



THE NATIONAL AQUARIUM IN BALTIMORE DISPELS MYTHS ABOUT SHARKS

Shark Quest Encourages People to Get Uncomfortably Close to Sharks

Baltimore, Md. (April 7, 2003)—In an effort to close the gap between shark facts and fiction, the National Aquarium in Baltimore is encouraging people to get “uncomfortably close” to sharks. Shark Quest, which opened March 15, is the most engaging exploration of sharks ever. Visitors will encounter live sharks, jaw-dropping artifacts and lively actors to learn the truth about these misunderstood and threatened fish.

Recent studies show that up to 90 percent of some shark species have been decimated in the last 15 years due to over-fishing, hunting and bycatch. Many key predator species are in danger of becoming extinct. With fewer top predators in the aquatic food chain, the balance of sea life could suffer great damage.

“People seek emotional connections with animals, and by learning about sharks in new and exciting ways, we hope to foster life-long respect for these amazing and important animals,” said David M. Pittenger, executive director of the National Aquarium in Baltimore.

The Aquarium has transformed its interior to provide visitors with entirely new ways to learn about sharks. Visitors can:

- Touch a live juvenile bamboo shark in a re-engineered touch pool
- Talk with underwater divers via special new communications equipment
- Find shark teeth embedded in a new “fossil wall”
- Pose with 7’ x 8’ fossilized ancient megalodon jaws—one of the largest real sets on display in the world
- Meet colorful characters including a waterman, a tourist, a surfer and a paleontologist to learn about sharks from various perspectives
- Get a souvenir photo of themselves with a shark with Fujifilm’s green screen technology

These new features are in addition to the Aquarium’s main shark exhibit, which virtually puts visitors nose-to-nose with sharks swimming around them. The Aquarium’s shark collection includes several sand tiger sharks, nurse sharks, sandbar sharks (coming in April), bamboo sharks, a zebra shark, a bonnethead shark and a horn shark.

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The five top myths Shark Quest will dispel include:

1. All sharks are the same.

Wrong! There are nearly 400 species with unique characteristics in size, color, shape, teeth and internal features.

2. Sharks are big, ferocious eating machines.

No! Many go for days or weeks without feeding; most prefer fish, mollusks and crustaceans; some eat plankton.

3. There are too many sharks in the sea.

Huh? Many shark species are in sharp decline due to overfishing, hunting and sharks' slow reproductive rates.

4. If you swim near a shark, it will attack you.

Not necessarily. According to the International Shark Attack Files, of shark attacks recorded since the year 1580, only 10 of 400 species were involved in unprovoked fatal attacks.

5. Sharks have been around forever and always will be.

Wishful thinking. Without human protection, conservation and ongoing advances in science, many species may become extinct.

Fujifilm is the lead sponsor of Shark Quest.

Baltimore's Hyatt Regency is a Supporting Partner and has created a special overnight package, *20,000 Zs Under the Seas*, as well as two beverages: the Sharktini and the Great White Milkshake. (See separate press release.) ESPN Zone and AT&T Wireless are also Contributing Partners of Shark Quest.

Shark Quest runs through 2003. For more information, call 410-576-3800 or visit www.aqua.org. The National Aquarium in Baltimore, a non-profit organization and world-class aquatic institute, is Maryland's leading attraction, hosting more than 1.5 million visitors per year. Dedicated to education and conservation, it serves the environment, students, visitors and communities through a wide variety of programs.