

Shark Conservation Society Newsletter - Autumn 2013



FROM THE EDITOR

As I am sure you are all well aware by now, SCS is a truly unique organisation. We are volunteer run with low actual office costs and for this reason the money we raise goes where you want it to – shark conservation. This is not unique but what differentiates the Society from other organisations is its ability to really go out there and make a difference with limited budgets. Everyone reading this Newsletter plays a part so thank you for your continued support over the years, it really is the only way the Society has and will be able to continue with its work.

However, as these challenging times continue, we are asking all of you for some extra support. No one likes asking for money, but it would be really great for SCS if we could raise a little bit extra each year. You might think the easiest solution would be to go and recruit a load of new supporters but this has never been our number one goal. We pride ourselves on the fact that our supporters take a genuine interest in the work we do. Many of you join so that you are eligible to come on expeditions and therefore recruiting hundreds of new supporters would mean a lot of disappointed people each time expedition dates are published. This is certainly not what either you or we want!

For this reason we are asking all of you, if at all possible, to do something to try and raise a bit of extra funding for SCS. Whether it's a cake sale, a marathon or even just increasing your annual fee by a few pounds each year then we would be extremely grateful if you would consider giving up a bit of extra time or money to help us continue the work we are doing for shark conservation. We can also take the hard work out of the fundraising by sending someone to do a talk at a local dive club, school, aquarium or anywhere else you fancy! As long as there's someone to shake a bucket at the end of the talk then we'll happily do the rest. Please just get in touch with the office - we need your help.

Before anyone thinks, “Oh the next thing coming will be an increase in annual fees”, then fear not. The Board have again decided to keep the annual fees at £20/year. This has been done for good reason and that is because we fully understand how tough times are at the moment, and for those of you who renew your subscriptions year after year we are truly grateful. It’s all of you that make the Society and we don’t want to put any of our supporters off renewing for another year. If you can come up with a genius idea to put a few extra coins in the SCS piggy-bank then we’d love to hear from you and, if not, please just renew those subscriptions and help us continue our work.

P.S. Apologies for the slightly more serious editorial this edition, so to end on a more light-hearted note, I saw a man at the beach a few weeks ago yelling, “Help, shark! Help!” I knew I just laughed to myself that shark wasn’t going to help him!...

Mark Boothman



FROM THE OFFICE

In theory, and hopefully, shark conservation has taken some massive leaps forward in the last year. The Europeans finally brought the Spanish and Portuguese to a point where their opposition to the FNA (Fins Naturally Attached) laws were dropped and the new measures became law for all European countries. Put simply this means that any fins landed anywhere in Europe, or anywhere in the world from a European vessel have to have a shark attached! Finally an end to finning in Europe.

In Beijing the consumption of shark fin soup is decreasing, but it will probably be years before this becomes a national phenomenon.

The SCS expedition to Lebanon had to be delayed until September 2014 due to fears that the Syrian civil war might start to engulf Lebanon. SCS has never concentrated on the obvious or the easy, and this is now the second expedition that has had to be delayed due to war/civil unrest (the first was Bahrain).

As I reported in my last “From The Office”, Egypt, Edremit Bay (Turkey) and a Kuwait expedition to research the Smoothtooth Blacktip are all still planned. However the global economic downturn has affected expeditions and people have had to pull out due to having lost their jobs, etc.

When expeditions are not part-sponsored by governments they can be expensive for volunteers and the Society is very aware of this, but we are a small non profit organisation that doesn't have money to lose, so volunteer contributions are what makes expeditions happen.

Jacqui writes:

After countless decades of being married to Richard nothing surprises me anymore; so when, on the Azores expedition, I got a call from him saying he had suffered a "little" shark bite I wasn't surprised that this "little" bite needed 30 stitches. I should point out this happened on the boat while a shark was being processed prior to release. Hours of swimming with sharks previously had produced one or two occasions when over friendly animals had to be shoved away but with no damage done. Yet another occasion of it being safer to be in the water with sharks than on boats! Well done Emma and Andy for some effective first aid action.

