

Shark Research Institute Newsletter



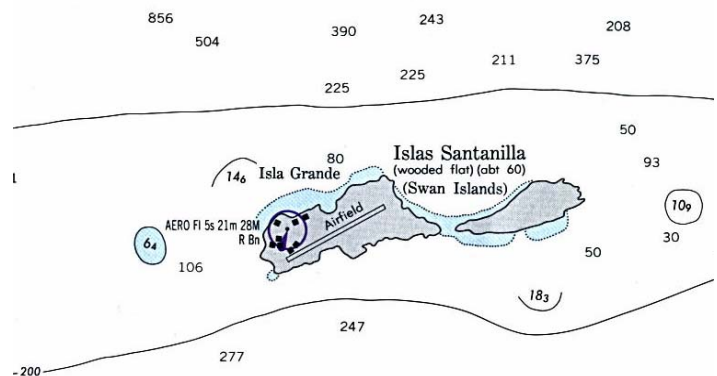
**Shark Research Institute Global Headquarters
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OPERATION WHALE SHARK DEPLOYS NEW SATELLITE TAG

July 2000 saw another successful expedition to Utila, Honduras. Volunteers accompanied the SRI researchers to assist with data collection. The goal of the field expedition was to deploy a newly-designed archival pop-up satellite tag manufactured by Microwave Telemetry, Inc., a company based in Maryland, USA. The expedition was a success. On the fifth day of the expedition the team came across three whale sharks and attached the tag to a 25' female whale shark. In addition, a visual tag was attached to the shark, and a tissue sample extracted to add to the DNA sampling study. The tag, which weighs just 3.5 grams, is programmed to detach from the whale shark on October 1, at which time it will transmit data collected and archived since its deployment.



SHARKS OF THE SWAN ISLANDS



On July 7, 2000, SRI embarked on a field expedition to the Islas Santanilla (Swan Islands) of Honduras. The purpose of the expedition was to assess the shark population surrounding these islands. If the islands were determined to have a significant shark population, then SRI, with the permission of the Honduran Navy, would pursue the establishment of a permanent research facility on site from which to conduct further shark studies. The remoteness of these islands and their lack of development suggests that its reefs and population of resident sharks could make the area a prime location for marine research.

The Swan Islands are composed of two islands (depicted in the chart above): a large island that has an airstrip and serves as a base for approximately 12 Honduran Navy personnel, and a smaller island to the east. The coastlines of both islands are very rugged, except for two narrow beaches on the northern (lee) shore of the large island. As the chart indicates, the underwater topography is varied. To the north, a shallow coral bank gradually slopes to

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Global Shark Attack File

SRI maintains the GSAF as a resource for researchers, medical personnel and the media who require accurate information about these incidents

- On July 1, 2000, sharks injured two women in separate incidents off the northern end of New Smyrna beach, Florida. In the early afternoon a one-metre shark bit the thigh of Danielle Shidemantle (19). Two hours later the calf of Amber Benningfield (13) was bitten. Local authorities believed that juvenile blacktip or spinner sharks were involved in both incidents. Both species feed on the large schools of baitfish that frequent the area. A week later, Anthony Zent (41) was surfing at Ormond Beach, Florida (about five miles north of New Smyrna), when a shark bit his right leg. The shark inflicted a 38 cm laceration above his knee, and a 30 cm wound in his calf. Bystanders bound the wound with towels and he was taken to Halifax Medical Center where he underwent surgery. The three incidents took place in Volusia County, which reports the highest number of shark attacks in the USA each year.
- On August 30, 2000, Thadeus Kubinski (69) was fatally injured by a shark at Boca Ciega Bay, on the west coast of Florida near St. Petersburg. At 4:00 PM (EST), moments before entering the water behind their home, Kubinski and his wife noticed a commotion in the water. Mrs. Kubinski climbed down the water at the end of their dock while her husband jumped into the water. As soon as he entered the water, the shark bit the right side of his torso. The swimmer died before he was pulled from the water by paramedics. The sequence of events suggests that Kubinski's entry in the water triggered a predatory or defensive response by a feeding shark. Bull sharks, *Carcharhinus leucas*, the species thought to be involved in this incident, are common in area during the warmer months.
- SOUTH AFRICA – Sean Smith, a backpacker filming surfers at Nahoon Reef, East London captured rare footage of a white shark attack on July 16, 2000. Shannon Ainslie (15) was on his surfboard 50 metres from shore when the shark hit his board, throwing him into the water. The surfer's right hand was lacerated. Willie Martiz, curator at the East London Aquarium, thought the shark was following the annual sardine run.
- KINGDOM OF TONGA -- The *Waikato Times* of 7-17-2000 reports that a New Zealand-based South African diver suffered a serious shark bite while scuba diving near Tonga. He was treated in the hospital at Nuku'alofa after rescue by the New Zealand navy ship *Resolution*.

