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# Shark Research Institute

## Newsletter

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## Philippine Whale Shark Slaughter

TAGBILARAN CITY -  
Whale shark hunting off  
Pamilacan, an island barangay  
of Baclayon town, Bohol  
[Philippines] is a way of life  
for most of the fisher folk in  
the barangay.

But the islander's fate and  
livelihood, which depend  
much on fishing of the whale  
shark [known locally as  
*balilan*] is uncertain, as the  
islanders hunt and slaughter  
about a hundred or more  
whale sharks annually,  
threatening the species'  
existence.

A ban on the capture of  
endangered species from the  
island's water has met with  
stiff resistance from fishers  
and their families. On the  
endangered list are dolphins



*A whale shark fin (foreground) and meat are being dried along the coastline of Pamilacan Island in Baclayon town. Inset picture shows a fisherman with a sharp harpoon demonstrating how to catch a whale shark. Ric Obedencio*

(locally known as *lumba-lumba*), manta rays (*sanga*),

blue sharks (*bongka-siso* or *bonkaras*) and turtles

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(*pawikan*).

The whale shark is excluded from the hunting ban, according to officials of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). It has gills, and hence," they said, "unlike the dolphin is not considered a sea mammal."

Fishermen of Pamilacan may feel fortunate that hunting of the whale shark is still tolerated. In the meantime, authorities of the agencies concerned are confused whether or not *balilans* should be classified similar to dolphins, manta rays or blue sharks, said Pamilacan barangay captain Crespo Valeroso in an interview.

He said that he only learned of the lack of a ban on whale-shark fishing during a meeting in 1995 with the local DENR people. The prohibition on the hunting of other species began in that year.

Valeroso said his constituents, who make up some 250 households in this 163-hectare barrio, are ready to take mass actions should the hunting of *balilans* be disallowed by the government, unless an alternative means of livelihood is provided for them.

Leon Guirigay, 37, who has been whale shark hunting since the 1970s, told [this

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reporter] that if a ban on whale shark hunting is imposed, islanders would not hesitate to rise in arms even at the risk of being put behind bars.

Earlier, a police officer here tagged the islanders as the "number one killers of dolphins and whale sharks," says Valeroso. This, he admits, has been true for years.

But residents of the island of some 500 voters are slowly being educated, their awareness being raised on the importance of preserving and protecting the endangered species following that significant meeting with the authorities. Islanders religiously observe a fishing ban on particular species, he said, except for the *balilans*.

### Lucrative business

The fishing of whale sharks continues to be a lucrative trade both for the fisher folk and the middlemen.

Guirigay said that every time a *balilan* is caught, "everybody is happy," as even family members of the crew of the motorboat that went out on the hunt, and even neighbors of the crew members, could have a share of the whale shark if they take part in its slaughter.

Earnings from one *balilan*, which weighs from three to

seven tons, go as high as P30,000 to P50,000, Guirigay says. "The whale shark is more valuable when dried than it is when newly slaughtered. The dried skin of the whale shark costs P100 a kilo, up from P30/k for fresh skin; its dried meat costs P80/k from only P10/k.

Fins, locally known as *palikpik*, when dried are the costliest part of the fish, costing between P400 and P500/k. The earnings of this part of the whale shark go solely to the owner of the motorboat and the crew.

Whale shark hunters whose grandfathers or fathers were former hunters themselves do not really know what the fins are for or how much profits the middlemen gain. Guirigay said the fishermen are only told that Chinese traders make a brisk business selling the dried fins for soup. Through island-based middlemen, he says, the fins are brought to Cebu and Manila, and even abroad.

There have been instances when about three or more whale sharks were slaughtered, providing the fishermen with earnings of about P150,000, he recalls. Around Pamilacan alone, more than 40 *balilans* have been slaughtered since January.

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Guirigay, however, admitted that unlike in previous years,

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the whale shark is diminishing, as more and more hunters from other islands are engaging in whale shark fishing.

Guirigay, together with Dominador Pagol, 37, also a shark hunter, derived their income mainly from fishing, which is often just enough for their families to survive during the lean season. If not hunting, the fishermen gather seashells, sea urchins and seaweeds and sell these in the mainland to augment their income, he added.

**Government action**

If plans push through, the Bohol provincial government led by Gov. Rene Relampagos will embark on a multimillion-peso ecotourism project, the Pamilacan Whale Watching Village. The project is being proposed by the Interagency Task Force on Marine Mammal Conservation, organized by the DENR with the Department of Tourism in 1994.

“Creating a task force is a positive and bold step in the right direction – toward heightening awareness of the islanders on marine wildlife,” Relampagos said.