SCS expeditions always bring surprises and I am well known for adopting and feeding cats wherever I find them. The July Azores expedition however produced a "first" when volunteer Lesley Guinn adopted a dog! Lots of fun and games including a 2.00 a.m. visit from the dog's owner who didn't realise that Lesley had adopted his animal!

Denise writes:

As the Society grows so does the admin. Sorry to bang on again but we really do need supporters to keep us updated with changes of address (e-mail), and to renew their subscriptions. We know times are hard for many but your £20 subs are what keeps us going, so many thanks, and please keep supporting us.



SOCIETY NEWS

NEW DIRECTOR

The Board is very grateful to Tony Bennett who has agreed to become a director of the Society. Tony will be a familiar face to many as he has been on several expeditions and is always a popular, amusing and valuable volunteer. Tony will be a great addition, and we look forward to having him 'on board'!

NEW HLM

Wilfred Chivell has accepted Honorary Life Membership (HLM) of SCS. Wilfred is a committed "action type" conservationist who founded the Dyer Island Conservation Trust. He is also the owner of Marine Dynamics (a Gansbaai shark ecotourism operator) and a well known figure in marine wildlife circles in South Africa's Western Cape. Within SCS there has always been the belief that in general life, and in conservation, there are the 'doers' and the 'talkers' - Wilfred is very much a doer!

HLMs – WE NEED YOUR HELP!

The Society now has an illustrious and wide ranging list of HLMs. From committed shark conservationists to well-known celebrities, our HLMs add significant weight and credibility. We are however always on the lookout for other names so if you have any useful contacts or other ideas about who may be able to add their support then do please get in touch.

MAKO CAUGHT OFF WALES

On 19th July 2013, Actor Julian Lewis Jones caught a 200lb (90 kg) shortfin mako shark off Pembrokeshire. The shark was approximately 6ft long and it is not clear whether it was successfully released or killed.

Makos are endangered and are rare in UK waters so we hope it was successfully released.

THE GWS AUGUST STORY

Almost to the day each year we can now predict when the next great white will arrive on British shores ready to terrify and slaughter the British public. This year was no exception when a British tabloid published photographs of a blue shark which had been bitten by another shark on its capture by anglers. Richard, amongst other shark experts, examined the photographs and it was agreed by all that these bites were inflicted by a Requiem or Carcharhinus shark, not by the dreaded great white.

Whether there'll be another British great white story this year remains to be seen, but you can almost bet your house that you won't have to wait longer than 12 months for the next one.

DYER ISLAND POPULATION DYNAMICS RESEARCH

Between 2007 and 2012 the Dyer Island Conservation Trust (DICT) of Gansbaai, South Africa, and local cage diving operator Marine Dynamics, carried out a pioneering study involving great white shark dorsal fin recognition.

Over 20,000 side-on photos of dorsal fins were collected in the Dyer Island area in the period. Like human finger prints dorsal fins are unique to each shark, and the researchers adapted a computerised fin recognition programme, which had previously been used for dolphins, to accurately identify individual sharks.

The analysis took more than three years to complete and the results have recently been published by DICT and are causing concern among scientists and conservationists. From the 20,000 photographs 532 individual sharks were identified. Another computer programme, called "Mark", was then used to extrapolate the open population of great whites in the Gansbaai area and numbers came to between 808 and 1008 sharks. The previous estimate was 2,000 which the new DICT research has now halved.

Researchers disagree with regard to the global population of great whites, but the generally accepted 'best guess' figure is between 3,000 and 5,000 individuals. The IUCN listed great whites as "vulnerable to extinction in the wild" before this new research. If the Gansbaai model is followed globally then the population could be half what it was thought to be despite the great white being CITES Appendix II listed, and despite it being protected in several countries including South Africa, Namibia, USA, Australia, Malta, Croatia and others.

