to your research interests to everyone, what would it be and why?*** Decolonizing "Prehistory" Deep Time and Indigenous Knowledges in North America! It is open access so no excuses!

RESEARCH PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Looking to the Past to Protect Mediterranean Sharks: Reconstructing Elasmobranch Bycatch in Cyprus Through Local Ecological Knowledge and Marine Historical Ecology

by **Marios Papageorgiou**, Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture at the University of Patras, Greece



Marios Papageorgiou holding a ray.

The **Mediterranean Sea** is recognised as one of the world's **hotspots of extinction risk for sharks and rays**, yet for many species we still know remarkably little about how their populations have changed through time. Long before fisheries monitoring programmes and onboard observer schemes became established, interactions between fishers and marine wildlife went largely undocumented. As a result, understanding **historical baselines** and **long-term trends** remains one of the greatest challenges for conserving these vulnerable species.

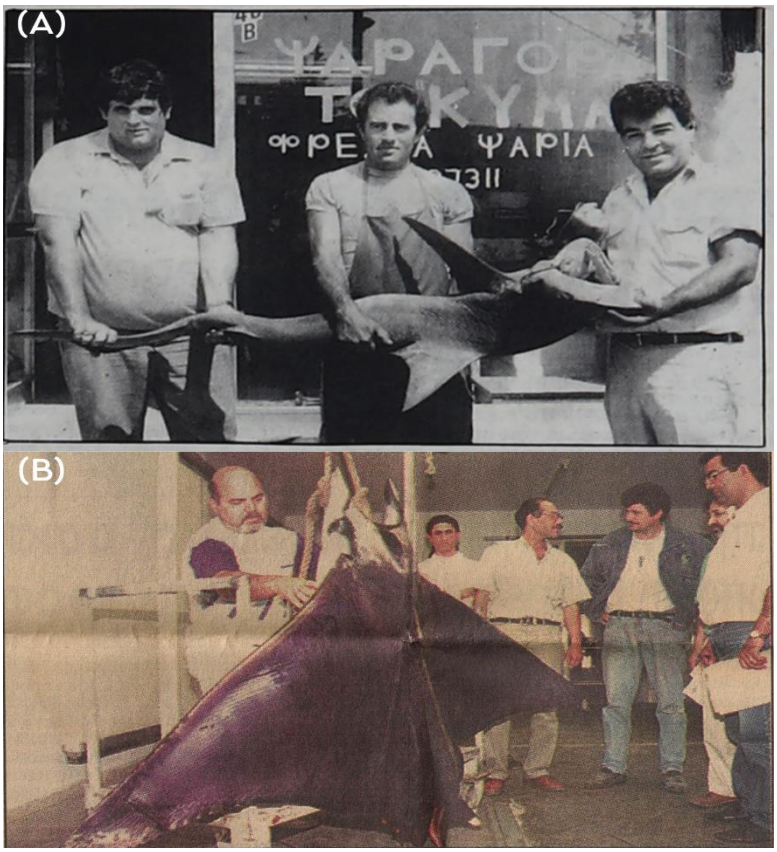
My **PhD research** aims to address this knowledge gap by **reconstructing the history of elasmobranch bycatch in the drifting pelagic longline fishery of Cyprus**. The project combines local ecological knowledge with marine historical ecology to better understand how shark and ray bycatch has changed over the past five decades and to identify the ecological and human drivers behind these changes.

Cyprus occupies a unique position in the eastern Mediterranean, where drifting pelagic longlines have targeted swordfish since the 1970s and more recently, albacore tuna. While these fisheries have operated for decades, historical information on incidental catches of

sharks and rays is scarce. Many species that were once regularly encountered were never systematically recorded, making it difficult to assess long-term population changes or shifting species distributions.

To overcome this limitation, the project integrates **multiple sources of historical evidence**. The primary source of information comes from **local ecological knowledge** gathered through structured, semi-structured, and in-depth interviews with active and retired pelagic longline fishers, as well as community members and other individuals closely connected with the fishery. These interviews document fishing practices, historical bycatch, species occurrence, fishing grounds, and fishers' perceptions of changes through time.

These first-hand accounts are complemented by marine historical ecology using **archival newspaper articles, photographs, historical records, museum collections, and other documentary sources**. Combining these independent lines of evidence allows historical observations to be cross-validated while generating quantitative information from otherwise data-poor periods.



