

Shark Research Institute Newsletter



**Shark Research Institute Global Headquarters
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Whale shark & Basking Shark win CITES Protection!



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The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), a United Nations Treaty Organization, convened in Santiago, Chile, November 3 to 15, 2002. Some 1,200 participants, including delegates from 160 member nations and observers from conservation organizations and special interest groups, were in attendance. A number of landmark agreements resulted, including international protection for two species of sharks: whale shark and basking sharks.

India and the Philippines proposed Appendix II listing of the whale shark, and the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland also proposed the basking shark for Appendix II listing. Appendix II listings do not ban international trade, but instead require member nations to take steps to ensure that trade is not detrimental to wild populations. Both proposals, defeated earlier in the week by narrow margins, were brought up for debate in the final session of the convention and received the required 2/3rd majority vote for acceptance.

The whale shark is the largest fish in the sea, measuring 40 feet and greater in length and weighing up to 34 tons. The shark is long-lived (60 to 100 years), and is slow to reproduce, reaching

sexual maturity when it is about 30 years of age. One of only three known species of large, filter-feeding sharks, it feeds on plankton and other small organisms that it filters through its gills. The proposal cited the species' biological vulnerability. Whale shark catches have declined significantly and rapidly over a short period of time in many parts of the world, including India, the Maldives, the Philippines and South Africa. "Since 1994, aerial surveys conducted by the Shark Research Institute (SRI) along the eastern coast of South Africa have documented an 83% decline in whale shark numbers," reported Dr. Alex Antoniou, SRI Field Director, "and similar declines have been recorded from our field stations in the Sea of Cortez, Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean."

The proposal cited the increase in international trade in whale shark meat, fins, and liver oil. In recent years, whale shark meat has become a delicacy in Taiwan, the world's largest market for the product. From 1998 to 2000, sales of whale shark meat more than doubled. While demand has been increasing in Taiwan, catches there have declined by 60-70%. To meet the demand, unsustainable whale shark fisheries were created elsewhere in the world, transforming small, subsistence-level fisheries into large-scale efforts supplying international trade. Protected locally in the Philippines and India after catches there fell dramatically due to overfishing, recent confiscations of illegal shipments of the meat, bound for Taiwan and Hong Kong, indicate that poaching remains a threat to this gentle giant. Demand for shark fin soup throughout Asia has also increased fishing pressure on whale sharks; their large fins, which retail for thousands of dollars each, are sold for soup and displayed in restaurants in China, Taiwan, Thailand and Singapore.

Also cited in the proposal was the growing importance of whale shark ecotourism to the economies of developing nations. “Alive, the shark generates economic benefits to countries that have developed whale shark tourism,” said Antoniou. Whale shark tourism brings millions of dollars annually to Australia (\$7 million), Belize (\$1.45 million), Ecuador (\$3 million), Honduras (\$2.5 million), Seychelles (\$5 million) and Thailand (\$3 million to Phuket alone). Revenue from whale shark tourism in the Donsol area of the Philippines, initiated in 1998, doubled within two years. These annual revenues far exceed that of the one-time catch of the rare giant. “In addition,” said Moonyeen Alva of the Philippine delegation, “whale shark tourism produces a continuing revenue stream for the former fishers.”

“CITES Appendix II listing is a major victory for whale shark conservation” according to Dr. Leonard J.V. Compagno, SRI Director of Science and Research and author of the FAO Sharks of the World. “The Parties sent a clear message to the world that whale sharks are far more valuable alive than dead,” said Victor Wu of WildAid.

Parties speaking in support of the whale shark listing included: Australia, Bahamas, Canada, Costa Rica (on behalf of El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Panama), Denmark (on behalf of the Member States of the EU), Ecuador, Germany, Honduras, India, Madagascar, Mexico, the Philippines, Romania, and observers from IUCN, SRI, Swan International, TRAFFIC and WildAid. Opposed were: China, Greenland, Iceland, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Norway, Singapore, and observers from the Singapore Shark Fin and Marine Products, Ltd. and the International Wildlife Management Coalition.

