



will become the home base for visits of the GHs. Interestingly, GHs now also show up regularly at the other side of the gulf stream at Jupiter, West Palm Beach. Here a variety of sharks can be encountered at more remote locations in open water, where baiting is permitted. The dives are not so easy since they often take place in deeper water with a strong current. But the shots I have seen so far are truly spectacular. One can only hope that charters with a reputation of being 'shark friendly' like Emerald will contribute to more respect for the apex

predators along the US coastline.

Cat Island: snorkeling with the Oceanics
After we spent three days at Bimini, Sky Bahamas took us back to Nassau and from there to Cat island, a long fishhook-shaped island. Cat Island was where Columbus landed in 1492. One says it is named after the pirate captain Arthur Cat who paid frequent visits to the island. Normally the plane will land at New Bight airport in the southern part of the island. But occasionally it will not go further than Arthurs Town Airport (ATC) in the north, in which



The 'Tresher' our diving boat in the Marina. Cat Island, with Debra and Vincent Canabal. Taken by Galice Hoarau.

case the airline will provide free transportation by ground to New Bight. From New Bight it's another 30 minutes (costing around 60 dollars) to the Greenwood Beach Resort at the south east point of Cat Island.

Greenwood is a real paradise located just at the edge of long deserted and beautiful beach of white sand. Each morning a car picked us for the 40 minutes ride to the Marina on the south west of the island, a place called Hawks Nest. From there Vincent en Debra and their friendly captain took



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us for a 40 minutes boat ride to a spot a couple of miles out of the coast near Port Howe, in real distance not so far from the Greenwood resort. Here the Oceanics show up regularly in the deep blue water of the Atlantic. Which implies that the dives have to be drift dives, with the boat moving gently with the divers. Normally there is a choice between a snorkel dive with a long rope and a buoy attached to the boat, or a scuba dive with a bait box hanging underneath the buoy at a depth of about 10 meters.

Snorkeling among sharks that circled around the boat was a new and amazing experience.

I also met Oceanics in the southern Red Sea, but here snorkeling with them is not recommended. This is because this pelagic and bold shark has the habit to come very close to, or even bump divers. And since baiting is prohibited in the Red Sea there is no bait in the water to distract the sharks from the divers.

At Cat Island however the boldness of the



Greenwood Beach resort. Cat Island.

Oceanic shark is rather an advantage than a menace for UW photographers. So we felt happy and safe to swim among a dozen Oceanics near the surface. Which also held for the scuba dives with the sharks circling around the bait box, hanging in the blue at around 10 meters deep. After the comfortable sandy bottom of Bimini, we now depended on our buoyancy control skills which made it sometimes difficult to get in the right position for a nice close up shot of the sharks, that constantly zigzagged between the divers and their bubbles.

Benefits of baiting In the Bahamas you can be pretty sure to come close to the apex predators. I am aware that some people reject baiting and defend a 'pure' non interventional approach of wildlife. But there also some arguments in favor of baiting sharks.

First, as said, it allows the photographer to come close to the shark, and second it prevents that the shark spends too much attention to divers. The only reason why a baited shark will occasionally



close in or even bump a diver is that it sees you as 'bait provider' not as bait. In fact, any event associated with bait administration, like the sound of the propeller of the approaching boat or a diver in a black wetsuit entering the water, will trigger its interest. So the bottom line is that baiting means more safety for the diver.

Furthermore, the shark close ups we take home and publish on Internet can help in correcting the false public image of the shark as a dangerous monster. As such it could also contribute, albeit indirectly, in saving the shark species from termination.

Last but not least: shark 'tourism' and commercial interests -although

not always compatible with the pure conception of wildlife- can help to establish more marine sanctuaries such as the Bahamas where sharks are protected in waters surrounding their islands.

Albert Kok



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