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- Are sharks good? A day with Greg Nowell of Sharklab Malta

# Are sharks good? A day with Greg Nowell of Sharklab Malta

Posted on May 7 2013 by [unlogged](http://blog.unlogged.co.uk/author/unlogged/) (<http://blog.unlogged.co.uk/author/unlogged/>)

[unlogged](http://www.unlogged.co.uk) ([www.unlogged.co.uk](http://www.unlogged.co.uk)), the dive centre guide, had the pleasure of joining Greg Nowell and his dedicated team of shark volunteers at several points throughout our time in Malta. The first time I experienced a day with [Sharklab](http://www.sharklab-malta.org/) (<http://www.sharklab-malta.org/>) was when I met

Greg at 6AM for a Saturday morning dive at the protected area around Filfla island. We had a chartered boat awaiting us and a special research permit for diving this restricted area located several kilometers out to sea. The day was spent with both resident divers and interested snorkelers from the local Gaia Foundation (<http://www.projectgaia.org/>), and we went out on a mission to document and photograph marine life in different zones around the island.



Though we didn't see a whole lot the winter day I went, I did learn quite a bit about shark research and conservation.

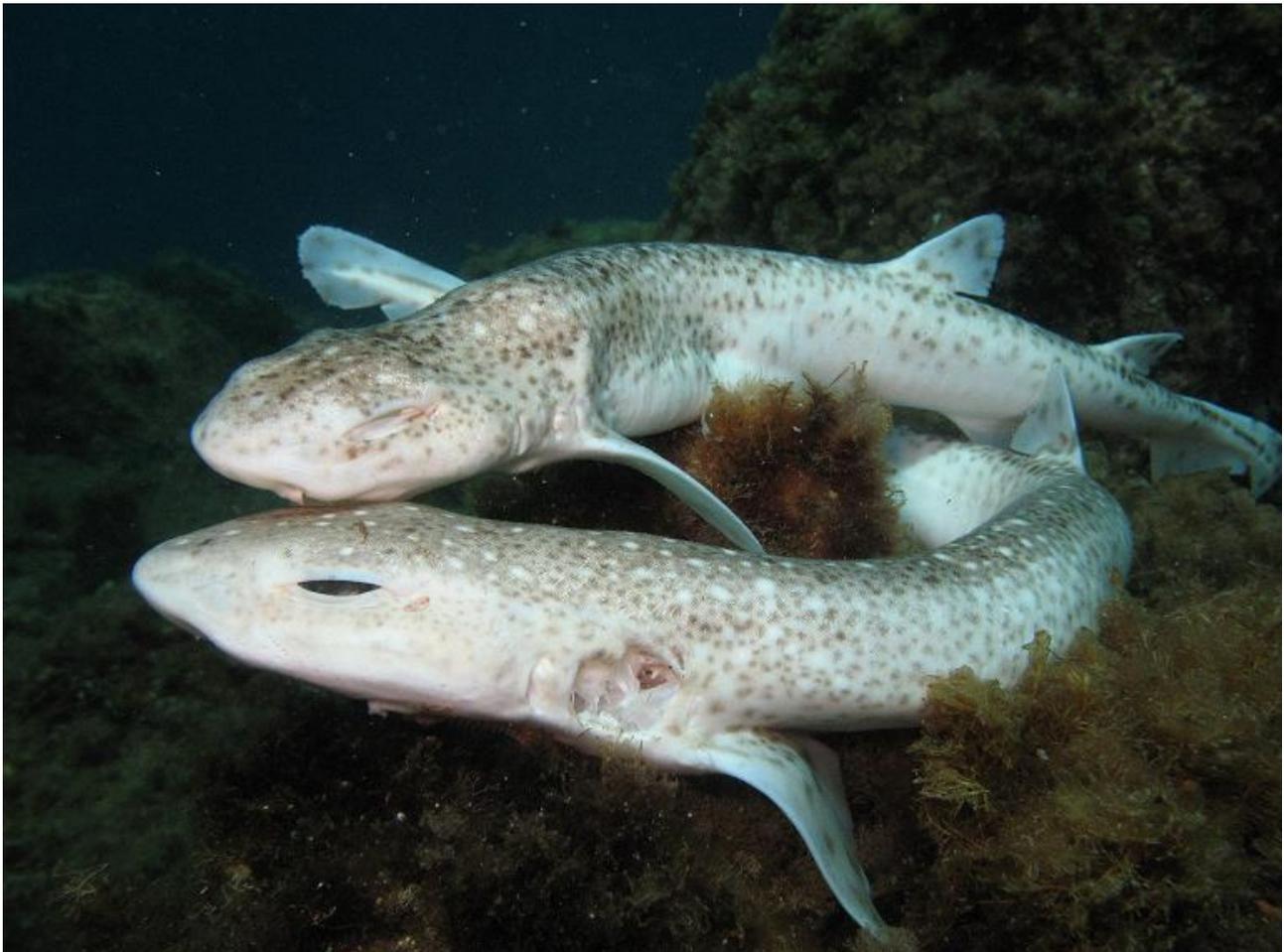
On another day, I got up at the no-one-sane-would-do-this hour of 3AM to join a couple of very dedicated Sharklab volunteers at Malta's main fish market. That is, the real-deal market where fishermen have brought in their catches to be sold by professional brokers. It's dirty, smelly, and not exactly a raging tourist attraction on the island. In fact, I don't even think it's open to the public. But since I was there with the Sharklab team, I was allowed in.



