



## **ATLANTIS DUBAI ANNOUNCES THE 2023-24 PROJECT PARTNERS SUPPORTED THROUGH THE 1 USD CONTRIBUTION PROGRAMME; THIS YEAR TOTTALLING \$140,000**

- *The 2023-24 1 USD contribution programme resulted in \$140,000, a 17.5% increase over the previous year*
- *To date, the 1 USD contribution programme has raised over a quarter of a million dollars to support conservation and sustainability projects*
- *The nine project partners were strategically selected to support Atlantis Atlas Project's conservation focus and create environmental social impact*
- *The programme has a strong focus on local partners, with seven UAE-based projects being funded this year*

**DUBAI, United Arab Emirates** – Atlantis Dubai announces the selection of nine local and international conservation and sustainability projects set to receive funding from the Atlantis Atlas Project 1 USD initiative. From June 2022 to May 2023, for every marine animal experience participated in by a guest, Atlantis Dubai contributed \$1 (USD), resulting in a \$140,000 (USD) fund, which aims to support projects that help protect the ocean and our environment. In the programme's first year Atlantis contributed \$120,000 of funding, and since launching in June 2021, the 1 USD contribution initiative has raised over a quarter of a million dollars.

Since April, organisations around the world were invited to apply for funding, after which proposals were solicited and assessed against their contributions to scientific advancement, conservation, and sustainability by the internal Atlantis Conservation & Science Committee. Atlantis Atlas Project currently focuses on four key groups of wildlife; sharks, rays, dolphins, and corals, and two key threats to the ocean; unsustainable seafood and plastic pollution. With this in mind, projects were selected based on their support of these conservation goals. This year, the 1 USD contribution fund will continue to support five organisations from the previous year (with United Arab Emirates University securing support for two projects), as well as welcoming three new organisations to the programme.

### **2023-24 New Project Partners**

A new partner this year is the **Emirates Environmental Group** and the 'For Our Emirates We Plant' campaign. The project funding will help foster a deep connection between individuals and nature through



urban afforestation programmes, educational workshops, and community engagement programmes. This campaign will also actively involve Atlantis Dubai's colleague base through tree planting events scheduled throughout the year.

A debut year of funding will go to the **Fujairah Research Centre** to support research providing important information about local species and biodiversity in the Gulf of Oman using Environmental DNA (eDNA) methods. The team will collect water samples and extract DNA to determine species in the water, monitor water quality and detect any harmful bacteria in the water. The research is the first eDNA analysis being conducted in Fujairah waters.

The 1 USD contribution initiative will provide a year of funding for the **Veterinary School of Toulouse** and a study led by Dr Fabienne Delfour to understand the impact that human activities can have on wild dolphin populations. The team will collect skin and fecal samples through non-intrusive methods to assess dolphin stress levels within multiple species, which will help inform future conservation actions.

### **2023-24 Returning Project Partners**

Another year of funding has been initiated with the **United Arab Emirates University** to support their study of two critically endangered chondrichthyan species in local waters. Last year the project successfully tagged 25 sharks and stingrays in the Arabian Gulf. This year, the project will investigate population genetics, providing critical insight into the status and population dynamic of these animals. In addition, funding will support a new research project from the **United Arab Emirates University** to develop and enhance Fujairah coral reef restoration by creating artificial reef shapes from recycled oyster shells. This study will provide key information on the optimal use of artificial reefs in supporting UAE biodiversity through the rehabilitation of its ecosystems.

A further year of funding has been initiated with the **Zayed University** and lead UAE-based researcher, Dr Ada Natoli, on the Dubai Dolphin Survey, which supports boat-based research of local dolphin populations. During the last two years, this project saw a total of 100 boat surveys spanning a distance of 8,759km along the UAE coastline and more than 450 man-hours, with dolphins spotted 28 times. This



year's project will focus on gaining more precise estimates of the marine mammals identified and engage with local authorities to support and advise on dedicated conservation measures.

Funding will continue to support the UAE's leading social enterprise **Goumbook** on their 'Save The Butts' campaign. This initiative sees the collection of cigarette butts littering beaches and public areas and uses circular economy principles to recycle the waste to create valuable material from it. So far the project conducted 46 beach clean ups with over 1,800 volunteers including Atlantis Dubai colleagues, and recycled over 500,700 cigarette butts. This year will focus on establishing collection points around UAE and continuing with public awareness through ongoing beach cleans.

The 1 USD contribution initiative will provide a further year of funding to support the position of Program Officer for the **IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group**, led by UAE-based Dr Rima Jabado. Sharks and rays are a key conservation focus for Atlantis Atlas Project and this IUCN specialist group is the leading authority on the status of sharks, rays, and chimaeras globally. They remain pivotal in the development and implementation of conservation strategies for these species.

