



## **Mark Swingle, Director of Research & Conservation**

**1. Where did you get your undergraduate degree from and in what major?**

College of William & Mary – B.S. biology

**2. Graduate school degree and major?**

Old Dominion University - M.S. oceanography

**3. How long have you been with the Aquarium?**

27 years

**4. Briefly describe your primary involvement with the *Restless Planet* exhibit?**

I have been involved as a member of the planning team, the animal acquisitions and conservation committees, and the label writing team. I and my staff have been particularly involved with the acquisition and quarantine of aquatic animals for the new aquariums, as well as developing the overall conservation plans and programs associated with the new exhibits.

**5. What has been your biggest challenge?**

The retrofit of our offsite Marine Animal Care Center to house and quarantine the new aquatic animals has been the most challenging part of the project for my staff and I. This process consumed more than 18 months and involved the addition of major new aquatic holding systems for species ranging from eagle rays to snakeheads.

**6. What are you most excited about guests seeing?**

The *Restless Planet* immersive exhibits will be a new and exciting experience for our guests. They will have the opportunity to “enter exotic habitats” for up-close views of fascinating animal species from across the globe. These animals, like Komodo dragons, Tomistoma crocodiles, and Mediterranean seahorses, also have compelling conservation stories. I am most excited about our guests being able to view these rare species and learn about their conservation challenges.

**7. What *Restless Planet* fact would surprise guests if they knew?**

Despite all of the amazing new exhibits, the exterior of the Aquarium buildings did not change. All of the exotic new habitats have thematic links to Virginia’s past. Special glass allows essential ultraviolet radiation to reach the Komodo dragons. Eagle rays are trained to come to targets for individualized feeding and husbandry care. Aquarium staff attended “Crocodile School” in preparation for the new Tomistoma exhibit. More than four years were required to gather all of the animals for *Restless Planet*.

**8. Once *Restless Planet* opens, how will your job differ?**

My job will involve more exciting projects and partnerships related to the conservation of the many new animal species in *Restless Planet*. This will include some new conservation fundraising programs and opportunities for international collaboration.

Date: July 10, 2009