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A Note from the Authors

The ocean's magnificent beauty and mystery have lured oceanic explorers in their quest for knowledge about the seas for thousands of years. As early as 2,000 B.C., the Egyptians were exploring the seas. In 325 B.C., one of the first documented marine biological laboratories was located along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, operating under the direction of Aristotle. Christopher Columbus, Benjamin Franklin, and Charles Darwin were just a few of the others driven by an innate curiosity about the ocean and its inhabitants. Man's curiosity of the ocean began in earnest in 1872 with the voyages of the *H.M.S. Challenger*, a British sailing vessel that covered 70,000 nautical miles exploring the seas. Data collected during the *Challenger* expeditions were recorded in 50 books that required 23 years to publish.

How did the ocean form? Where does it get its power? Why is it blue, brown, or green? What is living in it? Why do marine plants and animals look the way they do? What do they eat and where do they come from? Why do marine organisms change color and shape as they grow? How do they protect themselves? How do they reproduce and what do their young look like?

These are some of the questions we asked as young children and continue to ask today. Perhaps these are some of the same questions that led the Egyptians on their voyages almost 4,000 years ago. We would venture to guess that you, too, have at some time, thought about similar questions.

Questions about the ocean and the life it supports that we had as young children led us to pursue careers in marine biology and marine geology. They also led us to pursue the opportunity to write this book. Our purpose in promoting marine science education is to better prepare youth to make intelligent, rational decisions on issues affecting our fragile marine environment. Sharing some of the knowledge you may learn from this book with a child may be one of the most rewarding experiences that you will ever have.

There is still much more to tell—so many truly fascinating things about the Ocean Planet that could not be addressed in the scope of this project. This book is the beginning of an attempt to answer, at least in part, some of your questions about the Ocean Planet.

Paula Keener-Chavis and Leslie Reynolds Sautter

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