



REPORT

Green Foundation Ireland

invites you to an evening online TALK
with **Greg O'Corry-Crowe**, Professor at the
Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute in
Florida Atlantic University

***From Beluga Whales to Steller Sea Lions –
Life and research at the edge of the world***



Photo: Courtesy of the White Whale Programme

Venue: by Zoom (details given after registration)
Thursday 19 May 2022 – 19:00 to 20:00

Admission to this event is **FREE** but you **MUST** register beforehand.
You can do so through [our Eventbrite page here](#)

*This event is part of National Biodiversity Week 2022
organised by the Irish Environmental Network*

From Beluga Whales to Steller Sea Lions – *Life and research on the edge of the world*

THEME

Life in the far north is challenging for human and beast. It also creates unique challenges for those who choose to study wildlife in these regions. But it is worth the effort.

Greg O'Corry-Crowe and his team have been fortunate enough to spend the last 3 decades working in the Arctic and North Pacific Ocean on marine mammals, much of which has been conducted in partnership with indigenous peoples from the Russian Far East to Alaska and Canada. From remote field camps to genetic labs they've tried to unlock many of the mysteries of these incredible animals and their environments.

This work must now quicken its pace if we are to understand how polar and sub-polar ecosystems are to adapt to a rapidly changing world.

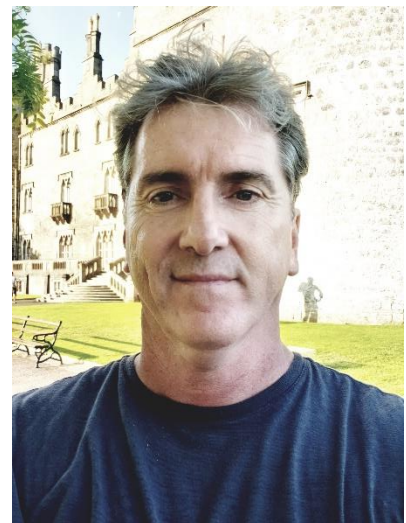
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ABOUT OUR SPEAKER

GREG O'CORRY-CROWE

Greg is currently Professor at the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute in Florida Atlantic University.

Much of his childhood was spent in the countryside of Kilkenny, wandering the fields and woods looking for foxes and birds, learning the sights and sounds of nature and pondering important questions like "why do cuckoos spit?". Somehow he made it to University to study Zoology and conduct graduate research on badgers when the badgers and bovine TB issue was emerging in Ireland. He was then fortunate to get a chance to go to Alaska after his studies. That trip shaped the course of Greg's career, not just because of the incredible wildlife and epic scenery but also because of the surprisingly familiar story and view on life of the indigenous people.



For over 25 years Greg and his team have conducted studies on beluga whales, Steller sea lions, polar bears, bottlenose dolphins and ice seals, many in partnership with these northern communities. They have found a way to harness the promise of genetics and genomics and the access and detail satellite telemetry can provide with the uniquely powerful perspectives and insights indigenous knowledge gives, to build a clear understanding of the natural world as well as a deeper sense of our place in it.

Donna Mullen, Chair of Green Foundation Ireland, began our event by welcoming everyone and introducing **Greg O'Corry-Crowe** who is currently Professor at the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute in Florida Atlantic University.

Many issues face animals in the Arctic, including climate change and environmental degradation. For much of his research, Greg works with indigenous cultures to study species resilience, and to map endangered species recovery. He also looks at the sustainable use of maritime resources, working on education and policy change.

One of his projects involves Steller sea lions, which he studies on the Aleutian Islands. These volcanic islands are home to the Unangan people, who are a sophisticated hunter-gatherer tribe.

Greg has undertaken DNA analysis and discovered that the sea lion population, which was considered one genetic group, is actually two genetic groupings. This explains their different diet and different species ranges.

Greg showed us footage of some terrifyingly large sea lions, with enormous teeth, which himself and his team had to tag. If this wasn't frightening enough, the team have to climb high, slippery shards of rocks, to put remote cameras on the sea lion rookeries, to monitor populations.

One of his team, **Katie Sweeney**, is asking for help from citizen scientists throughout the world to look at the camera footage and identify individual sea lions. If you can help, please contact [Steller Watch here](#).

Greg's other work involves beluga whales, and he has been tracking their migration, which is around 6,000 km yearly. The migration is along the same route, year after year, and Greg is interested in knowing if the beluga whales have their own culture, and how they learn this route. He is also looking at behavioural shifts in groups, seeing if they alter their behaviour quickly, and how this effects their resilience.

Finally, Greg spoke about the social organisation of beluga whales – do they group together with family or friends? This involved taking skin biopsies and placing satellite tags on these enormous animals in choppy seas. It seems that whales are just like ourselves – hanging out with the best of their families and a big group of friends.

Almost 30 people registered or expressed an interest in our event, out of which 22 attended on the evening, and a lively Q&A session followed Greg's most interesting talk.

Donna then ended with thanking Greg for an absolutely fascinating insight into life in the extreme wilderness of Alaska.