The DICT research shows the need for great white shark monitoring in the places with known populations. 'Protections' and CITES listings are one thing, but we need to know if they are working, and if they are not then different action will be needed..... and fast!

Richard Peirce

SHARK REPELLANT WETSUITS

Australian businessman Craig Anderson and a colleague have developed wetsuits which, it is claimed, may help prevent shark attacks.

The blue and white 'Elude' suit has been designed to make divers less visible by drawing on research into the way sharks see their prey. A second design, the 'Diverter' has black and white stripes which are supposed to signal that surfers/divers are not good to eat!

University of Western Australia researcher Shaun Collin commented "many animals are repelled by a striped pattern which indicates the potential prey is unsafe to eat". Western Australia's government funded trials in which tiger sharks were seen ignoring the new striped wetsuits but attacked the traditional black ones.

Earth's growing population and the increasing use of wetsuits means more and more people take to the sea for recreation each year. Any device which helps keep people safe from any potential threat must be welcomed. However I would warn against over reliance on such devices when sharks are concerned. Common sense is still a good defence i.e. avoid swimming at dawn and dusk, avoid areas in which there are scent trails that may attract sharks (e.g. fish discards), avoid spear fishermen diving/free diving with their catches, research shark eco-tourism operators who are feeding to make sure they are competent and experienced, and follow best practice guidelines etc.

Richard Peirce

FIN TRAIL UPDATE

The story continues to develop and this is a film that still needs to be made. As was explained in the last newsletter all that is holding up the start of filming is the little matter of £300,000/£400,000. So once again we ask that you keep your eyes open for any shark obsessed billionaires!

RICHARD ON TWITTER

For all you Twitter users out there, Richard has now got his own Twitter page. His twitter user name is RichardPeirce@rpaconsult.

For all other Society news please see the "News Section" of the website.

BIRMINGHAM DIVE SHOW

The Birmingham Dive Show will be taking place on the weekend of 26th/27th October this year. A firm favourite for many of our supporters, this is a great opportunity to come and have a chat, meet up with old faces and peruse the stalls looking for a bargain. Whether you're after the latest BCD, a holiday to the Maldives or just fancy a day out with the chance to have a chat with some of your favourite "underwater celebrities" the Birmingham Dive Show is the place to be.

Please come and find the SCS stand when you're there (Stand no.1142). We love seeing supporters new and old, and if you're lucky you'll find yourself with a brand new pen or something equally great! I can already hear the din of our master salesman Bob pestering people to buy our wares. All for the good of shark conservation, of course...

PHOTO COMPETITION

Finally, all you budding photographers out there then please take note! SCS is launching its very own photo competition. We are not asking for professional masterpieces but instead we are looking for the quirkiest or most unusual shark photo taken from anywhere in the world.

The winning photo will appear in the next Newsletter and will be judged by the directors at our Spring board meeting. The prize is a choice of the following:

- A day's cage diving with Marine Dynamics if in South Africa
- Signed copies of all 6 of Richard's current books
- A day with Richard out of Padstow either fishing, snorkelling with seals, free diving with baskers, etc. (which it is, will depend on weather)

Please send your photos to members@sharkconsoc.com together with a brief caption of where you took the photo, when, species, etc. before April 15th 2014. For all those sending photos, please also indicate if you would not like your photo published in future newsletters.

PAST EXPEDITIONS



AZORES EXPEDITION REPORT – (Richard Peirce)

Full reports from the Azores trips in September 2012 and July 2013 are in the 'Expedition Reports' section of the website. September 2012 was adversely affected by hurricane Nadine which put paid to our being able to get to sea, and most of the time when we did get on the water the sharks seem to have decided that they didn't like surface turbulence and went deeper.

In July 2013 it was a totally different story and we had large numbers of blue sharks every day.

