

SHARK RESEARCH INSTITUTE NEWSLETTER



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Whale Shark Adoption Program....

SRI launched its Whale Shark Adoption Program at the Dive Equipment Manufacturers Association (DEMA) trade show, held January 16-22 in New Orleans, Louisiana. For a \$10 donation a guardian receives an adoption certificate for a specific shark. Each certificate provides the shark's name, its sex and size when known, the name of the tagger, and when and where the shark was tagged. If the shark is resighted, its guardians will be notified when and where the resighting occurred. Most adoptions have been made by individuals, but Rancho Santa Fe School Student Council, Girl Scout Brownie Troop 829, and Manor Sharks Softball Team have adopted SRI-tagged whale sharks. Members are urged to photocopy the attached "Adopt a Whale Shark" application and distribute it to friends, schools, and anyone that you think may be a prospective guardian. Please consider adopting a whale shark if you haven't already done so.

From East Africa...

Sea conditions have been excellent off southern Mozambique, although poor along the northern coast of South Africa, and this season record numbers of whale sharks have been tagged. To date the Whale Shark Study team has tagged 76 whale sharks. SRI's goal to place a satellite tag in a whale shark during the 1996-1997 season may be met; we recently received a grant from the PADI Foundation to continue and expand our tagging efforts along the coast of East Africa.

From Seychelles...

David Rowat, Director of Seychelles Underwater Centres, has invited SRI to expand the Whale Shark Study to the waters of the Seychelles. Rob Allen will represent SRI at SUBIOS, the annual Indian Ocean Underwater Festival hosted by Seychelles in November, and initiate a whale shark tagging training program for local divemasters. Tagging operations will be conducted from the islands of Mahe, Praslin and LaDigue. The training program is being funded (in part) by a grant from Project AWARE Foundation.

From Australia...

June 15-21, and June 22-28 Marie Levine will be conducting field tests of the Mackler Shark Attractant and the Sharkpod, an electronic shark repellent, in the Coral Sea off the *Undersea Explorer*, a live-aboard research vessel operating out of Cairns, Queensland, Australia. Members that would like to participate should contact Kathy Rothschild at 1-800-359-0747 as quickly as possible.

Public Education....

The January-February issue of *Africa, Wildlife & Environment* contains an excellent article by Barbara von Etdorf on the work of whale shark study team in South Africa.

Andrew Gifford reports that SABC-TV has completed a documentary film on SRI's Whale Shark Tagging Project. The film centers on Rob Allen, and includes interviews with Andrew, Sue Smith, Dr. Len Compagno and Stephen Hoseck, the Natal Parks Board ranger at Cape Vidal. It is scheduled to air in South Africa on May 6th.

Kenny Doudt, SRI member and author of Surfing with the Great White Shark, has been conducting book signings for Barnes & Noble, and doing presentations for school children. Kenny exhibits the surfboard he was riding when he was attacked by a great white shark in 1979, and then teaches his audience about sharks and marine conservation.

Marie Levine presented a seminar on whale sharks and SRI's tagging program in the Faculty Room, Nassau Hall, Princeton University for the Princeton Old Guard.

SRI had a booth and presented a seminar at *Beneath the Sea*, the dive symposium held March 22, 23 & 24 at the New Jersey Meadowlands Exposition Center. The conference featured more than 300 exhibits, 16 in-depth workshops, over 50 seminars and was attended by 12,000 to 15,000 people. Many thanks to SRI members who took time from the program to staff our booth: Ethel Dragan, Paula Kovach, Harry Torres, Oswald and Marion Sykes, Keith and Teresa Markey, and Richard, Vivian and Eric Josephs. The SRI seminar, *Whale Shark Study - a diver-dependent research project*, was well attended.

On April 20 & 21 Kendrick McMahon, Maurice Coutts, Marie Levine and Keith Markey attended a fundraising seminar, *"Into the Field: Strategies for Funding Exploration,"* hosted by the Explorers Club. The weekend, planned by Peter Hess, Philadelphia Explorers Club Chapter Chairman, featured seminars by Dr. Bill Stone, Dr. P. J. Capellotti, John Chatterton, and professional fundraisers Bill Vartorella and Don Keel. Participants were also given the opportunity to make informal video and/or slide presentations to Steven Burns, Director of Production, The Discovery Channel, and Amy Bucher, Associate Producer, National Geographic Television.

On May 19th SRI will have a booth at *Discover the Undersea Realm*, an educational event hosted by Northeast Dive Journal. The goal of the event is to motivate youth to view the oceans as the next realm of discovery. 15,000 student tickets and 8,000 general admission tickets have been distributed. If you would like discount tickets or can assist in our booth, please contact Keith and Teresa Markey at (908) 247-9740.

SRI is on the Internet...

Our thanks to Tom and Tracey Wagner, publishers of New Jersey Scuba, for creating an excellent web page for the Shark Research Institute. The URL (address) is: <http://www.njscuba.com/Sharks/>.

