

Shark Research Institute Newsletter



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GALAPAGOS ISLANDS UNDER SEIGE



On February 19, 2004, 50 fishermen from Santa Cruz and Isabela islands committed an act of terrorism. The local media called it a “strike” for “freedom” when the fishermen took 33 scientists hostage, seized the headquarters of the Galápagos National Park and the Darwin Research Station, and threatened to kill the giant tortoises there (including Lonesome George, the sole surviving member of his species). The “freedom” the fishermen seek is abolishment of regulations designed to protect marine species, including removal of the park’s patrol boats, freedom to set longlines in the Marine Reserve and sell shark ‘by-catch’.

After an eight-day stand-off, Cesar Navarez, Ecuador’s Environment Minister, signed a pact to negotiate the fishermen’s demands outside the participatory forum that was designed to give Galápagos’ 18,000 people a say in the matter. As result, on March 3, due to national and international pressure, Navarez was forced to resign, and Fabián Valdivieso was appointed in his stead. The fishermen are threatening more action if Valdivieso ignores the illegal agreement signed by his predecessor.

Dissatisfaction escalates because the human population of the Galápagos has swelled from less than a thousand in 1950 to 18,000 today. As the number of fishermen in the Galápagos increases,

the quotas for catches are distributed ever more thinly. Nevertheless, local fishermen from the largest cooperatives, San Cristóbal Island with 700 fishers, did not support the actions of the 50 fishermen.

As in the past, this is a power play supported by some local politicians and fish-products middlemen. Four years ago, when they were demanding increased quotas for lobsters, the fishermen wrecked research facilities, harassed tourist groups and threatened the lives of Galápagos National Park staff. The government of Ecuador sent in troops, but eventually capitulated, raising the lobster limit from 50 tonnes to 80 tonnes to buy them off. Dr. John McCosker of the California Academy of Sciences, who was in the islands during that clash, said the concessions were “institutionalizing blackmail”. “It’s the short-term gain of a few fishermen versus the long-term survival of the Galápagos,” he said. “They are killing the golden goose.” Some of the turmoil stems from a 1998 law that gave Galápagos residents more political autonomy and set up a marine reserve extending 40 miles offshore.

The fishermen are demanding that they be allowed to reap the abundant seas of the Galápagos Marine reserve, unwatched and unregulated, where only tourism and local small-scale fishing is currently permitted. “When there is no one watching, there is no control,” said Eliecer Cruz, former director of the Galápagos National Park and currently head of WWF’s Galapagos Program.

Giving into to those who violate the law only promotes further disregard of it. Capitulation to demands of the strident few will destroy the fragile marine ecosystem of this World Heritage Site, and the livelihoods of people that depend upon it. Continued international pressure is vital. SRI urges Ecuadorian President Lucio Gutierrez to continue to protect the unique wildlife of the Galápagos through sustainable use such as tourism, rather than allowing depletion of the archipelago’s natural resources.

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Proposed Capture of Whale Shark for Georgia Aquarium

In late January, SRI was notified that the Georgia Aquarium, opening in 2005, plans to exhibit a whale shark as an attraction. In exchange for being allowed to capture a whale shark from the Belize Whale Shark Sanctuary for exhibition at the Aquarium, the Friends of Nature, the grass-roots organization in Belize that created the sanctuary, is to receive a substantial grant and the Belize Whale Shark Sanctuary will be promoted at the Aquarium. For more information, visit:

<http://www.destinationsbelize.com/whale-shark-petition.htm>

The Shark Research Institute (SRI) is NOT in favor of capturing a whale shark from the Belize Whale Shark Sanctuary for exhibition at the Georgia Aquarium. Whale sharks do not survive or thrive in captivity. Between 1980 and 1998, the Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium kept 16 whale sharks in captivity. All were captured off Okinawa and their transport did not involve long distances, as would be the case from Belize to the Georgia Aquarium. Their total lengths ranged from 3.1 m to 6.3 m (mean total length = 4.8 m) and their survival times ranged from three days to 2056 days. Thirteen of the sharks died in captivity, and of those, seven were damaged during capture and survived less than two months. The lifespan of a whale shark in the wild is in excess of a century, far greater than it is in captivity.

