

MARINE ENCOUNTERS

Dive into the adventure



Hello and welcome to our 2012 newsletter. Firstly, we would like to extend a warm thank you to all of those who joined expeditions, volunteered time, assisted with research projects and followed our progress via the web. Without your continued support and enthusiasm *Eye to Eye Marine Encounters* would not be what it is today.

This issue is packed full of expedition highlights, photographer profiles and info on what our team has been up to both on the water and at home. Enjoy!



SPRING 2012

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In the end we conserve only what we love, love only what we understand and understand only what we are taught

Minkes make a splash at Cairns Underwater Film Festival

Eye to Eye Marine Encounters biologist **Dean Miller** (Profile pg 6) has teamed up with Brisbane film makers **Briony Benjamin** and **Freya Wright- Brough** to create a unique entry for the Cairns Underwater Film Festival. Adopting the point of view of a minke whale visiting the Great Barrier Reef to attend the annual HWV (human watching festival) they put a

fresh and entertaining spin on the human-whale encounter. The result is a funny yet heartwarming entry into this year's short film competition. For those of you who are interested in supporting this local event then yourselves down to the **Cairns Civic Theatre** (Cnr Sheridan & Florence Streets) on the 25th August, 2012. Adult ticket prices are \$29 and are available through **Ticketlink**.

Changing the way we view whales and dolphins

Planet Whale is an online community for anybody interested in whales and dolphins. Launched only a few years ago this organization is working to change the way we see marine mammals by harnessing the passion and ideas of individuals to protect and defend our oceans.

Their ethical review system allows passengers to post opinions and rate the operator’s environmental, animal welfare and educational standards thus making the whale watching industry more sustainable. If you would like to get involved and share your reviews or benefit from others peoples knowledge please visit www.planetwhale.com



Planet Whale has also created **WhaleFest**, a yearly festival in Bristol that celebrates whales and dolphins through multimedia presentations, stakeholder workshops, interpretive talks and much more.

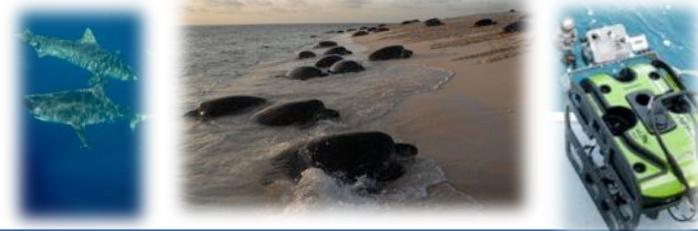
John Rumney of *Eye to Eye* was invited to give a lecture at the first ever WhaleFest in Oct 2011. His talk on how to develop and implement a Code Of Practice for ethical whale watching was very well received and he hopes to return in subsequent years to continue mentoring other eco-friendly operators from around the world and keep this positive momentum going.

Cradle of Life – Far Northern Great Barrier Reef



Ed Roberts

The remote waters of the Far Northern Great Barrier Reef are home to an incredible variety and density of marine life. A true ‘biological hot spot’ this region includes the largest green turtle rookery in the world as well as a significant seabird nesting site. For three weeks during the summer of 2010, intrepid guests joined *Eye to Eye* crew and researchers on board *Reef Connections* on an expedition to study and experience this pristine marine wilderness. With guest researchers Dr **Charlie Huveneers**, (sharks) PhD candidate **Qamar Schulyer** (turtles) and a team of deep sea explorers from marine institutions around Australia (JCU,UQ MQ etc) the group collected valuable data and had epic encounters with megafauna, including up to 50 whale sharks at one time – this is believed to be the largest aggregation ever reported in Australia!





Minke Whale Encounters 2012

It is with weary bodies but happy hearts that we wrap up our 17th minke whale season - the longest of any operator in the world! Despite being one of the roughest years on record (with two trips reaching 40+ knots) it was also one of the most rewarding. The *Eye to Eye* team along with fantastic crew from *Elizabeth E II* (led by **Shane** and **Courtney** and organized by **Claire**) worked tirelessly to create a comfortable atmosphere of fun and adventure while **Dr Alastair Birtles** nurtured our minds with interpretive talks and overviews of each day's minke experiences. A special thanks goes out to chef, **Cliff Kirby** who consistently created extraordinary meals, which our guests and crew are still raving about!

Highlights of the season included a number of mother and calf encounters, an underwater humpback sighting on the minke line (a first of it's kind!) and of course the individual personalities of the dwarf minkes who once again dazzled snorkelers and divers with their insatiable curiosity and beauty.

We also had an exceptional group charter with the **Young Presidents Organization (YPO)** who are planning on returning next year. Like all our guests, this group demonstrated an intrepid spirit in the face of less-than-perfect weather and as a result everyone (guests, researchers and crew included) had an amazing time.

