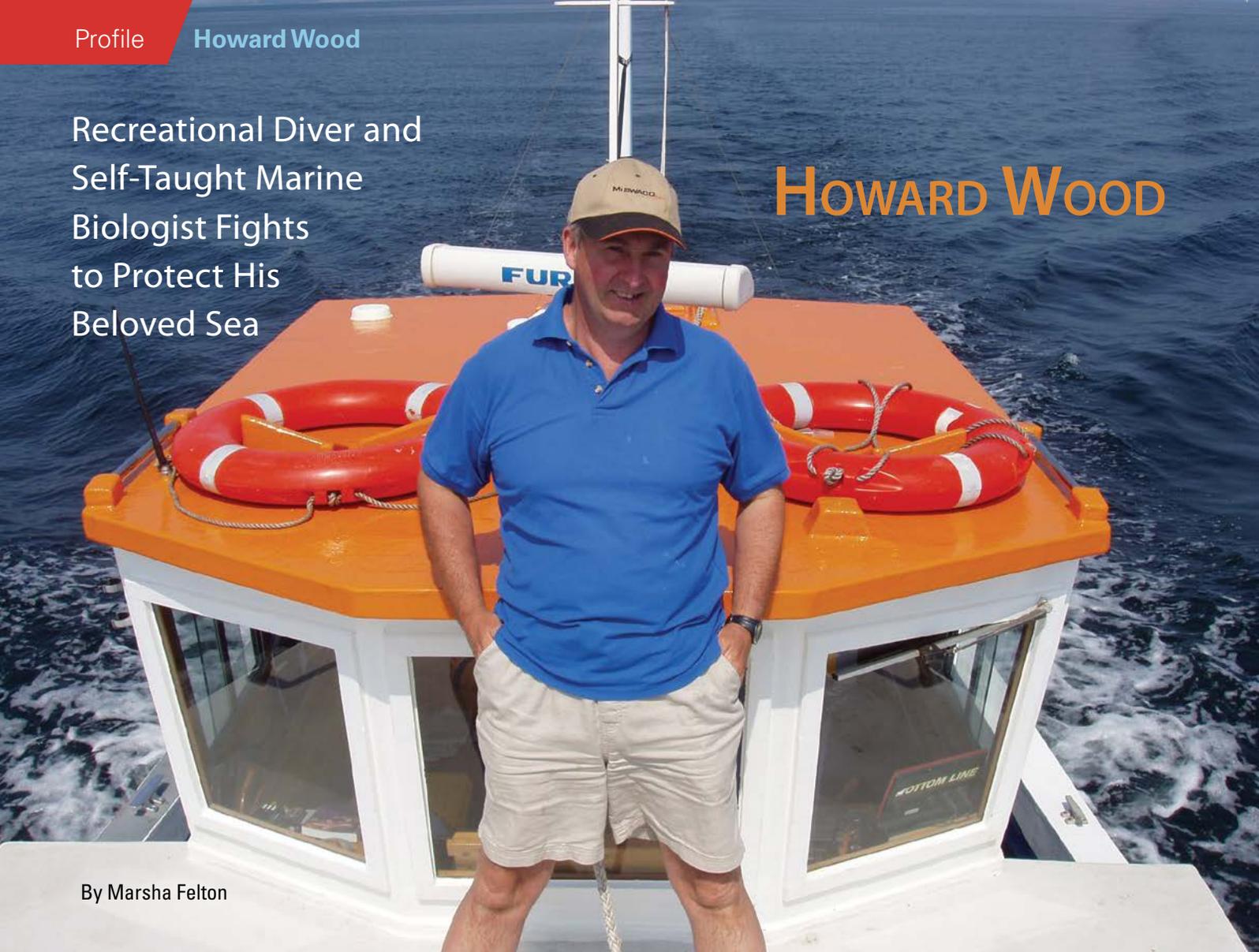


Recreational Diver and Self-Taught Marine Biologist Fights to Protect His Beloved Sea

