

Shark Conservation Society Newsletter 2012



FROM THE EDITOR

In the months since the last Newsletter, SCS has continued to demonstrate that it is a pioneering shark conservation organization. To all our Registered Supporters (RSs), Honorary Life Members (HLMs), expedition volunteers, and others who have helped the Society in many ways, whether you are a new face or old, we are all truly grateful for the continued support that you provide. I am confident that, if it were possible, the sharks themselves would be passing on their thanks!

In March 2012, SCS attended the London International Dive Show. Every time we attend a dive show, or other similar event, our intentions are threefold: 1. To raise as much money as possible. 2. To increase public awareness of the need for shark conservation and the Society's work; and, of course, 3. To sign up new RS's who pay a pivotal role in supporting our work and without whom we could not function. It is inevitable that over the course of 2 days in terms of recruiting new RS's, the 'spiel' gets better and more refined, but this year in London I had a really good example of just how effective SCS is and how proud of it we should all be.

A lady approached me to ask exactly what SCS is all about. "Well" I said, about to embark on what I hoped wasn't to become a monotonous diatribe for her, "SCS is an entirely volunteer based Society, and, apart from funding one Office Manager for a few mornings a week (and even if she puts in stacks more work than she gets paid for), we all do this for nothing, as a passion I suppose".

Immediately she lined up the fairly obvious next question, "So what is it that you've done for shark conservation?"

"We've got a long list of achievements and only 2 weeks ago the critically endangered Green Sawfish was given total protection in Bahraini waters. This comes just a couple of weeks before we are due to conduct a full research expedition in Bahrain to assess the shark populations both at sea and those being caught by fisherman and landed

in the local markets. This complements our recent expeditions to Qatar, which has also passed legislation to protect the Green Sawfish, and Kuwait. Both expeditions have re-written our knowledge of shark populations in the Gulf and have enabled us to focus on specific areas which we consider to be vital in maintaining shark numbers in this part of the world.....”

It suddenly becomes clear, as I start to talk with more enthusiasm and without pausing for breath, she is becoming totally enthused.

“How did you start doing this?” she asks.

“I did my first expedition in 2005 to Croatia and had a great time. About 6 months after I got home, I received a call from Richard to tell me that the Great White shark was now protected in Croatian waters as a direct result of the work that we had carried out there and, to be honest, I realized that I could actually make a difference and I was totally hooked.”

Our conversation continued for some time and she then said, “You haven’t once asked me to sign up and become a supporter. Why not?”

“Well because our Registered Supporters should want to join SCS. If they do then we want them to be a part of the Society, but the last thing we want to do is to have people on our books who are not really that interested. It’s not really what it’s all about...”

We spoke for a few more minutes and I am happy to report that she did want to sign up and become a new RS. (Thank you!) It was only afterwards that I thought about just how easy it is to ‘sell’ SCS, and it was then I realized why SCS is so effective. We operate not on bags of money, but bags of passion and strict focus. No one makes a living out of SCS so we can simply focus on doing what we think is right for the conservation of sharks. It’s that simple and I believe that’s why the Society is successful.

This is not intended to be a rant harping on about how fantastic SCS is, but simply that, if you’re like me, you could well have forgotten. It’s easy to say but when you sit down and think about it, each one of us, no matter how long you have been a part of the Society, has contributed to the successes that we have achieved. Not successes for ourselves but for sharks. We don’t target the obvious and only target the achievable – actions speak louder than words!

Well done everyone, and please continue your much needed support.

Mark Boothman



FROM THE OFFICE

Richard writes:

One of the great ironies of the Society has always been that we tend to achieve by NOT finding sharks. In the Adriatic in 2005 our failure to find White sharks gave Alen Soldo the first solid proof he had as to their depletion. This was a key factor in his campaign which resulted in their protection in the whole of the Croatian Adriatic. Five years work in the Gulf and not one Green Sawfish sighted, but we proposed the passing of two laws protecting these animals and legislation is now in force in Qatar and Bahrain, and I have just started a process in Kuwait, which we hope will lead to the passing of a similar law. Although it is difficult to make definitive statements regarding depletion in the Gulf because there is no historic baseline data, we do know that sharks are not plentiful, and pollution, increasing salinity, over fishing, and sedimentation etc. are all contributing towards an unhealthy picture. Again it's a negative, but such a strong negative gives us a clear campaigning platform.

Following our Bahrain expedition in April this year, Honorary Life Memberships were offered to the four government officials who had supported the setting up of the expedition, and I am delighted to report that all accepted our offer.

I am becoming more than ever convinced that while there are battles to fight around the world, the only way to save shark populations is to affect the supply i.e. China. I have said it before, but history shows that where there is a demand, a means of supply will always be found. WildAid, Richard Branson, Yao Min, Chinese legislators and others, are all working towards a ban on the import of fins into mainland China. At a stroke this would kill 95% of the demand, and whilst it might put a lot of people working for N.G.O.'s out of a job, it would be the most effective shark conservation move ever.

Various incidents have combined this year to make me start questioning just how successful wildlife conservation efforts have been over the last 50 years, and to what degree wildlife conservation N.G.O.'s are effective? I recently wrote a pilot piece which is being considered by several national newspaper editors at the moment, and perhaps reading it will give you some food for thought.

"Man is in daily conflict and competition with what's left of earth's wild animals. For many species time has run out, or is running out, and the extinction clock is ticking. All over the world scientists, conservationists, activists and advocates are working to save what's left of the world's wild fauna and flora. The questions that need serious study are how effective are their efforts, are these efforts productive or counterproductive, and if these groups and individuals are not delivering for earth's wildlife, who could do better?"

