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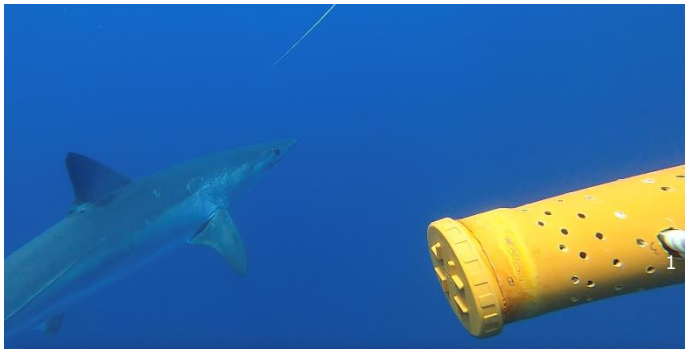
Sustainability in Yachting Article

Every yacht is a unique and bespoke construction, built to accommodate its owner's specific tastes. Yachts typically spend only 10% of a year cruising on the seas (with the average length of a yacht cruise being around 40 miles) and, for the remainder of the year, yachts are moored – consuming both fuel and hotel power. As a result of this, yachts are not generally perceived as being inherently sustainable.

Given the increasing pressure on every industry to increase its sustainability and minimise environmental impact, it is not surprising that unique solutions are being found within the yachting industry to advance the sustainability of yachts. One initiative that is achieving this goal and simultaneously aiding scientific research is Yachts for Science.

Yachts for Science was jointly established by Arksen, BOAT International, EYOS, Nekton and the Ocean Family Foundation, with the intention of driving a social shift in the usage of yachts and the perception of yachting. We spoke to Rosie O'Donnell, Co-ordinator at Yachts for Science and Eleanor Briggs, Head of Marketing and Creative at Arksen to gain further insight into Yachts for Science.



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The concept behind Yachts for Science is that idling yachts (with willing owners and captains) can be matched with marine researchers to undertake research projects in areas that are suitable for that yacht and its particular capabilities. The projects can be run when the vessel is not in use by the owners or can be conducted as a unique and educational experience for family and friends, providing the chance for owners to be actively involved in furthering our knowledge of the complexity and fragility of the ocean ecosystem.

Any yacht (whether big or small, old or new) can be used to assist these projects in some capacity. Larger yachts can accommodate several researchers and equipment, whilst smaller sailing boats (such as a 25-metre sailing boat) can also be used effectively in a range of roles, including acting as a dive vessel or as a platform from which ROVs can be launched. A 60-metre sailing yacht, m.y. Seahawk, recently assisted a shark-tagging project designed to shed light on the migratory patterns of endangered pelagic species within the Galápagos, and the yacht contributed by accommodating one scientist from Hawaii. Yachts for Science also provides adventurous owners with the ability to venture into areas of the ocean that would otherwise (without a relevant

1. ©James Glancy

permit) be off-limits, such as the Galápagos Marine Reserve.

One particularly large project that Yachts for Science is facilitating in 2024 is an expedition to Patagonia to study the biological and climate value of the region's kelp ecosystems. For this 14-day trip, Yachts for Science are seeking a yacht that can accommodate an expedition team of around 10 to 12 people. Another large project anticipated to take place in October 2023 is a two-week white shark tagging project, which will involve tagging the sharks and obtaining eDNA samples to promote the conservation of sharks and rays at both international and national levels. This project requires a yacht with six berths to accommodate the research crew in the Sicilian Channel and the Tunisian Plateau. Whereas an expedition to assess the levels of plastic marine debris in Bermuda only requires a yacht with three berths to be available for a day trip, emphasising the wide range of yachts that can assist with the Yachts for Science initiative.

The Yachts for Science initiative also highlights that yachts are multi-purpose vessels that can be very effectively used for scientific research and to aid the exploration of the ocean environment. This initiative has a twofold benefit: (1) a yacht that is otherwise sat idle whilst moored in a marina will be utilised (increasing its overall sustainability) and (2) marine researchers are able to undertake their research and benefit society (and the ocean environment). In terms of a wider impact, the Yachts for Science initiative is also a potential method by which a yacht crew's general mental health can be improved, given that most yachts typically have a significant amount of downtime outside of their charter season.

Rosie describes Yachts for Science as being equivalent to the 'Tinder of the Seas', in the sense that Yachts for Science's role is to identify willing yacht owners and match those owners with marine researchers seeking a vessel in that area. Yachts for Science does not permit its researchers to carry out 'parachute science' (where scientists collect data from an area and do not openly share that data with the relevant host nation). Yachts for Science have a requirement that any collected data is published in an open source, to ensure that the information benefits as many people as possible.

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Whilst an existing yacht is more than capable of assisting with the research projects, Arksen also consider the question of sustainability from the design phase of building a yacht, given that the environmental impact of a yacht is 80% determined during the design phase. Arksen recently launched their first 26-metre Arksen 85 explorer yacht, m.y. Project Pelagos, which includes a large aft deck and can be configured to provide more space for researchers and equipment.

Many yacht designers are finding innovative ways to minimise a yacht's environmental footprint. SAY Carbon Yachts designs yachts with a lightweight carbon structure, which decreases the total weight of a yacht by over 50% and is equipped with two ultra-low emission engines. SAY yachts are therefore designed to consume up to 50% less fuel. The industry is also making headway in respect of the alternative fuelling of yachts, with Arksen using hybrid propulsion coupled with solar panels for their yachts; other designers are even beginning to produce hydrogen-fuelled yachts. The exponential growth in sustainability-focused yacht design highlights the industry-wide understanding that, in

[2] ©Nekton Maldives Mission

terms of environmental impact, the design stage of building is crucial.

It is important for the yachting industry to be taking proactive and clearly defined steps to maximise yacht sustainability. Whilst this has been the case for several years, it is now crucial in the present climate, due to the growing prominence of environmental activism and activist groups. This environmental activism is targeted against a wide range of industries, including yachting, private aircrafts, sports cars and luxury clubs.

Against this backdrop of environmental activism, there is, of course, going to be additional scrutiny and pressure on the yachting industry to prove its commitment to achieving increasingly higher levels of sustainability. The Yachts for Science initiative is one of the ways in which the industry is evidencing its proactive approach in striving to achieve higher levels of sustainability, whilst using yachts in a manner that will also benefit society as a whole - by enabling further scientific research. It is also clear, based on the range of companies that established Yachts for Science, with (for example) Arksen being a pioneering designer and builder and BOAT International being a leading publisher, that this push for sustainability is being supported and driven by a cross-section of key actors within the yachting industry.

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