

SAGREN

Seychelles Whale Shark Monitoring Newsletter



March 2004 Vol. 2, No.1

SAVE THE WHALE SHARK CAMPAIGN, INDIA

Historically whale sharks have been slaughtered in large numbers when they visit the Gujarat coast, India, between March-May. In the past 10 years this has increased considerably as a means of making quick money.

Official figures before 2001 reveal, every year, over 150 whale sharks are caught along the Gujarat coast. Independent figures, however, show this figure

to be closer to 500. The number of whale sharks taken has reduced after the government banned its trade and fishing in May 2001 by placing the endangered fish in schedule-I of the Wildlife Protection Act. But legal protection is not enough as it is not possible to continuously police the state's large coastline. Awareness, therefore, is the only future key to protect and conserve this en-

dangered species.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) and the Forest Department of Gujarat along with two big corporate houses are joining hands to generate awareness about whale sharks in villages along the Gujarat coast. According to Aniruddha Mookerjee, the Director of WTI Programmes, a recent survey revealed that awareness regarding the whale shark is low. The first step, therefore, will be to create general awareness among the locals and hopefully steer the fishermen towards whale shark tourism which will earn them a handsome income while keeping the sharks alive. Poster campaigns and major awareness drives in villages

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Did you know...?

Although the whale shark was first described in 1828 by Dr Andrew Smith, earlier reports of a monstrous spotted shark seen in Seychelles waters have been found in the National Archive.

On the 24th September 1768 the Marion-Dufresne expedition reported seeing a monstrous looking black shark with white spots, which they estimated to be about 16 - 18ft (4.9 - 5.5m) long and 10 - 12ft (3.0 - 3.7m) wide. The slow moving shark was surrounded by small fish.



PHOTO: www.whalesharkthai.com

The liver constitutes about 10% of the body weight of the whale shark and can fetch up to Rs 25 (US\$ 1) per Kg. The oil, which constitutes about 60 to 70% of the liver is used for coating the wooden hull of boats.

WHALE SHARK ENCOUNTER POLICY

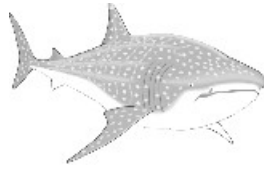
Globally the whale shark eco-tourism industry is growing and as such it is important to ensure that encounters are not only enjoyable and safe for people but also that the animal is not being harmed or disturbed.

The initiative for the Seychelles Whale Shark Encounter Policy Workshop

began with the Whale Shark Monitoring Network Workshop held in May 2003 (*Sagren* vol 1.2) during which the participants, amongst other issues, noted that the regular occurrence of whale sharks in Seychelles waters made them an ideal eco-tourism resource. It was agreed that a workshop should be

planned to develop an encounter policy and that existing models should be used as a basis for its development. Stakeholders requested that MCSS conduct an outreach programme to obtain additional viewpoints on the subject prior to the development of the

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WHALE SHARK ENCOUNTER POLICY...