Whale sharks do not breed in captivity; removal of a shark from the wild means that individual will never be able to reproduce. The numbers of whale sharks are diminishing worldwide, and at a very rapid pace: 83% within an eight-year period along the east African coast alone. As result, whale sharks were placed on CITES Appendix II in November 2002, confirming that they are a threatened species. The Appendix II listing prohibits all whale shark products (including live specimens) from being traded internationally unless it can be shown that such trade does not negatively impact on survival of the species. Indeed, at CITES COP12, data presented by SRI indicated that whale sharks met the criteria for listing on Appendix I. (Appendix I species are those that are in danger of extinction.)

Our satellite tagging study also indicates whale sharks routinely dive to depths in excess of 2,500', and thus no aquarium can provide a "natural

habitat" for a captive whale shark. While it is true that an aquarium may allow the general public to observe animals that they might not otherwise be able to see, to exhibit an endangered species that does not breed or survive in captivity is immoral. It may also strike the public as a profound betrayal of trust to capture a whale shark from a marine sanctuary created for whale sharks.

We do not doubt that the Georgia Aquarium is genuinely concerned about whale sharks and the Belize Whale Shark Sanctuary. SRI believes that the best course of action is for the Georgia Aquarium to provide funds to Friends of Nature/Belize Whale Shark Sanctuary that are not contingent on capturing a whale shark for exhibition, but rather can be used to further develop whale shark-based tourism in Belize. The Aquarium could construct a life-size model of a very large whale shark (60') to draw visitors. SRI can also provide – at no cost – video footage of whale sharks to the Aquarium that can be used to promote the Belize Whale Shark Sanctuary and the Aquarium's educational programs. The Aquarium could also sponsor trips to Belize for their members that want to observe whale sharks in the wild. A free-swimming whale shark is a charismatic ambassador for the ocean, but a dying captive animal evokes only sadness, regret and shame.

The Shark Research Institute is strongly opposed to the capture of a whale shark for exhibition in any aquarium.

Ed. Note: SRI received word from Belize that the Georgia Aquarium has withdrawn their proposal to Friends of Nature, but may be looking elsewhere for a whale shark.

Australia nominates the white shark for CITES protection

Australia has nominated the shark for listing by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and their proposal will be voted upon at the next meeting of member countries in October at Bangkok, Thailand. White sharks are protected in many parts of the world, Australian Environment Minister David Kemp said, "but their numbers have plummeted in the past 75 years, with trophy hunters partly to blame". The shark is "a much maligned species", he said, and could face extinction unless action was taken to protect it and its habitat. Kemp noted that the CITES listing would make it illegal for any of the 161 member countries to trade in great white shark products.

Field Expeditions

Cocos Island: Sept 17 - 29, 2004	La Paz, Mexico: Sept 18 - 25, 2004
Galapagos Islands: June 27 - July 6, 2004	Sept 25 - Oct 2, 2004
August 15 - 24, 2004	Guadalupe Island: Nov 26 - 30, 2004
July 31 - August 9, 2005	Utila:
August 8 - 16, 2005	Feb 5 - 12, 2005
Thailand: Wait-list only	Feb 12 - 19, 2005

All expedition volunteers must be certified divers and pay their own expenses, some of which are deductible from US Federal Income taxes.

Galapagos Adventures has a special offer for anyone making a \$150 donation to SRI. (The donations to SRI are 100% tax-deductible.) Each donor will receive an Eric Chen poster and CD slide show, plus a \$150 discount coupon valid on a dive trip booked to the Galapagos through them. The coupon can also be applied towards an SRI expedition to the Galapagos.

Mark Your Calendars



Beneath The Sea is the largest consumer dive show in America. The show, held at the Meadowlands Convention Center in Secaucus, NJ Friday March 26, 6 to 9 pm, Saturday March 27, 9 am to 5 pm and Sunday March 28, 9 am to 4:30 pm, features seminars, workshops, exhibits by hundreds of manufacturers and organizations, parties, special events, photo contest, and a Film Festival Saturday evening from 8 to 10 pm. Come visit SRI at booth 206, and attend our seminars. On Sunday morning, SRI will host its annual Shark Symposium at the Meadowlands Expo Center, Rooms 1 & 2. At 3 pm, Alex Antoniou will present *Saving the Sharks of the Galapagos Marine Reserve*. Tickets can be ordered online at www.beneaththesea.org



The London International Dive Show at ExCel - Docklands, London will take place Saturday March 27 from 9:30 am to 6:00 pm & Sunday March 28 from 9:30 am to 5:00 pm. Visit SRI at booth 300 and meet Maria Munn and other UK members.