Historically, shark fisheries are boom and bust operations. Sharks simply breed too slowly and produce few young to sustain targeted fisheries. SRI’s objective is worldwide protection for whale sharks, and the CITES Appendix II listing is the first step in achieving the goal.

The basking shark, another giant plankton-eating shark, is also hunted for its meat and fins. Parties speaking in support of listing of the basking shark included: United Kingdom, Ireland, India, New Zealand, Tunisia and observers from IUCN and the Humane Society International. Opposed were: China, Iceland, Japan, Malaysia, Norway and an observer from the High North Alliance.

“The two listings mark a milestone for marine species,” said Craig Manson, US Assistant

Secretary of the Interior. CITES has not traditionally played an important role in marine fisheries. Two years ago the United States proposed Appendix II listing for the whale shark but the proposal failed to win the necessary votes. Much of the credit for success in achieving CITES listings for sharks and other species was due to intense lobbying by the Species Survival Network (SSN), a coalition of conservation organizations. SSN’s shark proposal lobbyists included Marie Levine and Alex Antoniou (SRI), Liz Murdock, Susie Watts and Victor Wu (WildAid), Brad Norman, Nicola Beyson and Averil Bones (Humane Society International), Sonja Fordham (Ocean Conservancy), and Rachel Cavanaugh (Nature Bureau). “We worked as a team, pooling data, resources and expertise,” said Levine.

A number of other marine species received CITES protection. The trade in seahorses will now be regulated for the first time. Seahorse populations have declined dramatically in recent years due to commercial trade, by-catch in fisheries, coastal development, destructive fishing practices and pollution. At least 20 million seahorses were taken from the wild in the early 1990s for traditional medicines, aquarium pets, souvenirs and curios. All 32 seahorse species are listed on Appendix II.

Japan’s proposals to circumvent the International Whaling Commission and down-list two species of whales, Minke whales and Bryde’s whales, from Appendix I to Appendix II were defeated. CITES also set a zero quota for commercial trade in the Black Sea population of bottlenose dolphins, which was already listed on Appendix II. This population of dolphin has declined drastically in recent years due to hunting, pollution and other stresses.

“The key to global wildlife conservation in the 21st century will be to craft solutions that meet the specific requirements of each species and its specific circumstances,” said Willem Wijnstekers, Secretary-General of CITES.

Building the Research Center ...foot by foot

Permits have been secured and we are ready to start construction on the SRI/Cousteau Foundation Marine Research Center in Utila. The building cost per square foot is \$75, and the name of each donor contributing that amount or more will be acknowledged on the building.

Global Shark Attack File

AUSTRALIA: Queensland - At 02h30 on December 16, Beau Martin, 23, was killed by a shark in Miami Lake, part of the inland waterway. On December 20, Bayne Doyle, 11, was thought to have been bitten on the foot by a shark at Golden Beach. On December 29, Lienne Schellekens, 18, was on the Great Barrier Reef when her arm was lacerated by a shark.

SOUTH AFRICA: On December 24, Craig Bovin, 35, was snorkeling at Scarborough when his forearm was lacerated by a shark.

TONGA: On September 27, a 5' tiger shark bit the thigh of swimmer Filipe Tonga.

USA: Hawaii - On September 27 at Kahala, surfer Arnold Lum, 55, was not injured when a 4' blacktip shark bit his board. On October 31, at Kama'ole Beach Park in Maui, a female, 62, was bitten on her foot, and on November 17, at Ka'anapali, swimmer Julie Glace, 34, was bitten on her shoulder, forearm and wrist by an 8' to 10' shark.

California - On November 28, Michael Casey, 48, was body-boarding at Salmon Creek, Sonoma County when his legs were bitten by a 12' to 16' white shark.

