

Shark Research Institute Member Newsletter



Shark Research Institute Global Headquarters

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Scientific Advisory Committee Drafts Plan for Indian Whale Shark Research



Whale Shark Parade in Porbander



*By Jennifer V. Schmidt, Ph.D.,
Director, SRI DNA Study*

Until May 2001 whale sharks were hunted off the Gujarat coast, but the concerted efforts of SRI, filmmaker Mike Pandey, and two conservation organizations in India, Reef Watch Marine Conservation and the National Institute of

Watersports, resulted in the government of India protecting whale sharks by placing them on Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act. At the same time, the Indian government confiscated all whale shark materials and put strong penalties in place to prevent poaching. In 2002, India and the Philippines successfully nominated the whale shark for CITES Appendix II.

Beginning in 2004, the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) and the International Foundation for Animal Welfare (IFAW), with support from Tata Chemicals Limited, instituted a campaign to increase awareness of whale sharks among the people of Gujarat. The campaign employed a conservation-oriented traveling street play and

entreaties by cultural leaders to revere the whale shark. Indian fisherman now release whale sharks that are caught in fishing nets, with 80 whale sharks freed since hunting ceased. The end of whale shark hunting in India opened the way for scientific research aimed at understanding these magnificent animals.

I recently had the opportunity to participate in the first meeting of the Scientific Advisory Council (SAC) for the WTI program on whale shark research in Gujarat. The SAC is composed of an international team of scientists, and also includes: Vivek Menon, Executive Director of WTI, Rachel Graham of the Wildlife Conservation Society, Mark Meekan of the Australian Institute for Marine Science, Brad Norman of Ecocean, John Keesing of CSIRO Australia, Beena Kumari of the Indian Space Research Organization, M. Wafar and Vijayakumar Rathod of the National Institute of Oceanography, Gulshad Mohammed of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, B.C. Choudhary of the Wildlife Institute of India, and Dhires Joshi, Sandeep Tiwari, Rahul Kaul and Shibani Chaudhury, all with WTI.

The SAC met November 26 and 27 at the Circuit House in Porbander, Gujarat, India, where we drafted a five-year plan for whale shark research off the Gujarat coast. The plan includes satellite tracking to identify whale shark movements, habitat studies to understand what draws whale sharks to the area, photo identification to establish the numbers of whale sharks and genetic analysis to compare the Gujarat animals to other whale shark populations.

Following the scientific meeting, we were invited to participate in the annual Whale Shark Festival held in Porbander. The festival featured a parade with a life-sized inflatable model of a whale shark (known as Vhali, "the dear one", in Gujarati) pulled by a decorated camel, and more than 1000 local students dressed in whale shark shirts!

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White Shark Teeth & Jaws on ebay

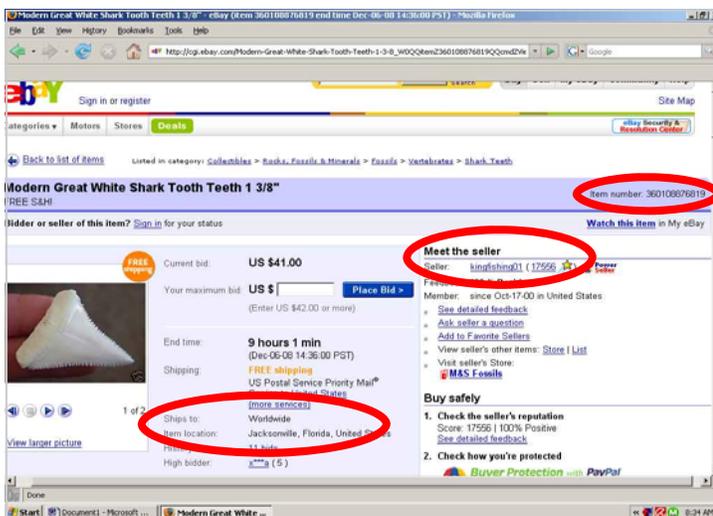
At the 2004 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), nations opposed to listing the white shark on claimed there was no international trade in the species. Screen shots of eBay offerings of white shark jaws and teeth proved otherwise, and white sharks were granted CITES Appendix II protection.