The expedition's local providers were Twin Peaks Diving who provided the shore base accommodation, the mini bus, diving kit and the boat all in a package. Our vessel, a large RIB, which was not an ideal platform for catching sharks for research but it was fast, good for diving and our only option. We knew we would have problems trying to work with large sharks in the water over the side of the boat. On the one hand the tubes on a RIB are nice soft structures to lean out over when working with sharks in the water, but on the other hand sharks teeth are quite good at putting holes and slashes in tubes! For this reason it was decided to only catch small sharks (+/- 1 metre) and to inboard them to process them prior to release. We were collecting fin tips for an Aberdeen University research programme, tagging for the UK Shark Tagging Programme, and noting sex and size for our records.

The next problem was that we weren't seeing any small sharks. Both males and females were right up to the top of their size ranges at 3 and 4 metres. Sharks below 2 metres in length were rare. This was wonderful from a watching and free diving point of view but very frustrating when trying to select small sharks to catch. Every day we had to move three or four times hoping to attract smaller sharks. The upshot was that out of frustration we were catching larger sharks than we should have because by comparison with others they looked small! We only managed to catch 4 sharks in 4 days. We had hoped for between 12 and 20 but due to the size issue this would have been stupid to attempt. The animals we did catch were all around 1.5 m up to 1.8 m and one of them did put a hole in the tube.

The circle hooks worked well and all sharks were processed and released quickly.



Shark number 4 ended up being called “Nipper” because he was too fast for Richard, and gave his foot a 30 stitch love bite while he was on board being DNA sampled and tagged. Richard doesn’t think that 3 bites in 25/30 years is bad, and this was the first time he had needed sewing up.

FUTURE EXPEDITIONS

September 2014 – Tyre, south Lebanon
 May, June or July 2015 – Edremit Bay, Turkey
 September 2015 – Either Kuwait Bay or Eastern Mediterranean (Egypt)

ADRIATIC EXPEDITION – September 2013

Due to the ever-escalating situation in the Middle East at the moment, we were forced to postpone the Lebanon expedition this year for very obvious reasons! Trying to work in that part of the world would not only be dangerous but virtually impossible with heightened security checks across the area.

The postponement of the Lebanon expedition left the Society only having worked in the Azores this year. It was therefore decided to go back to the Adriatic instead of Lebanon, as there is still a lot to be done in that region.

The September Adriatic expedition will focus on:

- * Tagging blue sharks for Dr. Alen Soldo
- * Gathering further data on the Kornati blue shark nursery area
- * Continuing to hope a great white will turn up in our chum slick!
- * Collaboration with Alen Soldo integrating the data gathered by SCS with other current research programmes.



LEBANON BRIEF

The proposed Lebanon expedition will work in three dimensions trying to gather data to augment existing records of species present:

- * Chumming and surface observation at sea
- * Market visits to identify species being landed
- * Examination of historical records

Edremit Bay in Turkey continues to be an area where juvenile great white sharks are recorded. SCS will work at previously recorded catch locations and hope to deploy satellite tags on up to 3 animals. As far as we are aware, this is the first time that any proper research has been done in this area.

The rediscovery of the Smoothtooth Blacktip by SCS in **Kuwait** in 2008 has indicated the need for more research on this species in what may be its last main population stronghold. Plans are afoot for either an expedition in due course. Keep an eye on the “News” section of the website for more details over the coming months.