*Bycatch of blue shark (*Prionace glauca*) in 1983 and devil ray (*Mobula mobular*) in 1998 on the drifting pelagic longline fishery targeting swordfish. Source: Newspaper archives.*

The project also seeks to move beyond documenting historical species occurrence. By standardising historical information into comparable bycatch-per-unit-effort estimates, it aims to **reconstruct long-term changes in the abundance and biomass of pelagic sharks and rays**, **identify historical bycatch hotspots**, investigate how captured animals were utilised by fishing communities, and explore the environmental and operational factors associated with bycatch. Together, these approaches will help establish historical baselines that can inform future conservation and fisheries management in the eastern Mediterranean.

Beyond its ecological importance, the project highlights the value of **fishers as holders of long-term environmental knowledge**. Their lived experiences provide insights that cannot be recovered from conventional scientific datasets alone and demonstrate how **collaboration between researchers and fishing communities** can improve our understanding of marine ecosystems and their historical change.

I am a **marine biologist from Cyprus** and a **fourth-year PhD candidate in the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture at the University of Patras, Greece,** under the supervision of **Professor Dimitrios K. Moutopoulos**. My research focuses on the conservation of sharks, rays, and other marine megafauna in the eastern Mediterranean, with particular emphasis on fisheries bycatch and discards, historical ecology, and the integration of local ecological knowledge into fisheries science and conservation. The present study forms a central component of my doctoral research.

This research is generously supported by the Cyprus Environment Foundation, whose funding is enabling extensive fieldwork and historical data collection across Cyprus. By bringing together the knowledge of fishing communities and historical records, the project aims to provide a clearer understanding of how Mediterranean marine ecosystems have changed over time and to contribute to more informed conservation and sustainable fisheries management in the future.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Aiken M, Erikson P, Kinze C, Carlström J. (2026). **Historical Range Contraction and Extent of Harbour Porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) in the Baltic Sea Revealed by Archival Newspapers**. *Ecology and Evolution*, 16(5), p.e73475. https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.73475

Degré D. (2026) **Un secret autochtone vieux de 1200 ans refait surface dans le Saint-Laurent.** *Espaces autochtones-Radio Canada.* https://ici.radio-canada.ca/info/long-format/2262130/piege-poissons-autochtones-saint-laurent

> Espaces autochtones-Radio Canada's article on the discovery of an Indigenous stone fishweir found in the province of Québec, Canada. It is the first underwater archaeological Indigenous prehistoric site declared in Québec.
>
> ~ *Aimie Néron, Institut de Recherche en Histoire Maritime et Archéologie Subaquatique*

Hurk, Y van den, Philipsen B, Seiler M, Buss D. (2026). **Tracing Giants Through Time: Stable Isotope Insights into the Historical Ecology of North Atlantic Sperm Whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*)**. *Frontiers in Environmental Archaeology*, 5, 1890042. https://doi.org/10.3389/fearc.2026.1890042

Ignatova P. (2026). **The Legend of the *Serra* Revisited: Identifying the Composite Creature**. *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*, *15*(1), 127-158. https://doi.org/10.5325/preternature.15.1.0127

Palomares MLD, Parducho VAA, Abucay LR, Sherman KD, Dahlgren C, Pauly D. (2026). **The marine fisheries resources in The Bahamas: Reconstructed catches 1950-2022 and status of traditionally and recreationally important species**. *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 13, p.1822127. https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2026.1822127

RESOURCES and OTHER NEWS

Thanks to **Lucia Snyderman,** a PhD student in zooarchaeology at the University of Reading, for drawing my attention to this piece of news! The **International Network for Conservation Paleobiology** just launched in June 2026. *What is conservation palaeobiology? Conservation paleobioloy is an applied science which uses historical, archaeological, and palaeo-ecological data to inform conservation practice for species and ecosystems. We are the INCP, the International Network for Conservation Paleobiology, which brings people together from across disciplines, career stages, and international borders. Members gain access to international networking opportunities, training and travel grants, conferences and other events, and more. Join now by visiting our website: https://conservationpaleorcn.org/.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS: CONFERENCES and WORKSHOPS

Upcoming conference. ICES Working Group on the History of Fish and Fisheries (WGHIST) invites researchers with an interest in marine historical ecology, environmental history, archaeology, fisheries science, and related disciplines to join its annual online meeting, taking place **1–4 September 2026**. Sessions will be held in the afternoons (**13:30–17:00 BST / 14:30–18:00 CEST)**. We've got an interesting range of talks lined up, and there will be opportunity to contribute to current future WGHIST deliverables and collaborative papers.