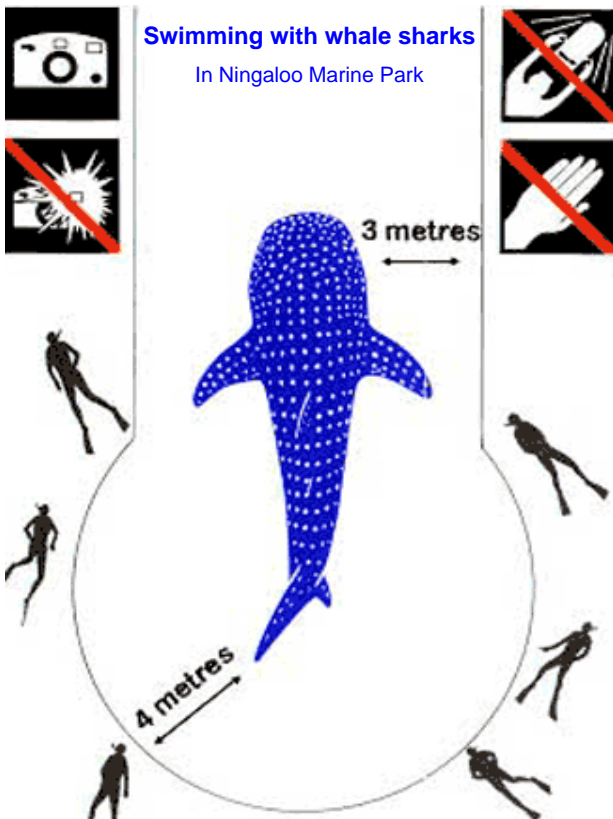
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policy. In addition the whale shark was declared a protected species in Seychelles waters, in January 2003, under the *Wild Animals Protection Act (Sagren vol 1.3)*, highlighting the need for the sustainable management of the

species.

In light of this, MCSS organised a second workshop on the 17th December 2003 to advise the public and stakeholders about the need for a whale shark encounter policy and get agreement from stakeholders in the development of a Whale Shark Encounter Policy for Seychelles.

Australian code of conduct for swimming with whale sharks



Department of Conservation and Land Management
<http://www.naturebase.net>

Feedback from the *Whale Shark Encounter Questionnaire* i.e. the outreach programme, showed that:

The majority of respondents agreed that there was scope for an Eco-Tourism Industry using the species as the primary resource. At present, however, sharks are not in general being targeted as an ecotourism resource.

Current practices in terms of approaching whale sharks involves dropping clients off either ahead of the shark or along its side at a distance of <10 metres. Generally, there would be between 5-10 clients in the water at the time. In the majority of cases, the boat engine would be switched off with the boat maintaining a distance of > 10m. In the

case where operators were involved in dry viewing, generally a distance of <10m is maintained with the engines switched on or in neutral to follow the shark.

Most of the organisations questioned had encounter protocols. In the majority of cases, clients are advised not to touch the animal, not to restrict its movements and to keep their distance from the shark, while avoiding the tail fin. None of the individual's questioned were advising clients against using flash photography.

Generally it was agreed that the recommendations of the Australian Whale Shark Encounter Policy were a sound basis from which to develop a local encounter policy.

A model Whale Shark Encounter Policy was presented and participants were asked for their feedback on all aspects of this Policy. Each clause was examined and changes were made to the wording of certain clauses within the model policy as per their comments. Following the workshop, the proceedings including the proposed Seychelles Whale Shark Encounter Policy were circulated to stakeholders for further comments. The stakeholder approved Policy will then be proposed to Government for endorsement and for the development of appropriate legislation.

For more information on the Seychelles Whale Shark Encounter Policy visit:
www.mcss.sc

SAVE THE WHALE SHARK CAMPAIGN, INDIA ...

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across the Gujarat coast are planned. The Coast Guard has agreed to support the campaign by providing the Forestry Department of Gujarat with information on the number of whale sharks spotted along the coastline, while ensuring they are not poached by the local fishermen. Speaking during the launch *Save Whale Sharks Campaign* in January 2004 the religious leader and the 'ambassador for the whale shark' Morarji Bapu said, "the people should aim to protect these sharks as their children". The campaign is

being funded by Tata Chemicals Ltd and Gujarat Heavy Chemicals Ltd, which also have industrial units on the Gujarat coast. Whale sharks along with "Asiatic lions" should become the twin pride of Gujarat, asserted the chief wildlife warden of Gujarat.

A senior forest official said, "While visual tagging and photo identification are being carried out in KwaZulu Natal (South Africa), southern Mozambique, Seychelles, Australia, Belize, Honduras, Mexico and Philippines, a small measure to protect this endangered species has been taken by us. We would adopt these techniques at a later stage."

