

# Boris Herrmann

Battling storms and high seas, this sailor is in a race to save the oceans.

As well as being a campaigner for ocean protection, Boris Herrmann is also one of the best sailors on the planet. At the start of this year he completed the Vendée Globe – a tough sailing competition. During the race the challengers sail non-stop around the world in an 18-metre-long boat, all alone and without any help. Herrmann was in with a chance of winning until disaster struck close to the finish line.

To celebrate World Ocean Day on 8 June, Herrmann spoke to *The Week Junior Science+Nature* about his adventures and the greatest challenge he is taking on – saving the oceans.

## Growing up by the sea

Herrmann's love for the sea started early. "I come from a small town in the north of Germany near the North Sea," he says. "My father took me on board his little sailboat at a very early age, even when I couldn't walk. So I practically grew up with sailing and it has never let me go." At the age of 18 he became the youngest person to compete in the Mini Transat race – a single-handed race across the Atlantic Ocean in 6.5-metre boats. Herrmann finished in 11th place and it was the start of his sailing career. "I love sailing and the

## The power of the ocean

The ocean plays an important role in helping to regulate Earth's climate and slow climate change (long-term changes in weather patterns, caused by harmful gases released into the atmosphere). Oceans soak up a gas called carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from the air. CO<sub>2</sub> is known to be a big contributor to climate change. The gas dissolves in the water and living things in the sea absorb it into their bodies. Herrmann's boat carried sensors that measured the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> and the level of salt in the water, as well the temperature. He said that sailors "get to places that would be difficult and costly for scientists to reach. That is why I took a mini-lab with me on board that would measure very valuable data in the most remote places of the ocean."



Herrmann's boat  
Seaxplorer.

ocean. You concentrate on nature and its beauty every time you are on it. It is also something you have to respect a lot. The power of the ocean is immense."

## STRANGE ROOTS

Mangroves grow half in and half out of the water. The tall roots make the trees look as if they are standing on stilts.

## Around the world in 80 days

On 8 November 2020, Herrmann started the Vendée Globe race. Competitors battle big waves and scary storms hundreds of miles from land. Living in cramped conditions can be tough and there is no one to take over from you if you need a rest. Herrmann slept for around five hours a day but only for about 20 to 40 minutes at a time so that he could wake up and make sure he was on course.

"On board you eat astronaut food," he says, referring to freeze-dried food mixed with hot water. Along the way he saw albatrosses, dolphins and flying fish.

## Lost at sea

Less than a month into the Vendée Globe, a fellow competitor called Kevin Escoffier signalled for help. A large wave had hit his boat and snapped it in half and it started sinking within seconds. He was around 840 miles from land in the southern Atlantic Ocean. Escoffier messaged – "I AM SINKING. THIS IS NOT A JOKE. MAYDAY." – and jumped into a life raft. Herrmann was one of four competitors who stopped racing and headed to Escoffier's last known location. Another sailor found him after Escoffier had spent nearly 12 hours adrift. "The relief when we heard he was safe was incredible. I was really emotional," Herrmann said.

Herrmann also encountered bad luck. Around 90 miles from the finishing line, on the last night of the race, his yacht collided with a fishing boat. He was in third place at the time but any hopes of victory were dashed because he had to stop and make repairs.

"I was so close to arriving and it's the worst nightmare I could imagine to happen in that moment," Herrmann says. "But I am just very happy we all came away from it ok and that I was able to fix the boat and continue, albeit slowly, to the finish." On 28 January, after 80 days alone at sea and covering 21,638 miles, Herrmann crossed the finish line to complete the race in fifth place.

## A mega-mangrove project

One of Herrmann's next challenges is to protect the ocean. He has joined forces with the Mama Earth Foundation to create the Malizia Mangrove Park in the Philippines. The goal is to plant a million new mangrove trees in the area. Mangrove forests grow in coastal waters and provide a habitat for many types of birds, fish, lizards and snakes. They also take a lot of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere.

Herrmann says even small efforts are important. "The time to act is now – not tomorrow, not the next day, but today," he told *The Week Junior Science+Nature*. He points out that young people can be really good at influencing people, such as their parents, to change their behaviour. "Keep motivated and keep motivating and inspire," Herrmann says, "There is a huge opportunity to change and have a big impact."

## A TOUGH RACE

The Vendée Globe is so gruelling that around 40% of competitors don't finish the race.



Herrmann battled the high seas alone.

