

Shark Research Institute



Newsletter

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Whale Sharks Slaughtered

by Froilan Gallardo, Cagayan
de Oro City

Maxer Janubas and four other fishermen had been drifting all night, without a catch, five km from the coast of Cagayan de Oro City [Philippines]. They were ready to give up and head for home at dawn when Janubas pulled the net toward their pumpboat and found it heavy.

Suddenly, Janubas said, the head of a fish as big as an office table jutted out from the net.

"*Balelan*, also known as *tawiki* to local fisherfolk (*tuki-tuki* to Cebuanos), is actually the great whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*), the largest of all living fish known to man. It is as long as 20 m and weighs more than 40 tons.

The whale shark Janubas and the others caught was young, no more than four tons and six metres long.



Curious children mill around a dead whale shark. Photo by Charlie Cepeda

"*Medyo nataranta ko, dayon nalipay kay dako kaayo nga isda ang among nakuhas,*"

Janubas recalled.

He said they all knew that the fish would command a good price from buyers. But first they had to tow the fish to shore.

So big and heavy

Janubas said the fish was so big and heavy that they had to ask a passing pumpboat to help them tow. Peter Villaneuva, a companion of Janubas, said the fish struggled to break free, flipped repeatedly and almost overturned their boat.

After three hours, the two boats finally reached Sitio Snowland in Libertad, 27 km west of the city. The entire village of 40 families rushed to meet them as they landed the fish, resting in knee-deep waters.

Janubas was beaming with pride. This feat would also

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make him a local legend. After all, it was the second time he had caught a fish this big.

Sometime in April last year, Janubas caught a *balelan* in the same waters off the coast in Libertad.

"*Suwerte langkay hahilig kining isda-a modasmag sa mga pukot,*" the 23-year-old fisherman said.

Hacked

The fish stayed in knee-deep waters for a day before it finally died.



Pieces of whale shark meat litter the beach. Photo by Charlie Cepeda

The entire community, whose main livelihood is fishing, became festive. People brought bolos and axes and hacked the big fish to pieces. Later, they divided the meat among themselves, hung the pieces to dry and sell.

Villaneuva said they had contracted a buyer for the entire fish, but the buyer failed to come. But they were not upset. They said a kilo of the fish can still be sold at P500 to buyers from Cagayan de Oro and Iligan City.

Janubas said their share of the fish can easily earn them P5,000 each – more than they can earn in a month. They got two lower fins, two upper fins, pelvic, anal and upper and lower lobe of the caudal fin.

Villaneuva said they can get better prices for the fins.

With four tons of fish meat, the people said their earnings are more than enough to tide them over for a few weeks.

"*Dili man namo kini kan-ondong. Ibaligaya man namo kini,*" an old woman said.

No regrets

Janubas said he had no regrets about catching the whale shark. He said he does not know of any law that prohibits or regulates its fishing.

"*Wala sab nako na tuyo-a. Ang isda man any misulod sa among pukot,*" he said.

Janubas said he and his companions are willing to face authorities if there would be an investigation.

The Department of Agriculture in Northern Mindanao reported that 100 whale sharks are caught and butchered each year by Misamis Oriental fisherfolk.

The great whale shark is known to frequent the waters of Misamis Oriental, where they feed on krill, known locally as *uyap* or *alamang*, and yellowfin tuna or *pidlayan*, which generally spawn in these seas between January and March.

There are also reported sightings in the waters off Surigao and Davao.

Whale sharks are harmless to humans and are known to give scuba divers the thrill of hitching

a ride on their back. The fish is known only to attack humans when it is harmed. But fishermen are ready for these instances, usually battering the head of the fish with small spear axes.

Not endangered

Carmelita Marban, chief of the DENR Protected Areas and Wildlife Division in the region, said the great whale shark being slaughtered in Misamis Oriental is not an endangered species.

She said the DENR can do little to run after the fishermen who slaughtered the big fish off Talisayan town. "There is no local and national law that prohibits the catching of whale sharks," Marban said.

Its capture or sale is not even regulated by the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) of which the Philippine government is a signatory, she said. CITES, which was signed in Washington, DC, on March 3, 1973, regulates worldwide trade of endangered animals and plants.

Marban said the fishing ban applies only to marine mammals like dolphins, whales and sea cows.

Dorothy Pabayo, regional director of the Department of Tourism, is incensed that the government cannot do anything to regulate the slaughter.

"Do we take this thing sitting down just because the fish is not listed as endangered?" she asked. "We cannot allow the slaughter to continue and do nothing. We

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Stan Waterman
Richard Ellis

would be contributing to its extinction."