NOTICE BOARD

Whale Shark Sightings
(Jan-Mar 2004)



In-water Sightings

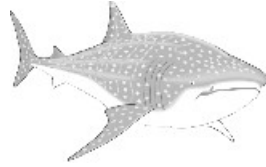
- 12 reported sightings
- 8 in-water encounters



Aerial Sightings

- 6 reported sightings during 13 flights

NOTE: such low numbers are normal for this period



WHALE SHARK MIGRATION - AUSTRALIA

In 2002, a whale shark was tagged in Ningaloo Marine Park (off the north west coast of Australia) and tracked for over 2500km towards Christmas Island (south of Indonesia). Although always expected, this was the first proof that sharks from Ningaloo travel long distances away from the Australian coast. In order to expand this program, in January 2004, a team from the Australian marine conservation group ECOCEAN conducted a field trip to Christmas Island at the time when whale sharks are usually sighted by the dive industry.

In addition to one SPOT2 satellite tag donated to the programme by MCSS, the team had four archival data-logging tags for deployment. Daily vessel surveys were undertaken between 9:00am - 4:00pm and 6:30pm - 10:00pm with assistance from the management agency Parks Australia North. The dive community was also on the look out for sharks and would radio to us if / when a shark was seen.

During the 7-day field trip, despite intensive effort, few whale sharks were sighted. This is not surprising given that the number of whale sharks sighted at Christmas Island has declined significantly over the last few years. This may be due to natural inter-annual variation, or it may be from increased fishing effort for this species in recent years. However, through the commitment of whale shark conservationists worldwide, the sharks are receiving greater protection through national legislation (e.g. Australia, India, Maldives, Philippines, Seychelles etc.) and through listing on international

The Smart Position and Temperature Transmitting (SPOT2) Tag transmits whenever it is at the surface. The shark's location is determined by cross triangulation between the receiving Argos satellites. This type of tag is used to track the sharks movement as it travels across ocean basins.



PHOTO: David Rowat

conventions (e.g. CITES, Convention on Migratory Species etc.).

The team was able to deploy the SPOT2 satellite tag on a 6.5m female whale shark. This shark stayed in the area for several days, with re-sightings occurring while the shark was feeding at the surface during surveys conducted on the following evening, and again two days later by a Japanese documentary-maker while he was on SCUBA at 26m depth. To date, no signals have been received by the satellite – the shark may have simply remained deep, a satellite may not have been overhead while the shark was on the surface or the tag may have failed. Importantly, the technique for deployment was shown to be successful, with this shark sighted several days after with the tag still attached. We still hope to 'hear' from this shark and will keep you posted on any results.

Unlike the SPOT2 tags, which communicated directly to the ARGOS satellites, the archival tags need to be retrieved from the shark before the data can be downloaded, i.e. the shark needs to be re-sighted and the tag removed. We are confident of success, considering many of the sharks seen at Ningaloo each year are seen again in subsequent years.

In addition to being tagged, the sharks were photographed and the identity of each recorded in the *ECOCEAN Whale Shark Photo-identification Library (Sagren vol 1.4)*. A whale shark is identified (or 'marked') through photo-identification – with a record stored in the public online Library. When this shark and many others are re-sighted we can recognize it as 'recaptured'. This will help us document the movements of this highly migratory species, and also help us make an estimation on the number of whale sharks that are actually in the region (through 'mark / recapture').

The success of the project relies on public support. For this reason, we encourage everyone to please take down a few notes on where and when whale sharks have been sighted (with estimated length and sex if possible). In addition to the sighting data, identification photographs of the whale shark, especially the natural patterning be-

hind the gill slits and any noticeable scars, can be submitted online to the Library (www.ecocean.org).

Your help in the conservation of whale sharks is much appreciated.



