THE SHARK WATCHER'S MANUAL

A GUIDE TO SPECIES AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

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Above: White sharks are highly intelligent and extremely curious animals. This combination often surprises first-time divers, and this species' capacity to learn and adapt in real time should never be taken for granted.

on full display. White sharks are, in my opinion, one of the most expressive sharks, which has always made my time underwater with them particularly fascinating and rewarding. I've spent days watching groups of up to ten white sharks shift and adapt their behaviors to my presence in the water, off New Zealand and South Africa. One of my favorite social interactions with sharks occurred in late 2021, off Isla Guadalupe, Mexico. While shooting underwater scenes for a media production, a giant 18-foot (5.5-m) female white shark approached me while I was in the cage. She swam toward me head-on, and once she knew she had my attention, she directly and obviously opened and closed her mouth widely, showing off her size and teeth. While I will never know for sure, it certainly felt like a social display of dominance. I have never felt so seen by a living organism in my life.

SHARK CONSERVATION

THE DECLINE OF SHARK POPULATIONS

The oceans we know and enjoy today have evolved with sharks in them. The ecological presence of sharks, as covered in the previous chapter, can influence entire food webs and impact the flow of energy and health throughout whole ecosystems. It follows that the opposite should be (and is) true. The absence of sharks will influence other species, habitats, and ecosystems; an ocean without sharks is a change to the genetic, ecological, and aesthetic fabric of our planet. Unfortunately, this isn't science fiction, as it is becoming a reality in many parts of the ocean.

Despite their important ecological role, and cultural and economic values, in general sharks have not fared particularly well in response to the most profound experiment of all time: human population growth. Many species have experienced declines in the last fifty years (our best estimates infer population reductions ranging from 50 percent to more than 90 percent for certain species), primarily as a result of overharvest and irresponsible exploitation by humans. As slow-growing, long-lived species, their biology constrains the potential for rapid population recovery, and any sort of recovery is measured in generations, rather than a few years. In many ways, sharks face a double jeopardy of threats, and sometimes the outlook isn't very positive. How did we get here? And more importantly, what can be done? These questions form the basis of shark conservation.

Above: Massive schools of fish dart, flash, and burst together in response to an actively hunting shark. The changing biomass of predators and their prey is a key factor in assessing any potential changes in their populations.

In this section, we'll touch on the threats facing sharks, what makes them so vulnerable, and the growing global movement to conserve and protect them. However, it's not all doom and gloom. There are some signs of hope, examples of some species that have rebounded, and uplifting moments where new species have been found and profound discoveries have been made. This is not just a story of loss.

Shark conservation is also a story of profound change and the ways people, such as divers and wildlife enthusiasts, are helping to shape a different future for sharks (this book itself is a testament to that). More than just saving one species, shark conservation is about learning how to coexist with these species and the ecosystems they call home.

THREATS: WHY ARE SHARKS IN TROUBLE?

Having survived multiple mass-extinction events, sharks as a group of organisms are pretty tough. Because of this, it's hard to imagine a situation where they'd struggle to survive. But, in the last century (the blink of an eye, evolutionarily speaking), they've encountered a threat more efficient than any predator they've faced in 400+ million years: us. Today, more than one third of all known shark and ray species are at risk of extinction, according to the IUCN Red List.

OVERFISHING

The single greatest threat to sharks today is overfishing. While humans have hunted and harvested sharks throughout the course of human civilization with varying approaches and rates, the advent of industrial fishing took things to a different level. It has been estimated that between 70 and 100 million sharks are killed every year, mostly taken in commercial fisheries targeting their meat, skin, oil, cartilage, and their fins. Indeed, sharks are consumed for their meat and their parts are used in various products, ranging from luxury skincare to dog food.

SHARK FINNING

Shark finning—the inhumane practice of slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea—is a main component of shark mortalities. Shark fins are used to fuel the demand for shark fin soup, which has historically been considered a premium, high-status dish in many parts of Asia. Although shark fin soup continues to be served widely in the region, it appears that younger generations are less favorable to it, given the conservation issue it creates. While shark finning is banned in many countries, the global shark fin trade remains lucrative and pervasive, as enforcement is often weak in many parts of the world.

Opposite: The discarded carcass of a hammerhead shark that was recently finned at sea. A primary driver of the decline of shark populations worldwide, numerous policies and regulations exist to reduce or ban shark finning, but enforcement remains politically challenging.

BYCATCH

Many sharks that end up dead aren't targeted at all—they're caught accidentally as bycatch in industrial fisheries. Commercial longlines, which typically target tuna or swordfish, and to a lesser extent trawled nets, incidentally capture or ensnare sharks by the millions. Often, these sharks are dead by the time they're hauled onboard, and may then be retained for the sale of their fins and/or meat or discarded as waste.

