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Hope Spot Gotland

New Hope Spot in the Baltic Sea Calls for Widespread Ocean Education

GOTLAND, SWEDEN (July 6th, 2020) –

Gotland, a limestone island that sits between southeast Sweden and Latvia surrounded by The Baltic Sea provides a marine environment unique in many aspects. It is the largest brackish body of water in the world and is quite young – it's approximately just 3,000 years old. Perhaps one of its most distinguishing characteristics is its salinity gradient, which allows its waters to house both saltwater and freshwater species.

Mission Blue, ocean conservation nonprofit, has named Gotland a Hope Spot in support of the Hope Spot Champions' goals of bringing ocean awareness to the general public through hands-on and digital educational programs for children and youth. On the island of Gotland, the Swedish mainland and the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea, there are many projects targeting the health of the sea and the marine habitat. The idea is to use the Hope Spot to amplify the work of local NGOs as well as the work of the research community to bring awareness of the Baltic Sea to the public eye and enact change.

Kirsten Åkerman, Hope Spot Champion, explains, "We want the Gotland Hope Spot to trigger hope that comes from being connected to the great variety of life under the surface and what it means to our existence and life on the planet. More than 90 percent of life is aquatic and in this part of the world, we seldom get to come close enough to explore it. Exploring is also a way of dealing with the anxiety that comes from climate change, and we hope to help children and youth to unleash their curiosity and find ways to be part of the change for a healthy relationship with our sea."

The Hope Spot Champions are working with The Blue Center Gotland, Uppsala University, the County Administration Board of Gotland and the Region of Gotland are building a platform for activities targeting different areas of sea life. Outreach platforms include the science center Fenomenalen in the harbor of Visby and the Research Station Ar.



Gunilla Rosenqvist, head of Blue Center Gotland, explains why they are Hope Spot partners. “This is in line with what the Champions are hoping to achieve with the Blue Center Gotland – to educate and help people with challenges and questions they have about the condition of water on land and in the ocean. To collaborate with Mission Blue on these important challenges is wonderful!”

Dr. Sylvia Earle, Founder of Mission Blue, says, “I applaud the Champions of the Gotland Hope Spot for standing up for the ocean and for using their knowledge to share the life within the ocean to the nine countries that touch the Baltic Sea. The Baltic Sea holds many species not yet known to science – and we must do everything at our disposal to protect this life before it’s too late. Students today are a cause for hope, and for the first time, a kid with a cell phone has access to the history of life on Earth. Digital education is empowering the next generation of ocean stewards.”

Gotland Island is a treasure – its long sandy beaches and wide-open fields of poppies and blueweed make home to the many species that can only be found there. Its fragile and unique environment holds a number of endangered species. Out of 1,750 species and subspecies evaluated, 69 were identified as being threatened with extinction, from cod and eel to the endangered Baltic Sea harbor porpoise. Their population decline is believed to have several causes, including lethal bycatch, environmental contaminants, and heavy shipping traffic. The number of porpoises in the Baltic Sea today is believed to be as few as 300-500 individuals.

Åkerman and her partners are hoping to leverage the Gotland Hope Spot designation in order to bring several urgent issues to the public eye. 85 million people live within the drainage area of the Baltic Sea. The area is intensely industrialized with forestry operations dominating in the north and agriculture in the south. Toxins and other pollutants from land sooner or later end up in the sea, and atmospheric pollution is a problem as well. Significant efforts have been made to address the largest point sources, but more must be done in all these areas.

“Research and mobilization of the coming generation are key ingredients for successful change,” explains Åkerman. The Hope Spot Champions recently got the chance to work with Fenomenalen the Youth Science Center at Visby harbor to create a permanent space that will lay the foundation for achieving long-term goals for ocean conservation.

Lisa Berg, Head of the Fenomenalen the Youth Science Center, explains, “We wanted to be Gotland Hope Spot partners in order to enhance our work of bringing the ocean to our visitors. We are located in the harbor, and marine life and the ocean is an important part of our daily life. Children need to learn what a vital resource it is.”

Joakim Odelberg, conservation photographer, has partnered with the Gotland Hope Spot to, among other activities, set up underwater web camera stations to document species in their natural habitat and capture what life is like under the surface of the Baltic Sea.



"In all my years that I worked to raise awareness about the Baltic Sea status, I wished for more focus and protection for the extremely endangered Baltic Sea harbor porpoise," says Odelberg. He continues, "Not many people know that we have a unique little toothed whale in the Baltic Sea, it's fantastic, and they need to be more protected. As a Mission Blue partner, I'm very excited about this new Hope Spot that will bring an international focus on the area and the beautiful Baltic Sea Harbor Porpoise. A healthy living sea is vital to every living organism on Earth," says Odelberg.

Peter Alexandersson, CEO of The Swedish Ship Götheborg, says, "The Swedish Ship Götheborg supports the Gotland Hope Spot and we are very happy to have been and continue to be a part of this initiative." He continues, "It is also in line with our values and vision, "Cleans Seas and Clean Waters – yes, it is possible." We humans need to respect and understand that water in any form and place is a matter of life and death for all inhabitants of this beautiful blue planet we live on. We encourage all initiatives to better these matters and establish us as a platform to inspire people and raise awareness that, yes – it's possible to change and make a difference. Gotland Hope Spot is such an important initiative in our region that gives hope and leadership in the preservation of species and our seas."

If it is safe to travel in 2021, the ship and its crew will sail to Gotland, carrying with it a digital exhibition and youth-centered mini-lab that will visit the nine coastal countries that touch the Baltic Sea.

Åkerman says, "The Gotland Hope Spot is looking forward to being in touch with all local and international initiatives on the health of The Baltic Sea and sending ripples from them to all of the 128 Hope Spots around the world."

About Mission Blue

Led by legendary oceanographer Dr. Sylvia Earle, Mission Blue is uniting a global coalition to inspire an upwelling of public awareness, access and support for a worldwide network of marine protected areas – Hope Spots. Under Dr. Earle's leadership, the Mission Blue team implements communications campaigns that elevate Hope Spots to the world stage through documentaries, social media, traditional media and innovative tools like Google Earth. Mission Blue embarks on regular oceanic expeditions that shed light on these vital ecosystems and build support for their protection. Mission Blue also supports the work of conservation NGOs around the world that share the mission of building public support for ocean protection. The Mission Blue alliance includes more than 200 respected ocean conservation groups and like-minded organizations.

About Blue Center Gotland

The Ar Research Station is primarily for research activities but is also used as a venue for small-scale courses, study visits, workshops and other meetings.



The station is engaged in both basic research and applied research with the focus on fish ecology in terms of studying the reproduction, behavior and life-history strategies for both freshwater and marine fish species in the Baltic. This in order to obtain knowledge about the mechanisms that affect population development for different fish species. Both the effects of natural variations in the environmental conditions and the effects of human impacts are studied. The results of the research are intended to form the basis for managing Baltic fish stocks and thus contribute to the long-term sustainable use of the fish resources and favorable development of the Baltic Sea as an ecosystem.

[About The Swedish Ship Götheborg](#)

SOIC Ship Management is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Greencarrier AB. Our mission is to ensure that the ship is kept in excellent condition so that she can and will continue to sail on the world seas. After extensive maintenance, including two shipyard visits, as well as lifting and inspecting the mainmast, Götheborg is ready to sail again. She is still the world's largest wooden ocean-going sailing ship.

The expedition to the Baltics and Baltic sea which was planned for the summer of 2020 had to be postponed due to the pandemic – Covid-19 – that has affected the world. Our focus now is to sail during the spring and summer of 2021. We will look into different options, both near and far away.