Florida - On September 27 at Key Largo, fisherman Jose "Pepe" Diaz was bitten on the hand by a 6' blacktip shark. On September 29, at 16h20, surfer Dave Fogelbergh was bitten on the hand by a shark at Sebastian Inlet. On September 30 at Ormond Beach, Matt Crawford, 47, was bitten on the hand by a shark. On October 5, two surfers were bitten by sharks in Volusia County: a 14-year old male was bitten on his finger, and Ivan Rios, 35, was bitten on his heel.

SRI Receives Continued Support

SRI thanks the following sponsors for their continued support:

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SRI News

Seychelles

The Seychelles Whale Shark monitoring program, run by SRI Seychelles under the auspices of the Marine Conservation Society Seychelles, has had a very productive year both in terms of sightings and data acquisition. Over 100 hours of aerial surveys were carried out from their microlight aircraft which recorded sightings of +490 whale sharks, with a maximum of 46 sharks seen on a single flight. More than 115 in-water encounters were logged with 65 individual sharks being identified. Of these, six sharks were confirmed resightings of animals tagged in 2001 - this is 14% of the sharks tagged in 2001.



The tags used in 2002 were those developed for the Belize whale shark monitoring project, but they have proven to be unreliable. All the tags attracted considerable marine growth and all but one had broken up with only fragments remaining attached. For 2003, a new tag material is being introduced, sponsored and manufactured by Aquasign (www.aquasign.com) from a non-fouling and environmentally safe, flexible material. It is essentially a synthetic sponge that releases a non-toxic oil through its surface, thus preventing attachment of marine organisms. This technology has been used for marking underwater pipelines and valves in the offshore oil industry, and markers have been in use more than 15 years with no marine growth adhering to them.

Data gained from the sharks tagged with satellite tags in 2001 have shown that the sharks radiate away from Seychelles to areas as distant as Zanzibar, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Thailand, so the resightings of the marker tags indicate that despite these long journeys a large number of the sharks do return to Seychelles waters. Satellite data also indicates that 37% of the sharks' time was spent within 10 metres (33ft) of the surface and 75% within 50 metres (165ft) of the surface; however deep dives to 796 meters were recorded.

2003 seems set to be equally interesting as the winter wave of whale sharks has already arrived in Seychelles waters and is keeping the monitoring team busy! *...David Rowat, Director, SRI Seychelles*

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Shark Diver Magazine



A new magazine, *Shark Diver*, will be making its debut on February 1, 2003. It promises to be an

excellent source for the latest news on sharks and shark diving. *All SRI members that have paid 2003 dues will receive a complimentary copy of the premiere issue.*

Whatzit?



Ranjit Sondhi, manager of Manta Reef Lodge on Pemba Island, Northern Zanzibar,

contacted SRI for help in identifying this 4 to 5 metre shark photographed near the beach. Dr. Leonard Compagno identified the shark as *Odontaspis ferox*, a wide-ranging but uncommon species usually found offshore.

Members' bookshelf

Sharks of the World, An annotated and illustrated catalogue of shark species known to date, Vol.2, by Leonard J.V. Compagno, published by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. This reference work should be in the library of all shark researchers. It can be ordered directly from the publisher at: <http://www.fao.org/icatalog/inter-e.htm>

Supermodel / Conservationist



Supermodel Lauren Hutton, a Supporting Donor of SRI, has been diving for 30 years and uses her celebrity status to promote marine conservation. Although she is busy launching *Good Stuff*, her own line of makeup, she will soon be hosting a new television series on marine life, including sharks.

Beneath the Sea Dive Symposium

On March 28, 29 & 30, 2003 Beneath the Sea (BTS), the largest consumer dive and travel show in America, will be held at the Meadowlands, Secacus, NJ. The show features seminars and workshops, door prizes, a film festival showcasing the work of world-renowned underwater videographers, door prizes and parties, exhibits and demonstrations by dive shops and resorts, and much more. BTS also



promotes environmental conservation and the protection of marine wildlife through grants to nonprofit groups. Through its international poster contest for children, called Ocean Pals, BTS helps educate children on the wonder and delicate nature

of our oceans. For tickets and more information, go to: <http://beneaththesea.org/>