Note: (For this piece to have any lasting validity I will have to look at issues with a broad brush. Numbers and facts are changing daily and to base arguments on today's specifics would guarantee inaccuracy tomorrow.)

In March 2010 over 1500 delegates from 170 countries met at the CITES conference in Doha, and achieved very little for anything other than for a few reptiles. Eight shark species, elephants, and polar bears were among the big losers. Since CITES 'protection', tens of thousands of leopards in Africa have been shot, poisoned and snared. Over half of the 400 elephants in Cameroon's Boubia N'Njida National Park have been killed by poachers in the last few months, and Virunga's elephants face extinction due to poaching. We lost the Balinese tiger in the 1950's, the last Javan tiger died in the mid '80's, and there are only a handful of Sumatran tigers left battling for survival.

Of course there have been successes, but generally on a global level, wildlife conservation is failing. One of the problems with scientists, conservation NGO's, and the endless talking shops they promote and attend is that they give the impression that something effective is being done, history indicates otherwise. It wasn't scientists, NGO's and talking shops that successfully intervened in Tsavo, it was Richard Leaky and an armed paramilitary force that shot poachers. If many shark species are to be saved from the fin trade and extinction, it certainly won't be CITES,



the IUCN, myriad NGO's, and talking shops that save them, it will be a Chinese ban on the import of fins, which at a stroke would kill 95% of the world's consumption. Jim Zhang, Ding Liguu, Richard Branson, Steve Trent, Wan Jie, Yao Min, and others are all working towards a Chinese fin import ban which would be the most effective shark conservation action since the threat began. Only two of the six individuals involved work for conservation NGO's!

Effective conservation has to be based on fact and science which is where scientists play a vital role. However once the facts and science have been established, what is then needed are policy makers and strong individuals to take notice and take action. The enormous army of advocates, scientists, conservationists, activists, do-gooders, and others that form the ranks of the talking shops and conservation NGO's are sometimes doing little other than to promote the illusion that something is happening. This could prove to be a terminally dangerous illusion for earth's fauna and flora, and may be stopping new champions taking up the fight.

We know that 7 billion humans have raped planet earth, we don't need scientists to tell us this anymore. There have always been extinctions, the difference now is they are man made. What we need now is men of action to do something about it. It is in the interest of those employed in "conservation" to keep their jobs. Processes, talking shops, recommendations, workshops and plans of action, all ensure the continued employment of the "army" of scientists and 'professional' conservationists, and the illusion of action continues. The roles of those in the conservation "army" are necessary and often valuable, it's the illusion that they are winning that's so dangerous. If the focus were switched to results, and pay became performance related, it would allow the achievers to be identified and given increased resources, and those providing illusions would be exposed. Of course this is impractical, and even if it were possible vested interests would prevent it happening; and all the time the losers are our plants, birds and animals.

I don't agree with much of what Sea Shepherd's Paul Watson says, but one thing I do agree with is that real lasting change usually comes from committed, driven individuals, not from often overstaffed organizations, governmental or otherwise."

Jacqui writes:

I am always amazed by the support and generosity that we get from some governments. For our Bahrain expedition the government not only provided all the practical working support needed for Richard and the volunteers, but our apartments were superb, they provided a daily evening meal from a local restaurant, and even gave me an account at the local supermarket! Scientists are used to getting funding and support, so this type of thing is no surprise to them, but for those of us who don't live in that world, this sort of support is something we are not used to and therefore are twice as grateful for. Thank you everyone in Bahrain.

Generally the expedition went very well and everybody stayed in one piece, safe, and was fed and watered. [I would make one comment on Richard's behalf which is when volunteers have to attend official government dinners, their appearance is not only a reflection on Richard and the Society, but on themselves as well, so for future government sponsored expeditions I really do suggest that everybody packs a clean pressed shirt, and a skirt or pair of trousers that make us look the part, rather than a bunch of escaped dossers!]

Denise writes:

It's always the same from me I'm afraid. Please remember to renew your 'supporterships', or I have to chase you, and please remember our shop when you have little presents to buy.

Our paid up supportership goes up and down, and people often only renew when they want to come on an expedition, or take part in some other SCS activity. This really isn't fair on those who are paid up all the time, so the Board have decided for future expeditions that priority will be given to those who keep their RS position continually paid up.



SOCIETY NEWS

The news section of our website contains regular updates of what the SCS is up to along with other relevant shark conservation news. Here is a selection of some of the postings over the past few months.

Changes to the Board

In the last newsletter we announced Nick Groom's resignation and welcomed Neil Britton to the board. Sadly for family reasons, Neil has a full time caring commitment, and he has had to resign. As yet there is no plan to appoint a new Director in Neil's place.

Green Sawfish Landing In Qatar

It was with mixed feelings that the Society learnt of a 1.5 metre Sawfish having been accidentally caught by fishermen in Doha in December last year. The downside is that the animal was not able to be released safely, but the plus is that this juvenile animal indicates that the population is still hanging on, and that the protection for Green Sawfish lobbied for by the Society and put into law by the government of Qatar has a chance of ensuring a future for these vulnerable animals.

Sipadan Island Shark Sanctuary Petition

The Society was made aware that if 10,000 signatures can be obtained in support of a shark sanctuary in the area surrounding Sipadan Island, then the sanctuary would come into being. As of May 2012, over 23,000 people (including many SCS members) have signed the petition. Lets hope the sanctuary comes into existence soon.

