

By Time Out Dubai kids staff

Time Out Dubai, 31 January 2013

<http://www.timeoutdubai.com/kids/features/38562-sharkspotting-in-dubai#.VHxZgjGsXNc>

Sharkspotting in Dubai

How kids can get involved in protecting endangered species in the UAE



In the first part of an ongoing series of local environmental initiatives, Marine Raynor of Global Ocean tells us how kids can get involved in protecting the endangered species living in the UAE's waters.

Did you know that the technical term for sharks and rays is 'elasmobranch'? And that with 30 species inhabiting the UAE's seas, over half are already on the verge of extinction? Global Ocean is a small marine conservation foundation, that aims to integrate the marine world with public stewardship, to create a community with a vested interest in contributing to the conservation of our seas. Originally based in the UK, they've recently expanded to the UAE, bringing with them their educational expertise, through workshops and outreach programmes, through schools and communities.

Shark facts:

1 The United Arab Emirates is home to 30 species of sharks, 16 of which are endangered.

2 By eating smaller fish, molluscs and clams, sharks help to keep the numbers of other species in our seas in balance. They also help to drive schools of fish closer to the shore, making it easier for fishermen to catch them.

3 Sharks are equipped with amazing natural gadgets, like night vision and vibration sensors, and also have an amazing sense of smell. What's more, they've been on this planet for over 400 million years, while us humans have only been around for 250,000 years!

4 Between 90 and 99 per cent of some local shark populations have already been wiped out, and worldwide, humans are responsible for killing around 73 million sharks each year – that's three every second. At this rate, we could see a mass extinction in our lifetime, which means unless we do something now, whole shark species could cease to exist altogether.

5 The UAE is the world's fifth largest exporter of shark fins, in spite of a 2008 ban on shark finning (now fishermen are allowed to sell the fins as long as they bring in the whole shark).

6 Sharks have rows of back up teeth to make sure they never run out. The size and shape of the tooth can tell you what sort of food the shark eats, and the shark can use up to 20,000 teeth in a lifetime!

7 Although many sharks are carnivores, some eat plankton instead, just like whales. These harmless sharks are protected all over the world, and you can find one such species – the whaleshark – here in the Arabian Gulf too.

8 Sharks do not have a single bone in their bodies – instead, their skeletons are made up entirely of cartilage (just like the tip of your ear), which allows them to move faster and more freely.

Get involved!

Global Ocean is looking to work with schools, educational institutions and museums in the UAE to teach the region's young residents about the importance of conserving the waters of the Middle East.

To find out more or to get involved, visit www.globalocean.org.uk.

Clean it up!

A day at the beach is top of the list for many of Dubai's families – but make sure you leave it as you found it. Teach kids about the importance of clearing up the plastics and waste that can have such a harmful effect on our oceans

Each year, 45,000 tonnes of plastic waste are dumped into the world's oceans, and the amount has been rising by around 10 per cent each year.

Plastics do not biodegrade, they photodegrade. That means they break down under the exposure of the sun's ultraviolet rays into smaller and smaller pieces. This means that virtually every piece of plastic still exists in some shape or form.

Small plastic pieces mix with sea-dwellers' natural food sources, and the inability of these ingested pieces to pass through the digestive tract leads to an accumulation of non-nutritive elements in the body of marine organisms. This can lead to malnutrition and eventual starvation (causing significant reductions in the world's fish populations).

Did you know that each high quality reusable bag that you use has the potential to eliminate an average 1,000 plastic carrier bags over its lifetime?

By Time Out Dubai kids staff

Time Out Dubai, 31 January 2013