We would also like to thank all those who contributed photos, video and donations to the *Minke Whale Project* - after all it's your participation in these expeditions that makes them (and the science) possible.

If you would like to reminisce about your trip with us or just need a 'minke fix' then check out the photos/video on our Facebook page: *Eye to Eye Marine Encounters*

Deano and the guests from YPO have some fun on Lizard Is.





Helen Robertson loves minke whales. And I mean *really* loves them. In fact this season marks her 10th Swim with Minke Whale Expedition with us as well as a career change from nursing to working on a whale watching boat in Hervey Bay. **Helen** has been a loyal supporter of many conservation organizations and also volunteers her time for Sea Shepherd. Her dedication and enthusiasm for our marine life is commendable and a true inspiration. Go **Helen!**

AUIP STUDENTS

This marked the third year of our involvement with AUIP (American University International Program). As part of a 3 week intensive fieldtrip to Australia *Eye to Eye* marine biologist and PhD candidate **Jimmy White** led students through a 4 day curriculum which covered coral reef ecology, threats facing the marine environment, management issues and scientific methodology.

Some of the students had never even snorkeled and it was quite amazing to see the change from not knowing (or necessarily caring) about coral reefs to duck-diving on world famous Ribbon reefs and having passionate debates in the classroom (as part of their assessment students were assigned to represent different stakeholder groups in the Marine Park).

Jimmy was helped out by **Nikki Runney, Hayley Gorsuch, Christain Miller** and **Paul O'Dowd** who were invaluable in adding to the safety and enjoyment of the students. A special thanks to **Paul** who came to the rescue when staff found themselves flooded in one morning!



Students from the **American Universities International Program (AUIP)** spent 4 days with *Eye to Eye Marine Encounters* learning about reef health and management issues.

CREW NEWS

Qamar Schuyler is currently doing her PhD on Stradbroke Island assessing the impacts of debris on turtles. Her first paper entitled *To Eat or Not to Eat? Debris Selectivity by Marine Turtles* has just published and is available on PLOS.

Gabriel Vianna released a groundbreaking study on the economic value of live sharks vs dead reef sharks in Palau. He concluded that each animal generated around US\$179 000 per year (US\$1.9 million in a lifetime) for the tourist industry. Fishing the same sharks would yield only US\$10 800, or 0.00006% of this lifetime value! This study has put a fresh spin on conservation by emphasizing the economic value of keeping sharks alive.

Jimmy White has been an incredible asset to *Eye to Eye* this past year, taking 3 months off his PhD in order to head up our AUIP groups. He is an exceptional teacher and has received glowing feedback from both students and other teachers. He also flew to Palau to help **Gabriel** (above) assess the status of its shark populations, which is the beginning of some long-term collaborations for upcoming shark research projects in the GBR and Coral Sea

Susan Sobotzick & Matt Curnock have received their doctorates under the supervision of **Dr Birtles, Prof Marsh & A/Prof Valentine** and are continuing to work with megafauna through the *Minke Whale Project* and other JCU affiliated programs (eg dugongs, turtles etc).

Mark and Em - Wow ! These guys are powering. After securing contracts with both Google Maps and the Australian Government they have had a jam-packed year of charters. On top of this they recently got engaged and brought a property in the Mowbray Valley - we look forward to having them as neighbours soon!

Dr Jules Bowett received her PhD in August this year (looking at the Japanese youth perspective to modern whaling) and is now working as Environmental Policy Advisor for the Department of Defence. You go girl!

And a very special thankyou goes out to **Dr Peter Wood** who also received his PhD this year and works tirelessly for us preparing briefs, funding applications and accreditation material. We would be lost without you Pete!

AWARDS

Award highlights from the past 2 years include:

- Being listed as one of National Geographic Traveller Magazine's 50 Trips of a Lifetime 2010



- Topical Innovation Awards (we were honoured to be chosen to accept these on behalf of the Minke Whale Project)



- Advanced Ecotourism Accreditation



PHOTOGRAPHER PROFILE:



Bryant Austin

Passionate and talented fine-art photographer **Bryant Austin** will be releasing a photo book to showcase his extraordinary encounters with whales. **Bryant's** specialty is high resolution life-size photography which he creates in the hope to peacefully inspire change on a personal level.

Bryant travelled with us in 2009 and will be including a few of JR's pictures in this book. We look forward to having him join our expeditions again in the near future.

World-class photographer duo '**Yogi' Freund & Stella Chiu Freund** have just released a beautiful coffee table book from their time on assignment with the *World Wildlife Fund*. The *Coral Triangle Book* is available for purchase on their website: www.juergenfreund.com



Yogi can now add lecturer to his resume, after teaching an intensive photography course through *James Cook University* in July. This proved very popular and he is already booked in for future courses. A special shout out goes to **Chico Birrell**, biologist from the *Undersea Explorer* days. **Chico** is currently doing his PhD at UQ and recently completed **Yogi's** course. **Chico** is a man of many talents and it was great to have him up this way again!