For those who haven't signed, see:

<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/support-a-semporna-shark-sanctuary-and-the-future-of-our-oceans/>

Angling Threat to South Africa's Great Whites

21 years ago the world applauded when South Africa granted protection to the Great White shark. Soon after this the Great White established itself as a valuable economic asset in the Western Cape and its future seemed assured.

'Shark Champion' Lesley Rochat supported by Chris Fallows has now launched a campaign to protect the sharks against the growing threat of illegal angling.

Support Chris and Lesley's efforts and sign the petition at <http://aoca.org.za/pages/2896/wanted-dead-or-alive>

Bahrain Green Sawfish Law

On February 22nd 2012 Order (1) of 2012 was signed into law by HH Sheikh Abdulla bin Hamad Al-Khalifa. The new law prohibits all and any targeted fishing for the Green Sawfish (*Pristis zijsron*) in Bahraini waters. Fishermen are required to return any bycatch specimens and report landings/captures referencing date and location. (This law was suggested by the Society).



Richard Peirce holding briefing sessions in Bahrain. Image © Shark Conservation Society

Bahrain Honorary Life Members

Following the Bahrain expedition the Society is pleased to announce the following new Honorary Life Members.

Sheikh Khalifa Ahmed Al Khalifa, Mr Anwar Mansoor AlHariri, Dr. Adel Khalifa Al-Zayani, Mr Abdulqader Saeed Khamis.

Chinese Government Shark Fin Import Ban

In 2011 Messrs Jim Zhang, Ding Liguo, and Wan Jie began moves to get a law passed in China banning the import of shark fins. Signatures were collected in The National People's Congress (NPC) and the People's Political Consultation Conferences (CPPCC) with the eventual aim of securing a ban on fin imports into mainland China.

Jim Zhang has now reported that the process is moving forward, and he and his colleagues have written a draft proposal which would ban shark fin consumption in government banquets and official events. The proposal has been co-signed by enough NPC delegates to ensure that it is considered as "state level important", and will get serious consideration. China consumes 95% of the world's shark fin harvest, and any steps to reduce Chinese demand are of enormous importance.

Fin Drying in Tenerife

A company called North Atlantic Agadir SL has applied for a PAT permit (Projects De Actuation Territorial) to open a shark fin drying operation in Tenerife. There is nothing illegal about this and the permit will probably be granted. The Society has added it's name to a letter of objection being prepared by the Global Shark Conservation Initiative and urges 'Registered Supporters' to contact the Global Shark Conservation Initiative and find out how they can object as individuals.

The Death of a Shark Legend

It is with great sadness that we can report that Ron Taylor died in hospital in Sydney on Sunday September 9th. Perhaps best known for his work on the original "Jaws", Ron was a real original and together with his wife Valerie spent decades filming sharks, and doing ground breaking shark work which challenged the stereotype long before it became as fashionable to work with sharks as it is today. The Shark Conservation Society (SCS) felt privileged when Ron and Valerie Taylor agreed to become Honorary Life Members of the Society.

The board of SCS, and all our volunteers and supporters send their deep condolences to Valerie and the Taylor family, and would like, at this sad time, to say thank you to Ron and Valerie for their enormous contributions to shark conservation.

Shark Conservationist of the Future?

On Wednesday 26th September, SCS director Stuart Nicholls and his wife Tanuja became the proud, "over the moon", parents of Eliana. Mother and baby are reported to be doing well and we know that all SCS Registered Supporters and Directors will be delighted to hear of Eliana's arrival.

Birmingham Dive Show

On 27-28th October SCS will again be at the Birmingham Dive Show. Please come and visit us. It's always great to see both the familiar and non-familiar faces. Look forward to seeing many of you there.

EXPEDITION REPORTS

BAHRAIN EXPEDITION REPORT, APRIL 2012

The 2012 Bahrain expedition followed similar exercises in Kuwait in 2008, and Qatar in 2009 (further work was also done in Qatar in 2010 and 2011). The expedition had been scheduled for April 2011 but was re-scheduled to 2012 due to civil unrest.

Our surveys concentrated on elasmobranchs and in all three countries work was done both at sea and in the markets. The impression formed on the Kuwait expedition was that shark populations could be seriously depleted, and this impression was reinforced after the Qatar surveys. However, due to a lack of baseline historical data, use of the word “depleted” has to be qualified by making clear that it’s an impression based on anecdotal rather than scientific data.



SCS Bahrain Team – © Shark Conservation Society

Between Saturday April 7th and Friday April 27th the Shark Conservation Society carried out a twenty day shark survey at the invitation of the government of Bahrain. The survey was conducted on six levels.

- Daily visits to the Manama market to record and process elasmobranchs (sharks and rays) present. A total of over 1500 specimens were processed with 15 shark, 7 ray and 3 guitarfish species being identified.
- At sea chumming investigations were carried out at locations with chumming being effective both at the surface and in the water column. Three shark species were identified at sea.
- Fishing effort was continual and involved hand lining on and close to the sea bed. Baited shark lines on floats were deployed at different depths astern of the vessels in the chum slick, and bottom longlines were set on the sea bed by Bahrain’s most noted shark fisherman in his prime locations.
- Snorkeling surveys were conducted in shallow sea grass areas.
- Anecdotal, photographic and film evidence was collected from a number of sources, and historic fishing records were examined.
- A seabed camera fixed to a chum tube was deployed on most days.