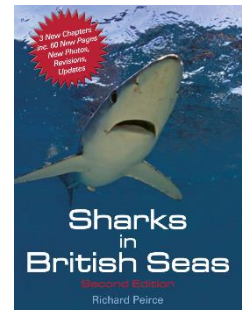
SCS IN CONSERVATION ACTION

- The September 2013 Adriatic expedition replaces the postponed Lebanon one and will collect more data to support the blue shark nursery area in Kornati. Alen Soldo is confident we will eventually get this area protected for juvenile blue sharks during the time we have identified them being present.
- Work continues in Kuwait to get a law passed protecting green sawfish. This would build on our successful efforts in Qatar and Bahrain
- The Society’s powerful new film “A Short Time Dying” has been received very well and will be a valuable tool in seeking measures to stop the Gulf sliding towards becoming a new ‘dead sea’.
- SCS images of porbeagles were used at CITES in Bangkok where the porbeagle secured Appendix 11 listing.
- Backing is being sought to enable SCS to undertake research off Kuwait on the Smoothtooth Blacktip. This area is almost certainly one of the few strongholds for this species so getting specific protection would be of great value.
- New research from DICT in South Africa has highlighted the white shark’s sensitivity to various marine factors including oxygen levels, water temperature and salinity etc. so it is clear that if the Bantamsklip nuclear power station were to go ahead the affects on the world’s main great white hotspot would be adverse. SCS will continue to play its role in seeking to block this potentially disastrous development.

SHARK SHOPPING

We continue to stock our usual range of items which you can order either online or by calling the office. There are however a couple of new additions that are worth mentioning.

The first is the latest edition of Richard's much acclaimed, *Sharks in British Seas*. This 2nd edition contains 3 new chapters, as well as updates and revisions to previous chapters. Such is our level of understanding and knowledge about these incredible animals, revisions and updates are always necessary as new information comes to light. Richard encapsulates all this new information plus loads more and for only just over a tenner it's well worth it!



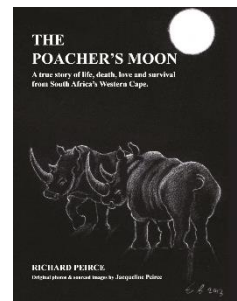
Another new addition is a book which is literally still hot off the presses. Although not shark related it will be of interest to many as it concerns wildlife conservation in South Africa. Called *The Poacher's Moon* it is the true story of attacks by poachers on rhinos in three private game reserves. Higgins and Lady are two rhinos which survived having their horns hacked out of their heads, and it is their story. It is also the story of other rhinos which didn't survive, and of rhino poaching in South Africa.

A portion of the net proceeds from sales of *The Poacher's Moon* will be donated by Richard and Jacqui Peirce to "on the ground" rhino protection against poaching. In addition, Richard will send out a free copy of *Shark Attack Britain* to any SCS supporters who order a copy of the new book.

Here's what some of the reviews have said...

"*The Poacher's Moon* is a fantastic account of what happened at Fairy Glen, and I am sure it will be a big success not only as a true story but also from an educational perspective. Reading *The Poacher's Moon* brought back both painful and happy memories. As someone who wasn't there at the time of the tragic events, Richard has captured what happened with almost uncanny accuracy."

- Pieter de Jager, Owner of **Fairy Glen Reserve**



"After we did the first horn treatment Richard interviewed me several times both on the phone and at the Inverdoorn reserve. *The Poacher's Moon* is a realistic actual account of rhino horn poaching today. I am glad *The Poacher's Moon* mentions the treatment we used which I believe is an effective way to defend the species. Richard Peirce is an experienced and dedicated conservationist and writer and has used his skills to portray a true picture of the barbarity happening to rhino and other species in Africa. A disturbing but very good read."

- Damien Vergnaud, **Rhino Protect Founder**

"*The Poacher's Moon* has brought back vivid memories of the tragedy at the Aquila Game Reserve in 2011. From the sadness and devastation a positive was created and Saving Private Rhino.org was born. This organisation has led to arrests, ivory and horn worth millions has been seized, and rangers trained in anti-poaching tactics. My thanks to Richard Peirce for his dedication to Africa's rhino, and I applaud

his efforts to keep the poaching epidemic at the forefront of everyone's mind. "

- Searl Derman, Owner of **Aquila Game Reserve**

If any SCS supporter would like signed and personalised copies of either book then do get in touch with the office and Richard, of course, will be happy to help out.

All that remains for me to say is good luck with the photo competition, I hope to see many of you in Birmingham at the Dive Show and if you can come up with any fundraising ideas then we would love to hear from you. We will not be issuing balaclavas and sawn off shotguns, but will consider anything legal!

Thanks for your continued support.

All the best

Mark Boothman

Mark Boothman
Editor

