

Shark Research Institute Newsletter



Shark Research Institute Global Headquarters
P.O. Box 40, Princeton, New Jersey 08540, USA

CITES FAILS TO PROTECT SHARKS

All three proposals to restrict/monitor international trade in shark species under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) were defeated at the biennial meeting held in Nairobi, Kenya (April 10-20, 2000). The conference was attended by 2100 participants representing governments, NGOs and IGOs. Delegates considered 62 proposals to amend Appendices I & II, and more than 40 resolutions including conservation and trade in tigers, elephants, rhinoceros, and traditional medicines.

Whale Shark: The USA proposed the whale shark for listing on Appendix II and amended the proposal to add the great white shark and the basking shark. The Czech Republic, Monaco, the Philippines, El Salvador, the EU and TRAFFIC supported the proposal; Indonesia, Cuba, Norway, Japan, China, Korea, Thailand, Venezuela, Singapore, OLDEPESCA and IWMC opposed it, with most noting “lack of evidence of threats resulting from commercial exploitation and the absence of trade.” (*Ed. Note: More than 1,000 whale sharks were slaughtered last year in India - all for the export markets of Korea and Taiwan (China), and whale sharks are actively hunted in Thailand and Indonesia.*) The USA called for a vote and delegates rejected the proposal.



Great white shark: Australia introduced its proposal list this species on Appendix I, and amended the proposal for Appendix II. Kenya & New Zealand supported the proposal; Panama, Japan and Singapore opposed. The proposal was rejected by secret ballot.

Basking shark: The UK proposed including this species in Appendix II. After initial defeat by secret ballot, the proposal was modified to include an implementation delay. Debate was reopened in plenary by the U.K.'s Fisheries Minister



himself. That proposal fell just a few votes shy of passage.

All three proposals received more than half of the votes cast, but fell short of the two-thirds majority required for adoption.



Global Shark Attack File

SRI maintains the GSAF to provide accurate data about these incidents

- Friday June 2, 2000: At 3p.m. Brian Longwood (13) was in 3 feet of water near the 27th Avenue beach ramp at New Smyrna Beach, Volusia County, Florida. "He had just gotten his goggles and was diving in the water," said the boy's mother. Apparently the teen-ager never saw the shark that bit him; he just felt a tug on his right forearm and then the shark released him. Brian's friend, Austin Gispanski (13), was swimming about 20 feet from Brian when the incident took place. Austin reported that the water was murky and, although he saw baitfish in the water, he didn't see the shark. Lifeguards administered first aid, and the teen-ager was transported to Bert Fish Medical Center. Dr. Arlen Stauffer, the emergency room physician who treated the seventh-grader, said he suffered possible tendon, joint and nerve damage. The species of shark involved in the incident was not known. This was the third shark/human incident in Volusia county this year.
- Friday June 9, 2000: Chuck Anderson (44), and Richard Whatley (55), were bitten by a

shark in the Gulf of Mexico. At 6:45 am the two men were swimming at Gulf Shores, Alabama, training for a triathlon when the incident took place. According to Donna McFarland, spokesperson at South Baldwin Regional Medical Center in Foley, Anderson lost his right arm above the elbow and Whatley was bitten on his hip and right arm. The two men were pulled to shore by construction workers. Bob Shipp, chairman of the marine science department at the University of South Alabama in Mobile, said that a bull shark might have been involved: the species is known to frequent warm Gulf waters during summer months. Officials shut down a 30-mile stretch of beach until noon the following day. This was Alabama's first confirmed shark incident in 25 years.

- Tuesday, June 14, 2000: Five days later and 25 miles from Gulf Shores a shark damaged a 22-foot pleasure craft in Pensacola Bay, Florida. At 2:30 p.m. the boaters were sailing west of Pensacola Beach when they saw a large shadow in the water. As the boaters moved closer they identified the shadow as a large shark. The shark, thought to be an 8-foot bull shark, bit the rear swim platform of the boat. Nobody was injured.

SRI NOTES

THAI AIRWAYS BANS SHARK FIN

Shark fin soup has long been considered a delicacy in Asian cuisine and as such it was included in Thai Airways special menu choices for first class passengers. That is, until the company was asked to remove it from the menu, citing that consumption of shark fin soup was decimating shark populations with resultant damage to marine ecosystems. Khun Thamnoon Wanglee, President of THAI Airways International, responded promptly with the announcement: "Support for conservation efforts, and responsiveness to passenger concerns, have always been THAI priorities, and therefore, with effect from 10th June 2000, shark fin soup will be withdrawn from the THAI inflight menu. We are requesting the understanding of those passengers who would

have selected this dish, and will be serving alternatives which we feel will be equally delicious and will pose no threat to our environment."