The project, estimated to cost some P6.8 million courtesy of the Pacific-Asia Travel Association, includes

capability-building, information and education, enterprise development, livelihood fund management and establishment of a museum right on the island.

*By Ric Obedencio*

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### *PROTECT YOUR ASSETS from the tax man...*

...By making a contribution to scientific research. SRI is making it easier to lend a helping hand, and reap tax benefits as well. Donations to SRI are tax-exempt and the end of the year is approaching. If you could use an extra tax deduction on your 1997 income taxes please consider helping SRI.

**Computer Equipment**

Planning to upgrade your computer? SRI, particularly our field offices, need additional computers and a donation of your used computer to SRI may reduce your 1997 tax bill. In particular, we need laptops that are IBM-compatible using Pentium micro-processor, 100 MHz or faster, capable of running Windows 95, and Modem 28.8 baud or faster, preferred. And HQ could really use a Power Mac. For more information on donating a personal computer to SRI, call Kendrick MacMahan at

(908) 294-1567. For information on allowable tax deductions on donations of computer equipment, contact Don Warren, Esq (609) 279-9696 or your accountant.

### **Planned Giving**

Annuities, Bequest, Life Income Gifts. This form of philanthropy is easier than it sounds, and not only benefits SRI, but the future of your estate. Planned giving allows SRI to conduct long-term, vital research. At the same time, it can help protect your heirs and lifelong assets. There are considerable tax and estate planning advantages associated with planned giving to SRI. We recommend that you consult your attorney, account or other financial advisor on the legal and tax-related matter which may affect your specific situation.

### **Gifts of Securities**

Marketable securities such as stocks, bonds or mutual funds provide attractive benefits. Tax laws make it possible for the donor to make an important gift at low after-tax costs.

### **Gifts of Closely Held Stock**

An owner of closely held stock may give the stock to SRI and receive important financial benefits

### **Bequests**

You may choose to support SRI research through your will or living trust. Because bequests to SRI are generally exempt from federal or state inheritance taxes and subject to an unlimited deduction, you may find that it is possible to make a larger donation than you might have thought.

### **Life Income Gifts**

You can transfer assets to SRI and receive income through a variety of ways. In addition to supporting shark research, life income gifts offer a variety of tax, financial and estate planning advantages. These gifts include: Charitable Lead Trusts, Life Insurance, Gifts of Real Property, Totten Trusts and "P.O.D." (Payable on Death) Accounts, IRAs, Pension Plans or other Tax-Deferred Retirement Assets. For more information on planned giving to SRI, please contact Don Warren, Esq (609) 279-9696 or your accountant. Personal discussions incur no obligation on your part, and all information discussed with SRI regarding your gift is confidential.

### **End-of-the-Year Donation**

You can give an End-of-the-Year Donation that goes a long way toward research, and can be itemized as a charitable deduction on the current tax year's income tax

statement. No matter how you choose to give, your support is needed and appreciated!

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## *Global Shark Attack File*

On August 9, 1997 a small (12ft) fishing boat 50km south of the Egyptian Red sea tourist resort area of Hurghada, was capsized by a large shark. The boat contained two teenage fishermen, one of whom died after sustaining multiple bites from the shark. The other teenager was in critical condition but medical personnel expected him to recover.

The attack occurred only 150 yards offshore, and in the vicinity of a steep drop-off. The motivation for the attack is unknown but it is speculated that the shark may have been attracted by the paddling of the fishermen's boat.

Tiger sharks, oceanic whitetip sharks, mako sharks and silvertip sharks are reportedly abundant around Hurghada, and are frequently encountered by divers. Last year a snorkeler was attacked by a tiger shark 150km to the north. Although local dive-masters and fishermen have not reported any contact with mako sharks, the species has

been implicated in an attack further north (Randall, 1979). *Reported by Dr. Sam Gruber, Bimini Biological Labs.*

## Welcome Aboard!

*To:* Mary Regan, SRI's new Development Officer. Mary hails from Garden City, Kansas, and has many years of experience in developing funding sources for non-profits. And SRI is definitely in need of her expertise!

### Lake Nicaragua Shark Tagging

A course is being designed for December 27, 1997 - January 18, 1998 that will initiate a shark/sawfish tagging program and assessment study for Lake Nicaragua. The program will continue this coming summer and for the next few years. The Nicaraguan Government heartily endorses this effort.

For more information contact Bill Raschi at: [raschi@bucknell.edu](mailto:raschi@bucknell.edu). Depending on the final enrollment, a focus on the Lake Nicaraguan elasmobranchs may play a major role.