SRI NOTES

\$1M Penalty for Shark Cartilage Companies

Two New Jersey companies, and the father and son team which operate them, have agreed to pay \$1 million to settle federal charges they used misleading information to sell shark cartilage as a cancer-fighting substance. Of the money, \$450,000 will go to a study on shark cartilage at the Mayo Clinic by the National Cancer Institute. The remainder will go to the Federal Trade Commission, which charged the companies

made unsubstantiated claims about two products.

The FTC also said the companies "falsely represented that clinical studies have shown that BeneFin and SkinAnswer are effective in preventing, treating and curing cancer, and falsely represented that the Food and Drug Administration has evaluated the effectiveness of BeneFin." Those products, along with MGN-3, a rice-bran extract, are sold by Lane Labs - UA, of Allendale, Bergen County, New Jersey, USA.

In December, the FDA sued Lane Labs and its president, Andrew J. Lane, charging

NOTES cont...

that the company illegally promoted and sold the three products. The lawsuit, which seeks to bar Lane Labs from selling the three unapproved drugs, is pending. The FTC suit, filed in U.S. District Court in Newark, New Jersey, charged Lane Labs and Lane, as well as a Short Hills, New Jersey company, Cartilage Consultants, Inc., and its president, I. William Lane, father of Andrew.

The elder Lane wrote the 1992 book Sharks Don't Get Cancer. However, his claim was questioned in April when researchers described 40 tumors that have been found in sharks, rays and chimerids. John C. Harshbarger, who heads the federally sponsored Registry of Tumors in Lower Animals, presented the data at a meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research.

Join the SRI e-mail Newsgroup

Associated Press: Newark, NJ, USA

Members that wish to receive action alerts, notices of openings on research trips, etc., via email are invited to join our newsgroup. To join, send an email with the subject heading "subscribe newsgroup" to antoniou@rci.rutgers.edu.

SRI receives continued support

SRI thanks the following sponsors for their continued support:

- Amphibico, Inc
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- Microwave Telemetry, Inc.

Who's Nibbling At My Toes?

This photo of a whale shark was taken by Mark Cunningham in the Bahamas in December 1999.

Barry Campbell, the diver in the photo, had recently become certified. In fact it was just his fifth dive after his certification. He was giving the okay sign, unaware that the whale shark was swimming behind him. So, look around, because you never know what fish might be following you!



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 is still space available on the following field expedition:

La Paz, Baja, Mexico: Oct 28 - Nov 4, 2000

For more information contact Dr. Alex Antoniou at (609) 921-3522 or email at antoniou@rci.rutgers.edu

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



In Baja, SRI uses a spotter plane to locate the whale sharks in the bay of La Paz.



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SWAN ISLANDS CONT...

deeper waters. To the south, there are steep drop-offs. The SRI divers used the naval patrol vessel as their surface support boat. Overall, the reef structure appeared healthy. While the corals in shallow water showed evidence of damage from Hurricane Mitch, new growth indicated some recovery. The deeper waters (10 - 30 m) were less affected by the hurricane.

There were indications that the Swan Islands may be a viable shark study site. Species observed included blacktip sharks, *Carcharhinus limbatus*, nurse sharks, *Ginglymostoma cirratum*, Caribbean reef sharks, *Carcharhinus perezi*, and hammerhead sharks, *Sphyrnidae*. Also, one of our satellite-tagged whale sharks was tracked to these islands last year. Despite the time constraints of the survey, there are indications that the islands warrant further exploration.

The survey team included SRI's Director of Field Operations, Alex Antoniou, Ph.D., and divers Fernando Aguilar, Doug Batchelor and Gayle Batchelor.

SRI is deeply indebted to the Honduran Navy: in addition to transporting the SRI team and equipment to the islands they provided logistical support. Special thanks are also due to Jim Engel and Utila Lodge, the SRI Field Station in the Caribbean, and our corporate partners: DragerDive America, Eastman Kodak Company, Berger Bros Camera and Video Exchange, and United Success Associates, Inc.

WHALE SHARK IN NEW JERSEY



On August 7, 1999, Rich Venuti of Planet Ocean Dive Club was returning from a dive trip off the Jersey Shore when he

and his dive buddies spotted something rather unusual: a whale shark. He quickly grabbed his camera and shot the two photos in this story. "We were about four miles off the coast of Cape May NJ, the time was around 4:30 pm during the incoming tide. Surface water temperature was in the lower 70s and was loaded with jellyfish." Rich stated. The water depth was 45' and the shark was judged to be around 30' in length when compared to their 25' boat. The shark came alongside the boat, his head even with the stern and his tail fin beyond the bow.



The shark remained in the area for five minutes or so. Rich was in the water the entire time and was later joined by another diver. "He seemed curious about us and was content to pose for pictures and have us swim alongside with no effort on his part to escape,"