Some of the species most affected by bycatch are open ocean pelagic sharks—species that range across ocean basins and national jurisdictions—which can't be protected easily by one nation's policies alone. Blue sharks, for example, are not heavily targeted in directed fisheries, but are frequently entangled in tuna fisheries around the world.

Opposite top: Landings of sharks at ports and markets around the world are more common than one might imagine, but proper reporting is necessary to evaluate the scale and scope of its impact.

Opposite bottom: The oceanic whitetip shark has suffered drastic population reductions throughout its range as a result of overfishing and bycatch. Pelagic, open ocean sharks are often seen trailing or retaining fishing gear in their mouths.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF SHARK CONSERVATION

Experts often debate the validity of certain population estimates, divide on whether or not shark finning can be done sustainably, and will argue over many other trendy or timely shark conservation issues (many of these debates are not actually about the sharks but more about the people studying them). Shark conservation is as complex as the people comprising the diversity of stakeholders in the space: ecologists, biologists, fisheries scientists, commercial and recreational fishers, divers, wildlife enthusiasts, and policy makers.

Despite these differences, there remains a general consensus that sharks demonstrate relatively high rates of extinction risk, and certainly some species have been hit particularly hard. Oceanic whitetip sharks—a large open ocean species found globally in subtropical and tropical waters—were once among the most common species of large sharks in the ocean. Today, the species has suffered drastic declines of more than 90 percent throughout its range, rendering it rare in most parts of the world, except for a few fragmented regional populations. Hammerhead sharks, which can be prized for their large fins, face similar declines.

BUILT FOR POWER, NOT FOR SPEED

People love to describe sharks as perfect predators: sleek, powerful, and finely adapted for hunting. However, in one critical area, they are surprisingly ill-equipped: recovering from human impact. Unlike many other fish species that grow quickly and replenish their populations rapidly, most sharks follow a different life strategy—one that has served them well for millions of years but now leaves them highly vulnerable in the face of modern fishing pressure.

Sharks are built for power, not speed. They typically grow slowly and steadily, and they live long lives. While it would be difficult to provide an average life expectancy for all species pooled together, most of the more "typical" Carcharhinid sharks live for twenty to forty years. It is thought that species such as the white shark and whale shark may live to one hundred, and this slow pace of life comes with costly trade-offs: they take years to mature—sometimes a decade or more—and produce only a small number of offspring at a time. For example, the great white shark reaches maturity at around fifteen years of age and may only give birth every two or three years to a small litter of fewer than ten pups. One species of thresher shark gives birth to just one pup.

This slow reproductive strategy works naturally in a stable ocean, ensuring that the few well-developed young survive in each generation. But when sharks are killed in large numbers—whether through targeted fishing or bycatch—they simply can't keep up.

In addition to overfishing, risks to shark populations include habitat loss, pollution, and the effects of climate change. Many shark species rely on coastal habitats during at least one critical phase of their lives, with coastal ecosystems such as mangroves, coral reefs, and seagrass meadows serving as nurseries or seasonal feeding grounds.

However, with up to 60 percent of the human population occurring along coastlines, these same habitats face immense pressure. In developing countries, demands from the ocean increase in coastal communities, while for developed countries, key coastal habitats are removed to create marinas, condominiums, and high-end real estate. The loss of these ecosystems affects everything that depends on the same habitat, from juvenile and young sharks to reef fish and sea turtles.