Objectives

The Society’s successful expeditions in Kuwait and Qatar were instrumental in rediscovering a shark species, and recording five species not hitherto known to be in the Gulf. Following the expeditions, laws advancing conservation were passed in Kuwait and Qatar, films were made of both expeditions, and a list of species proven as present in the Gulf was started and is a work in progress.



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Image © Shark Conservation Society

The Bahrain expedition continued the work of the previous five years and for the first time a seabed camera and longlines were deployed in the survey. The ultimate objective of these expeditions, is to build up a picture of the health of elasmobranch populations in the Gulf, and evolve appropriate conservation strategies, and record as many shark and ray species as possible.

Preparation and Planning

Following the Kuwait expedition in 2008, the Society decided to 'work down' the Gulf to Qatar, Bahrain and the UAE. Preparation for the Bahrain expedition started in April 2010 with an initial visit to the Kingdom by Richard Peirce and Mark Boothman. The visit resulted in the Society being invited by the government to carry out surveys in Bahraini waters similar to those done in Kuwait and Qatar.

Further recce visits were made by Richard Peirce to determine survey sites and finalise logistics. Sadly in March 2011 the expedition planned for April 2011 had to be rescheduled to April 2012, and preparatory and planning work was altered to take this into account.

April was selected as it had been the month of the earlier Qatar and Kuwait surveys.

The Market Survey

The expedition's scientific advisor, Alec Moore, has published papers based on data gathered on the Kuwait and Qatar expeditions, and on work he has done separately. Market surveys had provided most of the data gathered and the importance of this work cannot be overstated. However, market work can provide a misleading picture of abundance unless numbers of animals in markets are calibrated against fishing effort, and the impressions gathered on the surveys at sea.

The Manama market surveys in Bahrain processed over 1500 animals and determined the presence of 15 sharks, 3 guitarfish, and 7 ray species (see lists).

On two occasions sharks in the market were confirmed as having come from neighbouring Saudi waters. Whilst in Kuwait and Qatar it was felt that most of the sharks and rays found had come from Kuwaiti and Qatari waters. In Bahrain the proportion of market stock coming from outside Bahraini waters may well have been higher, as on the three occasions the author visited the market boxes of sharks caught outside Bahraini waters were pointed out.

Abundance/Values

Using the dictionary definition of the word (plentiful), there was no great abundance of sharks found in Manama market. However, as previously noted, there is little or no historical data against which to compare our findings.

As with Kuwait and Qatar there was an almost total lack of mature specimens from the larger species. Mature great hammerheads, pigeyes, bull sharks, tiger sharks and blacktips were not observed at all until the end of the expedition when two mature blacktips were recorded (N.B. one was caught 2 miles inside Saudi waters).

The value of fins makes up the main part of the value of sharks. The 3 fins (dorsal & pectorals) from a large mature female blacktip were sold in the market for 30 Bahraini dinars (£60). These were classed as 'large', medium sized fins fetched 12/15 dinars (£24/£30), and the very small fins from juvenile milk sharks and whitecheeks sold for between ½ dinar and one dinar (£2-£4) per kilo. In comparison to the 3 fins from the large blacktip at 30 dinars, the rest of the shark sold for 7 dinars, excluding the head which made 1 dinar (presumably for the jaw), total 38 dinars with the fins making up 79% of the value.

Times are lean for many fishermen in the Gulf and the value of shark fins helps boost falling catch revenues.

Trading in fins is now illegal in both Kuwait and Qatar, although there are black markets. In Bahrain being able to quantify the values of fins was a useful new dimension to our market work.



Images © Shark Conservation Society

Actual hours worked – Chumming fishing effort

At the end of 15 days/part days at sea we had chummed and fished for over 99 hours 41 minutes. Given that chumming with sardines works in every ocean in the world we have to assume this method of attracting sharks works in Bahrain! We not only worked all the areas which local advice had indicated would also yield shark encounters, we also deliberately did 4 deployments (longling surveys) with Bahrain's "Mr Shark Longliner" and let him take us to his favourite grounds.

On most days chumming conditions were excellent, and considerable fishing effort continued while chumming.

