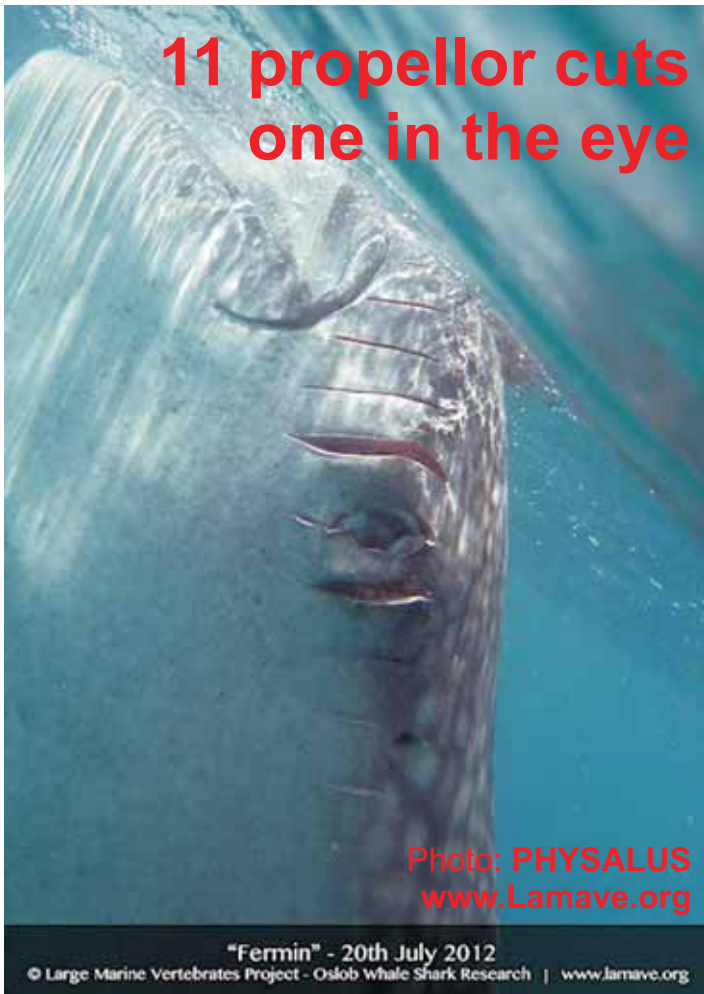


Little Fermin's story!



Fermin-P383, Oslob's flagship whale shark left Oslob for 3 days. On July 20th. Fermin came back with [11 propellor cuts](#) in his face, one in the eye. Fermin's wounds started healing but he turned blind on the left eye. Since the 2nd week fo August, Fermin is missing...!

Oslob: At the end, "Rules and Regulations, behavior codex" for snorklers and divers don't help!

In Oslob I learned boats and bubbles means food!
We whale sharks are a migrating species!

Did they teach me how to kill myself when I move on... or can you tell me how I distinguish boats & bubbles that bring food from boats and bubbles that slice my face?

Fermin

Feeding whale sharks

is detrimental ! Check Page 5. and up for: 5 good reasons why you should not feed whale sharks and 10 ways how YOU can help!

Fermin's story is entirely based on scientific statements, study & research, observation and proof by the organizations listed here below. It is also based on a series of articles by the local press (Cebu Daily News, Cebu Sun Star) and the Author's own observations.

Author of the story: Moalboal White Beach Scuba Divers Inc., Dolphin-House Inc., Ravenala resort Inc., Rudy Poitiers, Eduard Schaap with the help of Mathilde Deforge, Marine biologist.

Knowledge base:

-Cebu Daily News & Cebu Sun Star

-Butanding Network: www.butandingnetwork.net

-NGO Physalus (an Italian maritime Biological group of scientists monitoring whale shark feeding in Oslob, Cebu Island Philippines since March 2012) www.lamave.org

-Marine Wildlife Watch of the Philippines www.facebook.com/marinewildlifewatchofthephilippines

With the support of:

-UNEP Green Fins (United Nations Environmental Projects) www.greenfins.net

-VDST e.V. PD Dr. Ralph Schill umwelt@vdst.de +- 80,000 members in Germany alone and connected to CMAS an NAUI

-Harald Mielke, biologist and editor of one of the main European diving magazine: www.aquanaut.ch

-Shark Project: www.sharkproject.org Dr. Vera Schluessel Biologist Institute of Zoology Department of Comparative Neurophysiology University of Bonn, Germany
NAUI: James M. Bram, President, jbram@nauai.org Peter Oliver nauimail@earthlink.net

Thank you to those dive shops from Dauin and Moalboal who refuse to bring their guest to Oslob: Seaexplorers, Easydiving, Seaquest, Dolphin-House, Ravenala Resort, Blue Abyss Diving, Sampaguita and they are getting more by the day!