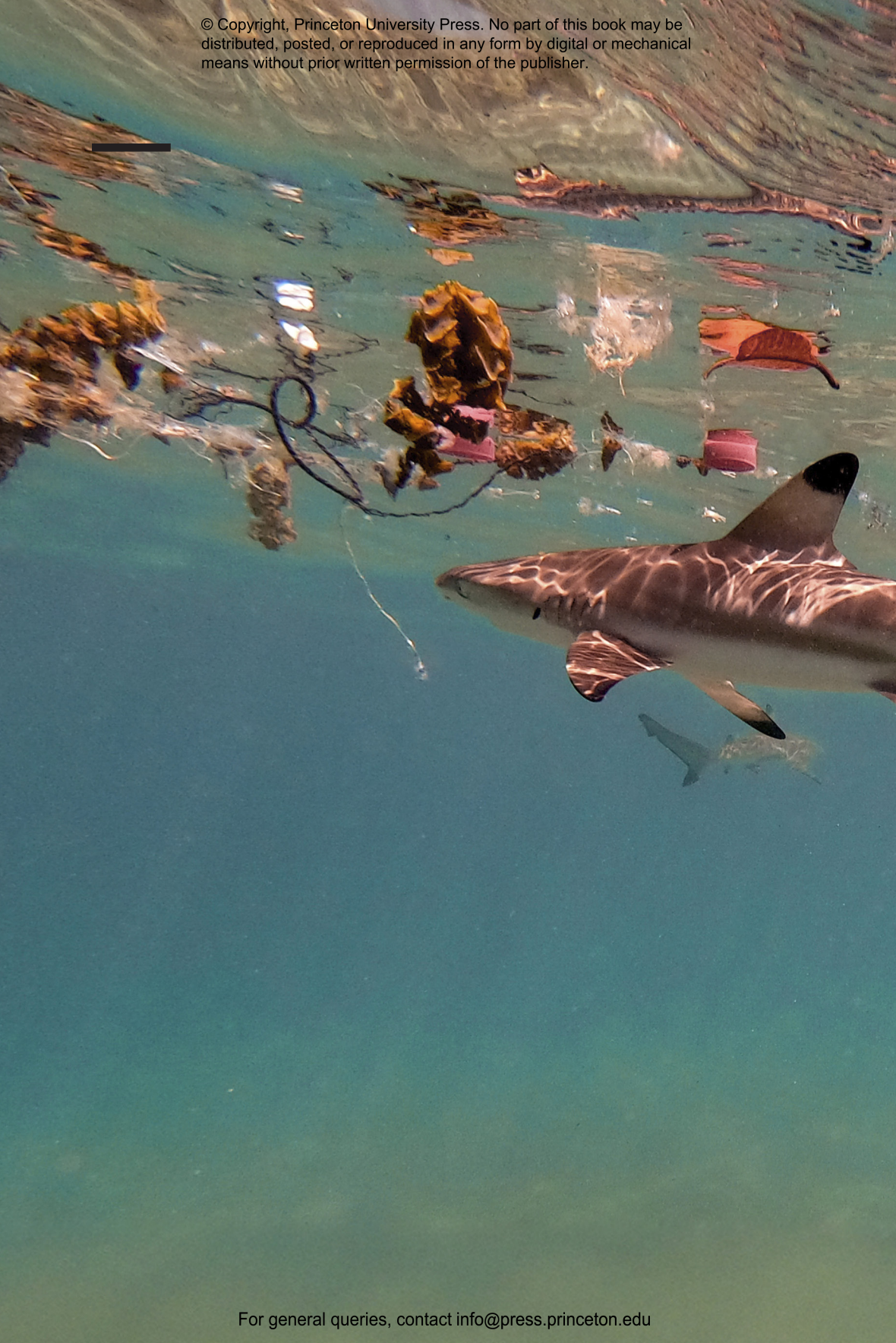
As ocean temperatures rise due to the effects of a warming planet, shifts in marine chemistry and oceanography can cause prey species to move and breeding seasons to change, affecting sharks and their natural patterns. These changes can also force sharks into unfamiliar waters—some species have been documented moving poleward and expanding their range, in part to escape the heat in search of cooler temperatures. The long-term effects of this are unknown for most species, but shark species living in the tropics and regions closer to the equator will be most at risk.

Pollutants entering the ocean from land-based sources also find their way into the food web and accumulate in larger consumers, such as sharks. Marine debris and plastics also affect sharks, ranging from entanglement to mortalities associated with consumption.

While these threats can be easily communicated and understood, they all operate far from shore, often out of sight and mind. When populations plummet, it may take years—even decades—before we realize something's wrong and by the time data confirms a species is in danger, the damage is likely already done.

It wasn't until the late twentieth century, and arguably into the early twenty-first century, that the scientific community had enough long-term data to begin accurately describing patterns of (negative) population change for sharks. Protecting sharks therefore means planning for the long game, and recognizing that even if we stopped all forms of shark fishing tomorrow, many species would take decades to recover. The good news is that recovery is possible.

Overleaf: The pollution of nearshore tropical marine habitats is particularly alarming. These habitats are often utilized by sharks as nursery areas, where juveniles may spend the first several years of their lives before venturing further offshore.



SAVING SHARKS

The global awareness around conserving, protecting, and saving sharks surged in the early 2000s, contributing to a near 180-degree shift from an idea on the fringes of the broader conservation movement awareness to something that is now commonly recognized and largely supported. There will always be those who cannot and will not be convinced (the stubborn and narrow-minded), and there will always be a small group of people who think it is cool or impressive to kill sharks for recreational purposes (the "dragon slayers"). However, today these groups are in the minority. The perceptions people have toward sharks are changing, and even those with the most inertia behind them (culture, religion, politics) can start to shift. Around the world, efforts to protect these animals—from local fishing villages to international treaty halls to some of the most remote diving sites—are growing. And while there's no single solution, there are many strategies that are beginning to show results.

As the knowledge base around shark biology increases, resulting from continued scientific research, so does our ability to determine what their conservation needs may be. This adaptive database forms the basis for ongoing assessments on the vulnerability and threat status of several species, which pave the way for international cooperation and progress in policy. Many countries now have national bans on shark finning, requiring that sharks be landed whole, with fins still attached, helping to curb some of the most unsustainable and wasteful sources of shark fishing mortality.

