



March 2017

Newsletter

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Major steps for international protection of Caribbean sharks following Dutch proposal

Great news for shark conservation in the Caribbean. Today it was officially decided to protect eight shark species under the international Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Protocol following a proposal by the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs in cooperation with a team of shark experts. The SPAW protocol is the only cross-border legislative instrument for nature conservation in the Wider Caribbean Region.

Political representatives of 14 Caribbean countries (the Netherlands represents the Caribbean islands Saba, St. Eustatius and Bonaire) came together in Cayenne, French Guiana to vote which species would officially be added to the SPAW protocol. Through the SPAW protocol, which is a United Nations initiative, the signatory countries set agreements to protect vulnerable animals and their unique habitats. The agreements concern trade and fisheries, as well as tourism and coastal development.

Until now, no sharks or rays were included in the protocol, despite being an especially threatened animal group, both on a global scale and in the Caribbean region. The main

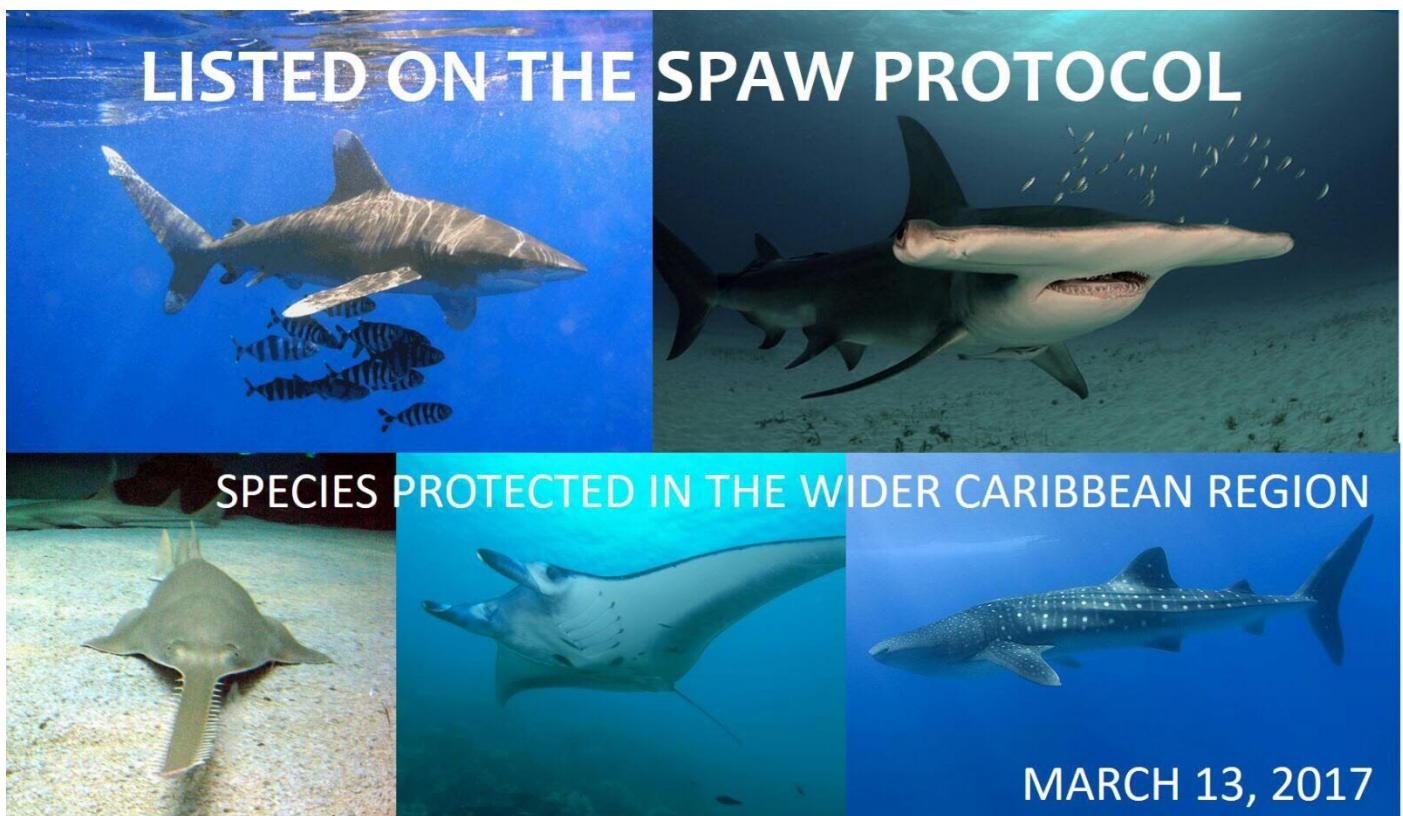
threats to shark populations are overfishing and destruction of vital habitats such as coral reefs and mangroves.

"We are delighted that our proposal got such broad support from the present countries," says Guus Schutjes of the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs. *"The Netherlands has strived for the structural protection of nature and biodiversity in the Caribbean for some time now and cross-border protection is an essential part of this."*

Threatened species

The Ministry of Economic Affairs proposed a shortlist of eight shark species for listing on the protocol. This included three species of Hammerhead shark, the Whale shark, the Oceanic Whitetip shark, the sawfish (of which few people know it is a shark), and two manta ray species. All of these species are Caribbean natives and threatened by human interference. Protection is needed to ensure the species are safeguarded for the future. In November 2016, the proposals of all eight species were accepted during a technical meeting in Miami. Today's vote was the final step towards legal protection.