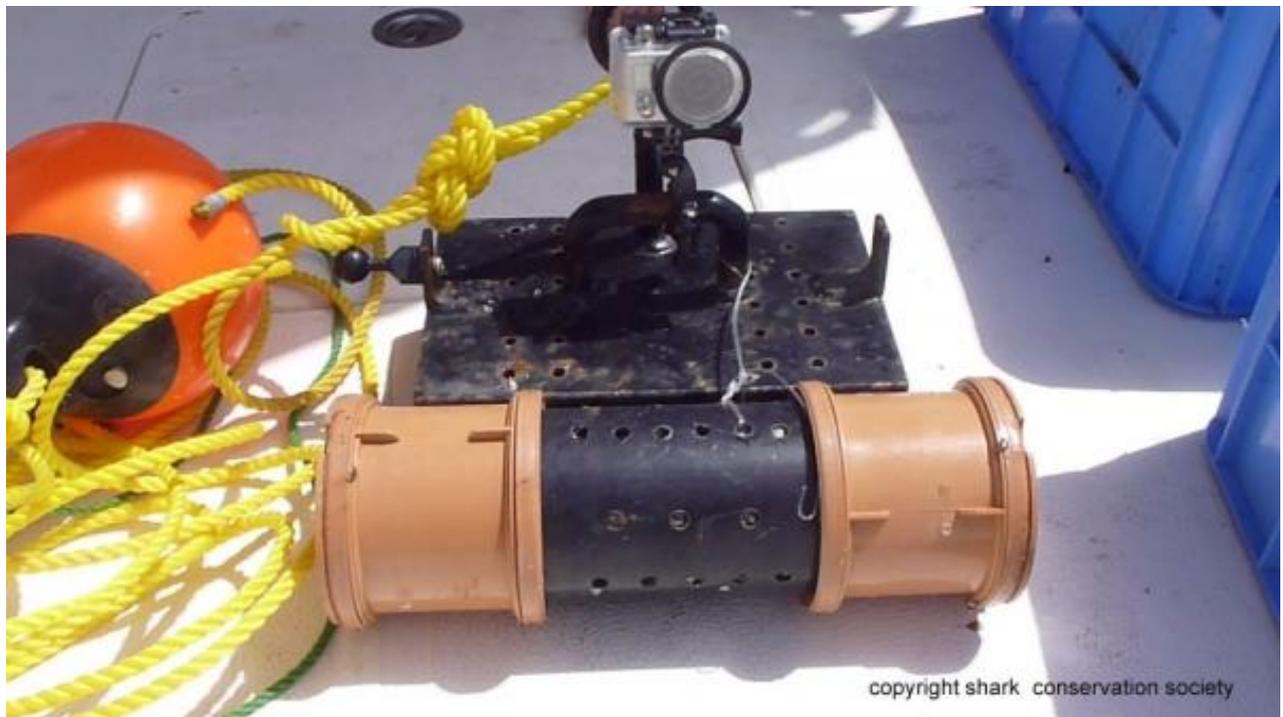
Notes

Water temperatures varied between 19.5' c and 22'c and a most days water clarity (visibility) was good or reasonable.

As previously noted the sea bed camera was deployed on most days and recorded some rays but no sharks.



Images © Shark Conservation Society



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Results

After 100 hours chumming and fishing effort in good conditions to only have achieved the results as below is truly alarming. In both Kuwait and Qatar Blacktips (maybe Spottails) and others had responded to chumming and this had allowed surface observation.

- 2 whale sharks (*Rhincodon typus*)
- 4 Arabian carpetsharks (*Chiloscyllium arabicum*) caught and released
- 1 probable Blacktip (*Carcharhinus limbatus*)
- Female Blacktip – dead (*Carcharhinus limbatus*)

Species Lists

The following species were recorded as a result of the market surveys

- Arabian Carpetshark (*Chiloscyllium arabicum*)
- Arabian Smoothhounds (*Mustelus mosis*)
- Hooktooth shark (*Chaenogaleus macrostoma*)
- Slender Weasel sharks (*Paragaleus randalli*)
- Snaggletooth shark (*Hemipristis elongatus*)
- Pigeye sharks (*Carcharhinus amboinensis*)
- Spinner shark (*Carcharhinus brevipinna*)
- Whitecheek sharks (*Carcharhinus dussumieri*)
- Hardnose sharks (*Carcharhinus macloti*)
- Blacktip sharks (*Carcharhinus limbatus*)
- Spottail shark (*Carcharhinus sorrah*)
- Sliteye sharks (*Loxodon macrorhinus*)
- Milk shark (*Rhizoprionodon acutus*)
- Grey Sharpnose sharks (*Rhizoprionodon oligolinx*)
- Great Hammerhead sharks (*Sphyrna mokarran*)
- Giant guitarfish (*Rhynchobatus cf. djiddensis*)
- Halavi's guitarfish (*Rhinobatos halavi*)
- Undescribed guitarfish (*Rhinobatos cf. punctifer*)
- Butterfly ray (*Gymnura sp.*)
- Cowtail ray (*Pastinachus sephen*)
- Leopard ray (*Himantura uarnak complex*)
- Arabian Banded tail whipray (*Himantura sp. B.*) Banded eagle ray (*Aetomylaeus nichofii*) Mottled eagle ray (*Aetomylaeus milvus*)
- Cownose ray (*Rhinoptera sp.*)

Conclusions

As was noted following the Kuwait and Qatar surveys there is no reliable baseline data as to historical shark abundance in the Gulf so drawing conclusions based on our findings is difficult. However following the Kuwait expedition in 2008, our impression was that elasmobranch populations were depleted. In the five years that SCS

has worked in the Gulf that impression has strengthened year after year. Several hundred chumming and fishing hours indicate that most shark species in the Gulf are present in low numbers.

An almost total absence of Gulf caught mature animals (both at sea and in the markets) from the larger species – Great Hammerheads, Tiger sharks, Bull sharks, and Blacktips – may indicate that their position as apex predators is being filled by smaller species whose reproductive strategy is better able to withstand fishing pressure.

Even if fishing policies were to change to allow the recovery of shark populations there is still the overall problem of habitat degradation which leads us to question whether the Gulf in its current state of decline could support increased shark numbers.

Increased and increasing salinity, sedimentation, overfishing, land reclamation and construction, and pollution have all played their parts in turning the Gulf into a seriously degraded sea at or near the recovery tipping point.

QATAR 1 DAY EXPEDITION REPORT, APRIL 2012

On Monday 16 April 2012 Mark Boothman and Jon Mitchell left the SCS expedition in Bahrain to fly to Doha to do a one night survey in the Aliyah Island area near to Doha. On the 2009 expedition this area had been identified as a possible nursery site for Whitecheek and Milksharks. Subsequent surveys in 2010 and 2011 gathered evidence which supported this, and due to the Society being on an expedition in neighbouring Bahrain, it was decided to do a one night survey in 2012.