GLOBAL SHARK ATTACK FILE

SRI maintains the Global Shark Attack File (GSAF) as a resource for researchers, physicians and the media who require accurate information about these incidents.

AUSTRALIA: **New South Wales:** On January 12, Bruce Flynn and a friend were diving in Bushrangers Bay at Bass Point when a 3.5 m sandtiger shark removed a swimfin. The diver was uninjured. On February 11 at Caves Beach, Luke Tresoglavic was bitten on the leg by a 60 cm blind shark or brown catshark. **Western Australia:** On January 25, diver Allan Oppert (46) sustained a severe bit on his lower legs from a 4 m to 5 m white shark. On March 6, diver Greg Pickering's lower leg was bitten by a 1.5 m bronze whaler.

BRAZIL: On March 1, Edimilson Henrique dos Santos was swimming at Piedade Beach, Recife, when he was fatally injured by a shark.

EGYPT: On February 14, a snorkeler was killed by a shark at Sharm.

NEW ZEALAND: On February 26 at 19h00, Chris Blair, 15, was surfing at South Beach near Karita, South Island, when his thigh was lacerated by a shark, possibly a two metre sevengill shark.

SOUTH AFRICA: On January 7, Allen Horsfield, 22, was surfing at Port Alfred when his foot was lacerated by a sandtiger shark.

VENEZUELA: On January 21, two people were bitten by sharks: Raphael Gonzalez, 40, was fishing at Mochima National Park when his leg was bitten by a 132 kg shark. An hour later swimmer Stefan Moeller was bitten on his lower back and hand. The 1.65 m bull shark was speared and killed.

Thank you to our Supporters

SRI is very grateful for the continued encouragement and support of:

- Amphibico
- C2 Educational Expeditions
- Freeman Foundation
- Galapagos Adventures
- Great White Shark Adventures
- Interdata
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- Pelican Products
- Project AWARE Foundation
- The Philanthropic Group
- Underwater Video Images



WE'RE ON THE WEB
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Shark Species Threatened in the Gulf of Mexico

The population of oceanic whitetip sharks, once among the world's most common tropical sharks, has plummeted by 99 percent since the 1950s and the species is virtually extinct in the Gulf of Mexico, according to a study by Dalhousie University biology professors Julia K. Baum and Ransom A. Myers. They based their research on a comparison of data compiled by the U.S. government in the 1950s and data collected by trained observers aboard fishing boats in the 1990s. Their study, published in the journal *Ecology Letters*, blames overfishing and calls for new regulations. The study also found sharp declines in the populations of two other species in the Gulf: the silky shark, down 90 percent since the 1950s; and the mako shark, down 79 percent.

In May 2003, Myers published a study in the journal *Nature* reporting a 90 percent decline in large predatory fish in the world's oceans in the last 50 years. The latest study was funded by the Pew Fellows Program in Marine Conservation at the University of Miami.

An advocate for U.S. fishermen disputed the study as a whole, saying its authors failed to recognize that changes in fishing technology over the past 20 years had drastically reduced the amount of sharks accidentally caught by fishermen targeting tuna or other fish. But Myers said previous studies have shown that changes in fishing technology had little effect on accidental

shark catches. He said fishermen in the 1950s reported that oceanic whitetips were everywhere in the open Gulf. Now they are rarely seen, he said.

The work of Baum and Myers indicates the historical abundance of many sharks was much greater than today, and provides clear evidence of shifting baselines – baselines that are needed for rational management and restoration of these species. This study contributes to the growing awareness that human impacts on natural ecosystems extend to our oceans, and confirms that retrospective analyses are essential to understand the full magnitude and nature of these impacts.

Galapagos Seige (from Page 1)

SRI urges members to send letters to President Gutierrez asking him to uphold the regulations of the Galápagos Marine Reserve. Write to:

Lucio Gutierrez, President of Ecuador
Palacio de Carondelet, García Moreno y Chile
Quito-Ecuador

- and -

Fabián Valdivieso, Minister of Environment
Avs. Eloy Alfaro y Amazonas
Edif. del Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería, piso 8
Quito-Ecuador

or, send your message to them online at:

http://takeaction.worldwildlife.org/action/index.asp?step=2&item=15542&ms=www_galapagos
and cc: your letters to the Director of the Galápagos National Park at: enaula@spng.org.ec