Organizations that manage fisheries at large regional scales (such as Atlantic and Pacific) have started placing catch limits on certain pelagic species, such as blue and mako, which are exposed to large-scale commercial fisheries. However, the efficacy of these measures is hard to determine, especially as many of these sharks are highly migratory and don't necessarily respect national borders during their migrations.

Above: The author releases a Caribbean reef shark after collecting measurements and tagging the species with an internal acoustic transmitter to passively monitor its habitat use throughout The Bahamas.

International agreements such as CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species), which regulate, report, and monitor the trade of threatened and endangered species, have increased listings of shark species over the last two decades. While CITES does not necessarily protect a given species, and several issues with enforcement and reporting remain, these species-specific wins underscore shifting political winds and awareness for shark conservation at a global level.

Straight-up protections that prohibit the fishing and killing of single species have been successful, and it helps when the species is charismatic and/or if their seasonal habitat use is well-defined. White sharks have been fully protected in US waters since 1993, and today their populations appear to be stronger than ever, following decades of unsustainable harvest, with robust populations on both coasts. In other cases, removing point sources of indirect mortality for sharks have proven valuable, as seen in basking sharks off Ireland, which rebounded in population after indiscriminate net-fishing was banned.

One of the most visible and effective conservation tools is the creation of marine protected areas (MPAs), which designate a given area of ocean and regulate the fishing pressure and activity, either for certain species, certain times, or a combination of both. MPAs, even if not shark-specific, can also benefit sharks, especially when they limit fishing and protect essential habitats, such as reefs and seagrass meadows, or if they protect the prey species that local sharks may rely on. Indeed, there are several examples where shark abundance is significantly higher in well-enforced MPAs than it is in surrounding areas. However, for these areas to remain effective there needs to be some degree of long-term financing to support both enforcement and monitoring.

Shark-specific protected areas also exist, with the most notable example being shark sanctuaries. These comprise the waters of entire nations, whereby all shark fishing is banned and commercial trade in shark products is prohibited. These areas provide sharks with something increasingly rare: a safe habitat where they can live, hunt, and reproduce without the threat of capture. Since 2009, more than twenty countries have declared their waters as shark sanctuaries, with some of the most notable including The Bahamas, French Polynesia, and Palau. The sustained abundance of sharks in these areas can have direct economic benefits to local and national economies, especially for the tourism sector, in which divers travel to these areas to encounter and experience sharks.

Right: Large, remote areas of high shark biodiversity—such as the nation of Palau, in the western Pacific—have established their territorial waters as shark sanctuaries, offering a sign of hope for the future of sharks.

SHARK DIVING: A NEW FRONTIER

One of the most powerful arguments for shark conservation is when protections can be leveraged to support markets. A key example of this is when conservation can benefit the sustainable, nonconsumptive use of sharks, as seen in shark diving tourism. For example, the three largest shark species—whale, white, and basking—support tourism activities around the world, creating important socioeconomic evidence for the maintenance of their national protection. In many places, diving activities are transforming local economies and this creates strong incentives to protect local shark populations. It would be socially and politically disastrous to start fishing out any of these species in the same areas where entire industries have been created around their repeated observation by tourists.

Shark diving now fuels multi-million-dollar tourism sectors in several countries. When it is managed responsibly, tourism can create a powerful economic incentive to protect sharks, provide jobs, and fund local conservation work. In some cases, dive operators have become conservation advocates, working with scientists to collect data for monitoring, and governments to promote sustainable practices and MPA management. In this way, the divers themselves support shark conservation indirectly (and sometimes directly) by using their wallets and choosing operators that follow sustainable shark practices, educate guests, and engage with local marine management efforts.

In my experience, shark divers are among the most passionate and dedicated ocean conservationists. By sharing their photographs and experiences online they become informal shark ambassadors. They can also play an important part in monitoring, which is a key aspect of conservation at all stages. Because divers tend to visit the same locations over time, they can make important observations on shark abundance and the health of the local marine habitat. In many cases, shark divers may notice changes before scientists do.

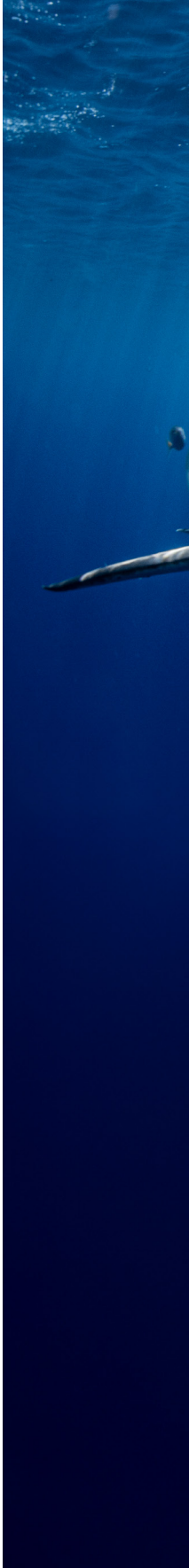
Opposite: The silhouette of the world's largest fish, the whale shark, almost completely eclipses the sun overhead off Mexico. Two snorkelers can be seen safely enjoying the encounter at the surface.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

While we have certainly pushed many species of sharks to the brink, we have also started to change course. Through a combination of better monitoring and science, stronger laws, engaged communities, and the growing influence of shark tourism, shark conservation will remain a viable platform for protecting these species.

