

triple the size of an already established 150,000-square-kilometer “no-take” fish reserve (the fourth-largest of its kind in the world) around a neighboring island, Salas y Gomez. Especially critical to restoring the region’s fish population is conserving the chain of seamounts between the two islands. Separately, Oceana is in discussions with the indigenous people, the Rapa Nui, about prohibiting industrial fishing (vessels more than 18 meters long) within a 200-mile zone around Easter Island “in a way,” Sharpless says, “that does not offend their ancestral fishing rights.” The rapid decline of tuna, sharks, and other big fish is primarily due to industrial fishing, particularly from illegal foreign fleets, according to Oceana. As a result, in an ironic scenario, the majority of island businesses are importing tuna from Tahiti to feed tourists, whose money, in turn, sustains the local economy. The proposed restrictions would “help regenerate fish populations over time,” Sharpless says, “and spur an artisanal fishing fleet of the Rapa Nui.”

The Rapa Nui are conflicted about ac-

cepting any limits, a situation complicated by the economic gains and the wish for more autonomy at the provincial level. “We are in a pre-existing, complicated political environment,” Sharpless concedes. “I don’t know whether we’re going to win there. But I think we have a good chance.” Oceana hopes that Chilean president Sebastián Piñera acts within a typically nonpoliticized time frame: after this November’s presidential election and before March 2014, when he leaves office.

THIS MAY, Sharpless’s Gameboy Weekend also featured a Saturday night discussion, over drinks, of life’s lessons. The question posed was: What do you know to be true now that you didn’t believe when you were younger? At 20, Sharpless believed good intentions led to good outcomes. Environmental work has shown him otherwise: “Pure-of-heart incompetence is a very dangerous thing,” he asserts. “You are going to create problems for yourself and the world if you don’t know what you are doing.”

The history of Easter Island’s ecological demise is well known. Even before

Europeans arrived, the rats that came with the original Polynesian settlers “were devouring the seeds of the future forests, and the forests were being cut down to plant sweet potato fields,” he explains. By the time Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen got there, on Easter morning in 1722, “the place was already in rapid decline, with anarchy, disorder, starvation, and signs of cannibalism.” The risks and results of environmental ruin were probably as clear to Roggeveen then as they should be to modern observers, he adds. “This is what you get when you have shortsighted overuse of natural resources: a collapse that is ugly and disadvantageous for civilization.”

Still, there is hope, he insists. The oceans are surprisingly resilient and, with help, can regenerate. Oceana predicts that the changes in Chile, and those proposed for Easter Island, mean that within five to 10 years, “people will be hiking and seeing more fish. More people will be fishing off the island,” he adds, “and bringing a healthy dinner home for their families.”

~NELL PORTER BROWN



Clockwise from top left: Everett Mendelsohn, Arnold Rampersad, Louise Richardson, and Sherry Turkle

Centennial Medalists

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL of Arts and Sciences Centennial Medal, first awarded in 1989 on the occasion of the school’s hundredth anniversary, honors alumni who have made notable contributions to society that emerged from their graduate study at Harvard. It is the highest honor that the Graduate School bestows, and awardees include some of Harvard’s most accomplished alumni. The 2013 recipients, announced at a ceremony on May 29, are: Everett Mendelsohn, Ph.D. ’60, professor of the history of science emeritus; biographer and scholar of American literature Arnold Rampersad, Ph.D. ’73, Stanford’s Kimball professor in the humanities emeritus; Louise Richardson, Ph.D. ’89, formerly professor of government and executive dean of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard, now principal and vice-chancellor of the University of St Andrews; and Sherry Turkle ’69, Ph.D. ’76, professor of the social studies of science and technology at MIT. For more about the honorands, see <http://harvardmag.com/medalists-13>.