

Shark Dive 2008

By Jessica Vasale

It was 2:30 in the morning and my alarm clock was going off and, as I dragged myself out of bed, I was excited to think of what I might see diving that day! I am in no way a morning person, but the possibility of diving with sharks will undoubtedly get me moving.

I was excited to be going but a little worried too. I was not worried that we were going to see sharks. I was worried that we were NOT going to see them. This was



my second time diving with Charlie Donilon, the Captain of The Snappa. The first time, many years ago, was a very disappointing experience, where I saw no sharks and it wasn't even worth the time to don my wetsuit. They're wild animals of course so there's always the gamble that they will not come. I decided to give it another chance and was hoping for a great day

We arrived at the dock at about 6 am in Narragansett, Rhode Island and unloaded our dive gear. As I was walking back and forth along the dock, lugging my gear to the boat, some guy on a nearby fishing boat asked me if I was scared to be diving in a cage with sharks. I said "No". "Not even a little bit??" I again replied "Nope", thinking to myself ... hmmm, maybe I should be.

As we were getting ready to depart the dock some of us helped Captain Charlie get the dive cage aboard and then we were finally off on our way to find the sharks. We ended up going out about 40 miles off the coast of Narragansett, RI. I don't remember exactly how long it took us to get to the dive site, because I took advantage of the time to catch up on some sleep!

With the cage in the water, hanging at no more than 10 feet, and oily chum slick glistening along the water, one of the members of my dive group was the first to jump in and wait on the playpen (imagine a metal fence that is attached to floats so it sits on top of the water) for the sharks to come. We waited, and waited, and waited some more. For me it seemed like we were waiting for quite a while and the thoughts of my last experience were in the back of my mind. I didn't want to tell Charlie I had been on before but when he asked me I told him that I had come, over 6 years ago, and got skunked. He then took this opportunity to tell me that I must be bad luck!

Two people were now in the water, lying on the playpen with their snorkels, when the first shark arrived! YEAH! I jumped in with my snorkel and saw it too! What a magnificent animal! It was sooo beautiful, swimming right beneath us, just gliding through the water looking at us with its big eyes. It was a big shark and may have been over eight feet long. The only blue sharks I had ever seen before were in photos, but those photos didn't do these animals justice. The blue color of its body was absolutely gorgeous and it's a color that I will never forget.

I went back to the boat, put on my SCUBA tank, grabbed my camera and went immediately back in the water. Visibility was pretty good and knowing that I would not be able to get the best shots from inside the cage, I opted to stay out of it, with my back towards it. With buoyancy control, it was possible to weave my fins through the bars to hold on and prevent myself from moving around too much, which also allowed my hands to be free to take pictures.

At least three different sharks (maybe four) came through to check us out that day. One had a hook in its mouth. Another had a rusty scar where a hook once was. One of them came a bit too close for my liking and I gave it a gentle nudge with one of my strobes (did I say before that I wasn't scared?). I kept looking around for the next shark to come and was often distracted watching the plentiful jellyfish slowly pulse by. There were also a few fish that found the cage and were using it as shelter and eating the chum scraps that were floating in the water around us.

Everyone else was now back on the boat and I was alone in the water, holding out for the next shark to come. I waited for a little while and thought it was probably time for me to get back too. I took close to 100 shots and I knew that a few were going to be good, so I was happy. It was a long, fun day diving with people who were as excited about diving as I am. It would have been nice to see more sharks, of course, but I'm glad I finally got the experience and have some great photos to show it. I would definitely do it again, but I think my next shark adventure will be diving with the big boys. I hear Guadalupe Island in Mexico is a great place to find Great Whites!!

Diving and taking underwater pictures is a true passion of mine, and having such an intimate experience with sharks was amazing. It was an incredible feeling to make eye contact with a shark and know its aware you're there, in its environment. Sadly, it may only be a few years until sharks are wiped off the Earth by human stupidity. The shark population in the world is in grave danger because of some fishermen who catch sharks as by-products in long lines and are driven by greed, illegally taking sharks out of the water, cutting off their fins and throwing them back to drown and die.

Continued on page 29

The fins are then sold in foreign markets as a delicacy! This abhorrent problem has been made public by Rob Stewart in a recent documentary called "Sharkwater". I hope everyone takes the time to watch this movie and spreads the word to help preserve the shark population, so that these amazing animals will be there to dive with again in the future!

Images were shot in manual mode at 1/125, f/10, ISO 320 with a Nikon D100 with a Light and Motion Titan Housing, a 12-24 mm lens with dome port, with dual Sea and Sea YS-90 strobes.

Ed Note: Jessica Vasale is a central Massachusetts native who has always loved to take pictures and capture moments and memories. She has been an avid SCUBA diver for over ten years and has merged her love of photography and SCUBA diving by bringing a camera with her underwater. She is a member of both the Seven Hills Camera Club in Worcester and Gateway Camera Club in Framingham. Her web site is www.jessicavasale.com.