Global Shark Attack File...

On March 22, 1996, S.R.I. whale shark tagger Barry Skinstad was working in Mozambique when he had a run-in with a subadult tiger shark. The tagger entered the water at 9:00 a.m. and was on the surface, swimming across a deep channel where marlin, sailfish and tuna are frequently taken. As he approached the seaward side of the channel the shark swam up from the depths at great speed, headed directly at him.

Barry used his tagging gun to fend off the 6' shark, but was hit with such speed and force that he was flung out of the water. Barry was shaken, but unhurt.

A documentary film focusing on the 1916 shark attacks in Matawan Creek, New Jersey, is currently in production. The film, due to air August 16 on Discovery Channel's Shark Week, is centered around the thorough research on five attacks conducted by Dr. Richard Fernicola, and also features interviews with SRI members Richard Ellis and Marie Levine. The producer, Drew Horton of Thomas Horton Associates, Santa Barbara, CA has won several awards for his latest documentary, "*Shadows in the Forest*," a study of the Ba'ambuti pygmies of the Ituri Forest.

White sharks get protection in Tasmania...

The Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS), with support of the Australian Seafood Industry Council has recommended an end to targeting fishing for white sharks in Australian waters. The South Australian Fisheries Department has also proposed to protect this species and New South Wales is considering the recommendation. It is only in Queensland that the taking of white sharks for public display is still permitted. AMCS suggests that until adequate scientific data is available, all large shark fisheries should be considered exploratory, not commercial, with precautionary catch levels set and maximum effort directed into data collection for stock assessment and management. Detailed information on the population status of white sharks is scarce, but what is available suggests that the world white shark population is dwindling. It was this conclusion that led agencies in both South Africa and California to adopt a precautionary attitude and declare the fish a totally protected species.

In November 1995, at the Convention for the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) conference, a resolution was passed calling for a study of the biological status of sharks and the effects of the international trade in sharks and shark products. Of particular concern is the international trade in shark fin exports which doubled between 1980 and 1990, driven largely by the Asian demand for shark fin soup.

The white shark, as apex predator in the sea, is a rare animal, and its slow growth rate, late maturity and low fecundity make it especially vulnerable to over exploitation. Some estimates have put the global population of white sharks at less than 2,000. "In marine ecosystems 'ecological extinction' occurs when a species is reduced to such low levels, that, although still present, it no longer plays its ecological role," reported a CITES representative. "This may soon be the case if it is not already so, with the white shark."

The resolution indicates the gravity of situation: very rarely have non-listed species been debated in the CITES forum.

From the Cage...

Congratulations to Ken and Marcia McMahan; they are proud parents of a baby girl, Mackenzie, born February 8th.

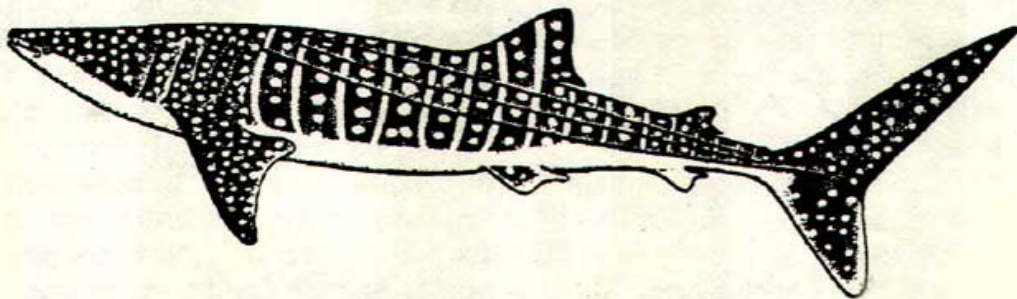
Congratulations to Andrew and Pam Gifford on becoming grandparents for the second time within the year. On April 26 at 09h45, their daughter Tracey gave birth to Dillon, "a 3-kilogram male."

As we go to press Maurice Coutts is sailing the waters of Vanuatu and the Torres Straits, and Marie Levine is bound for Suluwesi, after a 2-day stop in Singapore to attend the Asian Dive Equipment Conference (ADEC '96).

Adopt a whale shark

The Shark Research Institute invites you to join our exciting Whale Shark Study. This program enables you to adopt a whale shark, tagged by the Institute, for one year. By adopting a shark you will help finance the Whale Shark Study, and receive information about your shark: when, where and by whom it was tagged. If your shark is resighted you will be notified where and when the resighting occurred.

Become involved in scientific research in your "other world."



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Yes, I would like to adopt a tagged whale shark. Enclosed is my check for \$10 (US funds).

Name

Address

City State Zip

Country

Please make your check or money order payable to:
The Shark Research Institute
PO Box 40, Princeton, NJ 08540, U.S.A.

Consider joining the Institute. Individual memberships are \$25 per year.

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and PADI Foundation