Photo: **PHYSALUS**



Cebu Daily News 30 July 2012:

Oslob, Cebu Island: 11 propeller cuts on my face, one in the eye

Fermin P-383

On Jul 31, 2012, Scar Face's friend wrote:

Hi friends! Believe it or not, but this is Fermin's story, a whale shark from Oslob. Oslob is where whale sharks go to eat for free! Fermin told his story to a scientist who understands whale shark language and the scientist passed it on to me!

Little Fermin's story!

Hello Everybody,

My name is Fermin P-383, that's what your scientists called me before a boat propeller ran over my face (eleven cuts, one in my left eye); now they me Scar Face. I am a young whale shark, only 6m (18 foot) tall. My parents were about 35 Foot (12 m) tall. That makes our species the biggest fish on earth. We were here long before the time humans were still living in trees. We do not have any weapons; we don't even have teeth to defend ourselves because before, we never had enemies! Surviving mainly on a diet of plankton and the occasional krill, anchovies, and sardines as a snack, we need to travel very long distances to filter enough food from the sea because we are soooo big.

Migrating species must migrate to mate and reproduce:

 (read also Sun Star Cebu Feb 19 2012)

They call us a migrating species and say we need more protection as initial data show PH maybe breeding area. I am still a young boy, but my parents told me that we must travel to find a partner, "mate and reproduce" ourselves. Since October last year humans started feeding me in Oslob, "eat all you can, for free!" In return, humans stare at me, some even touch or ride me but I don't like it. I heard they have to pay a lot of money to do this but to be honest, I don't exactly know what that is. Either way, it seems as though I'll be staying here for awhile.

Feeding wild animals kills:

Many whale sharks stay in Oslob now for the food. And although it's free, it's also never fresh and is teeming with harmful bacteria our bodies are not adapted to. I started getting stomach aches more frequently and lost a lot of weight because the food is not adequate in portion as well as variety. Fully-grown whale sharks require 400 kg of food every 2 to 3 days and if a young boy, like me, doesn't eat enough, my body will not mature in time and it will affect my growth and "reproduction". We are already considered a species vulnerable to extinction. That means our numbers are getting fewer and fewer.

You know, we sharks we really have to move and eat a lot, if not we get ill. I just want you to know that now and then the free meal is even getting smaller and smaller because brown sharks and other species are coming to enjoy the free meals.(Sun Star Cebu 8 Jan 2012) They are not dangerous to us but they can be dangerous to you, especially when they feed! Please take care ok!?

In Oslob I learned boats and bubbles means food:

Well, for a change and to eat properly again, on July 17, 2012, I decided to move away for a while. After 2 days of travelling, I encountered a boat and thought to myself, why not a fast snack for free? In Oslob I learned, "Boats + Bubbles = Free Food!" (Cebu Daily news Jul 30 2012) Upon approaching the boat and bubbles, I opened my mouth to ask for food. Too late I noticed some rotating knives in between the bubbles (they call that propellor) were hiding and cut 11 deep "S" gashes in my face. One cut went right through the eye. I am hiding that eye now. You know, we sharks can turn our eyes outside-in to protect them. It's very painful and I still don't know if it will ever recover. I just hope the deep cuts in my face will not become infected and kill me.

I returned to Oslob the following day where "Rules and Regulation" were implemented to avoid such accidents. Some dive shops even published a behavior codex about how to properly stare at us. Some even have a green washing logo ...oops sorry, I mean Green Fins logo on their website. One shop in particular is even offering a "Whale Shark Specialty", whatever that is. I heard they come from miles away, Moalboal and Mactan, some even from Bohol and Negros or Manilal, even from other countries to stare at us here in Oslob.

It's almost as if they were teaching me how to kill myself:

My face is in so much pain that I asked the humans for medicine. One of their scientists, the one who can who understands shark language told me they cannot help me and I should not accept medicine from humans because it might cause even more complications. I appreciate your rules and regulations but I now realize - for my kind, it means we can never leave Oslob again, swim freely, or eat what we want or can you tell me the differentiate between boats that bring food from those that cut your face? I will never see the beautiful females the bigger boys here are always talking about to start a family and have children. Did you know nearly all of us here in Oslob are males? Very boring here...