The Appendix II listing means that white shark jaws and teeth may still be traded domestically, but it is a violation of international law to ship them across international borders. For example, a seller in the USA cannot ship white shark jaws or even a tooth to a buyer in Canada because both countries are members of CITES.

Concerned that the trade in white shark material was still continuing on eBay, SRI contacted sellers that were shipping jaws and teeth "Worldwide" and told them about the CITES listing. Most thanked us and said they would comply with CITES, but a few refused.

Next, SRI contacted the U.S. Attorney's Office and offered to help monitor the illegal trade on eBay. The US federal attorney's office assigned Special Agent Roy Torres to work with us, and SRI's leads are investigated by the appropriate agents.

SRI is asking members to assist with monitoring eBay trade by sending screen shots of violations to SRI. Each screen shot must include the eBay number, the seller's eBay name and a photo of the item (see below). To make a screen shot, depress the print screen key (PrtScan). Next, go to your program list and open Accessories, click on Paint, and then Paste. This creates a bitmap file. Name the file with the date (e.g 2008.12.10 & your name) and email it to SRILevine@gmail.com



Expeditions

Spaces for sport divers are available on the following expeditions. Please note: These are *not* dive vacations; they are research expeditions. All participants will be expected to assist SRI scientists to gather and record data, and thus costs are partially deductible from your US Federal income taxes. *Spaces fill quickly.* To reserve a space or obtain more details, go to:

www.sharks.org/expeditions

Whale Sharks

Utila, Honduras: March 1-21, March 21-28, March 28-April 4, April 18-25, 2009. \$1,760 per diver.

Holbox, Mexico: June 23-27, 2009, \$1,500 per person.

Sandtiger Sharks

North Carolina: May 15-17, 2009. \$660 per diver.

India...continued from page 1

The committee members were granted a place of honor atop a troop of camels - if you have never ridden a camel, it is an experience not to be missed! The entire town turned out to march in the parade, which concluded with speeches by leaders in whale shark conservation and legislation, and a performance of the street play that figured so prominently in ending whale shark hunting in Gujarat.

Following our time in Porbander, members of the SAC were escorted on a sightseeing trip organized by WTI. We visited the historic city of Diu, and went on safari in the Gir Forest National Park. Gir is the last remaining home of the Asiatic lion, and during our three days in the park we had several opportunities to observe these endangered animals at close range.

Sadly, we learned during our stay in Porbander of the terrorist attacks in Mumbai. Having just left Mumbai the day before, our proximity to these attacks was alarming to those of us fortunate enough to live in more peaceful areas of the world. Our hearts went out to our Indian colleagues who must deal with such violence daily, and to all those who lost family and friends in these terrible incidents.

For a history of whale shark conservation in India, go to the publications page on our website and download Commander Arun Patil's reports of 2001, 2002 & 2004.

Thank You to Our Supporters!

We are very grateful for the support of:

- **The Adikes Family Foundation**
- **Adventure Aquarium**
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- **Greg Sparks**
- **Underwater Adventures Aquarium**
- **Underwater Video Images**
- **The Wave Foundation**
- **World Wildlife Fund**

It Happened AGAIN!



The *Coral Princess* was blocked from calling in Costa Rica for a third time by fishermen protesting

new regulations. A spokesperson for Princess Cruises reported the 1,970-passenger vessel once again had to turn away from the Costa Rican port of Puntarenas after fishermen in industrial fishing boats barred the entrance. The fishermen are protesting a law that bans shark finning -- the practice of removing the fins of sharks while still at sea.

Princess' Julie Benson says the line has sent a letter to the Costa Rican Minister of Tourism expressing its concern over the recurring incidents. "We have been in ongoing discussions with Costa Rican officials on this issue and are hopeful it can be resolved with no further disruption to our calls there," she says.

