

Project Update: November 2002

In November 2002, I attended the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) conference in Santiago, Chile. I played a major role in the preparation of this nomination - submitted by the governments of the Philippines and India.

The nomination was successful, with the CITES countries (160 in total) agreeing to endorse the Appendix II listing. This will result in improved monitoring and tighter trade restrictions on the sale of whale shark products - a species that is vulnerable to extinction.

This will greatly assist my work within the Rufford grant. In the first instance, extensive liaison with international attendees at CITES opened up opportunities for further work in 3rd world countries to help efforts for the global conservation of the whale shark.

I have been invited to give the keynote presentation at a seminar / conference planned for Taiwan in May 2003 that will be aimed at promoting whale shark ecotourism as an ecologically sustainable alternative to the slaughter of this threatened species. It is at this time that I will also have extensive discussions with the community to help them make this transition and undertake work identified in the original Rufford Grant application.

I had previously planned a trip to Mexico in November 2003 to help the community with the sustainable management of the sharks near here. Unfortunately, the numbers of whale sharks were severely reduced in 2002 - which is very worrying for the survival of the species in this region. The visit was therefore postponed. However, I continue to liaise with Mexico and plan a visit during 2003 when the sharks return. The visit to India is scheduled for later in 2003, although I continue to have discussions with stakeholders in the region in preparation for my visit. The work at CITES in November 2002 has enhanced the Rufford program planned for this region in 2003.