Bad imitators, and now more exposed to hunting and poaching:

Another whale shark here told me that he went off for some time and someone stabbed him with a spear in the back! (Cebu Daily News Jan 10 2012) I was told some humans even want to eat us but I don't believe that! How can something as small as a human swallow a big fish like me?

A close friend of mine went to the neighboring town of Boljoon a while ago. The humans there were not nice! They roped him to a rock by the tail! (Cebu Daily News April 2 2012) Some of them were sitting and jumping on him, having fun by hurting him and they didn't even give him any free food!



Boljoon: Whale shark attached with a rope for "shark surfing". An example of "bad imitators" generated by the feeding "attraction" in Oslob

**It's MORE FUN
in the Philippines
with whale shark
watching,
NOT FEEDING**



Underwater chaos caused by the feeding "attraction" in Oslob



Photo: PHYSALUS

Oslob: Infected scars around the mouth from bumping boats while begging for food



Photo: PHYSALUS

Even without “feeding” and being domesticated/focused on feeding, in waters too warm for us, we are already vulnerable to extinction:

We may not be smart like humans, we don't know how to use computers, drive cars or fly to the moon. We have no idea how to defend ourselves but we know that what you are doing is not nice!

Aside from feeding, did you know we must dive deep to rid ourselves of parasites, clean our filter plates, and “sleep”? In Oslob, we are near the surface most of the time for the free food, this means we are constantly exposed to warmer waters and surface currents. These conditions force us to consume more energy, causing stress, which makes us more vulnerable to diseases. The scientist who understands shark language told me, we have to perform our ecological role in the ecosystem. He even told frankly if that is not the case, then we are of no use to the planet and we will be effectively removed from the population. An endangered species, like us whale sharks, needs all the opportunities we can get to have many many babies. He said, it is important for wild animals to interact with their natural environments, as this is how ecological balance is maintained necessary for the health of this planet.

Repercussions on the tourist industry and the Philippines as a destination for diving:

We should respect each other. Please don't take advantage of the fact that you can make easy money by putting us on display. Maybe your own kind, especially those who love the water like us, will no longer have the heart to visit the Philippines.

As a result of this, many innocent humans will lose their job and income, suffering greatly for what few have failed to recognize as cruelty.

The humans that organize shows and promote us globally on the net, those that try to justify themselves with rules and regulations are only lengthening our sentence to this prison without steel bars; not quite a jail cell, but still a deadly trap.

On the bright side, those humans who want to help us may also start to feed the humans who are feeding us. I was told they do that by throwing with eggs... hehe.



Photo: PHYSALUS

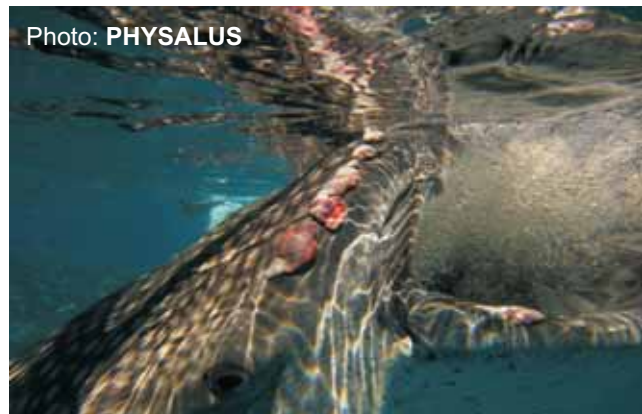


Photo: PHYSALUS

Oslob: Bleeding scars around the mouth from bumping boats while begging for food.



Photo: PHYSALUS



Photo: PHYSALUS



Oslob, Cebu. More fun in the Philippines

About Oslob and Whale Shark Feeding

The coastal community in Oslob, Cebu Island, Philippines has been intentionally feeding whale sharks in shallow waters so that tourists can interact with them. Since the news hit mainstream media in late 2011, Oslob has become a major tourist attraction in Cebu. Dive operators, hotels, resorts, and restaurants were quickly established. Snorkelers, underwater photographers and filmmakers, scuba divers, and beachcombers arrived in buses.

As the hype escalated, so did the concern of scientists and environmental advocates. Meetings with government officials were held and research-based guidelines were offered, which primarily discouraged the practice of feeding the whale sharks by hands. Such recommendations fell on deaf ears as the practice continues.

