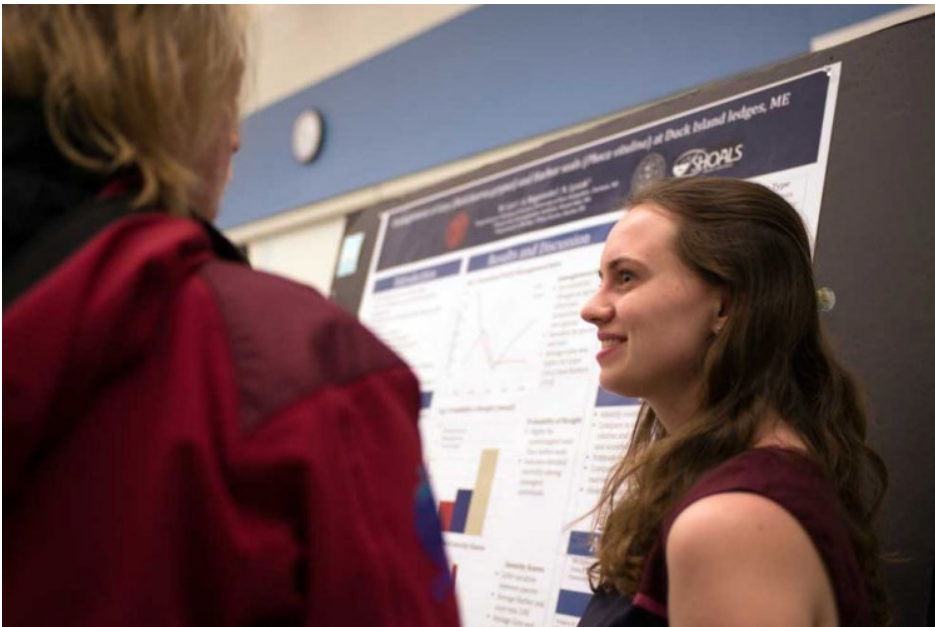


The Sea Is Her Campus

Meghan Carr '17 will continue research at Dalhousie

Thursday, May 18, 2017



MEGHAN CARR '17 PRESENTS HER RESEARCH ON GREY AND HARBOR SEALS AT THE 2017 COLSA UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH CONFERENCE.

Meghan Carr '17 is no stranger to the plight of sea mammals, and now she's taking her research efforts to the next level.

"In September, I will begin graduate school at Dalhousie University, where I will study oceanography and conduct research that aims to reduce ship-strikes of whales," Carr explains.

During the summer before her senior year at UNH, Carr, a [marine](#),

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[estuarine and freshwater biology](#) major, delved into an issue affecting some of New England's most loved sea mammals, grey seals and harbor seals. She shared her research at the [COLSA Undergraduate Research Conference](#).



CARR SHARES HER RESEARCH AT THE URC.

Her project, “Entanglement of Grey (*Halichoerus grypus*) and Harbor Seals (*Phoca vitulina*) at Duck Island Ledges, Maine,” is part of an ongoing study begun by two of her advisors, Andrea Bogomolni and Nadine Lysiak, in 2011. Her third project advisor was [James](#)

[Coyer](#) of the [School of Marine Science and Ocean Engineering](#) and [Shoals Marine Laboratory](#).

Part of the Isles of Shoals, the Duck Island ledges are a “haulout” — the name for locations “where seals leave the water to rest and thermoregulate,” Carr explains.

During the summers of 2011 to 2016, the location was monitored to assess the seal population's health. In 2016, Carr was one of several marine mammal interns at the Shoals Marine Laboratory. She describes how she spent her time there conducting shipboard photographic surveys of Duck Island's seals.

Growing up on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, Carr recalls becoming interested in marine mammals at a young age. “Several years ago I was lucky enough to take a marine mammal course at Shoals Marine Lab, then spend a season as a marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation intern at the Riverhead Foundation,” she adds. “After learning about the many ways that humans negatively impact marine mammals, then seeing them in action, I was drawn to this research project because it aimed to identify human

impacts as a way to inspire change.”

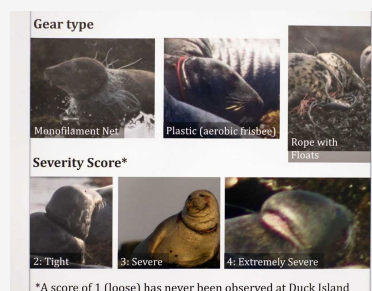
What she found in her research at the Isles of Shoals was disturbing.

“During the surveys, incidence of diseased, injured and entangled seals was noted. Entangled animals were assessed according to the severity of their wounds, type of entangling gear and location of entangling material on the body,” Carr says. “Additionally, we collected data regarding re-sights of individual seals, which were identified using unique body patterns.”

The results?

“Over the course of this study, 80 harbor seals and 56 grey seals were observed entangled. At least 80 percent of these cases are considered severe or extremely severe because they cut into the animal’s flesh. Approximately 98 percent of the affected animals had gear encircling their neck, and several had material located on their flippers or body. Entangled individuals were less likely to be re-sighted in subsequent years than non-entangled seals, which may indicate a source of increased mortality,” Carr explains, adding, “This site’s high incidence of entanglement

How To Help a Seal in Need



ALL SEAL PHOTOS WERE
TAKEN UNDER LEVEL B
NOAA NMFS LOC PERMITS
16260-01, 16260-02 AND
20412.

If you encounter a seal in distress, please remember to keep your distance — at least 150 feet away — and call the nearest rescue hotline. In New Hampshire, call Seacoast Science Center's [Marine Mammal Rescue](#) at (603) 997-

identifies a significant threat to both seal populations in the Gulf of Maine.”

9448. In Maine, call [Marine Mammals of Maine](#) at (800) 532-9551.

The seals were often entangled in such gear as gillnet, monofilament line, multifilament line, rope and plastic rings, she notes.

“I was shocked by the sheer number of entangled animals we observed at Duck Island,” she says. “Just in 2016, we observed at least 33 entanglements. This is a serious issue, and I’m glad that our team has been able to document it.”

Now this class of 2017 Wildcat who loves marine mammals, hiking, swimming — anything that involves the outdoors — and served as the environmental advocate and community service coordinator for UNH’s Fairchild Hall is taking her educational pursuits across the sea. She will spend this summer studying in Berlin, Germany, before beginning her graduate work at Canada’s Dalhousie University in September.

Her advice for current and future Wildcats?

“If you ever have the opportunity to visit Shoals Marine Lab — whether for a day, a week or the entire summer — do it,” she says. “Shoals Marine Lab is a fantastic learning environment unlike any other.”

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