Funding will also be provided again to **New York University Abu Dhabi** to support their investigations into the impact of climate change on coral reef ecosystems in the Gulf. With rising sea temperatures, these insights will help scientists better understand the drivers of coral thermal tolerance that is critical for future conservation efforts.

Kelly Timmins, Director of Marine Animal Operations and Sustainability, Atlantis Dubai, commented: *"We are thrilled to embark on the second year of the 1 USD contribution initiative and continue working with existing and new partners in order to help protect the ocean and our environment. We remain dedicated to supporting organisations who are actively working in the field and with local communities to make a difference. As these projects get underway, we encourage both our colleagues and our guests to get involved and learn more; such as volunteering to join a beach clean, or joining the UAE Dolphin Project Initiative as a citizen scientist. We look forward to supporting these incredible projects to drive local and international conservation and sustainability efforts."*



Tim Kelly, Managing Director & Executive Vice President of Atlantis Dubai, commented: *“We are all extremely proud to announce the second group of projects supported by our 1 USD contribution programme. The nine projects we have chosen demonstrate significant expertise, ingenuity and innovation in their work to protect our environment and the ocean while sharing our conservation goals – and the need to accelerate progress towards them. Driving conservation and sustainability initiatives outside of Atlantis Dubai as well as transforming operations inside the destination are critical to Atlantis Atlas Project’s long-term strategy – and through this, our collective aim is to make positive, measurable impacts on our planet and its people.”*

To learn more about Atlantis Atlas Project and the full list of 1 USD contribution supported projects, please visit: <https://www.atlantis.com/dubai/sustainability/atlantis-atlas-project/one-usd-projects>

\*\*\*ENDS\*\*\*

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

The 2023-24 partners and their projects supported by Atlantis Atlas Project’s 1USD contribution programme are:

##### **1. Emirates Environmental Group**

*By organising tree planting events, educational workshops, and community engagement programmes, the project aims to foster a deep connection between individuals and nature. Since the inception of this programme in 2007, EEG has managed to plant more than 2,115,712 indigenous saplings resulting in the sequestration of 12,475.72 CO2 Emissions. Atlantis colleagues will be actively involved in tree planting events.*

##### **2. Fujairah Research Center**

*Environmental DNA (eDNA) metabarcoding can provide important information about taxonomic species and biodiversity (eDNA method – collect water samples and extract DNA to determine species in the water). This project will apply eDNA to assess the biodiversity in the Gulf of Oman from the Fujairah shore up to 5 km, United Arab Emirates. Previously no eDNA metabarcoding analysis has been conducted in Fujairah water so far and data recorded on marine biodiversity is unclear. Other benefits of eDNA are monitoring the water quality and the number of harmful bacteria in the water samples. The result of the eDNA will provide important information for assessing the biodiversity, and conservation of Fujairah marine biodiversity species.*

##### **3. Veterinary School of Toulouse**

*Cetaceans face complex and growing threats due to anthropogenic activities and are at high risk of extinction in 47% of coastal waters worldwide. The effect of repeated exposures to human activities such as whale watching and “swim with dolphins” tours, can lead to changes in activity budgets, physiological stress, reproductive success, behaviours and habitat use. In this project the team aim to collect fecal and skin samples using a non-intrusive method to assess dolphins’ glucocorticoids’ levels (stress), for multiple species off Reunion Island. This study will help understanding of the possible impacts of the factors causing stress, and therefore help inform potential conservation actions.*



#### **4. United Arab Emirates University**

Led by UAEU's Dr Aaron Henderson, this project will study the evolutionary relationships of sharks and rays in the United Arab Emirates. The results will provide fishery management authorities with a foundation for developing meaningful, species-specific conservation strategies. Sharks and rays are a key conservation focus for Atlantis Atlas Project as the resort is home to 10 shark and eight ray species. This project will investigate the population genetics of two critically-endangered species that occur in the coastal waters of the UAE, thereby providing critical insight into the status and population dynamic of these animals.

#### **5. United Arab Emirates University**

Reef balls are designed to enhance, restore, and rehabilitate marine habitats. This project will install three different artificial reef shapes using discarded oyster shells, in a restoration project in Fujairah marine water. The aim will be to study each shape and its impact on developing and enhancing coral reefs and marine habitats. This study will provide key information on the optimal use of artificial reefs in supporting UAE biodiversity through the rehabilitation of the ecosystems.

#### **6. Zayed University & UAE Dolphin Project Initiative**

Led by Dr Ada Natoli of Zayed University, and founder and director of the UAE Dolphin Project Initiative, Atlantis Dubai has been a key partner of the Dubai Dolphin Survey since 2021 – a project which aims to gather scientific baseline information about the local dolphin population off the coast of Dubai through boat surveys. Dolphins are a key conservation focus for Atlantis Atlas Project and this study based in the UAE involves volunteers from the local community as well as Atlantis' employees. This year's project will continue with surveying and focus on gaining more precise estimates of the marine mammals identified, continue with citizen science data public awareness, and engaging with local authorities to support and advise on dedicated conservation measures.

