

Sylvia Earle: National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence

Sylvia Earle was called a "Hero for the Planet" by *Time* magazine. She's an oceanographer, explorer, author, and lecturer.

Sylvia Earle is a world-famous ocean scientist and a National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence. She loves diving in the ocean. She spends a lot of time under the sea. Earle has been the leader on more than a hundred expeditions. She also set a record for solo diving in 1,000-metre deep water. In total, she has spent more than 7,000 hours underwater.

Earle describes the first time she went to the ocean: 'I was three years old and a big wave knocked me over. I wasn't frightened, I was excited. That was the beginning of my interest in the ocean.'

In the past, Earle was the chief scientist of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in the USA. Now she works with Google Earth's Ocean. Earle's special interest is the development of a network of areas on the land and in the ocean. This network can protect the life systems that are important to the Earth. She explains why this is important: 'When I went to the Gulf of Mexico in the 1950s, the sea was a big blue infinity. I didn't understand that the sea was in danger from the actions of people. That was an impossible idea. Then, after thirty years (only thirty, not a thousand!), the blue paradise disappeared. At the end of the 20th century, there were only about 10 percent of the sharks, whales and other animals in the Gulf.'

Why is the ocean important to life on Earth? Earle says, 'The ocean is alive. The living things in the ocean generate oxygen and take up carbon. Our planet doesn't work without the ocean.'

There are many problems in the Gulf of Mexico. But Sylvia Earle says, 'In 2003 I was in clear water in the Gulf. I was a long way from the mouth of the Mississippi River. The area was full of healthy sea life. We can protect the ocean and our future.'