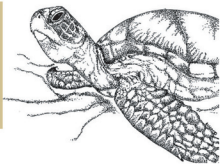


SIMCA Newsletter

www.reef-guardian.org

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Whaleshark Season

On March 13th, 4 whale sharks were sighted about 4 kilometers north-west of Lankayan Island. It was an exciting moment for the divers and snorkellers. The whale sharks stayed near the surface, with their dorsal fins visible from the surface. The whale sharks come early this year compared to 2007 & 2008. In 2007, 5 sightings were made in May and while in 2008, 4 sightings were made in April. The sea around Lankayan Island is a migration passage for the whale sharks. Whale sharks are highly migratory species, but the migration pattern is poorly understood. The presence of whale shark is often associated with the availability of foods which is plankton. In 2007, two whale shark pictures, taken in Lankayan, were submitted to ECOCEAN for the Whale Shark Photo-identification Library. Apparently whale sharks can be distinguished by natural markings or scars which are unique to each individual animal. From the two whale shark pictures that we posted, ECOCEAN found that both had never been recorded anywhere else before. The two whale shark were given the IDs :MY-005 & MY-006.



Similar to other shark species, whale sharks are threatened because their fins are highly prized in Asian market as the key ingredient in shark fin soup. Beside that these creatures are also slaughtered for shark liver oil and cartilage. Many sharks have also been inadvertently killed by fishing gears such as longlines and drift nets with more than half of those killed being juvenile.

The population of sharks is declining globally. About 18 species of sharks, including whale sharks have been listed as endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).



Baby sharks were killed in drift nets. Pictures taken near Billeean Island



News: Baby whale shark caught in net at Johore 2004



Shark fins soup?

6700 eggs Not hatched!

On November 3rd, 2008 Reef Guardian & Sabah Wildlife Department incubated about 6700 green turtle eggs that had been confiscated from illegal traders during a Marine Police Operation. With the help of resort guest Suzanne and Heidi, the eggs were buried at the Lankayan Island turtle hatchery on November 5th even though we expected that nearly 99% of the eggs would not hatch after the 2 months incubation period. This is because almost all the eggs were more than 3 days old, and had indications of weight loss (reduced water content).



Almost all eggs were spoilt.

Sea turtle eggs are still harvested illegally in the region, although all species of sea turtles are listed as protected species. A few years ago, sea turtle eggs priced at about RM0.50 each could still be seen being openly sold in Sandakan market. Today, turtle eggs cost about RM1.50 to RM2.00 (US\$0.90) each. Enforcement by authorities has helped to eliminate turtle eggs being sold openly in the market. However, turtle eggs are still available in the black market. The turtle egg sellers use creative strategies such as sign language to indicate to buyer that there are turtle eggs for sale. This strategy has been used in order to escape from being detected and caught by the authorities.

Our Funders -

Conservation International Philippines

This year Conservation International - Philippines continued support Reef Guardian (RG) financially by providing US\$60,500 in funds to strengthen RG's sea turtle monitoring program, and to extend RG's enforcement activities to Billeean and Tegaipil Islands. The aim of RG's sea turtle monitoring program to reduce or totally eliminate threats to sea turtles and their habitats (coral reefs & nesting beaches) from destructive human activities within the SIMCA region. The partnership with Conservation International - Philippines was established in 2006, when Reef Guardian was funded to increase the capacity of staffs for enhanced SIMCA management and to increase enforcement efficiency through training with the Sabah Wildlife Department.

United States National Fish & Wildlife Foundation

Funding provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) in 2008 was a great success. The funds enabled Reef Guardian to carry out a variety of activities, such as implementing 5 education programmes with schools in Sandakan, coordinating 2 strategy planning meetings with enforcement agencies, and training & certifying 6 staff as Honorary Wildlife Warden to perform enforcement duties within SIMCA.

Sugud Islands Marine Conservation Area (SIMCA)

SIMCA was declared as a marine conservation area on 3rd December 2001 under category II, which provides that SIMCA is protected for ecosystem preservation and recreational purposes.

Thank you for your support.

Regards from: Achier & all others from Lankayan Island

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