

## STEWARD OF THE SEA

Raising awareness of California's fragile marine ecosystem is top priority for environmentalist Jennifer Stock



Like many of us, Jennifer Stock was filled with "sadness and anger" upon learning of the recent BP Gulf Coast oil spill. But, as Education and Outreach Coordinator at the Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary, near Point Reyes, Stock also can relate the disaster to her own work. "It's a reality we have outside the Golden Gate, with the huge ships coming in," she says. "There have been spills in the past, and there probably will be again."

The sanctuary—529 square miles of ocean centered on its namesake undersea rock formation—will be featured in OMCA's Gallery of California Natural Sciences, set to open in 2012. Cordell Bank's food-rich waters attract hundreds of species of fish, invertebrates, marine mammals, and seabirds. "It's like a little city, twenty miles off the coast," Stock says.

A similar plethora of marine wildlife extends up and down the Golden State. "The entire coast of California is unique, in that we have the California Current that generates incredibly productive areas for wildlife and feeding," says Stock. "The combination of this current being so productive and the diverse topography of the sea floor makes unique feeding areas for different types of marine wildlife."

Stock is excited about the upcoming Cordell Bank exhibits within the Natural Sciences Gallery, which she hopes will raise awareness of this hidden network of species and incredible undersea habitat. Considering that well over three-quarters of all ocean debris originates from land-based sources, educating landlubbers makes sense and is critical to the future of the ocean's health. "Any trash or candy wrapper that makes it to the ground—unless it is picked up and put in the garbage—will find its way to a storm drain, then to a creek, which will drain to the Bay, and then to the ocean," Stock says. "If there's one thing humans can do to be great ocean stewards, it's to keep their trash off the ground."

The consequences of marine habitat degradation—whether by massive oil spill, global warming, or tiny Twinkie wrappers—are real, says Stock. "If we lose habitat due to any type of destructive practices, we miss out because a large population relies on the ocean for food for at least a part of its diet. If you take away the habitat, you lose the potential for life to exist."

"My hope is for people to feel connected to every creek and path of water that goes into the Bay and drains into our beautiful, productive marine environments."