

Shark Research Institute Member Newsletter



Shark Research Institute Global Headquarters

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Report on the Second Meeting of the Gujarat Whale Shark Scientific Advisory Committee

November 25-26, 2009, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

By Jennifer V. Schmidt, Ph.D., SRI Director of DNA Studies



Last month I traveled to India as part of the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) charged with directing a research program for the study of whale sharks in Gujarat. This project is run by the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) and the Gujarat Forest Department, with support from TATA Chemicals. Whale sharks seasonally frequent the Gujarat coast, and the animals were formerly hunted here in large numbers. Once whale shark hunting ceased in India, plans were initiated for scientific study of these animals. The SAC includes scientists from India, Australia and the United States, forming a team with experience in the key areas of the research program – satellite tagging, genetics, photo identification and ecotourism. Fisherman along the Gujarat coast release more than 50 whale sharks each year, after the animals are accidentally trapped in their nets. This unusual access to a large number of animals provides a unique opportunity to take tissue samples and apply tracking tags.

My own role in the project is to advise on the tissue sampling and genetic analysis of Gujarati whale sharks. Upon arriving in India, I first traveled to the Marine Biotechnology Division at the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) in Kochi, which will perform the genetic analysis. I met with Dr. K. K. Vijayan, the head of the division, and toured their very active and well-equipped facility. The SAC conference was held over two days in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The first day featured a scientific meeting, during which the researchers reported on the

progress made so far and future plans for each part of the project. The second day marked the meeting of the Governing Council, composed of members of WTI, the Forest Service, and local and regional legislators. These meetings were very successful, and the scientists and officials alike reaffirmed their commitment to the program. As the researchers reported, the first year of the program was spent designing plans for each of the different aspects of the project, and obtaining the necessary permits. During the coming second year of the program, we are poised to move ahead intensively with the research.

After the meetings the SAC traveled to the coastal city of Dwarka, to participate in this city's first annual whale shark festival. The festival involved a parade with a life sized inflatable whale shark, children in whale shark shirts, and a marching band. The parade was followed by a formal ceremony that included a children's art contest, a performance of a traveling street play about whale shark conservation, and speeches by officials supporting the whale shark campaign.



Whale Shark Festival



FWC Acts on More Protection for Sharks

On December 10, 2009, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) approved a series of rules to protect stressed shark populations in Florida waters. Sharks have been strictly regulated in Florida with a one-fish-per-person/two-fish-per-vessel daily bag limit for all recreational and commercial fishers, a prohibition on nearly two dozen overfished or rare shark species, and a ban on finning.

The new rules prohibit harvest of sandbar, silky and Caribbean sharpnose sharks from state waters. Sandbar sharks are considered overfished, which means that fishing pressure is too high to be sustainable. Silky sharks are highly vulnerable to overexploitation, and Caribbean sharpnose sharks do not occur in waters off Florida, so the addition of this species will have no effect.

The rules also establish a 54-inch fork length minimum size limit for all sharks, except Atlantic sharpnose, blacknose, bonnethead, finetooth and blacktip sharks and smooth dogfish. This will help protect the juveniles of 14 species of sharks in Florida waters. The species where no size limit is required are considered to be at healthy population levels or don't warrant a minimum-size limit. In addition, the rules prohibit the removal of shark heads and tails at sea, allow only hook-and-line gear to harvest sharks, and make other administrative and technical rule changes. These rules take effect in mid-January 2010.

The FWC also proposed a rule to prohibit all recreational and commercial harvest of lemon sharks. The species is highly susceptible to fishing pressure when they aggregate in shallow waters close to the shore. The proposed rule is intended to limit potential of overharvesting lemon sharks. A final public hearing on the lemon shark rule will be held in February in Apalachicola.

Expeditions

Spaces are available on the following expeditions. *Spaces fill quickly.* To reserve a space or obtain more details, call SRI Headquarters at 609.921.3522, or go to:

www.sharks.org/expeditions

Whale Sharks

Utila, Honduras: March 13-20, 2010 & March 20-27, 2010, are special whale shark observation/training weeks. \$1,880 per diver. Other weeks, \$1,760 per diver.

Holbox, Mexico with Doc Anes: July 22-26, 2010, \$1,500 per person.