HOWARD WOOD



By Marsha Felton

Howard Wood heading out to sea

Profile: Howard Wood

Age: 60

Occupation: COAST co-founder; self-taught marine biologist, scientist and lobbyist; deep-sea diver, instructor, photographer and videographer; retired: family horticultural business

Family: Wife Lesley; son Martin, 27, and daughter Jennifer, 24

Residence: Whiting Bay, a village on the Isle of Arran in the 'Firth of Clyde' on the west coast of Scotland

Honors & Accomplishments:

- 2015 Goldman Environmental Prize
- Co-Founded COAST (Community of Arran Seabed Trust) in 1995
13 years later, the driving force to establish Scotland's first No Take Zone (NTZ) in Lamlash Bay in 2008
- Led campaign for another six years; government established 30 new Marine Protected Areas (MPA) and the first community-led MPA on the South Arran shore in 2014

“What stood out about Howard is his tenacity and that he is a completely self-taught marine biologist, scientist, lobbyist, and politician. He wasn't professionally trained in any of these fields but he can hold his own in a room full of scientists or government bureaucrats and he does so without an ounce of pretense.”

– David Gordon, Executive Director of The Goldman Environmental Prize

Howard Wood is one of six grassroots environmentalists from around the world honored with the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize for 2015. (See Goldman Environmental Prize sidebar.)



Protecting the ocean is a full time job

What caused Howard, a deep-sea diver for over 40 years, to become a prominent advocate for protecting the seas, co-found COAST, challenge the Scottish Parliament to acknowledge the people's voice, win impactful victories and to this day... never take 'No' for an answer?

MF: What is your background and why did you become motivated to become a fighter for protecting the seas, persuading community activism and politicians?

HW: I have been fascinated with the sea for over 40 years. To some people, "out of sight, out of mind," but with the sea, I am always excited to find out more. At age 19, I became a deep-sea diver, then

instructor, photographer and videographer. With my long-time friend, Don MacNeish, through the 1980's as divers we witnessed the rapid decline in species and habitats due to fisheries management. Whiting Bay is a small village, most people know each other, we have lots of clubs; it's a small community with big, big community spirit. We believed we must get all segments of our community informed about the decimation of our seas and find a way to act as a group advocating for change and the development of Marine Protected Areas.

MF: How did you become a "self trained marine biologist, grassroots activist and lobbyist?"

ISLE OF ARRAN

Howard lives in the small village of Whiting Bay on the Isle of Arran. It is in the 'Firth of Clyde', which encompasses the largest and deepest coastal waters in the British Isles.

Arran is known as a "gem" in Scotland; tourism is very popular. It is well-known for its revitalizing fresh air, sea breezes, towering mountains, fertile valleys, beautiful coastlines, water and land recreations, old world charm and pleasurable pace of life.

What was not as well known was that the beauty and vital ecology in the sea were being dramatically destroyed and exploited in the sea by commercial fisheries and the Scottish government, which overturned a 100-year old ban on destructive fishing practices. As a result, the Clyde was (and to a major extent still is) devoid of commercially exploitable fish, with the fishing industry left with just scallops and prawns, using methods that destroy the ecosystems.

WHAT IS A MARINE PROTECTED AREA (MPA)?