Irene Kingma, director of the Dutch Elasmobranch Society (DES) and one of the shark experts that helped with the shortlist: *"Sharks do not respect borders and cover enormous distances, which is why it is important to protect them on a region-wide scale. The proposals from the Dutch Ministry have helped providing these fragile species with the protection they deserve, which we consider a great success."*



Great hammerhead tagged on St. Maarten

An exceptional catch for the Nature Foundation in St. Maarten waters this month. During their last trip, they worked up a 3.3 meter (11 ft.) great hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna mokarran*), a first for the region! And needless to say, the team was very excited! Measurements and DNA samples were taken and the animal was released in good health. That same day, two tiger shark were also recorded and tagged.

As part of the Save Our Sharks conservation and research program, the shark population on St. Maarten is regularly monitored, recording the various species, and their health and morphology. They also take DNA samples and tag the species. This data is used to guide policy and to educate the public on the importance of sharks.



Prize for DCNA's Tadzio Bervoets

The Advisory Committee of the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands announced that the Euan P. McFarlane Environmental Leadership Award for calendar year 2016 goes to Mr. Tadzio Bervoets of Sint Maarten, in recognition of his important work as a dedicated and passionate Caribbean conservationist.

Recipients of the McFarlane Award are recognized to be persons who have applied themselves to the preservation of the natural or built environment on one or more of the small islands of the Caribbean and whose career or avocation demonstrates an appreciation of and support for the advancement of environmental stewardship and balanced development in the Caribbean. The Committee believes that presentation of the McFarlane Award to Mr. Bervoets (for the amount of \$1,000) will boost conservation efforts in St. Maarten and promote recognition of the challenges faced by the region.

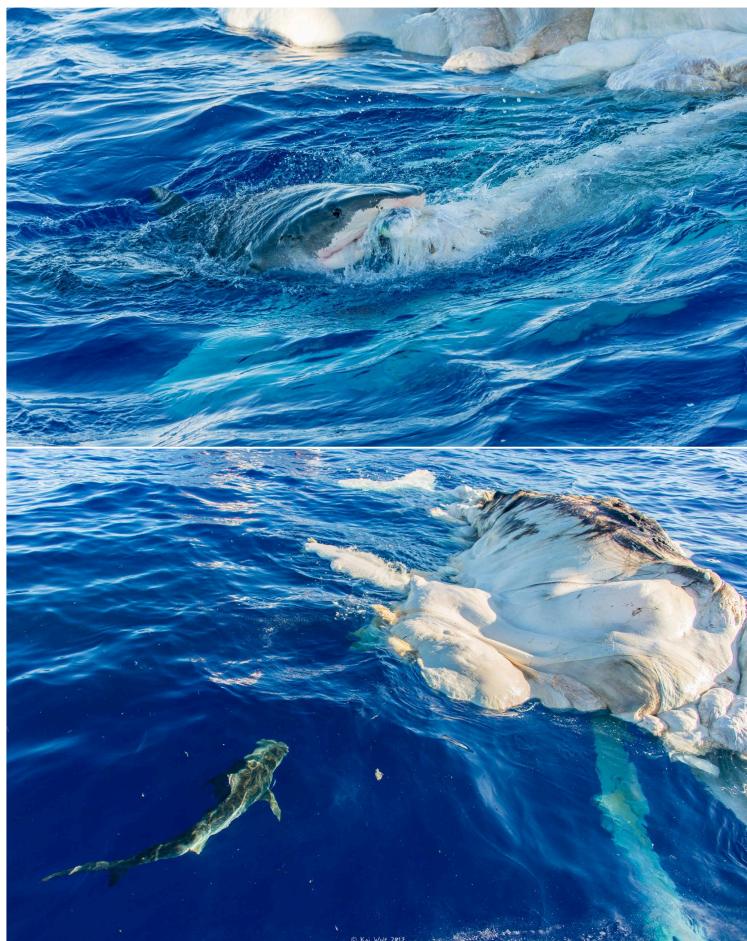
Mr. Bervoets was nominated by colleagues, who highlighted his policy and management skills and experience as demonstrated at local, national, and regional levels. Mr. Bervoets has both created and revitalized environmental institutions in St. Maarten, including the Ocean Care Foundation, the St. Maarten Nature Federation, the Reef Check Program in St. Maarten, and the Sea Scouts Program to teach local children about the marine environment. In addition, he helped to establish the territory's first protected area, promoted enactment of species-specific legislation, successfully lobbied for the establishment of Mullet Pond as a Ramsar site of international importance. Bervoets is the project manager of the Save Our Sharks project and chair of the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance.

Feast for tiger sharks on Saba

A large dead whale floating about 5 miles Northwest off Saba on March 5th provided a great feast for sharks around the island. The 12-meter long adult humpback whale was found with a long oil slick behind it. A group on the Dawn 2 ferry, the Saba Conservation Foundation, and several dive organizations quickly arrived at the scene to collect check out the situation. As expected, large number of sharks was circling the whale. Certainly some huge, about 4 meter long tiger sharks were seen, but also threshers sharks, bull sharks, and possibly even blue sharks were feasting on the carcass.

Tiger sharks are opportunistic scavengers, known to gather around dead whales. But unlike white sharks, which tend to scare off other shark species from their prey, tiger sharks do not keep away other shark species.

The Saba Conservation Foundation went back the next morning, to take further images and collect tissue samples, which will be sent to their partners at National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Wageningen Marine Research in the Netherlands for analysis about the origin and possible cause of death of the whale.



Photos by Saba Conservation Foundation

If you have any questions or comments regarding this newsletter, please contact
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