Greg goes to this middle-of-the-night market several times a week to document the types of fished animals being caught and sold there. This isn't Sea Shepherd (<http://www.seashepherd.org/>) like active intervention; besides monitoring legal and illegal fishing, the group also makes sure to spread the word via posters, word of mouth, and more when new fishing laws are enacted (especially concerning sharks). Greg and his team act with the utmost respect for the fishermen and the brokers, and all sides get along rather well. The morning I was there, we measured and recorded juvenile sharks that were caught and saw the remains of a 6-footer (caught far out at sea) that was sold in parts to area eateries. Seeing the juvenile sharks, some just 18 inches long, was especially disheartening since there's no way for these animals to ever reach sexual maturity, thus being able to procreate.

All this brings us to a question so many ask: Are sharks good? If one spots a shark, isn't that, well, scary and dangerous? As Greg points out, sharks are apex predators – that is, they're at the top of the food chain. This also means they help maintain a balance. If sharks disappear, certain fish populations can get out of control, or, in Malta's situation, sharks will disappear because a marine population has already been overfished, and there's little to feed on. And to answer another common question – no, shark attacks are actually not that common! They're publicised well, yes, but did you know that in 2007, faulty toasters killed 791 people, while sharks killed 9 (<http://blogs.reuters.com/environment/2008/01/17/toasters-deadlier-than-sharks/>)? The point is, the media sensationalises shark attacks, but most sharks are afraid of humans.

Perhaps that's because we kill over 100 million of them each year, often to be used in dishes such as shark fin soup. Your chances of seeing a shark in Malta are very slim, and most sharks don't even enter waters closer than 15 kilometers to shore.



Simply put, sharks are a good thing, and Sharklab is helping the waters of Malta through their efforts to help out sharks and other species. And when it comes to shark awareness, marine lookouts, and the state of underwater life in the country of Malta, Sharklab knows what's happening and what to do about it. Many dive shops on the island support or take part in Sharklab's work, and folks of all ages enjoy activities hosted by the organisation. The NGO's youngest member is just 6 years old, and their oldest is...well, we won't disclose that part. But with everything from school lectures and investigative dives to hatching egg casings and visiting markets, this NGO is doing their best to help protect the waters around Malta. If you want to find out more details about their current activities visit their website on [www.Sharklab-malta.org](http://www.Sharklab-malta.org) (<http://www.sharklab-malta.org/>).

Sharklab is an international non-profit NGO dedicated to research, education, and raising greater awareness about the Elasmobranch species (sharks, rays, and skates) around Malta and within the Mediterranean. It was founded by Andrej Gajic and Greg Nowell in 2008 and it is a member of the Shark Alliance ([www.sharkalliance.org](http://www.sharkalliance.org)), a coalition of many organisations intent on pursuing better management of sharks globally.

This entry was posted in [Time above the water](http://blog.unlogged.co.uk/category/time-above-the-water/) and tagged [Environment](http://blog.unlogged.co.uk/tag/environment/), [Fish](http://blog.unlogged.co.uk/tag/fish/), [Gozo](http://blog.unlogged.co.uk/tag/gozo/), [Malta](http://blog.unlogged.co.uk/tag/malta/). Bookmark the [permalink](http://blog.unlogged.co.uk/shark-protection-sharklab-malta/).

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