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Listening for Fish Conversations in the Kelp Forest

Glub? Pop! Squeak? Birch Aquarium is testing a new ocean conservation tool used to identify sound-producing fish

La Jolla, Calif. (Feb. 27, 2018)—Guests visiting Birch Aquarium at Scripps this week may notice something new in the Giant Kelp Forest exhibit. Birch Aquarium at is helping Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego test a new ocean conservation tool used to identify sound-producing fish. This research equipment will then be deployed in the ocean to gain a better understanding of wild kelp forest habitats and the noises within.

From February 26 to March 2, the acoustic-camera system will continuously record sounds and time-lapse video of the creatures in the Giant Kelp Forest exhibit. Scripps scientists will analyze the recordings to understand the unique sounds different species of fish create. They will compare fish calls made in the exhibit to those recorded in the wild, allowing them to interpret which fish are “chatting” in the kelp forest. They will also update a catalogue of fish sounds for species that live in our local kelp forests.

“This installation exemplifies Birch Aquarium’s strong relationship with Scripps Institution of Oceanography,” said Harry Helling, executive director of Birch Aquarium. “The aquarium supports scientists with design and prototyping equipment for use in the field, which helps us all of us understand and protect our planet.”

The acoustic-camera system will be listening for common — Kelp Bass, Opaleye — and rare — endangered Giant Black Sea Bass — kelp forest species, all of which are represented in Birch Aquarium’s Giant Kelp Forest exhibit. After the acoustic-camera system is tested in the exhibit it will be deployed in the ocean to listen to the sounds of fish in La Jolla’s kelp forest.

Through this research, Scripps Oceanography scientists will also gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of Marine Protected Areas. The acoustic-camera system is a conservation tool that will allow scientists to quantify diversity — and changes in diversity — in protected areas like Matlahuayl State Marine Reserve in La Jolla.

Birch Aquarium’s Giant Kelp Forest exhibit is open for viewing year-round. Every Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday divers enter the exhibit for the Kelp Forest Dive Show where visitors can see them

feed the animals. For more information, or to purchase tickets, visit aquarium.ucsd.edu or call 858.534.FISH.

About Birch Aquarium at Scripps

Birch Aquarium at Scripps is the public exploration center for the world-renowned Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego. Celebrating its 25th year perched on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the aquarium features more than 60 habitats of fishes and invertebrates from the cold waters of the Pacific Northwest to the tropical waters of Mexico and the western Pacific. An interactive museum showcases research discoveries by Scripps scientists on climate, earth and ocean science, and features interactive elements. Accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, Birch Aquarium has an annual attendance of more than 460,000, including 40,000 school children.