Tourism built around the natural environment is not an easy business. Lawmakers have to be extra careful in making sound policies that are based on how the ecosystem works to ensure the sustainability of the resources and, consequently, of the industry.

In less than a year, researchers have already observed marked changes in the whale sharks' behavior. The gentle giants are exhibiting unusual, less energetic behavior and feed vertically in shallow areas. Seeing the whale sharks put their guard down can cause an array of problems: net entanglement, cuts from propellers, and poaching, among others.

Here are 5 reasons why whale shark feeding in Oslob should stop immediately:

1. The whale sharks are not getting their full range of nutritional requirements, which may affect their growth and reproduction.

Adult whale sharks in the wild eat about 400 kilograms of food every 2-3 days. They feed on plankton, macro-algae, shrimp, bait fish, squid, and other crustaceans.

In Oslob, only one type of food is given. The whale sharks are fed dead, frozen shrimps that have reduced nutrient content.

Their biological requirement for growth will not be met, delaying growth and time of maturity. Delayed maturation will affect the reproduction of these species that are already vulnerable to extinction.

2. Whale sharks naturally do not spend a lot of time at the surface or in shallow waters.

Monitoring of whale sharks through satellite tagging shows that whale sharks spend more time in deep waters. Aside from feeding, there are studies suggesting that whale sharks dive deep to rid themselves of parasites, clean their filter plates, "sleep" and thermo regulate. Preventing whale sharks from spending time in deep waters will affect important biological activities.

The whale sharks in Oslob are near the surface most of the time due to the hand-feeding practice. This means that they are constantly exposed to warmer waters and surface currents. These conditions will require more energy from the shark, causing stress, which makes them more vulnerable to diseases.

3. Whale sharks are migratory species. They're not supposed to stay in one site for prolonged periods of time.

If the whale shark does not migrate to their deep habitats or the next feeding area, which are possibly mating and birth grounds, they are unable to perform their ecological roles in these ecosystems. It is important for wild animals to interact with their natural environments, as this is how ecological balance is maintained necessary for the health of this planet. If they cannot perform these functions, then they are of no use to the planet and are effectively removed from the population. An endangered species, like the whale sharks, needs all the reproductive opportunities it can get.

4. Conditioning whale sharks to approach boats can make them more susceptible to injuries and poaching.

The whale sharks' positive association with boats in Oslob may cause negative impacts when they migrate to other areas, where there are no guidelines and trained personnel to conduct and monitor human interaction.

Fermin, a "resident" whale shark in Oslob identified in October 2011, went missing from July 17-19, 2012 and returned on July 20 with propeller scars on its head, sores around its mouth, and visible damage on the left eye. Propeller-related injuries are usually found on the whale shark's body, except on the head. Given the location of Fermin's injuries, he most likely mistook the bubbles of the boat for food, or as an indication that the people on the boat would feed him.

Conditioning whale sharks to approach boats can also put them at a higher risk of being captured when they are not in Oslob.

Although whale shark fishery has been banned in the Philippines since 1998 (FAO 193), there are still reports of whale sharks being slaughtered in places like Bohol, Antique, and Bicol. They are still actively fished and slaughtered for their fins, meat, and gills in other parts of the Asia-Pacific region as well. While this may not be done in Oslob, poachers in areas that these sharks migrate to will have an easier time catching them because they've grown to be comfortable around boats and humans.

5. The whale shark's welfare is governed by local and international protection laws. Anything that could harm them needs to be banned.

Whale sharks are vulnerable species as assessed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and is listed in both Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) and the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS). The Philippines is a signatory to these conventions, which means that our country has to take measures to conserve these animals, protect their migration, and prohibit their trade.

The Philippine Fisheries Code states that the Department of Agriculture shall take conservation and rehabilitation measures for rare, threatened and endangered species for which by CITES definition, includes whale sharks (Republic Act 8550, Section 11).

Moreover, the Wildlife Act states that it shall be unlawful for any person to willfully and knowingly exploit wildlife resources and their habitats (Republic Act 9147, Section 27). Feeding of whale sharks for economic purposes is clearly exploitation of nature and not promotion of ecological balance.

It has been argued that feeding the whale sharks in Oslob is protecting them from being killed. These 5 reasons show that this activity is **not** protecting them, and is in fact doing the complete opposite.

