

Contact:
Kristinha M. Anding
kmanding@gmail.com

The Blessing Flag Project:

An Eco-Art Activity for Extinct & Endangered Marine Species

Concept:

Let's raise awareness about extinct and endangered marine animals as part of Capri Elementary's Earth Day Celebration. Marine species have been negatively impacted by over-harvesting, entanglement in commercial fishing nets and lines, habitat loss, sonic interference, ocean warming, acidification, and increased coastal pollution. The Blessing Flag Project presents an engaging, artistic way for children and adults to learn more about extinct and threatened ocean species.

History:

Blessing Flags were first created for extinct and endangered animals as part of Remembrance Day for Lost Species (www.lostspeciesday.org), a growing international event highlighting species loss and the importance of biodiversity. I learned about Blessing Flags while in Southern England last fall, where I was assisting in community eco-therapy trainings. A local art studio in Totnes, U.K., provided a space for community to gather and paint these beautiful flags honoring the animals, which later became part of the RDLS Life Cairn Ceremony, the dedication of a permanent memorial to extinct species. Approximately 150 people contributed and gathered for the dedication on Sharpham Estate.

Inspired by the beauty and intention of this project, and how well it was received as a community eco-art activity, I returned home and hosted my own RDLS event with a focus on marine life. I wanted to bring awareness to North County and begin a conversation about what we can do to assist the endangered animals of our seas. It was a wonderful night, with many adults and children (aged 2-13) in attendance. The children loved learning about the species represented, and all ages enjoyed painting the flags. We also successfully raised funds for the nonprofit Oceanic Conservation Research.

Process:

For this event, I will post images and information about select extinct and endangered marine species on easels surrounding a table (or tables), with seats and art supplies ready for use. Materials will include pre-cut fabric squares, acrylic paint, brushes, Sharpies, paper towels, water bowls, and paper or reusable plates for palettes.

Individuals approaching the Blessing Flag station will be encouraged to peruse the boards and choose an animal they would like paint a flag for—or simply write a blessing or commitment that he/she will make for the healing of our waters.

Individuals could then take their flags home ... OR if Capri is open to displaying the flags, we could string the finished flags onto a ribbon. (I've used no-sew iron-on bond for this in the past, but if someone wanted to sew them on that works, too). The finished flags are beautiful and would be a lovely addition to our campus.

Future of the Project:

The Blessing Flag Project will be part of the Encinitas Library's Pete Seeger Clean Waters Event this May, and finished flags will be displayed in the children's room.

I also have a dream of creating a permanent memorial to extinct species in Encinitas, as I witnessed how the dedication in England fostered community and commitment to protecting biodiversity.

About Me:

I am an Encinitas resident and mother of two boys, ages 9 and 13, who attend Capri Elementary and Diegueto Middle School. I am a writer and a women's group facilitator, and I am currently learning eco-art and eco-therapeutic practices to bring to community. I am passionate about reconnecting people back to the Earth and their larger ecological selves through art, ritual, dream work and storytelling.

What threats do sea animals, fish and birds face?

- Over-hunting or over-fishing
- Illegal hunting / shooting
- Collision with boats and ships
- Entanglement in fishing nets
- Habitat loss
- Pollution
- Warming oceans

Good sites for learning more about endangered animals:

World Wildlife Organization

www.worldwildlife.org

National Geographic

www.nationalgeographic.com

Our Endangered World

www.ourendangeredworld.com

10 Things You Can Do to Save the Ocean

(From National Geographic):

1. Mind Your Carbon Footprint and Reduce Energy Consumption

Reduce the effects of climate change on the ocean by leaving the car at home when you can and being conscious of your energy use at home and work. A few things you can do to get started today: Switch to compact fluorescent light bulbs, take the stairs, and bundle up or use a fan to avoid oversetting your thermostat.

2. Make Safe, Sustainable Seafood Choices

Global fish populations are rapidly being depleted due to demand, loss of habitat, and unsustainable fishing practices. When shopping or dining out, help reduce the demand for overexploited species by choosing seafood that is both healthful and sustainable.

3. Use Fewer Plastic Products

Plastics that end up as ocean debris contribute to habitat destruction and entangle and kill tens of thousands of marine animals each year. To limit your impact, carry a reusable water bottle, store food in nondisposable containers, bring your own cloth tote or other reusable bag when shopping, and recycle whenever possible.

4. Help Take Care of the Beach

Whether you enjoy diving, surfing, or relaxing on the beach, always clean up after yourself. Explore and appreciate the ocean without interfering with wildlife or removing rocks and coral. Go even further by encouraging others to respect the marine environment or by participating in local beach cleanups.

5. Don't Purchase Items That Exploit Marine Life

Certain products contribute to the harming of fragile coral reefs and marine populations. Avoid purchasing items such as coral jewelry, tortoiseshell hair accessories (made from hawksbill turtles), and shark products.

6. Be an Ocean-Friendly Pet Owner

Read pet food labels and consider seafood sustainability when choosing a diet for your pet. Never flush cat litter, which can contain pathogens harmful to marine life. Avoid stocking your aquarium with wild-caught saltwater fish, and never release any aquarium fish into the ocean or other bodies of water, a practice that can introduce non-native species harmful to the existing ecosystem.

7. Support Organizations Working to Protect the Ocean

Many institutes and organizations are fighting to protect ocean habitats and marine wildlife. Find a national organization and consider giving financial support or volunteering for hands-on work or advocacy. If you live near the coast, join up with a local branch or group and get involved in projects close to home.

8. Influence Change in Your Community

Research the ocean policies of public officials before you vote or contact your local representatives to let them know you support marine conservation projects. Consider patronizing restaurants and grocery stores that offer only sustainable seafood, and speak up about your concerns if you spot a threatened species on the menu or at the seafood counter.

9. Travel the Ocean Responsibly

Practice responsible boating, kayaking, and other recreational activities on the water. Never throw anything overboard, and be aware of marine life in the waters around you. If you're set on taking a cruise for your next vacation, do some research to find the most eco-friendly option.

10. Educate Yourself About Oceans and Marine Life

All life on Earth is connected to the ocean and its inhabitants. The more you learn about the issues facing this vital system, the more you'll want to help ensure its health—then share that knowledge to educate and inspire others.