Article by: Brad Norman
ECOCEAN

For more information about whale sharks in Australia visit:
www.ecocean.org

The Whale Shark

A Poem by Tom Butcher
MCSS Volunteer

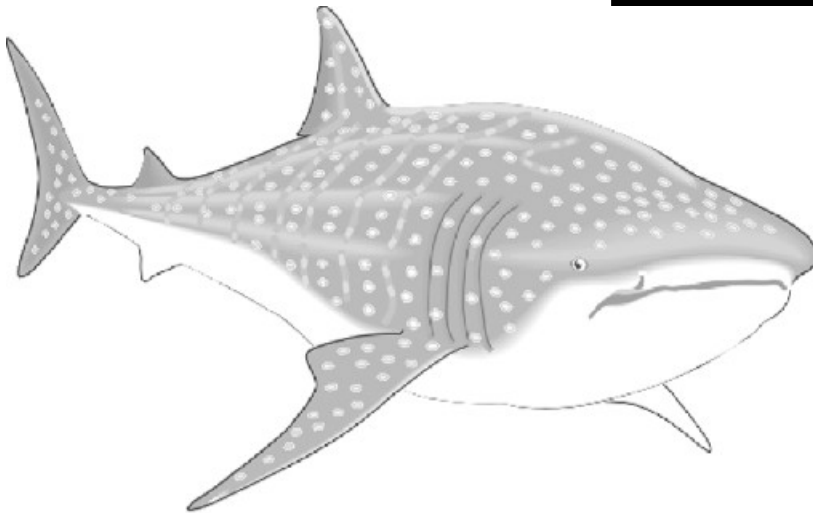
Cutting through a running world,
That rocks and swells,
Its angles, edges and spots of white,
catch their frame in the flickering.
Slumbering in its power,
This stony blade of white and grey,
Slices among the beams and the
tuna that gleam, and dull,
As they turn from its' towering.
Rising to filter the foe,
Its flattened face opens and gills
flare,
The sea sucked through,
As little yellow ones dance from the
entrance,
And its host hurry to keep where,
They are in its shade,
With it for a time,
We wonder and stare amongst its
wake,
But then its bulk is sundered from
our eye,
Contorting tail and torso,
It darkens into the bank of black,
Till even the turning tail fades,
Melts into the murk from whence it
came,
And will come again.



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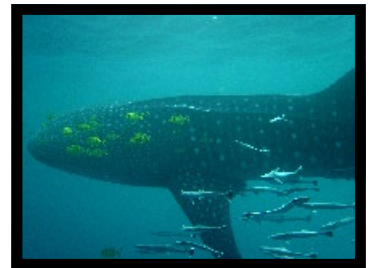
To receive copies of SAGREN regularly contact us on info@mcss.sc

Adopt a whale shark

By becoming a whale shark foster parent you are ensuring that research on whale sharks is continued. Your support will assist in protecting these amazing creatures and ensure that they continue roaming the world's tropical oceans.

Adopt a whale shark for one year and we will send you (or your friend):

- A personalised Adoption Certificate
- Fact sheets on your chosen shark
- A general whale shark fact sheet
- The MCSS Whale Shark Newsletter



Adopt me !

Pa- Seye (s322): A 5m juvenile male whale shark tagged on the 7th October 2003 off Beau Vallon, NW Mahe. He has no identifying marks other than the "Aquasign" tag on his left side.

Hasi (s238): A 6 m whale shark tagged on the 27th October 2003 near Therese Island. He/ she has a distinct scaring pattern and is easily recognized.

YES! I want to adopt a whale shark ___ Pa-Seye ___ Hasi for one year
For myself / as a gift (delete as necessary) Please state Delivery address

Name to go on Adoption Certificate:

Address:

I enclose Cheque/Postal Order for US\$50/SR250 made payable to: MCSS

OR Please charge my MasterCard/Visa Account No.:

Issue no.: Name on Card:

Signed: Message:

RETURN TO; Marine Conservation Society Seychelles, PO Box 1299, Victoria, Mahe, Seychelles