Reported by Wolfgang and Evi of High Class Adventure in Phuket, Thailand

Drift Gillnet Fleet Decimates Revillagigedo Island Marine Reserve

On April 29th a fleet of seven 70 to 90 ton drift gillnet boats, each carrying 2 miles of net, arrived at San Benedicto Island in the Mexican Marine Park. Five of the boats were identified: the *Victor M. Calzas*, the *Macapule III*, the *Mazatlanco*, the *Tiburón Maco* and the *Nino*. All were observed setting their nets within the 12 mile no fishing zone of the Revillagigedo Islands Marine Reserve

After four days of fishing, each boat was still catching from 100 to 200 sharks per day. It is

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estimated that they killed between 2,000 and 4,000 sharks, plus sea turtles, tuna and other marine animals including manta rays. (The fine for killing a manta ray in the marine reserve is \$10,000).

The Revillagigedo Islands have become a premier area to observe and dive with giant 2-ton Pacific Mantas. People come from around the world spending over \$2,000,000 each year to dive with these magnificent animals.

On May 2nd people from the dive boats *Solmar V* and the *Ambar III* confronted the *Nino* at Boiler rock. They also filmed the net of the *Mazatleco* and counted the catch coming on board. Next day the Mexican navy was contacted, and on May 12th video tapes of the incident were aired on Mexican television.

The divers reported that after departure of the gillnetters not a single shark was seen in areas where hundreds had been seen in previous weeks. Recovery from the damage caused by this incident will take many years, perhaps as long as a decade or more. This area is the only area in all Mexico that has been protected and still has much of what was there 30 years ago. It would be tragic to see this last frontier be permanently decimated.

Reported by Mike McGetigan, Sea Watch (For more information go to <http://www.seawatch.org>)

SRI receives continued support

SRI thanks the following sponsors for their continued support:

- **Amphibico, Inc**
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Interesting Observation

The blacktip reef shark, *Carcharhinus melanopterus*, is a common inshore species of the Indo-Pacific. While diving in the Tuamotus, French Polynesia, Ridlon Kephart observed this four-foot female blacktip reef shark in a coral pass. She was resting motionless on the bottom with her snout wedged between two rocks. The shark did not appear to be injured. Kephart, speculated that the current flushed enough water over her gills to allow her to breathe. Such behavior is common in sluggish bottom dwelling sharks, but rarely observed in strong swimming sharks such as blacktip reef sharks.

Photo & report by Ridlon Kiphart, President, Global Dive Expeditions



Field Research Opportunities for Volunteers

Members that wish to participate in Operation Whale Shark fieldwork may join SRI researchers in Honduras or Mexico. These are not luxury dive vacations; volunteers pay their own expenses, collect data and document shark behavior. It is hard work, but it is also very rewarding.

There are still spaces available on two field expeditions.

**Utila, Honduras:
September 2 - 9, 2000**

**La Paz, Baja, Mexico:
October 28 - November 4,
2000**

For more information on field expeditions, contact Dr. Alex Antoniou at (609) 921-3522, or e-mail at antoniou@rci.rutgers.edu

Note: Additional field expeditions are being planned for July, September and October 2001.



Shark Research Institute
Global Headquarters
P.O. Box 40, Princeton,
New Jersey 08540, USA

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Permit No. 390
Princeton, NJ 08540



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SRI joins forces with French researchers

Project leaders from Association Pour L'Etude et la Conservation des Selaciens, a French organization dedicated to the study and preservation of sharks and rays, visited SRI Headquarters several months ago and proposed a collaborative effort to study the basking shark, *Cetorhinus maximus*.



The basking shark averages nine metres in length and, like the whale shark, feeds primarily on plankton. This giant shark is targeted by fisheries in Norway, Finland, Japan and China, but is protected in the British Isles. Little is known about the population size, reproductive habits or migratory routes of basking sharks, but sightings of the sharks are reportedly declining throughout their range.

The objective of the project is an assessment of the population of basking sharks along the coast of France. Using the same methodologies that have been so successful with Operation Whale Shark, the sharks will be photographed, and



both visual ID tags and satellite tags will be utilized to track their movements.

AES Meeting

The 16th Annual Meeting of the American Elasmobranch Society was held June 14-20 at LaPaz, Baja California Sur, Mexico. Presentations by SRI staff included "What is wrong with the shark attack picture?" by Erich Ritter and Marie Levine, and "Shark-human interaction: a research field too long



Presentation, "What is wrong with the shark attack picture?" by Erich Ritter and Marie Levine

neglected" by Erich Ritter. A symposium on the Natural History of the Whale Shark was held on June 16 at which Alex Antoniou presented "SRI's satellite tagging program in Utila, Honduras". Other SRI members at the meeting included Fernando Aguilar, Brooke Flammang and Anne and Richard Martin, who are also busy organizing the Canadian chapter of SRI.