Date	Location	Depth	Hours chummed	Species
16/04/12	Aliyah area 25'24'197 N 51'40'421 E	10.14m	3 hrs 35 mins	Whitecheek – male 86cm
16/04/12	Aliyah area 25'25'386 N	10 m	Power chumming and at anchor. 1hr	1 Milk shark juvenile, female 52cm
16 & 17/04/12	Aliyah area 25'25'495 N 51'40'665' E	10m	3 hrs 30mins at anchor	

A total of 8 hours and 5 minutes chumming was achieved with sardines being the material used, and with a mixture of power chumming and chumming at anchor. During the survey 80+ possibly 100 catfish were caught. In previous years catfish numbers had been nothing like this – sharks had always been more numerous. Clearly a one night survey is a tiny snapshot and adds little, however all the surveys continue a trend as follows:-

- Shark numbers decrease
- Catfish numbers increase
- Each year 2009/10/11/12, juvenile specimens have been found in this area

If the area were closed to fishing for the three months suggested (February, March, April), it would be interesting to see if juvenile Whitecheek and Milkshark numbers increased again. Numbers of pups in Doha markets would indicate huge fishing pressure continues, and if the animals are being taken in large numbers as juveniles, clearly the population will crash. During previous surveys in this area, 8 hrs 5 mins chumming and fishing effort had always produced larger numbers of juvenile sharks. However the fact that a juvenile was found is consistent with previous years.



AZORES SHARK RESEARCH EXPEDITION, SEPTEMBER 2012



The SCS Azores expedition was influenced, with devastating results, by hurricane Nadine. The plan was for two segments each of seven days, and each with five volunteers. Each segment would start with two days diving/swimming with blues and makos. The other five days should have been spent catching/releasing blue sharks to obtain DNA samples for up to 50 specimens for an ongoing research programme. The first segment volunteers got to sea for two days and saw nothing - all the sharks had disappeared! The next five days were spent ashore watching palm trees being lashed by Nadine and rain falling in tropical style.

The second segment fared better. The first two days were lost to Nadine but five days were achieved at sea. Two days were blank the other three were wonderful. On one day a blue shark and a minke whale appeared beside our vessel, and on the other two days the whole team got to swim/free dive with blues and makos to their hearts content, to a point where on the last day we had had enough and returned to harbour early.

It looks as if the sharks sensed the impending arrival of the turbulence and decided to dive deeper and ride out the storm, which is why they disappeared before Nadine arrived and took a couple of days to come back after she had gone.

A full expedition report will be posted within the next two months. In the meantime Registered Supporters should be aware that another ten day Azores expedition is planned for July 2013 to achieve some of the work that Nadine prevented. The ten day expedition will comprise:

- 2 days getting there, 2 days swimming with sharks, 5 days work, one day getting back. Priority will be given to those who were on the first segment of this year's expedition. (Please check the website for details)



The SCS Azores Team – © Shark Conservation Society

FUTURE EXPEDITIONS

Expeditions are now confirmed for the Azores in July 2013, south Lebanon in September 2013, Edremit Bay (Turkey) for March 2014 and probably for Kuwait in September 2014. In recent years juvenile Great White sharks have been caught in Edremit Bay on several occasions during March/April. Our expedition will spend ten days/two weeks chumming these catch locations, and if White sharks are caught, then PAT satellite tags will be deployed. In addition to this main aim the usual shark survey/search will be carried out, and all species encountered listed.

Tyre in south Lebanon is a really exciting location and right on the Israeli border, so we can expect to be checked out on a regular basis by both sides, and probably by the Americans as well! This expedition will be another general shark search/survey working in the markets and at sea. It is unlikely that our Mediterranean scientific advisor, Dr. Alen Soldo, will be able to come on this trip, so if any SCS Registered Supporters that are scientists would like to take over the writing up of data gathered on the trip, then they should apply to the office. There has never been a specific research programme conducted in these waters to determine what species are present, but of course sharks have been caught here for hundreds of years and several species are documented. This is technically a conflict zone and applications for this expedition will be assessed bearing this in mind.

The Azores in July 2013 will provide an opportunity to do the work that hurricane Nadine scuppered in September 2012.

We are exploring the possibility of a mixed SCS/Gulf team rowing the length of the Gulf from Bubiyan to Hormuz. This exercise would be carried out to draw global attention to the fragile health of the Gulf as a marine system, and to try and encourage legislators to act to reverse its decline. As well as the team rowing, the escort vessel would chum the whole length of the Gulf recording all species encountered. We are hopeful of favorable reactions from Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain, but the longest coastlines involved are Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and without permissions from these countries this event will not be able to proceed.

FIN TRAIL UPDATE

Sadly and annoyingly the producers have had to take the decision to shelve this project. Due to it being a cinema release (1 hour 45 mins) film being shot around the world the production bar is set very high, and this together with travel costs means a large budget of between £350,000/£400,000. Many of you sent in donations and indeed Simon and I promised funds as well. In addition to this various "in kind" promises were received together with offers of existing footage. However it would not be fair to those who supported the Fin Trail if we had started what we hadn't got the money to finish. Therefore the only way shooting could start was once funding had been received to do the whole project, and this has still not happened. There were recent hopes based on a couple of major funders, and it may be these could still come to fruition.

