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OUR LATEST NEWSLETTER

All the best for 2009 to you all and may this year be the year that brings in a major improvement in the conservation of our oceans and a major shift in attitude where it is needed the most.

Well we are in full summer now, lovely warm days, shorts, t-shirts, swimming attire and sunburnt bodies (hands & faces only with a wetsuit tan if you are an avid diver). This is the time of year that skippers should be holding an umbrella over themselves too whilst waiting for divers below. So many of us are having such fun below the waves that we forget that the skipper is sitting above the waves for at least 50 minutes. But it is all such fun and it is so very inviting to be in the water on a hot day. Mother Nature has graced us with some really great conditions of late. We have had our fair share of summer rain or thunder storms in the afternoons after a hot day. All in all it has been a great time to be out on the ocean since last we updated you and there is a lot to tell you about this time.

DIVE CONDITIONS & DIVE SITE NEWS

We have had some very confusing days with regards to the weather & ocean conditions, only to be replaced with the "old" familiar weather patterns. There have been days that the water temperature on the bottom has been a chilly 21°C, where I decided to once again don my chicken vest & hood that I had happily packed away in the cupboard until winter time. Then it would creep up to 23°C over the next couple of days and the hood would remain behind. Then we would experience 24°C with a 3°C drop in a thermocline at some areas in the dive. How odd? And then.....we would have long spells of such a warm 24°C with crystal clear visibility reaching up to 30m. We have had 4m viz on certain days and then the doctor wind comes charging through and opens it up to 20m+ - so I guess a couple of seasons in a few days is what we had. And then it all just calmed down to a very, very exciting time of a flat ocean, clean viz and warm water. And if you think WE were a little confused, read on further to see what is still hanging around way after season has ended!!!!!!

At the time of writing this to you, we have had over a week and a half now of settled conditions and constantly good visibility, with 24°C being the normal water temperature.

We have had a very mixed group of experience levels with our divers of late and have spent quite a bit of time at Cathedral, Raggie Cave, North Sands, Pinnacles, Shark Alley, Howard's Castle and drifting happily along the outside edge of Aliwal Shoal - I love this site!!!!!!

OCEAN AWARENESS EDUCATION

We will be starting our ongoing ocean & shark awareness project again once all the schools are back in the swing of things and we will report to you as we go along. We aim to reach a much wider area of schools this year and hope to reach 10 more schools, over and above re-visiting & assisting the other schools that we presented to in 2008.

CONSERVATION & RESEARCH NEWS

Are you ready for this bit of news.....we **STILL** have 8 ragged tooth sharks on the reefs at the moment - 5 females at Raggie Cave and 3 females at Cathedral!!!!!!! We are stunned, what are they still doing here and why have they not moved off with the 60 others that were here and have since left???? Maybe they will stay for summer?? They were supposed to move off at the end of November?? They have no visible ID marks, save for the one female that has quite vivid mating scars on the right hand side of her dorsal fin, which will heal with time



At Raggie Cave, 2 of the females are much larger than the other 3 and at Cathedral, 1 of the females is larger than the other 2. At Cathedral, the sharks have moved away from the main amphitheatre section of the site and are hovering underneath a shallow ledge on the northern side of the amphitheatre.

The females at Raggie Cave are hovering inside the main cave and are not venturing out of the cave area much. None of the sharks are vaguely interested in the divers, nor do they appear to be slightly interested in the visits that they are receiving due to their presence being "totally out of season". They are all super chilled and merely floating around.

On one of our dives at Cathedral, we managed to find 2 teeth in the sand, one belonging to a very juvenile Ragged tooth shark and the other a fully mature front tooth.

On the tiger shark side of things, we have had some brief interaction with some new sharks to the area as they are not as relaxed as the others and they do not hang around for long. We are still spending time with some older, chilled animals too. In addition, an older 4m female has been sighted a few times now and some are saying that she looks pregnant. As is always the case, we still have around 30 blacktip sharks in the same area and they seem to be an absolute certainty for these encounters.

The other dive destination that we work with on our mobile trips, Sodwana Bay, has reported that their seasonal ragged tooth sharks have now arrived and they have around 30 sharks on quarter mile reef (their favoured spot). These sharks should remain there until mid to late February. Likewise, Rocktail Bay, a further site that we work with on our mobile trips, has also reported their seasonal arrival of Ragged tooth sharks and currently have around 7 at Island Rock.