On the road with Deano

Scientist. Film Maker. Adventurer. Dean Miller is all of the above and much more. ..

'Deano' joined our team in 2001 when as a fledgling biologist he got a job with **JR** on *Undersea Explorer*. Spending so much time at sea fuelled his love for the marine world and he soon completed his PhD under **Dr Alastair Birtles** (Chief Scientist of the *Minke Whale Project*). **Dean** then went on to work for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority but after 2 years was lured back out to sea for more adventures.

During 2008 - 2010, **Deano** spent two seasons working for the *Fur Seal Research Program*, tagging and researching the fur seal population on Macquarie Island (Macca). This isolated and rugged outcrop is located in the sub-Antarctic and is one of the last pristine wildernesses in the world with 4 million seals, penguins, seabirds and whales making the island home each summer. **Dean** and assistant **Tessa Bickford** spent a truly unforgettable 12 months on Macca conducting field work and capturing the gorgeous scenery and charismatic wildlife on camera.

From this experience **Deano** created his first full length documentary "*Edge of Nowhere*" that aired on the ABC earlier this year, and **Tessa** wrote and recently released a children's picture book about a little penguin on a big swim called "*Go Jo Jo Go!*" (published by Allen and Unwin)

Throughout his time on Macca, **Dean** developed and refined his talents for natural history filming which has seen him work all over Australia, Antarctica and the Arctic (where he filmed polar bears!), and of course with our beloved minke whales right here on the GBR. To see **Dean's** footage of the minkes go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahlj8cPX-J4>



Every winter **Dean** comes back to North Queensland to work on board our minke whale expeditions and was joined this year by work experience student and nephew, **Reece Evans**. **Dean** is an incredible asset to the *Eye to Eye* team and an example of the extraordinary things that can be achieved when you follow your dreams.

For more information on **Dean's** adventures visit: deanmiller.com.au



“EVER SINCE I CAN REMEMBER I WANTED TO BE A SCIENTIST WHO MAKES A DIFFERENCE, AND THAT’S EXACTLY WHAT I INTEND TO



Other News & Personal Messages

FROM ABROAD

Ursula Tscherter is a great supporter of *Eye to Eye* and the director of ORES, a non-profit whale research organization specializing in minke whale research in the St Lawrence Estuary. She has recently taken a year out to pursue her masters in Marine Mammal Science in Scotland and we wish her all the best in her studies To learn more about her program or become a volunteer, go to www.ores.org.

BBC GREAT BARRIER REEF SERIES A HIT!

Following a year of intensive filming at some of the most spectacular spots on the Great Barrier Reef a 3-part BBC series of the same name was released earlier this year. The result was an explosion of colour, movement and sound that celebrates our unique natural treasure. *Eye to Eye Marine Encounters* is extremely proud to have been involved in such a high quality documentary as well as make lifelong friends along the way. Congratulations to **James Brickell** who produced this masterpiece.

We would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate **Rachel Butler** who left *Eye to Eye* in 2011 to pursue her dream of working with the BBC. What started as an entry level editing job on the GBR series has now grown into a dream career and we have just received word that **Rachel** will be heading up more research projects with them in the future. We couldn't be more proud of her!



JR's corner.

As many of you know, our beloved founder and operator **John Rumney** was diagnosed with throat cancer at the start of this year and has spent the past few months receiving radiation and chemotherapy in Brisbane.

It's been quite a rough ride for **JR** and wife **Linda** (who has been by his side every step of the way) but luckily his strength and enthusiasm has not wavered and he has kept the hospital staff entertained with stories of tiger sharks, minke whales and 'crew dives' at Osprey Reef!

The **Rumney family** would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all those people who have expressed their love and kept John smiling with phone calls, emails and texts. Your support has been truly amazing.

If you would like to be kept up to date with his progress then please 'like' the facebook page his daughters setup called:

JR's Get Well Soon Page (Cancer Schmancer).

EYE TO EYE MARINE ENCOUNTERS

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Massive thanks to **Rosco, Shane, Courtney, Nikki, Dean, Jaap, Cliff, Alastair, Kristie, Peter, Kris, Dave, Deb** and of course **Jenna** and **Linda** for making this year's minke such a success! Also a special mention goes to **Bruce Paterson** for his continued support and willingness to always lend a hand to the minke cause.



A winning team

A huge welcome to the newest member of the *Eye to Eye* family - little **Austin Miller!**



Austin takes his first watch

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Just like the good ol' days.
Debs and Al on 'minke watch'