The DoT and the DA have taken interest in protecting the whale shark for its tourism potential. "Sooner or later, they will all be gone if we don't do something," Pabayo said.

Dr. Rizal Aportadera, who is based in Davao City, wrote the US magazine *Diver* [and *Asian Diver* magazine] that if the government officials would not do anything to stop the killing, the great whale shark would soon be extinct.

Stop the slaughter

"The slaughter of whale sharks must be stopped," Misamis Oriental Gov. Vicente Emano said. He said he would ask all the town mayors to help in the campaign to stop the commercial fishing and slaughter of the sharks. Magadapa Paporo, DA assistant regional director for fisheries, said fishermen find it easy to catch the fish since it follows a migratory path between Camiguin Island and Misamis Oriental.

Armed with harpoons, the fishermen usually operate two pumpboats which sail from Talisayan at 5 p.m. and return at 10 p.m. Many of them come from as far as Bohol and Zamboanga.

Paporo said that most of the whale sharks are brought to Barangay Nabuod in Talisayan. Every day, the beaches of the village are littered with the bones and dried blood of whale sharks, he said.

Diver Roel Uy, whose family owns the Alibuag Dive Resort, reported to the DoT that the number of whale sharks is

decreasing each year because of wanton fishing and slaughter.

From 1990 to 1994, Uy said, about 100 whale sharks could be seen near Camiguin. In 1996, he said, they observed only 30.

"Despite the drastic drop of its population, the killing of the docile creatures continues," Uy said in a report.

5 killed a day

Salay Mayor Angelo Capistrano said that in the waters off their town, FIVE WHALE SHARKS ARE KILLED EVERY DAY.

A DA report said the fins, prized most by traders, can fetch P2,000. The skin sells at P11 per kilo. Most fishermen would dry the meat for five days, washing it with water for the first three days.

Dried meat sells from P30 to P50 per kilo. Fresh meat is cheaper at P4.

Buyers from Davao, Cebu and Manila usually flock to Talisayan for their supply of whale shark meat.

Marilyn Baldo of DoT Region 10 said they received information that Chinese-Filipino businessmen from Binondo, Manila, are buying whale sharks from local businessmen. An entire fish, she said, sells for about P14,000.

Protecting the sharks

"I think the DENR is only good in protecting mangroves. I think this is already a cause for alarm," Paporo said.

Paporo said they plan to organize a Fisheries and Resource Management Councils in all Misamis Oriental towns, especially in Talisayan.

The councils, he said, would be composed mainly of fisherfolk whose livelihood could be affected by the campaign to protect the whale shark.

Paporo said the councils would map out strategies to seek alternative sources of livelihood. "The fishermen could act as guides and bring the tourists out to watch the whale sharks," he added.

Already, the DoT has started two expeditions to watch the whale sharks as they swim off the waters between Camiguin and Misamis Oriental.

"We don't want the poor fishermen to starve, too. We have to find a suitable way to balance the two needs," Pabayon said.

Reprinted from The Philippine Daily Inquirer

WHALE SHARK SLAUGHTER -- CAUGHT ON FILM

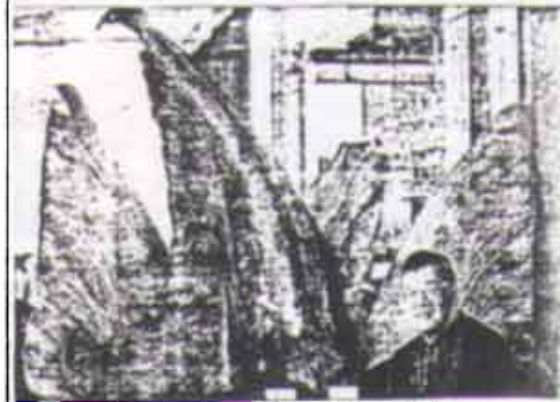
Michelle Marie P. Apotadera, M.D. daughter of Rizal D. Apotadera, M.D., who reported the slaughter of whale sharks in the Philippines, confirms that on April 19th a local television show, "Magandang Gabi Bayan" (Good Evening to the Nation), aired footage of fishermen hunting down a nine-metre whale shark, spearing it, and watching the shark struggle for three hours. The journalist covering the slaughter said that parts of the animal are being sold in HongKong and elsewhere. The footage was filmed on the Island of Bohol,

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Philippines and is "very clear and vivid." The Apotadera's have taped the segment and are sending a copy to HQ.