We will be contacting all the donors and offering a 75% return of their money, or suggesting they might like to split this and give it as donations to the Shark Conservation Society and/or the Shark Trust. The reason for a 25% deduction is that we have spent several thousand pounds in cash and kind of our own money, and in some ways the project has already had the impact that the donors were supporting e.g. the trailer has attracted worldwide attention and praise, and has been a powerful tool in drawing attention to the whole issue of finning.

We are ever optimistic and really believe this film needs to be made, so this is genuinely a 'shelving' rather than an 'abandonment' of the project. If anybody knows any large scale potential backers please put them in touch!

Richard

LEGISLATION/CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Most Society supporters will be aware that in March the Bahrainis followed the Qataris by signing into law new measures protecting the Green Sawfish. This followed a similar law in Qatar and both of these came about as direct results of SCS proposals and lobbying. During the Bahrain expedition I flew to Kuwait and have started a process there which I hope will mean they join Bahrain and Qatar, and we have also made initial approaches to the governments of the UAE and KSA. If laws can be achieved in all the Arab states, then we see no reason why the government of Iran would not also protect this animal which would effectively mean the whole Gulf was a Green Sawfish protected area with encounters having to be reported.

In October 2009 an SCS expedition to the Adriatic collected evidence of a Blue shark nursery area, and passed this onto Dr. Alen Soldo so that he could use it to try and get measures introduced to protect the sharks in this area at certain times of the year. We haven't been reporting on this because the process is a work in progress, but we would reassure supporters that Alen is still lobbying his government for this to happen.

Our five years work in Kuwait and Qatar have really underlined that the health of the Arabian Gulf as a marine environment is declining, increasing salinity, over fishing, sedimentation, pollution, large scale building projects, and general habitat degradation, are all contributing towards the Gulf becoming a new dead Sea. SCS will be working with our friends and colleagues in the Gulf to draw international attention to this and try and bring about measures to reverse the decline.

The catching, tagging and releasing of sharks for research purposes continues to be a contentious issue. This was recently underlined by the Oearch/Nat. Geo operations in South Africa. The Society accepts the need for some science and the role that tagging can play in producing data. Equally the Society believes there are a lot of scientific projects which are of questionable value and may well be carried out to serve the interests of the scientists, rather than the sharks. Given our acceptance that tag and release can sometimes be necessary we believe this has to be carried out by experienced and competent operators, and to this end we will continue to lobby the Home Office to modify the current inadequate provisions for the granting of tagging licences.



UK Thresher and Mako Shark Database

There has been a lot of interest in our Thresher shark database, and while the Society is reluctant to present all the data for unrestricted public scrutiny, we have gone live with some data and the full database will be available on application to those with credible reasons for needing it. The Mako database (an abridged version) will also soon be live on the website.

Tiger Beach Trip Report, October 2011



There are only a few locations in the world considered to be shark diving Meccas and Tiger Beach in the Bahamas is up there with the best. Last October, a group of us booked the M/V Dolphin Dream for a week of shark diving and photography. Unfortunately, the eastern coast of the US was experiencing extreme weather conditions with freak snowstorms in New York, and when we landed in Miami the rain was horizontal and the long term forecast didn't give any cause for optimism. The waves were too high to put to sea that night as the coastline was hammered by two successive waves of high energy storm systems. This wasn't good, but shark divers are a patient lot and sometimes you have to let nature do its own thing. The Dolphin Dream's skipper, Capt Scott, made the call to stay in port for the night, so we got to know each other over a few beers and some shark tales.

The group were a mix of experienced shark divers and novices from across the world united by their enthusiastic desire to spend as much time as possible with the sharks at this iconic destination. We were accompanied by legendary shark-lover, and my old friend, Wolfgang Leander. Wolf is a veteran freediver and Nikonos photographer (eschewing everything digital) who loves nothing more than to swim side by side with any sharks, but with tiger sharks in particular.

We set out in the morning hoping for a break in the storm, and got lucky so we were able to make it to the 'Beach' later in the afternoon. Once anchored, the crew charged the chum boxes and put them out over the back of the boat, and it only took a matter of minutes before we saw our first large. These sharks are famed at Tiger Beach and though they may not have the charisma of their larger cousins, the tiger sharks (*Galeocerdo cuvier*), the lemon sharks are still 3m + animals that turn up in droves, come in close, and stick around for as long as the chum is in the water.

The thing that makes Tiger Beach such a wonderful site for capturing enigmatic and memorable shark images is its shallow, gin-clear water and reflective, white sand bottom. Unfortunately these same conditions can lead to milky zero visibility when the storms come



through, and this was the case now which meant that no decent diving would be had for days. The team were becoming a little disheartened but Capt Scott had a cunning plan. Only a kilometre from Tiger Beach is a reef called Fish Tales that is right on the edge of the sand bank and close to deeper water. This deep water makes the visibility much better with the added benefit of there being a huge number of reef sharks inhabiting the reef that rarely venture to Tiger Beach, so we headed off there instead with our chum slick trailing us and the lemon sharks following behind.

At 'Fish Tales' the lemon sharks were quickly joined by many caribbean reef sharks (*Carcharhinus perezi*) and a few nurse sharks (*Ginglymostoma cirratum*). The chum boxes are designed to let out a scent but not actually feed the sharks, which is of course a correct practice. With the boxes in position the sharks happily stay around in great numbers behind the boat, all pointing into the current like a squadron of aircraft on a bombing raid. It is amazing how the sharks show such an interest in the scent coming in from miles away once they detect it, but display no artificial or forced feeding behaviour (beloved of the Shark Week producers). This leads to natural images which are the Holy Grail for 'real' photographers.