White Sharks

False Bay, South Africa, with Chris Fallows: July 22 to 31, 2010, \$3,900 per person. Cage diving optional. This is the prime time to view white shark predation activity. These are the sharks of 'Air Jaws' fame, known for spectacular aerial displays. If you prefer a shorter stay or have particular dates in mind, contact HQ.

Multiple Species

Palau with Dean Fessler: April 2-11, 2010, \$1,500 per diver.

Wolf & Darwin, Galapagos Islands with Amos Nachoum: August 7-22, 2010, on the Sky Dancer. \$12,900 to \$12,500, per diver (\$12,255 to \$11,875 for SRI members).

Lembah Straits, Indonesia with Tom Campbell: September 18-29, 2010, \$3,104 per diver. September 30-October 11, 2010, \$2,696 per diver.

For space on these and other expeditions to **Isla Guadalupe, LaPaz,** & the **Philippines** contact HQ at 609.921.3522.

EU Ends Fisheries for Endangered Sharks

The EU Council of Fisheries Ministers have decided to end all fishing for porbeagle sharks and slash by 90% fishing quotas for spurdog, in line with scientific advice and proposals from the European Commission. "These dramatic reductions in spurdog and porbeagle quotas amount to a solid performance on the first big test of the new EU Plan of Action for Sharks," said Sonja Fordham of the Shark Alliance. "Ministers have acted in line with the Plan's pledge to follow scientific advice and a precautionary approach when setting fishing limits for inherently vulnerable sharks. Ending fisheries for critically endangered porbeagle and spurdog will allow European populations to recover while enhancing the EU's ability to promote conservation of the species on a global scale," Fordham said.

Most sharks and rays are easily overfished because they grow slowly, mature late and produce few young. Porbeagle and spurdog sharks are included on the IUCN Red List as *Critically Endangered* in the Northeast Atlantic.

Thank You to Our Supporters!

We are very grateful for the continued support of:

- **The Adikes Family Foundation**
- **Adventure Aquarium**
- **Wendy Benchley**
- **D.W. Bennett**
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- **Craig Grube**
- **Ben Fackler**
- **The Freeman Foundation**
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- **The Martin Revson Foundation**
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- **Greg Sparks**
- **Underwater Adventures Aquarium**
- **Underwater Video Images**
- **Al Vinjamur**
- **The Wave Foundation**
- **World Wildlife Fund**

SRI offered a \$50,000 match grant!!

SRI has received an offer of a \$50,000 matching grant from a major donor. The donor is matching all donations dollar-for-dollar made to SRI between December 1, 2009 and November 30, 2010.

This grant doubles the value of your donations. We know times are hard, but please give as much as you can afford. This grant will enable us to significantly expand vital programs.

Help Wanted

SRI has an opening for a part-time development professional. Interested parties, please send your resume to Trustee Stephen Weinstock at: weinstoc@his.com

Basking Shark Stranding

On the morning of July 14, 2009, surfers off the beach at Gilgo State Park on Long Island, New York spotted a 26'6" male basking shark circling in the waves. Shortly afterwards the ocean giant washed ashore on the beach and died.

Basking sharks are the world's second largest fish, reaching lengths of 32 feet (10 meters). Although the sharks have huge mouths, they are harmless to man, and feed mostly on plankton. The sharks are considered vulnerable to extinction by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and are listed on CITES Appendix II, which prohibits international trade in their products.

Basking sharks spend the summer months off America's Northeast coast and then migrate to the warm waters of the Southern Hemisphere.

The shark, which weighed an estimated 5,000 pounds, bore no visible wounds, ruling out of the possibility of a boat strike. Tracy Marcus of Cornell University's Long Island-based Sport Fishing Education Center, was on the beach when the shark stranded, and sent tissue samples to SRI. DNA extracted from this tissue will allow SRI scientists to study many different aspects of the biology of these giant animals.



Tracy Marcus & the basking shark

SOS - Save Our Sharks

By Lesley Rochat
SRI Director of Media Productions,

On December 2, 2009, 430 students from 14 high schools and junior schools from the South Peninsula in Cape Town, South Africa, including 30 learners from COSAT in Khayelitsha, called the young AfriOceans Warriors, walked 8 km in howling South Easter winds along a stretch of the coast from Muizenberg to Glencairn to give a 'Voice to the Oceans'.



© Copyright AfriOceans Warriors

Hundreds of children form the SOS - A plea for help to South Africa's leaders, and to world leaders, to Save Our Seas, Save Our Sharks, Save Our Seafood, Save Our Sealife, and most of all SAVE OUR SELVES! The oceans are our life support system.