Sharks' Fins in high demand in Singapore

More sharks' fins are being eaten in Singapore than ever - about 500,000 kg annually, up from about 400,000 kg five years ago, estimates Mr. William Goh, managing director of Yeow Seng, a major importer of sharks' fins. "This has pushed the annual market for sharks' fins in Singapore to more than S\$100 million, an increase of 35% over the past five years," says Mr. Yio Kang Leng, managing director of Chin Guan Hong, another big supplier of sharks' fins in Singapore. "This boom - coupled with a dwindling shark population - has boosted the price of frozen sharks' fins from around S\$135 a kg in 1991 to S\$150 today, and dried sharks' fins from S\$350 a kg to about S\$400," he says. Singapore restaurants generally use fins from sharks such as the blue shark, white shark and black-tip shark. In great demand are basking shark fins, known as *tin kow*, which costs about \$400 per kg. Top of The Plaza Chinese Cuisine Restaurant recently sponsored a three-week Sharks' Fin Fiesta featuring *tin kow*, at S\$88 per bowl. It proved so popular that customers consumed five fins in four days.



Mr. Robert Chan from Top of the Plaza restaurant in Singapore with some of the biggest and most expensive basking shark's fins in Singapore. *Photo by Stephanie Yeon.*

Eleven Thai-Chinese or Thai-Teochew sharks' fin restaurants have opened in the last six years, including three chains: Klongtan Ping, Thai Village Shark's Fin and Siamese Fins which lures crowds by giving children a half price discount on shark fin.

From Singapore Sunday Times

RARE SHARK CAUGHT

GENEVA, April 10 (Reuter) - Malaysian fishermen have caught a shark thought to have been extinct, the World Conservation Union said on Thursday.

The Borneo River Shark, a freshwater species, was caught in the Kinabatangan river in Sabah state, northern Borneo earlier this year and kept in a tank of formalin.

It was identified last month by a visiting team of scientists. The only other preserved specimen, in a Viennese museum, was taken from a Borneo river some 100 years ago, the Swiss-based agency said.

Global Shark Attack File

CASE SA-0234: In the late afternoon of December 10, 1996, Stephen Cross was surfing in Sardinia Bay, South Africa, when he was attacked by a white shark. The shark approached from behind and below, striking the surfboard with great force and dumping the surfer into the water. The shark bit the surfer's forearm and thrashed its head from side-to-side, which flung the surfer onto its back. Cross pounded on the shark's head and was released. Another surfer, Carl Walton, helped the injured surfer back onto his board. "I was about 200 metres out and losing blood...and still had to paddle through a deep inshore channel," said Cross. "Just to make my day there wasn't a wave in sight." As the pair headed inshore, the shark surfaced behind them, severed Cross' surfboard leash, then submerged. Cross and Walton reached shore without further incident. The injured surfer was transported to a hospital in Port Elizabeth in the back of a surfer's kombi (mini-van). Thirty sutures were needed to close lacerations in the surfer's arm. *Case Investigator: Andrew Gifford*

On Monday May 1997, 54-year-old Wilbur Wood was spearfishing off Spanish Key in the northern Bahama Islands, when a shark attempted to snatch a fish on the end of Wood's spear. Unfortunately,

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the shark missed the fish and bit Wood's arm, severing an artery. His girlfriend, Gail Brooks, was credited with saving his life by using dental floss to tie off an artery. "She clamped the artery with her fingers, went back on the boat and with other people's help, she found the artery and that's all it took," Dr. Imad Tabry said. Wood, a Gainesville veterinarian, underwent surgery at Broward General Medical Center in Miami. It is not yet known if Wood will regain full use of his arm. *Case reported by Stan Waterman*

Unidentified chondrichthyan ashore in Philippines

On December 25, 1996 a large unidentified animal was found dead on the beach of Claveria, Masbate, Burias Island. The fisherfolk there said that it was the first time they had ever seen such an animal. Its head was 1.5 ft in diameter and resembled that of a turtle, its neck was almost one foot (diameter / length?), and its tail looked like that of a crocodile. The dorso-ventral measurement was about 5'3". Although no pictures were taken, its backbone, skull, pieces of skin and muscles were dried, other portions were preserved in denatured alcohol. The BFAR concluded that the animal was a chondrichthyan based on their identification of the "backbone" sample as a cartilaginous centrum, and thought the animal was a gigantic ray. Most of the

scientists suspected that the carcass was that of a whale shark. However, local people, who were shown pictures of a whale shark, were positive that the pictures did not depict the creature found on the beach.

Sharks at Great Risk in Indian Seas

NEW DELHI: India has emerged as a major world supplier of sharks' fins along with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives even as an influential global environment group gave a clarion call to help curtail over-exploitation.