If you are interested in attending and/or joining WGHIST, please contact Georgina Hunt (g.hunt@bangor.ac.uk).



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Registration open. The 23rd **ICAZ Fish Remains Working Group** meeting will be taking place **28 September – 03 October 2026** in **Nice, France** hosted by the **CEPAM laboratory (CNRS)**. The registration deadline is **01 September 2026**. Registration and conference details such as the venue, tentative schedule, and practical details can be found on the conference website.

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Call for abstracts. **International Council for Archaeozoology (ICAZ) International Conference 2027** will be taking place **17-22 May 2027** in **Vancouver, Canada**. There are numerous panels to submit abstracts to, including four within the sub-theme of '**Ocean Connected Communities**', which can be found on the conference website. Abstract submission will close on **25 August 2026** at **23:59 PST.**

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Upcoming conference and **call for abstracts**. **BLUE Humanities: Rethinking our historical and cultural relationships with watery environments,** an international workshop which will take place on **06th November 2026** at **IMF-CSIC, Barcelona, Spain** is being organised by **Dolores Martín-Moruno** and **Débora Zurro** from **The Global Sustainability Group, IMF-CSIC**.

The Blue Humanities is an emerging field of research which shifts from the land-centric focus in which the Environmental Humanities has been traditionally grounded to study how bodies of water –including seas, oceans and rivers as well as terraqueous geological formations such as coasts and also our own bodies (Neimanis 2017; Kluwick 2025) – have had crucial historical agency in the making of human culture and society. Unlike the Environmental Humanities which is still anchored on terra firma, the Blue Humanities aims to challenge land-based anthropocentric thinking by submerging humans into deep-water ecological contexts which contest their control and show their radical vulnerability (Mentz 2024a). Originally launched by Steve Mentz as 'Blue Cultural Studies' in 2009, the Blue Humanities project is bringing together an increasing number of disciplines –including literary, visual and science studies, maritime history, philosophy, political science, law, anthropology, archaeology and marine science – to open a fluid discussion about our relations with water and chart unknown routes which could allow us to take care of the planet Earth's blueness in the age of climate change.

By organising this one-day workshop, we are seeking to open a dialogue amongst scholars from the Humanities, the Social and Natural Sciences to build new transdisciplinary alliances within the framework of the Blue Humanities. We are particularly interested in receiving proposals from researchers who are currently working on the development of long-term perspectives through blue-tinted lenses to explore in which ways humans have engaged with oceans, seas and coasts by examining the following themes:

- Fresh perspectives on planetary health waters
- Seascape epistemologies and wet ontologies
- Mobile materialities of water.

Scholars who are interested in participating in this event are invited to send a **300-word proposal** in **English, Spanish or Catalan** to the following email address by **30th September, 2026**: **bluehumanitiesBCN@proton.me.**

Neimanis, Astrida. 2017. Bodies of Water. Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology. London: Bloomsbury.

Kluwick, Ursula. 2025. "Blue Humanities". In: Lived Handbook Environmental Humanities, edited by Evi Zemanek and Timo Müller, 1-12. Heidelberg: Springer Nature.

Mentz, Steve. 2024a. "The Submersion of the Hero: A Blue Humanities Paradigm". Conference at St. John's University New York. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vavf1Vs8BHU&t=236s
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CONTACT

Oceans Past News is a quarterly newsletter that aspires to both unite and inform the worldwide community interested in historical perspectives of marine social-ecological systems by providing insight into the wide-ranging and excellent work being done and the resources available. If you would like to propose work for OPN in the future, please contact **Rachel M. Winter** (info@oceanspast.org or rachelwinter@palaeome.org).

If you have **news or an event to share with the wider OPI community,** please get in touch with us (info@oceanspast.org) and we would be happy to share your content on our social media platforms.

*The next Oceans Past News will be out in October 2026. We **warmly welcome submissions** through the end of September 2026.*

RESOURCES

*The Oceans Past News Archive is available online: **https://oceanspast.org/newsletter/***
*More on the Oceans Past Initiative: **http://oceanspast.org***
*OPI on X: **@oceans_past** and Bluesky: **@oceanspast.bsky.social***