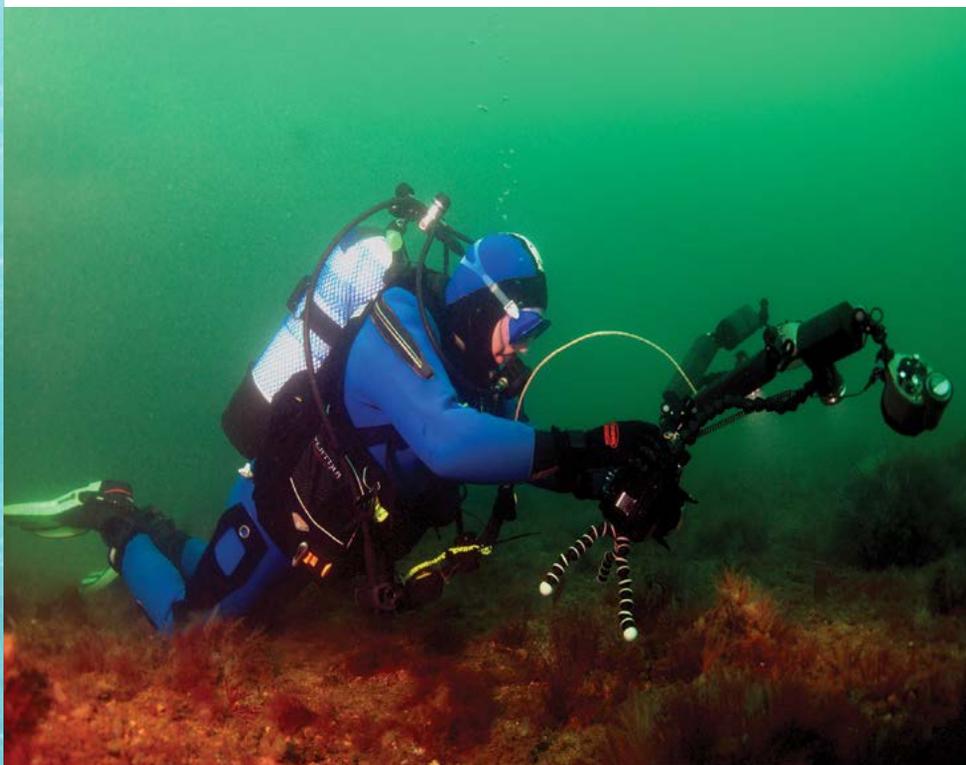
Marine Protected Areas are like National Parks in the seas and oceans.

Not surprisingly, one of Howard's heroes is the Scottish-American John Muir. A renowned conservationist and essayist, Muir fought to protect the places he loved. He inspired America to protect and preserve natural areas for their beauty, ecological importance and profoundly contributed to the Federal Government's establishment of the National Park Service.

COAST

(COMMUNITY OF ARRAN SEABED TRUST)

Co-founded by Howard with Don MacNeish, COAST is a Scottish non-profit, recognized worldwide as model of innovative and highly effective community advocacy, involving many sectors of the public. One of its primary goals is persuading the government to acknowledge the will of its constituents. COAST has had to take the lead in driving the scientific debate which has led to action on marine conservation issues. Their work benefits the local community, enhances the experience of the many visitors to Arran and contributes to the recovery of their seas. They recently hosted visiting government, NGO and university representatives from China who sought to learn about public participation in environmental policy, management and community-led environmental campaigning.



Exploring the seabed for life

HW: Don and I learned as we went along. Beginning in 1993-94, we went to MP (Member of Parliament) surgeries (which are meetings). In 1999, MPs evolved to MSPs (Member of Scottish Parliament) with monthly surgeries held at different villages on the island. Constituents go to speak to their elected representatives. We would eagerly ask for support to create marine reserves. We told them the fish stocks were in very bad shape and the government didn't seem to be doing anything about it. We learned how to lobby; we were invited to speak at committees and put in petitions. We learned how our passions could be persuasive.

MF: How did you and Don enroll others to join your cause and COAST?

HW: Initially we set up COAST meetings. A lot of the earlier people who came along to help were either divers or recreational sea anglers.

Eventually all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds came to volunteer, ranging from teachers to lawyers to web experts to tradesman and retired fishermen. Twenty years ago, we set up as an association with a membership of over 2,000 people, 30%-40% of our island of 5,000. After transitioning our status as a charitable non-profit, our supporters are many more thousands.

MF: Do you know about Dr. Sylvia Earle? (ActiveOver50 Winter 2013 Cover Profile)

HW: Of course! Dr. Sylvia Earle is obviously amazing and a complete legend. A great thing about COAST is that leaders like Sylvia need local initiatives. It's very difficult to put in MPAs if locals don't understand and don't want them. What COAST is about are grassroots initiatives to build support amongst local communities so they're pushing government for them. Scientific research shows

when communities like COAST get involved and make sure there is good compliance within an MPA, these MPAs become the most effective for sustainable marine management and are the best for economics.

