



small aquarium, BIG MISSION

FALMOUTH'S NEW VISITOR ATTRACTION PASSIONATELY
PROMOTES THE PRESERVATION OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT

Words by **Yayeri van Baarsen**



Falmouth's aquarium doesn't only display pretty fish; it is also keen on promoting marine conservation. The not-for-profit organisation opened its doors to the public in August, in a four-storey townhouse in the centre of Falmouth. Its mission: to promote Cornish marine life and raise awareness for marine issues all over the world. Co-founders Johanna Naradzay and her husband, Barry Pope, put their own savings into this project and have worked in marine conservation for many years.

Surrounded by tanks filled with multicoloured fish, walking the ground floor of the aquarium feels like diving in the Caribbean. The tanks are all sorted by theme, making it easy to find Nemo (he's among the clownfish and anemones). Johanna knows everything about the different fish, even their personalities. "You won't get any big sharks here," she says, "as we don't have room. But as our tanks are smaller than most aquariums, you can get closer and have a better look at the fish."

Visitors can even take a look behind the scenes. A clear glass door allows the public to see the huge white machine that filters the water of all 14 fish tanks. With 20 different parts and a UV filter to sterilize the bacteria, this is a massive operation. "In the ocean, this all happens naturally," Johanna tells me. "We wanted to show our visitors what's needed to make it happen in an aquarium."

The whole first floor is dedicated to Cornish marine life, some specimens donated by locals. "Our new starfish was brought in by Mylor fishermen," Johanna says. "When people hear the word 'aquarium', they automatically think about exotic waters, but with our Cornish tanks we want to show how beautiful the local marine life is. Also, it might give people an idea of what the fish they eat look like when they're still alive," she laughs.

In one tank, large mussels lay scattered around wooden poles, while grey mullets shoot through the water, avoiding the glass bottles. Glass bottles? "We wanted to show what the environment looks like underneath your feet, when you stand on a pier waiting for the ferry," Johanna explains. "Hopefully, seeing glass bottles in the tank will make people think twice before throwing their trash into the water."

Johanna's passion for marine life flourishes even more when we enter the conservation area, with displays on unsustainable fishing, shark finning and endangered turtles. Next to a loggerhead turtle skull, she tells me about the sort of internal

compass baby turtles have, so that when they mature they can find their way back to the exact beach they were born on, to lay their own eggs. Sadly, she ends by saying that nowadays, all turtle species are endangered or threatened. "I really hope that after visiting, our visitors realise the threats our marine wildlife face, and take a leaflet of the Marine Conservation Society home with them," she says.

The aquarium works closely with Falmouth Marine School and other organisations, such as Cornwall Wildlife Trust. BBC presenter David Dimbleby has already visited to film part of his new series, Britain And The Sea, due to air this autumn. In future, the aquarium will host monthly workshops with people from the green industry or local fishing community, including talks on how to be more environmentally friendly. "Our main mission is to educate people," Johanna explains. "We try to make sure that everyone can come in by keeping our admission prices low."

In keeping with its green ethos, the aquarium won the competition in Cornwall Today's April issue to win a solar panel installation worth £3,000 courtesy of Cornwall Solar Panels. "We're still in the process of getting permission from the council," Johanna says, "so the solar panels aren't up yet, but we're hoping to have everything ready very soon. They'll be installed on the rear side of the roof, so they won't change the look of the street."

The panels will enable the aquarium to minimise its carbon footprint. "By using solar panels, we'll have a lower environmental impact," Johanna explains. "Because of the fish, we can't turn our engines off at night, and keeping the system running 24/7 is a massive energy drain. At the moment we are monthly spending between £500 and £600 on energy, so every bit helps."

"We've always wanted solar panels, so we are really excited to get them. For us, they are a big talking point; we want to make visitors aware of how to get solar panels and the environmental benefits they offer," she adds.

For Tony Sampson, company director of Cornwall Solar Panels, choosing a winner wasn't easy. "With dozens of entries, it was encouraging that so many people wanted to reduce their carbon footprint and be green," he says. "However, the aquarium stood out because they'll be educating people on Cornish marine life. Therefore, it seemed like the most worthy cause." 

Falmouth Aquarium can be found at 23 Church Street, Falmouth, TR11 3EG