#### **7. Goumbook**

Led by Tatiana Antonelli, Goumbook's 'Save the Butts – Waste to Value' local environmental campaign aims to reduce single-use plastic pollution in our oceans and adopts a circular economy approach by recycling cigarette butt waste to create valuable manufacturing material. Plastic pollution is a key threat impacting conservation. This year will focus on establishing collection points around UAE and continuing with public awareness through beach cleans. This year will continue to actively involve Atlantis colleagues who participate in beach cleans and collect cigarette butts resort-wide for collection and recycling.

#### **8. International Union for Conservation of Nature, Species Survival Commission Shark Specialist Group**

Led by UAE-based Dr Rima Jabado, Atlantis Atlas Project will continue to support the position of the Global Program Officer for the IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group. This important role includes organizing online workshops, data entry into the IUCN Species Information Service to complete Red List of Threatened Species assessments, researching and preparing grant applications for funding the development and implementation of conservation strategies for shark, ray, and chimaera species, and assisting in the production of peer-reviewed scientific papers. Sharks are a key conservation focus for Atlantis Atlas Project and this specialist group is the leading authority on the status of sharks, rays, and chimaeras globally.

#### **9. New York University Abu Dhabi**

This project will be led by NYUAD's Dr John Burt. Corals are a key conservation focus for Atlantis Atlas Project, and Atlantis, The Palm will continue to increase its efforts to breed them in-house. This project will investigate whether corals have the capacity to adapt to more extreme heat environments. This will be achieved by transplanting corals from thermally benign reefs to thermally extreme reefs in the Arabian Gulf. With rising sea temperatures, these insights will help conservationists understand coral thermal tolerance critical for future restoration efforts.



### **MEDIA ENQUIRIES**

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For further information about Atlantis Atlas Project, please visit <https://www.atlantis.com/dubai/sustainability/atlantis-atlas-project>.

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### **About Atlantis Atlas Project**

Atlantis Atlas Project is Atlantis Dubai's commitment to do business in ways that are good for both people and planet, by focusing on Responsible Operations, Conservation & Animal Welfare, Education & Awareness, and Corporate Social Responsibility. Atlantis Atlas Project endeavours to be a leader in responsible tourism, ensuring that Atlantis Dubai stands above the rest, whilst providing guest experiences that are more extraordinary than ever. The destination provides immersive experiences and opportunities for guests to learn about the local environment both in and outside of the resort. From inspiring young explorers and families to learn about marine conservation through educational programmes to offering 100+ locally and responsibly sourced dishes across restaurants and cafes around the resort, guests are actively encouraged to participate in Atlantis Atlas Project. Atlantis Dubai is also dedicated to supporting the local community and contributes 1 USD from every marine animal experience to projects which make measured impacts on conservation, education and society. Atlantis Dubai has been awarded EarthCheck Silver Certification for the past three years, recognising its contributions to social and environmental sustainability and accreditation from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, the internationally-recognised gold standard for animal welfare and care.

### **About Atlantis, The Palm, Dubai**

Located at the centre of the crescent of The Palm in Dubai, Atlantis, The Palm is the first entertainment resort destination in the region. Opened in September 2008, the unique ocean-themed resort features a variety of marine and entertainment attractions, as well as 22 hectares of waterpark amusement at Atlantis Aquaventure, all within a 46-hectare site. It is home to one of the biggest waterparks in the world and one of the largest open-air marine habitats, with more than 65,000 marine animals in lagoons and displays including The Lost Chambers Aquarium, a maze of underwater corridors and passageways providing a journey through ancient Atlantis. Aquaventure Waterpark features 23.5 million litres of fresh water used to power 105 thrilling waterslides and attractions, including several world record-breaking slides, and two river rides featuring tidal waves and pools, water rapids and white-water chargers. Dolphin Bay, the unparalleled dolphin conservation and education habitat, and Sea Lion Point were created to provide guests with a once in a lifetime opportunity to learn more about some of nature's most friendly mammals. The resort boasts an impressive collection of luxury boutiques and shops as well as extensive



meeting and convention facilities. Atlantis, The Palm is also known as the culinary destination in the region where guests can take their pick from a collection of 35 world-renowned restaurants including the one Michelin star rated Hakkasan and Ossiano, as well as celebrity chef outposts Bread Street Kitchen & Bar by Gordon Ramsay and Nobu. Atlantis is also home to a buzzing nightlife scene with entertainment destination Wavehouse offering something for everyone, while WHITE Beach is the perfect place to unwind with a drink as the sun slips into the Arabian Sea.