



It pays for Rays to learn their shapes!

SUMMARY

This project investigates the behaviour of blue spotted lagoon rays in a captive environment (Reef HQ Aquarium). The aim is to improve the health and wellbeing of the animals. It involves training the rays to recognise targets with various shapes, and rewarding them with food when they recognise “their” shape. After initial training, these targets can be used to diversify the stimuli that the rays are exposed to, which, in turn enriches their environment and the range of behaviours the rays exhibit.

DATES

Nov 2014 - June 2015

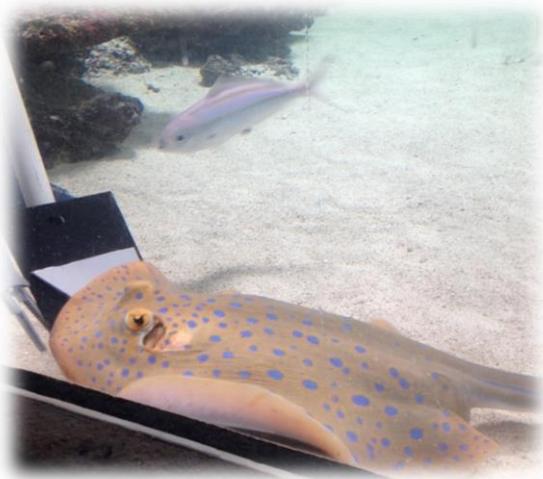
LEADER

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FOCUS

Rays and sharks are charismatic species, popular with visitors to aquariums. In order to maintain them in good health, some stimulation and behavioural enrichment tools are tested on three blue spotted lagoon rays at Reef HQ aquarium. The aim of the training is to prevent them from adopting repetitive behaviour - such as swimming patterns – which can be related to stress for animals in captivity. Target training is one of these tools, which has been successfully used with other ray and sharks species.

The project involves trying to ‘target train’ three rays (Mum, Dad, and their offspring) with a variety of shapes, whereby the rays are rewarded with food when they respond to the shape meant for the specific individual. The rays will be observed prior to the target training, during and after. The behaviours will be compared and the results can be used to design enrichment programmes for other species in the future.



Above left: blue spotted lagoon ray being target trained. Above right: several of the different target shapes mounted on a pole for use in the Aquarium. © Sara-Louise McCracken.

OUTCOME

This study will provide practical tools to stimulate captive rays and sharks, and ultimately improve their health and welfare in aquariums.

