

VLIZ-philanthropy: the sea as a good cause

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The Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ), recognized as a charitable organization, uses donations, bequests and other financial contributions in a targeted manner to support philanthropic projects that increase scientific knowledge about the sea and promote social awareness of the major importance of the seas and ocean. A project can be put forward by anyone but needs to be supported by at least one VLIZ staff member, who will act as mentor of the project. Each project proposal is then presented to the VLIZ Scientific Committee, which includes representatives from all Flemish universities and research institutions performing marine research, for approval. The Scientific Committee in turn presents the project for approval to the VLIZ Board of Directors.

In 2015, the first two projects were launched, with more lined up for 2016!

In June, VLIZ launched the Beach Observation Network, SeaWatch-B (VLIZ mentor: Jan Seys). This project aims to generate reliable long-term data on our North Sea and beaches using volunteering citizen-scientists (SeaWatchers). The generated data are crucial to study the environmental changes of our sea and beaches, such as pollution, climate change and overexploitation of ocean resources. To this purpose, an achievable and scientifically sound measuring program was developed. Sampling equipment for the SeaWatchers is purchased with membership fees and donations that VLIZ receives annually. Currently, 10 SeaWatchers are active at our coast. The dream is to reach a network of 67 volunteers, that is one SeaWatcher for each kilometer of Belgian coast. More information on this project can be found at www.seawatch-b.be. The project can be supported at www.vliz.be/support-our-seawatchers.

In December, another project was approved, namely 'Support the WoRMS Editors' (VLIZ mentor: Leen Vandepitte). The World Register of Marine Species (WoRMS, <http://marinespecies.org/>) is an authoritative reference list of all life in the ocean. It aims to capture the names of all species described since the pioneering work of Carl Linnaeus and is continuously updated and improved by a group of taxonomic experts ("the editors"). Currently, more than 200 editors across the world, each with their expertise in a certain taxonomic group, are working on this Register voluntarily. Each year up to 2,000 newly described species are added to the Register. Completing and correcting WoRMS requires an enormous continuing effort and is entirely dependent on the expertise and time of the editors. On top of that, it is a race against time as species are at risk of disappearing due to changing maritime conditions (such as warming, pollution and acidification), before they are discovered. For this project, VLIZ provides an online platform at www.vliz.be/support-the-worms-editors enabling users of WoRMS (and the public at large) to make (tax-deductible) donations to support the work of the many WoRMS editors.

In the near future, VLIZ-philanthropy also aims to launch calls for proposals for grants to support the marine scientific community. Calls for travel grants, marine research grants and grants for ocean observations and expeditions will be the main focus. Nonetheless, major donors will be free to make a suggestion to formulate a call around their specific interest.

Also you can help! Make a gift to VLIZ-philanthropy at www.vliz.be/make-gift and support our philanthropic projects! Good to know: gifts to VLIZ are tax-deductible as from EUR40 per year. Or suggest a project that is aimed at helping our seas and ocean and could benefit from our support! More information regarding the conditions and requirements can be found at www.vliz.be/projects-philanthropy or feel free to contact filantropie@vliz.be.

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