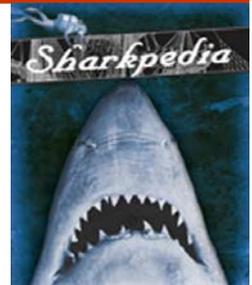
Surfers promote Shark Conservation

Eleven top South African artists will use surfboards as canvases in a national exhibition to highlight the predicament of one of Africa's most endangered predators — the shark. The exhibit will be in Cape Town until December 3, and then move to KwaZulu-Natal in 2009. Also on show is the work of photographer Tom Peschak who says, "Sharks are the most important animals in our oceans. They sit on top of the food chain and without them, nature's delicate balance will collapse. For example, sharks control the populations of large predatory fish on coral reefs, ensuring that the numbers of smaller grazing fish remain high enough to prevent coral reefs from being smothered and killed by algae. Sharks also keep predatory rays in check, which in turn allows shellfish populations to thrive. My mission as a conservation photographer is to create visuals that make a difference. I hope that my images will give a voice to sharks and other marine animals and, in turn, contribute in a small way to safeguarding our planet's marine heritage for future generations."

The surfboard art exhibition culminates in a special charity auction for the National Sea Rescue Institute and Shark Spotters. The exhibition is followed by the opening of the Wavescapes Surf Film Festival — again with a KZN bent. In addition to a screening of the Shaun Tomson movie *Bustin' Down the Door*, which premiered in Durban in July, it will feature the documentary *Zulu Surf Riders*, which tells the story of Umzumbe surfing twins Cyril and Mishak Mqade who are making waves as competitive surfers.

A New Book for Kids

SRI staff edited and wrote many sections of *Sharkpedia*. Intended for ages 7 and up, the book mixes textbook shark profiles with entertaining cinematic and classic literary references. Young shark trackers will love to hunt through all of the special features offered, including hundreds of photos, diagrams, maps and illustrations that bring the deep to light. The book also comes with a pull-out map and a large shark poster.



www.sharks.org/sharkstore_nonfiction.htm

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WE'RE ON THE WEB
WWW.SHARKS.ORG

Looking for a Gift for Someone Special?



The holiday season is upon us, and SRI may be able to make gift shopping much easier. After you've made your list and checked it twice, you can cross off everyone on your list by giving them a whale shark. SRI has tagged more than 600 sharks. Each adoption includes a personalized adoption certificate with the name of the guardian, the shark, and when and where it was tagged. Not only is your gift tax-deductible, it makes a great present, especially for those hard-to-buy-for loved ones.

And look for gifts in our winter auction. We have some very unusual items including **a week's stay in a castle!**

To visit the auction, click the eBay button on our home page: www.sharks.org

Meet SRI Staff at Upcoming Shows



January 15-17, 2009 **Surf Expo** at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Florida.
www.surfexpo.com. SRI's booth is #572-South

March 28-29, 2009 **Beneath the Sea** at the Meadowlands Convention Center in Secaucus, New Jersey. www.beneaththesea.org SRI's booth is #117, and both Matt Potenski and Dean Fessler will be presenting seminars.

March 28-29, 2009 **London International Dive Show** at ExCel, London, UK.
www.diveshows.co.uk

YEAR OF THE SHARK — 2009

2009 has been declared the "International Year of the Shark" by a group of shark conservation organizations, motivated by the current rate of decline among shark populations worldwide. The group privately exchanges ideas, plans, and intellectual and written material in order to facilitate and boost mutual efforts to protect sharks.

It has been predicted that some species will be extinct within 10 to 15 years. Studies of open ocean sharks estimate 80 to 90% of heavily-fished species are gone. Yet sharks are still fished intensively, and fished for shark fin soup. The oceans have evolved over hundreds of millions of years with sharks as apex predators, and their loss will have profound effects on the ecological balance of the sea.

Please download a *Year of the Shark* poster, print copies and post them in as many places as possible. You can download a poster on our Alerts page, or go to

www.year-of-the-shark-2009.org/downloads/YOS.poster1.English.pdf The poster is also available in Spanish, Chinese, French, Finnish, Italian, German, Swedish, Catalan, and Bosnian-Serbian.