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the scale of the challenges sharks face, but I've learned that hope in conservation is often built from momentum. It takes time and relentless dedication. Through this hard work, the small (and big) victories should be recognized and celebrated. Every discovery, every dive, every small shift in public perception matters. When people meet sharks on their own terms—without misguided fear, without unnecessary hype—they may start to care. And when people care, things can change. That's why I'm hopeful.

Now that we've covered the basics—from the diversity of sharks to their ecology and behavior, as well as their conservation—we're getting closer to suiting up for the adventure of diving into the world of sharks. In the following sections, we will learn more about what shark diving really is, how it can be done safely, and tips for maximizing experiences through photography and media.



Right: The crystal clear blue waters off Isla Guadalupe in Mexico show every detail on the body of this white shark as it passes by.

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR SHARKS

Here are a few ways divers, travelers, and ocean enthusiasts can help shark conservation efforts:

1. **Eat sustainable seafood.** Avoid consuming predatory fish, and avoid unsustainable fisheries (including those that incidentally catch sharks).

2. **Avoid shark products.** This includes shark fins and meat, as well as by-products that utilize their cartilage (pills) and liver oil (squalene, found in cosmetics).

3. **Learn and educate.** Stay up to date on shark science developments and share them with your community.

4. **Support conservation organizations.** Many reputable nonprofits and NGOs work directly to protect shark populations through science, policy, and education.

5. **Support responsible shark tourism.** Choose operators who follow best practices, respect wildlife, and educate their guests.

02

ENCOUNTERING SHARKS

DIVING WITH SHARKS

WHAT IS SHARK DIVING?

Diving with sharks is one of the most sought-after experiences in the ocean. It is an exhilarating activity that gives people the opportunity to share underwater space with sharks of various shapes and sizes (and demeanor), often under natural conditions. This immersive activity can be experienced in numerous ways, each offering unique interactions, viewing perspectives, and observational opportunities to get up close to these powerful creatures.

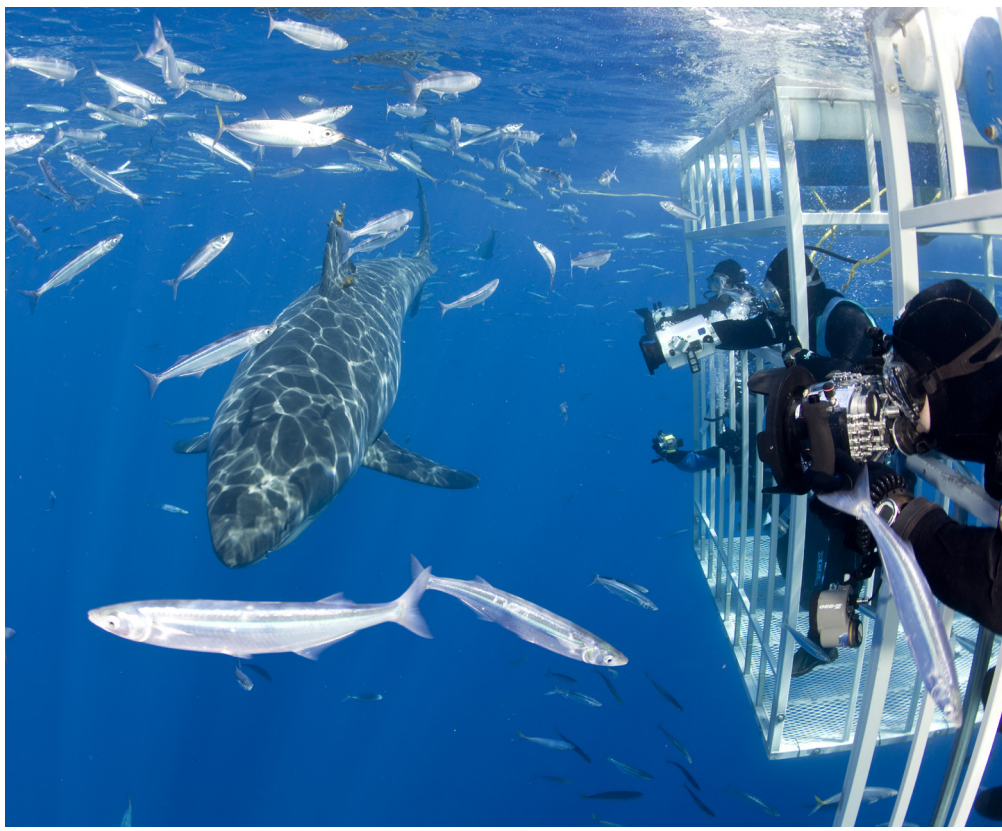
Opposite top: Certain dive activities feed sharks during the operation—either by hand, stick, or by placing pieces in the sand or suspended in the water column.