Two reports released by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) said unregulated shark fishing would put the "tigers of the sea" at peril as they grow slowly, mature late and produce few offspring. Though demand exists for shark meat, skin, liver oil and cartilage, sharks' fins are considered a delicacy in many South Asian countries.

According to available data, India exported more than 2,000 tonnes of sharks' fins worth Rs 64 million last year. The figure might be much higher as there is a tendency to under-report the volume of sharks landed, said the study conducted by Traffic-India and the IUCN-the World Conservation Union. Traffic subsidiaries carried out similar studies in different parts of the world and presented its findings before the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization member nations meeting in Rome in late March

1997. Due to late sexual maturation and low fertility rates, shark population replacement rates are very low.

According to the study, there is a direct relationship between stock size and recruitment, with population replacement rates being very low. As many as 380 shark species have so far been identified and recorded all over the world and about 40 of them are found in the Indian seas.

The weight of a shark varies from a few hundred kilograms to about four tonnes. Because fins constitute a small portion of the total weight of a shark, fishermen have to catch a large number of sharks to meet the export requirements. Even though the meat is generally consumed by locals, many a shark is discarded alive, maimed and dying, after its valuable fins have been chopped off.

According to Traffic, preservation of different shark species is crucial because they play an important role in maintaining health and the fragile balance of the marine ecosystem.

Once a mere by-catch, sharks are slowly becoming target catch because of spiraling prices of sharks' fins in the international market. Depending on the quality and species, one kilogram of shark fin fetches anything between Rs. 4,000 to Rs. 10,000 in the global market.

"Faint signals of sharks being threatened are already coming in with traditional fishermen contacted during the study testifying that of late there are not as many sharks as there once

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appeared to be," said Ms. Fahsmida Hanfi, the team leader. "However it is very difficult to quantify the impact of fishing as very little information exists on the levels of by-catch, survival of discards, and deep-sea shark populations."

CATCH THESE....

AWES & JAWS - a hands-on exhibit featuring more than 30 species of sharks and rays, interactive activities, and an amazing touch tank - opens June 14, 1997 at The Florida Aquarium, 701 Channelside Drive, Tampa, Florida.

SHARKS & DIVERS - published by Skin Diver Magazine - will be on newstands in June, July & August. Don't miss Tamara Collins' superb article about SRI's whale shark study on page 76. This magazine is a collector's edition!

BENEATH THE SEA

Beneath the Sea Dive Symposium and Trade Show was a great success thanks to the generosity of Ziggy who provided SRI with an excellent forum to interact with the sport diving community. Special thanks go to members who staffed SRI's booth: Marcia McMahan, Paula Kovach, Marie Levine and Paul Sutherland. Paul also presented a seminar on SRI's whale shark tagging program to a standing-room-only audience!

MORE MEGAMOUTHS!

A five-metre, 1000 kg female megamouth shark was obtained near Toba, a seaside town on the eastern coast of central Japan, equidistant from Osaka and Nagoya.

Two other megamouths were recently reported one from Brazil and a 1.8-metre shark from the coast of Senegal, the smallest specimen found to date.

AUSTRALIA PROTECTS GREAT WHITE SHARKS

Ian Gordon of the Australian Shark Conservation Society reports: "In Australia, the State of South Australia now joins Tasmania, New South Wales and Queensland in protecting the great white shark. It is felt that the States of Victoria and Western Australia will follow with protective legislation in the near future."

"The South Australia State Government has given the go ahead for the protection of the Great White Shark. In announcing the move the Minister for Primary Industries, Rob Kerin, said it followed an extensive two-year state-wide review and subsequent national review instigated by the Liberal Government in September last year. Mr Kerin said Cabinet has given the go ahead to draw up regulations to ensure the total protection of the white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*) - a move which will prohibit the

capture, holding or killing of the species.

"The use of blood, bone, meat, offal or skin of a animal (other than in the rock lobster pot or fish trap) within 2 nautical miles of the mainland of the State or all Islands and Reefs of the State which are exposed at the low water mark will also be prohibited.

"Regulations will also be drafted to amend the National Parks and Wildlife act 1972 to extend the boundaries of the Sir Joseph Banks Group Conservation Park, Neptune Island Conservation Park and the Pages Conservation Park to include the waters within two nautical miles of the low water mark of these islands. However the Minister said there would be exemptions to the berlying restrictions for approved cage viewing operators pursuant to the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972. and subject to conditions established by PISA Fisheries and the Department of Environment and National Resources.

"There is still a great deal we don't know about the species - research proposals are being developed by a National White Shark Research Working Group which aims to improve our knowledge of the abundance, distribution and biological understanding of the species.