After forming a symbolic S.O.S. on the beach, they hiked on to their final destination where invited dignitaries welcomed them, and to whom they handed a copy of the AfriOceans Warriors Scroll to each dignitary. The scroll highlights their concerns regarding the state of our oceans, requesting South Africa's leaders to take action and allow the youth of the country their constitutional right to inherit healthy oceans. To see this historic event, go to:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOsrrJYs0v0&feature=channel>

Need to renew your SRI membership?

You can do it online at:

http://www.sharks.org/membership_home.htm

ICCAT FAILS ... AGAIN

The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) has again failed to establish adequate management measures for commercially valuable bluefin tuna and sharks.

Driven to the brink of collapse by international markets, decades of mismanagement and illegal fishing, stocks of bluefin tuna have plummeted in recent decades. Yearly quotas set up by ICCAT are methodically exceeded by industrial fleets. That, together with illegal fishing, have caused the population of bluefin tuna to decline by more than 85 percent in the eastern Atlantic and by more than 90 percent in the western Atlantic. Most of the fish are shipped to the lucrative markets of Asia and Japan.

ICCAT, an intergovernmental body of 48 nations, was formed in the late 1960s to conserve "tuna and tuna-like species in the Atlantic Ocean and adjacent seas." Today, after 40 years of empty promises and ineffective controls, tuna stocks are on the brink of collapse. ICCAT has once again failed to act beyond the interests of a few tuna fishing and farming industries and approved recommendations that fail to ensure the recovery of Atlantic bluefin tuna. Scientists estimated that a catch limit of 8,000 tons would have given bluefin tuna stocks a 50 percent chance of recovery by 2023. Instead, ICCAT set the catch limit for bluefin tuna at 13,500 tons.

Monaco has proposed the Atlantic bluefin tuna for inclusion on CITES Appendix I when the treaty organization convenes in March 2010. A ban on international trade in Atlantic bluefin tuna is now the only hope to save the iconic fish from commercial extinction.

Only one protective measure for a shark species was adopted by ICCAT, and only after it was weakened. The measure prohibits retention and sale of bigeye threshers, one of the most depleted and vulnerable species in the Atlantic. ICCAT prohibits retention of the species in recreational fisheries with the exception of Mexico, which is allowed to land 110 of the sharks each year.



SRI Welcomes New Officers

Edward Dorson Director, Conservation Strategies

Edward Dorson is an advocate for the oceans and a strategist/activist for the marine environment. His professional and academic background in both fine and applied art led to his creative approach to species preservation and ecology. Edward formulates, implements and encourages marine conservation strategies worldwide to stop the relentless assault on sharks, sea life and ocean ecosystems. Edward is and has been the moving force in marine conservation efforts in Palau.



Edward's personal website is:

<http://dorsonstudios.com/-/dorsonstudios/default.asp>

Lesley Rochat: Director, Media Productions

Lesley Rochat is a Shark Warrior, shark and marine conservationist. Lesley graduated from the University of Cape Town, South Africa, where she studied dramatic arts, followed by studies in Environmental Science and Cosmology through UNISA. Before dedicating her life to marine conservation, she had a diverse background which included modeling, acting and television presenting, to running a financial advisory business for many years. As result of her growing concern for the ocean environment, she founded AfriOceans Conservation Alliance (AOCA), a non profit organization in 2003. AOCA achieved major success through the SOSF Maxine, Science, Education and Awareness Programme, a unique shark conservation campaign designed by Lesley, supported by the Two Oceans Aquarium and sponsored by the

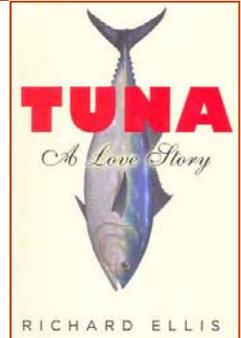


Save Our Seas Foundation. Lesley is an avid diver and a PADI Divemaster. In 2008, she helped open the Save Our Seas Shark Centre, in Cape Town, South Africa, where she served as the Executive Manager and Director of Education and Awareness. She is a published travel and environmental journalist and underwater photographer, and the author of childrens' and educational books. She has been the creative director of many educational and awareness initiatives from campaigns such as the award winning *Rethink the Shark* campaign, created by Saatchi & Saatchi, to educational outreach programs for children. Lesley is also the CEO of Blue Pulse Pictures, a production company which has produced numerous marine related documentaries.