Opposite bottom: A group of divers snap away from inside a large surface cage, as a large great white shark passes by at Isla Guadalupe, Mexico.

Shark diving can be defined as any activity where human divers share the water with sharks in their wild, marine environment. Most shark diving activities around the world can be placed into one of three categories: snorkeling (including freediving), scuba diving (utilizing compressed air tanks to breathe at depth), and cage diving (which includes snorkeling, breath hold, compressed air lines, and the use of scuba tanks).

Of course, people can dive with sharks in other settings, such as inside aquarium tanks (some aquariums have massive tanks for large species, such as the whale shark), but while these programs can certainly bring people close to sharks, they don't constitute a true "shark diving" experience as defined above.

There are hundreds of locations around the world where it is possible to dive with sharks, with estimates of between 260 and 380 operations, across up to eighty or so sites. These range from chilly temperate waters to the warmer



subtropics, tropical coral reefs, and regions close to the equator. Each region offers the chance to observe different species, while specific locations can also offer different types of sharks according to seasonal patterns, providing a unique experience for each dive.

While they are obviously wild predators, the predictability in getting to see a shark (or multiple sharks) on a given dive is a key motivational factor for divers and a driving force for sustaining the business side of any operation advertising these experiences. Locations sustaining higher densities of healthy shark populations allow for more predictability in getting to see a shark on a given dive, which is why most shark diving operations build their activities around sites where species are either found commonly or regularly (such as coral reefs), or where sharks aggregate seasonally (such as great white sharks and seal colonies, which they use for hunting and foraging).

It is also logical that shark diving and the business operations involved in the industry will benefit greatly when they overlap with conservation measures that protect the sharks and their habitats. The Bahamas, for example, have been protecting sharks since 2011, when its territorial waters were declared a "shark sanctuary" (in fact, one could argue that sharks have been protected there since the early 1990s). Today, The Bahamas is a massively popular destination for shark enthusiasts to explore, and as a result it is often referred to as the "shark diving capital of the world."

Shark diving is one of my favorite activities, and in the pages that follow I will be drawing from the extensive personal experiences I've had in locations all around the world over the last fifteen years. I've shared the water with dozens of species, from seemingly endless groups of reef sharks in the tropics to blue and mako sharks in colder offshore habitats. I have enjoyed calm, relaxing shark dives and also felt the intense adrenaline when sharks become aggressive, forcing me to exit the water as quickly as possible.