Each day followed a similar pattern: up early with a cup of steaming coffee to accompany the sunrise. The chum boxes were refreshed by the crew and all the lemon and reef sharks milling around in the vicinity of the boat overnight would immediately return. There's something very stimulating about standing on a dive deck, watching dozens of large sharks thrashing around inches from your bare feet - although one must remember not to become too complacent and absent-mindedly dangle one's toes in the water as I caught myself doing once!

The morning dives usually took us down to the sandy edge of the reef at about 15m where our shark-wrangling crew would open a chum box and hand feed the lemons for the cameras. The reef sharks rarely got a look in with the much larger lemon sharks enjoying all the fun, although they weren't able to chase away a cheeky nurse shark that would regularly position herself by the crate and suck scraps of food through the bars. (N.B. The feeding of sharks is not a practice of which the Society approves, and there is published scientific material confirming that feeding can cause 'conditioning'.)

It wasn't until the second day that our first tiger shark came to investigate followed very soon by another larger one, and once they were with us they never went too far away. The great thing about tigers is that one can have a hundred other sharks in the water hustling, jostling and bumping but as soon as a single tiger hoves into view all attention is focused solely on this incredible presence. On any dive anywhere else in the world the lemon, reef and nurse sharks would be considered an excellent encounter but here they are almost entirely forgotten once the tigers roll up. If a tiger shark comes in close to investigate or check you out, the sense of privilege at being in the presence of these magnificent predators is overwhelming. To get a photograph up close with no divers or bubbles in the background took careful positioning and patience. The best place to dive is right on the edge of the group as the tigers would cautiously circle us a few times but would always investigate those a little further from the group first before swimming through to the chum box. There were certainly lots of big smiles on the faces of the team after each of these dives



and quite a few quick changes on the tanks so the divers could immediately return to the water not wanting to miss a moment of the fun.

In addition to the static shark dive, we also did a stunning drift dive nearby. The reef was very healthy and inhabited by large schools of snapper and quite a few grouper. Invariably the divers were accompanied by a number of reef sharks weaving in and out of the group as it drifted along the exceptional reef.

We were doing 4 or 5 dives each day, but when surrounded by sharks sometimes that just isn't enough. So a couple of us made up reef hooks so that we could effortlessly hang off the back of the boat next to the chum boxes at about 5m in the midst of the schooling sharks – what a wonderful way to spend a couple of hours! This is where Wolfgang could usually be found freediving down to about 10m to swim and commune with his sharky friends.

Then after six days it was all over. In spite of the stormy start to the week, and the fact we didn't do a single dive on Tiger Beach itself, it had been a very successful trip. The tigers had visited us and stayed around, the lemon and reef sharks were ever-present and never disappointed, and the nurse sharks were fun and opportunistic making fantastic foils for their larger more 'sharky' cousins. So, with our heads full of memories and our flash cards full of images, we returned home without having actually ticked off Tiger Beach – but that, of course, is a GREAT excuse to return next year and do it all over again!

Rob Allen



Caribbean reef shark (Carcharhinus perezii). Image © Rob Allen

SHARK SHOP

Please don't forget to use the SCS online shop for all your SCS branded merchandise. Even if it's only a few pounds, they are all going directly towards the running of the Society and are essential if we are to carry on our work.

Many thanks to all of you for reading this issue of the Newsletter and hopefully you will have noticed (and approved of) the format change to the Newsletter. Many thanks to Russell Atkinson for producing the necessary templates and to Rob Allen for his time in putting it all together.

On a final note, please do keep an eye out for the new SCS printed material. The 3 postcards and posters have been designed by Russell and reflect the Society's work and successes. Pick up the postcards at the next Dive Show or alternatively order something from the shop and ask Denise if she would include them with your order. Russell



'Asking questions - getting answers'

and Shane have been instrumental in the production of the new material meaning the Society has had to pay very little for a professional job, and so thanks very much to you both.

I look forward to seeing many of you in the coming months and please don't forget to keep renewing your subscriptions. We really do rely on your support.

All the best

Mark Boothman

Mark Boothman
Editor

STOP PRESS

Following the SCS expeditions in Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain, it was decided to start a campaign to try and promote awareness of the declining health of the Gulf, and thereby encourage those states with Gulf coastlines to act in concert to ensure a future for this fragile and valuable marine eco-system. The Society is delighted to announce that HRH Prince Turki bin Faisal has agreed to see Richard Peirce, and it is hoped that His Royal Highness will become a backer/patron for this important campaign.

STOP PRESS

PLEASE HELP

Your renewing as an SCS Registered Supporter enables our work to continue. No-one in SCS takes a salary, we are all doing it for the sharks. Please **help** us **help** them.

STOP PRESS

"SHARKS ARE MORE DANGEROUS DEAD THAN ALIVE" (SCS 2011)

For most people the above would be a confusing and untrue statement. Sharks kill and injure people, don't they? Well, yes, very rarely and often in provoked situations. The reality, the less evident truth is that dead sharks mean unbalanced marine eco-systems, and oceans without apex predators would not be healthy.

Shark conservationists, scientists, divers and other groups in the marine world all understand this issue, but most people don't. SCS urges its Registered Supporters to use this statement "Sharks are more dangerous dead than alive" to provoke thought and discussion.