To view Lesley's Blog, go to:
<http://www.lesleyrochat.com/news-and-blog/>

Members' Bookshelf

Tuna, A Love Story, by Richard Ellis. Available through SRI's Shark Shoppe at amazon.com



"Richard Ellis is surely the most vivid, thoughtful, and loving recorder of the splendors and travails of the ocean. This time he has cast his net wide and come up with a riveting story of the heartless destruction of the 'wildest, fastest, most powerful fish in the sea.'" The glorious, angry book made me weep, but gave me a lot of insight and even a ray of hope."...*Joe MacInnis*.

This book is to the tuna industry what Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, was to the meat packing industry.

Mark your Calendars

- **March 13-25, 2010:** CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) CoP15 at Doha, Qatar.
- **March 26-28, 2010:** Beneath the Sea (the largest consumer dive show in the USA) at Meadowlands Convention Center. Tickets may be purchased online at www.beneaththesea.org
- **June 6-11, 2010:** Sharks International, a one-time conference in Cairns, Australia.

Amos Nachoum

Award-winning wildlife photographer and animal behaviorist, Amos Nachoum, believes that those who rely on sharks and other marine animals for their living should financially assist those who are working to protect them. Amos auctions one or more museum-quality signed prints, valued at \$2,500 each, at his presentations with the proceeds going to SRI. He has raised thousands of dollars for SRI in the past 6 months.

"I've worked with Amos for nearly 20 years and his rapport with sharks and other large marine animals is truly extraordinary," says Marie Levine, SRI Executive Director. If Amos is doing a presentation in your city, please attend. His images are spectacular! To see some of Amos' images go to:

www.biganimals.com

"News" — 80 years late!

This month *Science Daily* reported on a "new" method of determining the shark species involved in an accident or attack by comparing the bite patterns on human victims and objects with jaws of various species of sharks, but *Science Daily* gets an "F" for not doing its homework. The methodology they described as "new" was developed in the early 1930s, and has been used by researchers worldwide for many decades!

Duke of Edinburgh Prize

When he was President of the British Sub Aqua Club, HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, offered an annual prize for the best underwater scientific project carried out by members, which has become the premier award made by the British Sub-Aqua Club. Last month Exercise Jurassic Shark was acknowledged by the Duke of Edinburgh Award for their conservation work at Cocos Island and was invited to Buckingham Palace for a formal presentation by the Duke.

Exercise Jurassic Shark, a tri-service team of divers from the British Armed Forces, provides manpower and resources for marine conservation projects where diving skills are required. Also known as The Joint Services Shark Tagging Team (JSSTT), the team assisted a joint study by SRI and PRETOMA at Cocos Island. Shark movements were monitored using radio telemetry. To read more about the project objectives and results, go to

http://www.sharks.org/reports/exercise_jurassic_shark.pdf

CITES Update

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) is a United Nations treaty organization created to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. Formed in the 1960s, today its members (parties) include 175 nations, with each nation having a single vote.

To date, only three shark species are protected by CITES: The whale shark, basking shark and the great white shark. At the upcoming meeting (CoP15, the 15th Convention of the Parties), scheduled for March 13-25, 2010 in Doha, Qatar, a record eight species of sharks are being proposed for Appendix II. Palau and Sweden are proposing the spiny dogfish and the porbeagle shark. Trade of both species is not controlled and fisheries are ineffectively managed. Palau and the US are proposing three species of hammerhead sharks (the scalloped hammerhead, great hammerhead shark, and the smooth hammerhead shark), the sandbar shark, the dusky shark, and the oceanic whitetip shark. In the past 15 years, the hammerheads, sandbar and dusky sharks have suffered steep declines in the Northwest Atlantic while the oceanic whitetip shark has declined 99% in the Gulf of Mexico and has virtually disappeared in those waters. The fins of these species are among the most valuable in the soup fin market. Outside of the United States, there is little fishery management in place to regulate the catch of these sharks.

Funds are *urgently needed* to send SRI scientists to CITES. The cost is approximately \$5,000 per scientist including CITES fees, airfare & accommodations. It is *critical* SRI scientists attend the two-week meeting to provide delegates with data to support the listings.

