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Newsletter

## In this issue

- 1 Crowdfunding campaign for St. Maarten nature restoration
- 2 Bonaire Hosts International Meeting on Protection of Sharks
- 3 Remarkable showdown captured on camera

## Crowdfunding campaign for St. Maarten nature restoration

On September 6th 2017, category 5 hurricane Irma passed over the Caribbean region with absolutely devastating effects. On St. Maarten alone, an estimated 95% of infrastructure was destroyed. And nature took a big hit as well. In addition to damages on land, the underwater environment was greatly affected by the currents and swells caused by the storm. Scientific research conducted in the Caribbean Sea, which is a critical aspect to protecting the underwater life, was also impacted. Shark conservation campaign Save Our Sharks focuses on the protection of sharks in the Dutch Caribbean and is therefore committed to raising funds on the crowdfunding platform 1%Club, which is needed to bring the shark conservation and scientific research efforts back to their previous status. The goal is to raise €8.000,- that can either contribute to restoring an important shark nursery area or replace lost acoustic receivers used to track tagged sharks. Save Our Sharks hopes to be able to address both issues.

### Restoring Mullet Pond mangroves

The first assessments post hurricane Irma by the local Save Our Sharks partner, the Sint Maarten Nature Foundation, found major devastations of the St. Maarten marine ecosystems. The findings included damaged coral

reefs, uprooted seagrass beds and mangroves, and sunken boats leaking fuels adding to the high level of pollution from debris caused by the storm. Mullet Pond, a protected area containing 70% of the last remaining mangroves on St. Maarten, was found littered with large debris, sunken boats and even houseboats that were illegally stored for the storm, and most of the mangroves are severely damaged. Mangroves are important habitat for young sharks providing shelter until they are large enough to move to the open coral reef habitat.



The mangroves of Mullet Pond before (left) and after (right) hurricane Irma

## Replacing scientific research set-ups

The Sint Maarten Nature Foundation spent the previous years conducting research on the status of shark populations around the island. They placed acoustic receivers allowing scientists to track tagged sharks and learning about their migration patterns and habitat use. This information is vital to improve policy and legislation for shark conservation. All the receivers recording the sharks' movement can no longer be retrieved as they either washed away or buried deep under the ocean floor. This brings a halt to the current research and many valuable data will be lost if they cannot be replaced.

The costs for cleaning up Mullet Pond and purchasing new acoustic receivers is estimated to exceed €15.000,-. Save Our Sharks hopes to raise at least €8.000,- with a crowdfunding campaign. Thanks to a generous donation from the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance, the Nature Foundation was able to start cleaning up Mullet Pond, but there is still a lot of work to be done.

Tadzio Bervoets, manager of the Sint Maarten Nature Foundation and Save Our Sharks project leader: *“The humanitarian consequences of Irma are obvious. And its effects on land are very visible. The underwater damage, however, is not as clear to most. Restoring this environment is equally important. St. Maarten is known for its sharks and the associated dive tourism is an important source of income. With Save Our Sharks, we have had some great accomplishments and we really elevated the level of shark protection. It is a great shame that these efforts are now jeopardized. While everybody is working hard on land, we are working hard towards restoring the damages underwater and preparing the environment for better times. We can use all the help we can get.”*

# Bonaire hosts international meeting on protection of sharks

(Source: RCN/EZ Netherlands)

From November 20-24th, 2017 a group of international shark experts gathered at Captain Don's Habitat on Bonaire to discuss measures for the international protection of sharks. Countries ranging from the Philippines to Saudi Arabia, from the United States to Australia and from Costa Rica to Chile have sent experts to Bonaire for an advisory meeting of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks (Sharks MOU) under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

The meeting brought together both the Advisory Committee and the Conservation Working Group of the Sharks MOU, to discuss what shark or ray species need more protection internationally, how they can best be protected, how to cooperate with fisheries organizations and how to build capacity for better shark protection. They formulated recommendations for the Meeting of Signatories, which will take the final decisions.

The Netherlands is one of 41 signatories to the Sharks MOU; the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food quality (LNV) hosted this workshop on Bonaire in order to help profile Bonaire as a shark friendly island and "green destination" and also to promote the Sharks MOU in the Caribbean region, where there are still relatively few signatories. Bonaire has been protecting sharks since 2008 because of their importance to its dive tourism and in 2015 also joined in the Yarari Sanctuary for marine mammals and sharks, comprising the waters of Bonaire and Saba. The Tourism Corporation Bonaire (TCB) supported the



meeting and welcomed the participants at a cocktail party on Monday evening.

The Sharks MOU is the first global instrument for the conservation of migratory species of sharks. Sharks are under serious threat around the globe. At present time, it is estimated that one-quarter of shark and ray species are threatened worldwide. The number of sharks being killed every year ranges between 63 and 273 million individuals.