Lamlash Bay Success Leads to New MPAs

After 13 years of intense community engagement and government lobbying, in 2008, Wood and COAST succeeded in establishing a No Take Zone (NTZ) in Lamlash Bay. It prohibits fishing of any kind and protects key habitats. Residents from the Isle of Arran, mostly retirees, watch the NTZ with binoculars from porches and balconies to monitor for violators. Since the establishment of the NTZ, scientists have documented a dramatic recovery of the seabed.

Building off the Lamlash Bay victory, Wood began a campaign to establish a Marine Protected Area (MPA) to

establish a larger buffer zone. In 2014, the government established 30 new MPAs around Scotland including the first community-led MPA on the South Arran shore in 2014.

MF: What are some of the biggest challenges you face? What are your goals?

HW: Biggest challenge, which is a COAST issue as well, is to get the Scottish government to manage our seas as a public asset. For years, we have meetings, and debates. The Scottish government kept insisting managing of our seas was between the government and fishing industries.

Our lawyers fortunately convinced them they had to manage all our seas as a public asset. Are their decisions in the public interest and making a difference for future generations? In my experience, all governments are interested in short-term economics which is why our seas are in such state. The government has never taken one fisherman to court for infringements into the NTZ. Last fall, they refused to accept our proposed management position for the MPA.



Greenpeace supports the cause

There is a big battle and campaign ahead. There's a fair chance they will put in a management plan that is totally unacceptable. It's incredibly complicated. They continue to consult with us but do not listen to the public! They know they're under pressure. There will likely be some type of compromise.

HW: Goals include to make sure management and compliance is effective in MPAs. And within 5-10 years, to go to Australia and New Zealand* and see more MPAs!

*Another of Howard's heroes is Dr. Bill Ballantine, awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize in 1996 for his work on marine conservation and New Zealand's Marine Reserve Act.

Howard says: "It's time for effective, well articulated marine management. Our MPAs must be managed in a way that contributes to the Government's wider marine commitments. Lets not take the 'P' out of our MPAs! Marine Scotland cannot continue to hide behind their own narrow definitions of what constitutes a marine protected area. The public won't buy it, COAST won't buy it and the Scottish Government will have lost a real opportunity to make a contribution to the health of our marine life and coastal economies."



ABOUT MARSHA FELTON

"I'm on the 'inspiring and motivating' beat. I cover exciting people and uplifting endeavors." Marsha Felton is a marketing consultant and freelance writer. Email: marshabf@gmail.com

GOLDMAN ENVIRONMENTAL PRIZE

For more than a quarter century, the world's largest prize honoring environmental pioneers from six regions of the globe.



In 1989, the late philanthropists Richard N. Goldman and his wife, Rhoda H. Goldman established the Goldman Environmental Prize, stemming from their lifelong commitment to environmental protection in order to recognize ordinary individuals working at the grassroots level who protect and enhance our environment. Their legacy is continued by their two sons, John and Doug Goldman and daughter Susie Gelman.

ABOUT THE PRIZE

- The Goldman Environmental Prize each year honors six heroes from the world's six inhabited continental regions: Africa, Asia, Europe, Islands & Island Nations, North America, and South & Central America.
- The Prize recognizes individuals for sustained and significant efforts to protect and enhance the natural environment often at great personal risk.
- The Goldman Prize views "grassroots" leaders as those involved in local efforts where positive change is created through community or citizen participation in the issues that affect them.
- Through recognizing these individual leaders, the Prize seeks to inspire other ordinary people to take extra-ordinary actions to protect the natural world.

Financial support: \$175,000 to each recipient to pursue their vision and heroic efforts

2015 Award Ceremonies: San Francisco & Washington, D.C.

Total number of Prize winners to date: 169

Total number of countries represented by Prize winners to date: 83

Total amount of money given to Prize winners to date: \$21 million