*Cost:* \$1,350 (includes everything except round trip airfare)

*Location:* Omotepe Biological Station on Omotepe Island - in the middle of Lake Nicaragua.

*Course focus:* Establishment of a small museum collection of all vertebrates on and around the island, including elasmobranchs and teleosts. Participants should have an excellent time - great rainforests seated on two beautiful volcanic peaks. *Bill Raschi*

## KILLER WHALE WHITE SHARK ENCOUNTER

*On 9 October 1997 at 9:40 a.m. Farallon Island biologist Peter Pyle of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory witnessed an encounter between a white shark and killer whale. Peter shares his observations with us.*

It was a very amazing sight, the orca with a 10' white shark in its mouth. Above-water video taken aboard the vessel "New Superfish," captured it somewhat. Here's the from-island account: At about 10:30 a.m. the two orca (apparently mother and calf) were seen by a sport fishing boat, *C-Gull*, killing and eating a California sea lion off the west end of the island. We saw gulls and

pelicans circling the event but it was out of view from our vantage to the southeast.

I had to do a boat landing at 11:30 am. As I offloading people and equipment the fishing boat came over and told us of the encounter. I called the *New Superfish* and they were heading for the orca at that point. I finished the landing and called the *Superfish* again to learn that the orca had a large shark in its mouth. Two volunteers and I immediately jumped in our 17' shark research whaler and headed out to the event, which was occurring just north of the island.

When we got there the calf orca was dragging the shark through the water. It had grasped the shark by the dorsum, just caudal to the pectoral fins. From our vantage we could see the underside of the shark from the pectoral fins forward, all white except for the tips of the pectoral fins, which were black. I later learned that this was diagnostic of white shark in our area (it looked like a white shark to me but I was not 100% sure that it was a white shark (thought it might have been a large salmon shark), and wanted confirmation of species.

From our vantage we could not tell if the shark's tail was present or not but I believe it

was (see below). I estimated the length from the posterior edge of the pectorals to the snout to be 4.5-5.5 feet. It was a bit hard to know what to do at this point. Orca are very rare here and I have not had close encounters with them before. We did not want to approach too closely for fear of disturbing the orca or inciting the wrath of the adult female, so we circled slowly toward the calf/shark. It was also quite rough and hard to control the boat precisely.

About five minutes after we got there part of the liver popped out of the shark. The gulls were in a feeding frenzy on the liver and other bits of the shark floating to the surface. At this time we secured a piece of the liver for species documentation and genetic analysis.

We saw the calf drop the shark carcass and head for the liver. We rushed over to the carcass and I was able to get some underwater video (without shark-research pole camera) of the carcass sinking. A phytoplankton bloom was occurring so the only thing visible on the video is a fuzzy outline of the carcass receding into the depths.

On the video the carcass appears essentially to be entire, although it is possible

that what looks like the tail may actually be entrails. At this point the boat had drifted close to the liver and I was able to obtain several underwater video sequences of the calf eating the liver.

Scot Anderson was on his way out from the coast and arrived at this time. He also got some underwater video of the two orca.

Based on accounts from the *Superfish*, it appears as though the adult female orca killed the shark then later gave it to the calf. We wonder now if the killing was for 1) food, 2) protection of the calf, and/or 3) removal of a competitor for a prey resource. Orca are so rare here and pinnipeds so abundant that I doubt the last hypothesis. Since the orca did not appear to be actively feeding on the shark we wonder about the 2nd option. Feedback will be welcome.

Based on the video the orca have been tentatively identified as belonging to a southern California "offshore" pod that feeds more on fish than mammals. We will, of course, be writing this up when all is said and done.

9 October 1997, 12:59 p.m.

*Peter submitted the following addendum:* Having seen the video tapes on the news, whale researcher Alisa

Schulman has identified what we thought was the calf as an adult female. This could be. We estimated the animal to be 12-15 feet in length which may be typical of a small adult female. Perhaps this indicates that the other animal (the one that killed the shark) was a subadult male. We will be reviewing all of the videotape and photographs to sort this out in the end.

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### **Members' Bookshelf**

*Great White Sharks*, by Marie Levine, published by Weigl, Calgary. \$12.95 Canadian. To order copies contact: Weigl Publishers, 1902-11<sup>th</sup> Street SE, Calgary, Alberta T2T 3G2, Canada. Customer Toll Free Telephone Number: 1-800-668-0766.

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### **Holiday shopping?**

A one-year adoption of an SRI-tagged whale shark is a unique present for those very special people on your gift list! Order forms are available on our web site: <http://www.sharks.org> or call HQ.