So it is all looking great on the shark movement side of things, apart from the females that are so in love with Aliwal Shoal that they don't want to leave and may not either

RECENT DIVE SITE SIGHTINGS

Aside from all the exciting shark sightings that we have mentioned above, we have also encountered the following recently:

Nudibranches – many, in all different forms & colours

3 round ribbon tail rays – 1 co-existing with the 5 raggies at Raggie Cave

Loggerhead turtles & hawksbill turtles out on the reef

White paper fish

Green frogfish (painted angler fish) – a very exciting find and my first here at Aliwal Shoal

Numerous large pods of bottlenose dolphins with calves and bottlenose dolphins mating

Scalloped hammerhead shark – on my open water students' 2nd training dive

A massive honeycomb moray eel trying to fit into a ledge at Shark Alley

Flounders

All the usual reef dwellers, mid-water swimmers and fusiliers in great shoals midwater

The largest and fattest potato bass (grouper) that we have seen in some time, wedged underneath a ledge, attempting to hide away!!



And wait for it.....

As we ascended from one of our recent dives, Andrew (skipper) signalled for us to look beyond the boat and as we did, we saw a humpback mother & calf on the surface. The mother was sailing (head down, tail (fluke) in the air) and was teaching her calf tricks. Now this was a rare treat for us as they too are late for their season as they should have travelled past our area by late November, to be back home in the Arctic for winter. They were in no hurry at all and were playing around on the surface together, flukes out of the water, mother constantly sailing and an absolutely amazing encounter. Had we remained in the water for a few minutes longer, we are sure that they would have passed by our group. It is an absolutely amazing sight to surface and see a whale's body not far off from where you are, all sharing ocean space at the same time.

RECENTLY QUALIFIED STUDENT DIVERS

Our heartiest congratulations go to our most recent newly qualified divers Greg, Di, Brett & Storme who all completed their PADI Open Water dive course recently. We had the pleasure of doing some extra dives with them and they were incredibly fortunate to witness some amazing encounters, amongst others, the ragged tooth sharks, the scalloped hammerhead shark on their 2nd training dive and of course the hectic north to south current on their first dive and successfully completing skills on this dive despite this. Well done to you all!!





SHARK AWARENESS COURSES

Don't forget that we are running a host of speciality courses this summer, amongst them Tiger Shark, Blacktip shark and Ocean Awareness and we can tailor make these for you when it suits you, if you are not able to join a scheduled course date.

In addition we are also offering mobile shark awareness courses up at Sodwana Bay (Ragged tooth shark & Whale shark) or at Rocktail Bay (Ragged tooth shark). Both of these spots are exciting sites and we can join you there and continue diving with you

Contact us if you would like to learn more about all of these amazing animals.



FACEBOOK

Keeping up with the times and for those of you on Facebook, Diving with Sharks is now on Facebook as a group. Please join and feel free to write to us here or post your pictures taken with us onto the page. We will keep you updated on happenings via Facebook too. Also, please feel free to invite your friends.





And finally.....

NEWS FLASH

We have just linked with a "first ever" unique product for Aliwal Shoal in conjunction with Shark Life. To further promote shark awareness and the **critical** need for education and to ensure that all sharks remain in our oceans, we are now promoting **shark cage "diving"**, typically aimed at non divers, who wish to see sharks up close in their natural environment. This is however not limited to non divers as there are a lot of people out there who would love to view sharks up close but would prefer to do this within the confines of a cage. We are also going to be promoting this for corporate team building events, school education, groups & individuals.

The cage is not of the metal variety, as used by the Great White shark operators, as we are not viewing Great White sharks. The cage is made of a strong, meshed netting material, is inflatable and can take up to 4 people at one time for viewing with **snorkel equipment only**.

We will not be focusing on any one shark species but will spend time with whatever sharks come in at the time.

The proceeds from these trips will go to Shark Life, to aid their growth as a non-profit conservation group creating an awareness of shark conservation and lobbying for further protection of our shark stocks.

So..... Be sure to watch this space and we will update you of all our exciting sightings as they happen.

Until next time, take care, happy bubble blowing wherever you are and we look forward to seeing you soon!! And don't forgetresponsible seafood eating & choices.

Debbie
Diving with Sharks