"It is anticipated that gamefishers will have the opportunity to participate in these research programs and will be provided exemptions to catch, tag and release white sharks to assist in assessing the abundance

and movement patterns of the white shark.

"This provision will be subject to the approval of a code of practice in fishing for white shark to be developed by the Game Fishing Association of Australia.

Mr Kerin said the basis for protection of the white shark is the uncertain status of the shark, the importance of the white shark as the apex predator in the ocean, and the associated risk of ecological extinction.

"The proposed research will address the issue of accidental capture and mortality - however a prohibition on the deliberate killing of the white shark is necessary to ensure it's long term survival.

"In response to the increasing pressures on fisheries to comply with environmental requirements we will continue with research monitoring the development of by-catch reducing devices and fishing methods," Mr Kerin said. "This will not impact on the ability of game fishers to fish for other shark species such as bronze whalers and hammerhead, which are more common across a wider range and can be easily taken on hook sizes smaller than 12/0 and wire traces smaller than 2mm in diameter. It is unlikely that white sharks will be captured by accident using permitted gear."

"Although big game fishers land very few sharks in South Australia each year (less than five) a large number are tagged and released with an unknown mortality rate.

"An extension of the boundaries of a number of conservation parks is required to allow the management of the cage-viewing operations to come under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources."

SHARKS & C.I.T.E.S.

Sharks have been the focus of much attention within CITES (the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species) after passage of the Shark Resolution at the 9th CITES meeting in 1994. Sharks will again be on the agenda in Zimbabwe in June 1997 at the 10th CITES meeting.

A number of shark species are seriously depleted and international trade is one of the major factors for declining shark populations throughout the world, although at present no cartilaginous fish is listed on the CITES Appendices.

CITES is restricted to conservation issues involving international trade and has no management authority. Thus, listing of species on CITES only requires that countries involved in trade demonstrate that export of the listed species is not detrimental to the biological status of its population. The listing, however, draws attention to the need for domestic management of declining populations. Appendix I prohibits trade in listed species and Appendix I requires that any trade be carefully monitored.

The shark resolution passed at the 1994 CITES meeting

mandated the CITES Animals Committee to undertake a study of the biological and trade status of sharks. Three reports - from the US government, TRAFFIC and the SSG - were submitted to the Animals Committee in Prague in 1996. The reports were combined by the Committee into a single document which will be presented at the Zimbabwe meeting. The document affirms the need for improved species-specific fishery, trade and biological data by all Parties and UN FAO, and an increase in research and management efforts for elasmobranchs.

ATTENTION: DIVERS! Whale Shark Weekend

To date, the SRI dive team has tagged 166 whale sharks along the coast of South Africa and Mozambique. Any other divers who wish to participate in the tagging program and can get to Ponta do Ouro, Mozambique by July 13th, should call or fax Andrew Gifford at 011-27-31-764-0349 as soon as possible.

We are sad to report the death of Sid Cook on May 2, 1997. Sid, a Fisheries Biologist, artist, poet, Senior Editor of *Chondros*, and Shark Specialist Group Northeast Pacific Regional Vice Chair, will be greatly missed by all of us who were fortunate enough to know him.

"Sid was a rare combination of compassion, generosity, brilliance, artistic skill, lateral thinking, rationality, sheer honesty, openness, courage, cheerfulness and conviction. A fighter who kept fighting and kept working against odds that few of us have had to face, for most of his life. An inspiration for all who worked with him, he was always open to discussion, to suggestion, and to reason. His ilk are few and far between, and his passing leaves a gap that will never be filled. In living and keeping his life alive within our minds, we celebrate his life and times and works. Goodbye and hello, Sid."

Leonard Compagno

Shark Cartilage Found Ineffective as Cancer Treatment

On May 19, 1997, results of a study presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology in Denver,

Colorado, concluded that shark cartilage was inactive in patients with advanced stages of breast, colon, lung and prostate cancer. *Midwestern Regional Medical Center press release.*

MEETINGS

American Elasmobranch Society 13th Annual Meeting: June 26-July 2, 1997, Seattle Campus, University of Washington. For more information contact Dr. Sanford Moss, Department of Biology, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, 285 Old Westport Road, N. Dartmouth, MA 01747-2300, USA. Fax (508) 999-8196 or Email: smoss@umass.edu

5th Indo-Pacific Fish Conference and Shark Specialist Group Meeting: November 3 - 8, 1997, ORSTOM Centre and South Pacific Commission Headquarters, Noumea, New Caledonia. View the web page at <http://www.mnhn.fr/sfi/Congres/IPFC5.html> or contact the Conference Secretariat in Noumea by fax at (687) 26-43-26.

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