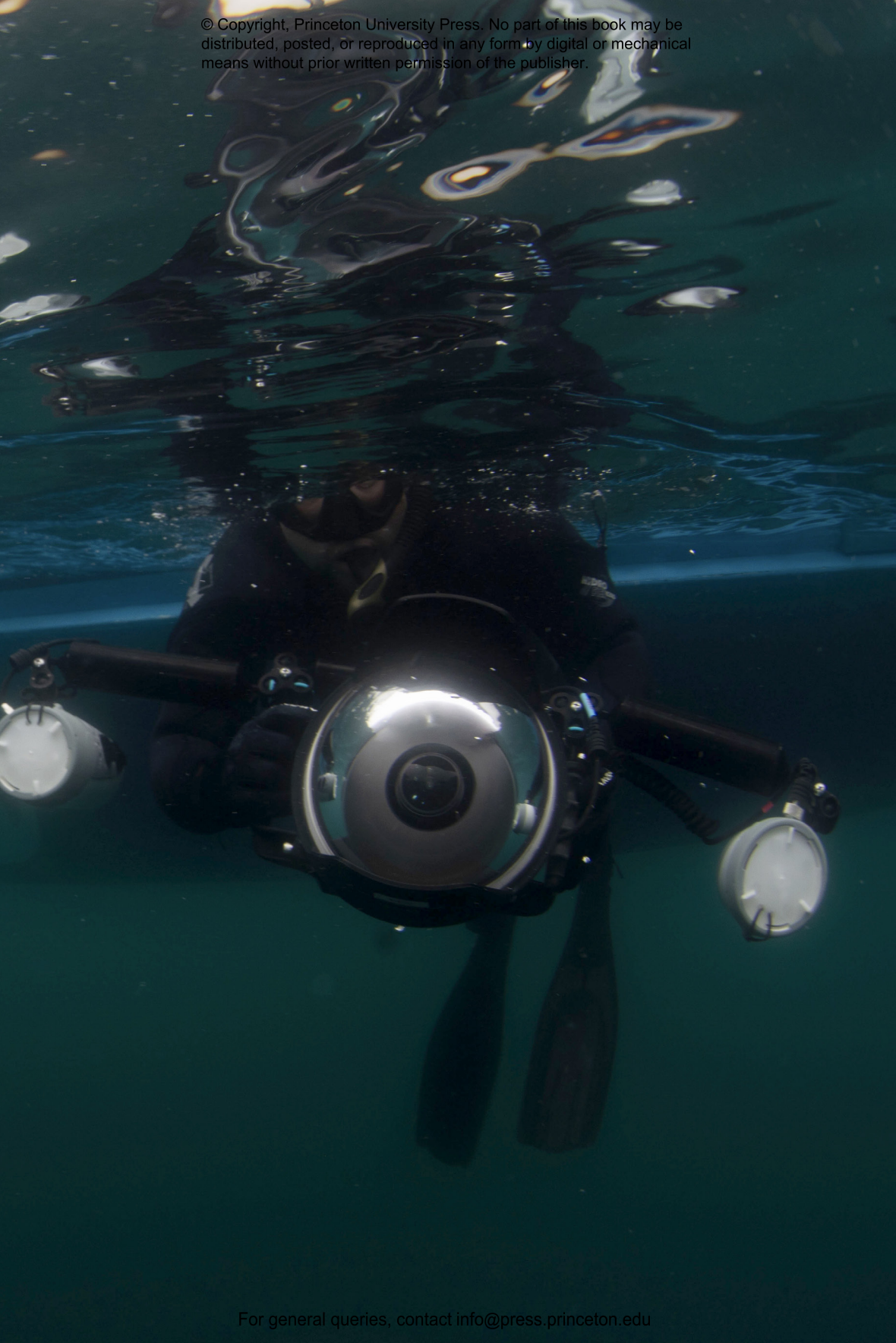
While shark diving can be a bucket-list experience for many, it also allows scientists to observe these creatures in their natural habitat. From viewing tiger sharks swimming over

Opposite: The face of a white shark houses an ancient supercomputer. On the outside, things are not just powerful but also dynamic, as the animals are constantly making small movements with their eyes and lower jaw.

Overleaf: The cool waters off Rhode Island, USA, in the northwest Atlantic, are one of the best places to reliably encounter and photograph blue sharks in their natural habitat.

seagrass meadows in The Bahamas to diving underneath hundreds of hammerhead sharks off the coast of Japan, to watching 20-foot (6-m) great whites from the protection of cages in Mexico, South Africa, and New Zealand, I have built up a massive database of firsthand experience with sharks and shark diving.

I've worked with tour operators throughout the global shark diving industry (and experienced a wide range of morals and ethics in how safety and conservation are approached), built friendships with dive masters and animal naturalists across multiple continents, and forged mutually beneficial research collaborations with industry stakeholders around the world. With these experiences, I have been able to share my insights in scientific studies on the scale, scope, and value of the shark diving industry itself, and what the impacts of these activities might be on shark behavior and physiology. I'm excited to share what I've learned—both as a shark diver and from the perspective of an active shark scientist—about shark diving locations, best practices, and, of course, insights into the species themselves, because (let's be honest) it is really all about them.



WHY IS SHARK DIVING POPULAR?

Historically, sharks have always been feared by people. Even as recently as three decades ago, they were largely viewed as mindless killers. Their portrayal in movies and popular media in the back half of the twentieth century reflected this sentiment quite profoundly. People rarely considered getting in the water with sharks. These species have always inspired our interest, but our knowledge about them—their biology, behavior, and the role they play in the ocean—has always lagged behind that of many other species, including the study of bony fishes.

Even today, there are still many gaps in our understanding of sharks. Building on the important work done by the few pioneering "shark scientists" pre-2000, shark research expanded in scale and scope in the 2000s, aided in part by innovations and improvements in technologies, such as electronic tagging. This increased the rate of discoveries, bringing greater interest toward capturing the nature of these animals in popular media and documentaries. The narrative started to shift, and the perception of sharks transformed from them being largely feared and hated to being idolized, protected, and in some cases worshipped by a newly borne community of shark enthusiasts.

As time progressed, more people began to seek out experiences with sharks and, by 2010, a number of forces combined to push shark diving well beyond the ultra-niche status it previously had. With the advent of social media, a growing conservation ethic, and the realization that sharks could be safely (and repeatedly) experienced by many, shark diving went big-time.

