

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 one of the world's most famous marine scientists and a National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence. She loves to go diving in the ocean. She has spent a lot of her life both in and under the waves. Earle has led more than a hundred expeditions and she 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 I got knocked over by a wave. The ocean certainly got my attention! It wasn't frightening, it was thrilling. And since then I have been fascinated by life in the ocean.'

In the past, Earle was the chief scientist of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the USA. Now one of her jobs is with Google Earth's Ocean. Earle's special focus is on developing a global network of areas on the land and in the ocean. This network will protect and support the living systems that are important to the planet. She explains why this is important: 'When I first went to the Gulf of Mexico in the 1950s, the sea looked like a blue infinity. It seemed to be too large and too wild to be damaged by the action of people. Then, in a few decades, not thousands of years, the blue wilderness of my childhood disappeared. By the end of the 20th century, about 90 percent of the sharks, tuna, turtles, whales and many other large creatures had disappeared from the Gulf. They had been there for millions of years.'

Some people don't understand why the ocean is so important to life on Earth. Earle explains that 'the ocean is the foundation of our life support system. The ocean is alive. The living things in the ocean generate oxygen and take up carbon. If we don't have the ocean, we don't have a planet that works.'

The Gulf of Mexico has had many problems, especially after the Deepwater Horizon Oil disaster of 2010, but Earle says, 'In 2003 I found positive signs in clear, deep water far from the mouth of the Mississippi River. It was full of life. Large areas of the Gulf are not damaged. Protecting the most important places will be good for the future of the Gulf and for all of us.'