While there is scientific consensus that the practice of feeding whale sharks by hand is harmful, environmentalists and scientists are advocating for the **precautionary principle** or precautionary approach. This states that if an action or policy has a suspected risk of causing harm to the public or to the environment, the burden of proof that it is *not* harmful falls on those taking the action. Simply put, an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure.

Feeding of wildlife is strictly prohibited in well-managed and protected areas. This is done for good reasons. The disturbing practice of feeding whale sharks and its consequences should not be encouraged and replicated. In a country where rules and regulations are difficult to implement, Oslob is one big bad example of what not to do.

The role of the government

The days allowing whale sharks to be handfed in Oslob, Cebu, may be numbered, thanks to efforts of whale shark researcher Elson Aca and the positive response of national government agencies.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) responded favorably as well. BFAR Director Asis Perez informed Aca that the Fisheries Administrative Order on whale sharks protection (FAO 193) is being amended to include feeding as a prohibited act.

The issue of livelihood

We need not look for far for lucrative whale shark watching industries that don't allow feeding. According to a study published in 2005, whale shark interaction in Donsol, Bicol, created more than 300 jobs and contributed more than US\$ 620,000 to the Filipino economy that year. From 867 tourists in 2002, the number ballooned to 7,000 in 2005.

The practice of feeding whale sharks is damaging the reputation of the Philippines as a prime diving destination. It shows disruption of social balance, structure, and economy of an entire town that has built its source of income on domesticating sharks.

Supporting this practice goes against the proper behavior codex published by dive shops. By bringing guests to Oslob, dive operators are going against their claims of wildlife conservation and offend to the "do not feed" rule claimed by all relevant international dive instructor associations and it is an offence to the UNEP Green Fins Code of Conduct. (United Nations Environmental Project)

How you can help

As divers, we are play a major role in marine conservation and sustainable tourism practices. Here are some of the things we can do:

1. Sign the online petition addressed to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Department of Agriculture to stop the practice.
www.change.org/petitions/sec-proceso-alcala-dept-of-agriculture-sec-ramon-paje-denr-stop-feeding-of-whale-sharks-in-the-philippines
2. Write a letter to the provincial government of Cebu and the local government of Oslob to encourage them to learn from well-managed protected areas in the Philippines that do not practice the feeding of animals by hand and yet remain sustainable and profitable.
3. Write a letter to the Department of Tourism. They may not be mandated to conserve wildlife, but they are mandated to promote sustainable tourism practices. They also hold dive shows and exhibits around the world to market the wealth of the Philippine seas.
4. Express your concern to your tour operator and on social networks about dive operators / dive shops that do not practice sustainable interaction guidelines.
5. Be aware of "green washing" and don't book your diving holidays with tour operators / resorts or dive shops cynically trying to justify the feeding practice with "rules and regulations / behavior codex". Whale shark feeding is detrimental.

6. Support whale shark interaction sites that do not promote feeding, like Sorsogon, Donsol, and Southern Leyte.
7. If you are a dive operator, dive instructor, or head of a dive association, adopt the Green Fins Code of Conduct. Green Fins is a worldwide campaign to increase public awareness and promote sustainable diving practices that benefits the conservation of coral reefs and other wildlife. The comprehensive pre-dive briefings of Green Fins includes explaining how to dive with zero impact on the reefs and emphasizing the importance of strictly no feeding wildlife.
8. If you are a dive operator, dive instructor, or head of a dive association, make the Green Fins seminar materials and code of conduct to “Module One” of your scuba diver and open water diver course! The environmental aspect has been severely neglected in diving education since the very beginning of scuba diving.
9. If you are a student or guest, ask questions about interaction guidelines and practices if your dive master/instructor doesn't offer any.
Discourage family and friends from visiting Oslob and supporting the practice of feeding the whale sharks.
10. Be aware of “green washing” and don't book your diving holidays with tour operators / resorts or dive shops cynically trying to justify the feeding practice with “rules and regulations / behavior codex”. Whale shark feeding is detrimental.

Knowledge base:

-Cebu Daily News & Cebu Sun Star
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 -Shark Project: www.sharkproject.org Dr. Vera Schluessel Biologist Institute of Zoology Department of Comparative Neurophysiology University of Bonn, Germany
 -NAUI: James M. Bram, President, jbram@nau.org Peter Oliver nauimail@earthlink.net

Thank you to those dive shops from Dauin and Moalboal who refuse to bring their guest to Oslob: Seaexplorers, Easydiving, Seaquest, Dolphin-House, Ravenala Resort, Blue Abyss Diving, Sampaguita and they are getting more by the day!