The MOU is a legally non-binding international instrument within the framework of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). It aims to achieve and maintain a favorable conservation status for migratory sharks based on the best available scientific information and taking into account the socio-economic value of these species for the people in various countries. Currently 29 species of sharks are listed in Annex I of the MOU

The Netherlands has taken an active role in the Sharks MoU, and with the Caribbean Netherlands the Netherlands is a range state for numerous migratory shark species. Sharks are an important attractor for dive tourism. Dive tourism is the economic mainstay for Bonaire, which is why the island decided to protect all sharks almost ten years ago already. More recently both Bonaire and Saba requested the Netherlands to establish a sanctuary for both sharks and marine mammals in the water so the islands as well as in the waters of the adjoining Exclusive Economic Zone. As a result, the Yarari Sanctuary was established in 2015 which will help to improve protection of in particular migratory sharks.

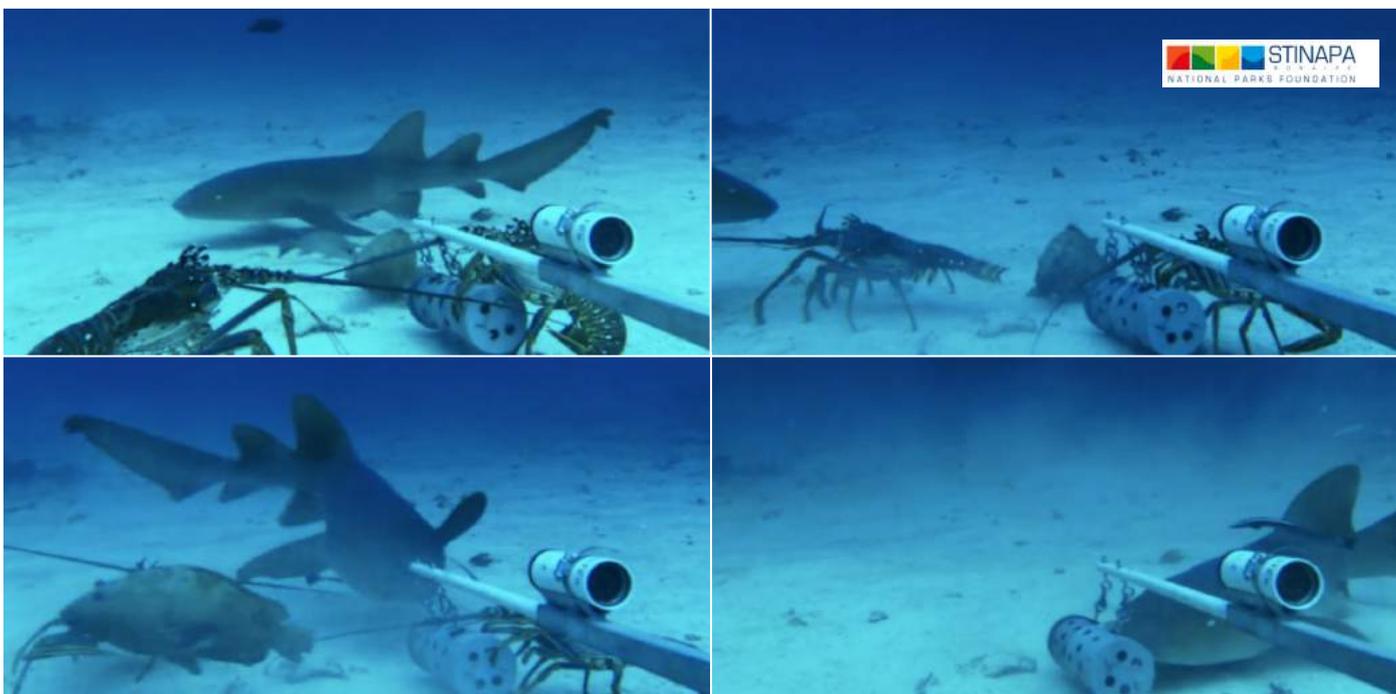
## Cooperating partners

The Dutch Elasmobranch Society (NEV), the partner organization of Save Our Sharks in the Netherlands, signed an agreement this week making them an official 'cooperating partner' of the Sharks MOU. Cooperating partners are asked to use their network and expertise to help attain the objectives of the MOU.



## Remarkable showdown captured on camera

The team from STINAPA Bonaire is currently conducting a camera study of the shark communities around the island. By deploying so-called BRUVs (Baited Remote Underwater Video) it is investigated what species occur in Bonairian waters, and what can be deduced about their relative abundances in different locations. The videos of the study occasionally yield some remarkable footage, such as a recent showdown between a shark and two hungry lobsters competing over the bait bag in front of the camera. The video shows two lobsters working to access the bait inside the bag when an inquisitive nurse attracted by the smell shark comes over. The lobsters' first reaction is to defend the food source from the shark by displaying threatening behaviors. However, it doesn't take long for them to realize that they are not a match for the much larger fish, and they have to accept their defeat. The footage greatly portrays an example of natural dynamics within the underwater ecosystem. You can watch the entire clip on the Vimeo channel of STINAPA: [www.vimeo.com/stinapa](http://www.vimeo.com/stinapa)



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you can visit our website**

**[SaveOurSharks.nl/Donate](http://SaveOurSharks.nl/Donate)**

If you have any questions or comments regarding this newsletter, please contact [info@saveoursharks.nl](mailto:info@saveoursharks.nl)