

THE GREAT WHITE IN ALGOA BAY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this project is to collect information on the population dynamics of white sharks within Algoa Bay, specifically within the Bird Island Marine Protected Area. The project will focus on juvenile white sharks and investigate the possibility that the Bird Island MPA and inshore regions of Algoa Bay are nursery or pupping grounds for white sharks in South Africa.

This is the first focused study on white sharks in Algoa Bay and the first of its kind in South Africa in an area not currently influenced by cage diving operators and chumming. If a cage diving permit is issued in the future, this study will provide the first direct comparison in the altered behaviour, if any, on a white shark population pre and post-chumming. This information should help to illuminate the possible association between chumming and shark attacks alleged by some opponents to cage diving.



White shark breaching.
Photo: Ian Ruxton

WHITE SHARKS

White sharks (*Carcharodon carcharias*) are widely distributed across southern Africa's oceans from Angola to Mozambique. Growing to over 6 m in length and up to two tonnes in weight they are the world's largest predatory shark species. Although they are found in sub-tropical and tropical seas, they occur in highest concentrations in temperate waters, particularly in the vicinity of cape fur seal colonies.

South Africa was the first country to declare the white shark a protected species in 1991. They are not protected, however, along the Mozambique coast or in international waters. Due to declining population trends worldwide, as a result of long-lining, shark nets and poaching this species is not only listed on CITES, but also on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species as Vulnerable.



Despite their name the dorsal surface of a white shark is dark grey, not white.
Photo: Ian Ruxton



One of the greatest threats to white sharks is over-fishing.
Photo: Ian Ruxton

BIRD ISLAND & CAGE DIVING

Bird Island is one of a cluster of four islands, which constitute the Bird Island group in Algoa Bay. Proclaimed a Marine Protected Area in 2005, it is home to numerous bird species and a large colony of cape fur seals. The island is thought to be an epicentre of white shark abundance and has been earmarked for a cage diving permit. Despite this fact, there is very little information on the population dynamics of white sharks in the area. This information is crucial from a management perspective, for the future development of any white shark-cage diving operations within Algoa Bay.



WHITE SHARK NURSERY?

Although very little sampling of white sharks has been conducted in the Eastern Cape, this area has the highest number of recorded catches for small (< 160 cm) sharks, in South Africa. This is close to the reported birth size for white sharks (1.2 to 1.5 m). This study will provide further evidence on whether or not the Bird Island MPA and inshore regions of Algoa Bay are nursery or pupping grounds for white sharks in South Africa. This information is crucial not only to improve our understanding of white shark biology, but also for their long-term conservation in South Africa, particularly within the Bird Island MPA.



Aerial view of the Bird Island Marine Protected Area and Black Rocks.
Photo: Ian Ruxton

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PROJECT SPONSORS