In one of the first global assessments of the shark diving industry, I mapped out its extent and scope with my then-PhD supervisor and now colleague and friend, Neil Hammerschlag, compiling data and interviewing experts from around the world. We recorded a total of 376 shark ecotourism operators

Opposite: Whale sharks can be encountered with relative ease at multiple locations worldwide, but management protocols and conservation ethics vary widely between sites.

across eighty-three locations worldwide, spanning eight geographic regions. When this paper came out, it caught fire among the ocean and shark conservation NGO communities, as well as within the policy and advocacy worlds. This novel output made two things very clear:

1. Shark diving tourism was here to stay.
2. Shark diving tourism was likely economically significant.

In light of this, the non-consumptive nature of shark diving was heralded as a major argument for protecting sharks. Follow-on assessments suggested that the shark-watching industry (which combined boat-based viewing with in-water diving or snorkeling) engaged more than 500,000 tourists, with the resulting expenditures exceeding $300 USD million per year. However, these figures were provided nearly a decade ago now and are likely much higher today; it has been predicted that shark watching (inclusive of diving) could generate nearly $1 USD billion a year in tourist expenditures by 2032. Several regional socioeconomic valuations of shark diving have also been performed in key areas such as Australia ($46 USD million) and The Bahamas ($113 USD million).

The timeline and factors above demonstrate how the shark-diving industry became a global movement, but at an individual level, what is it about shark diving that continues to drive its worldwide popularization?

A unique wildlife encounter
Sharks are awe-inspiring, mysterious creatures that most people don't encounter in their everyday lives. Diving with them offers a rare opportunity to witness their grace and power up close, which is both thrilling and humbling.

Size and diversity
Many of the most sought-after shark species in diving activities are large and iconic, suggesting that their impressive size is an important driver. Two of the most popular—great white sharks and whale sharks—are among the largest of all living shark species. In fact, most reef sharks, which are commonly seen throughout operations on coral reefs, are often 6 feet (1.8 m) or longer as adults.

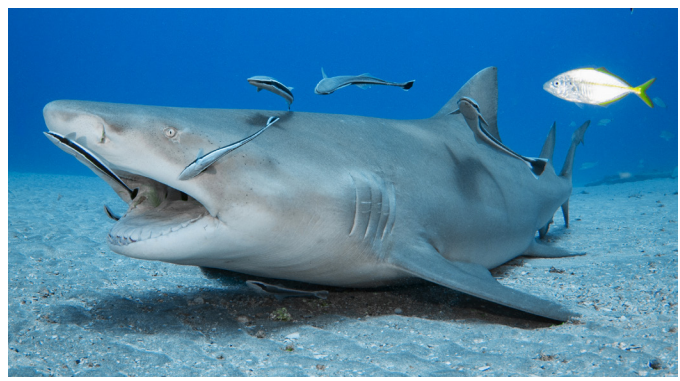
There are actually more than 550 species of sharks known to science, providing a huge database for people to encounter (although many species are found in the deep sea, which is not easily accessible).

Thrill and adventure

There are few opportunities to be up close and personal with wild animals (of any type) that have the size, power, and grace of sharks. As predatory consumers, sharks bring forward an element of risk and danger (in fact, they can be deadly), but with the right gear, guides, and education, shark diving can be very safe, as we will discuss later. While it can be intimidating for first-time divers, the experience is often thrilling (and can be addictive). People love telling stories about their unique shark diving experiences.

Observation and learning

Shark diving, like most wild animal encounters, puts us in a position to observe and understand sharks and their behavior. Certain shark diving encounters result in extended observational time, putting divers in the position of naturalists viewing behaviors, as would scientists conducting research. Personally, I know there is nothing more fulfilling than being able to generate ideas and theories about animals like sharks based simply on watching them. Being able to observe them in their natural habitats has not only allowed me to understand natural shark behavior, but it has also furthered my research into their biology and ecology. The excitement around watching and learning is a huge reason why people love shark diving and keep coming back for more.



Right: A lemon shark rests on the seafloor while having its mouth cleaned by fishes. Observing behaviors like this are possible at sites that are frequented by divers.

(continued...)

180. WELCOME JETTY, UEPI ISLAND, SOLOMON ISLANDS

Main shark species:
Often: grey reef, blacktip reef, whitetip reef
Occasional: scalloped hammerhead

Best time of year:
Year-round

Viewing notes:
Uepi Island is a secluded spot in the Solomon Islands, set on the edge of the Marovo Lagoon—the largest lagoon in the world. Colorful coral reefs are found all around the island, especially covering steep walls. While the occasional reef shark and scalloped hammerhead are seen on these walls, the best place to see sharks is at the end of the resort jetty, which sits on the top of a wall that drops to 108 feet (33 m). Constantly patrolling the wall are dozens of grey, blacktip, and whitetip reef sharks. Reef sharks are often shy of divers blowing bubbles, so the best way to get close to them is to snorkel. While grey reef sharks hang off the wall, blacktip and whitetip reef sharks constantly patrol the shallows, often in water only 3–feet (1–m) deep.

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