

**SURVIVING SHARKS! WITH SCOTT GURNEY** PG.26

# SHARKDIVER™

ISSUE 19

## MAGAZINE



## THE MONEY \$HOT!

TEACHING SHARKS TO POSE  
FOR THE PERFECT PICTURE  
*IS THAT POSSIBLE?*

## WHALE SHARK BAITBALL

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER  
TURNS INTO THE PHOTO  
SESSION OF A  
LIFETIME!

## SOUTH PACIFIC

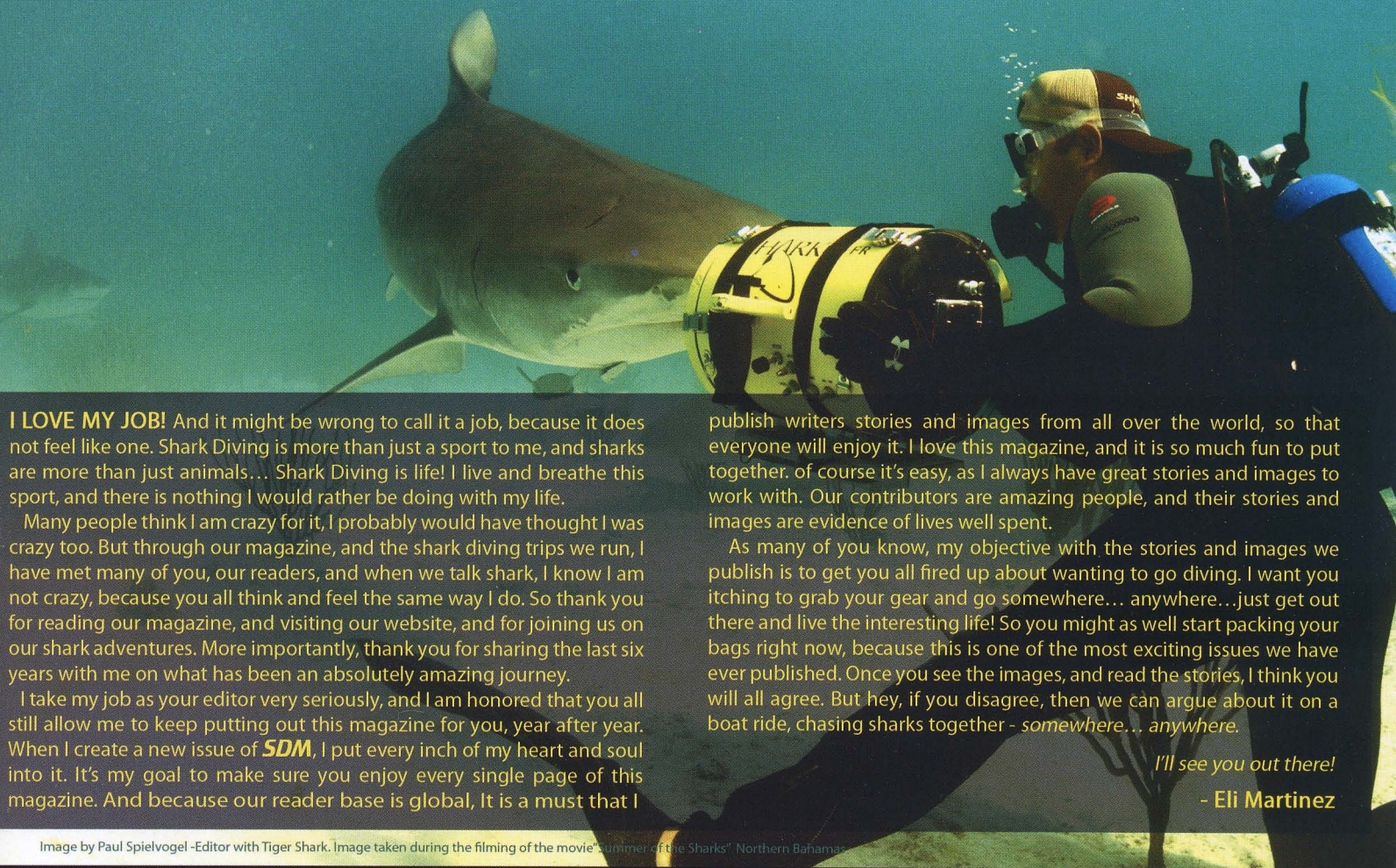
THE SHARKS OF  
FRENCH POLYNESIA

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# FROM THE PUBLISHER



**I LOVE MY JOB!** And it might be wrong to call it a job, because it does not feel like one. Shark Diving is more than just a sport to me, and sharks are more than just animals... Shark Diving is life! I live and breathe this sport, and there is nothing I would rather be doing with my life.

Many people think I am crazy for it, I probably would have thought I was crazy too. But through our magazine, and the shark diving trips we run, I have met many of you, our readers, and when we talk shark, I know I am not crazy, because you all think and feel the same way I do. So thank you for reading our magazine, and visiting our website, and for joining us on our shark adventures. More importantly, thank you for sharing the last six years with me on what has been an absolutely amazing journey.

I take my job as your editor very seriously, and I am honored that you all still allow me to keep putting out this magazine for you, year after year. When I create a new issue of **SDM**, I put every inch of my heart and soul into it. It's my goal to make sure you enjoy every single page of this magazine. And because our reader base is global, it is a must that I

publish writers stories and images from all over the world, so that everyone will enjoy it. I love this magazine, and it is so much fun to put together. Of course it's easy, as I always have great stories and images to work with. Our contributors are amazing people, and their stories and images are evidence of lives well spent.

As many of you know, my objective with the stories and images we publish is to get you all fired up about wanting to go diving. I want you itching to grab your gear and go somewhere... anywhere... just get out there and live the interesting life! So you might as well start packing your bags right now, because this is one of the most exciting issues we have ever published. Once you see the images, and read the stories, I think you will all agree. But hey, if you disagree, then we can argue about it on a boat ride, chasing sharks together - *somewhere... anywhere.*

*I'll see you out there!*

- Eli Martinez

Image by Paul Spielvogel - Editor with Tiger Shark. Image taken during the filming of the movie "Summer of the Sharks" Northern Bahamas

## SHARK DIVER magazine

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# SOUTH

## THE SHARKS OF

THE OBJECTIVE, OF COURSE, WAS TO DIVE WITH SHARKS. AS OFTEN AS WE COULD, AND WITH AS MANY DIFFERENT TYPES AS POSSIBLE. SIX DIFFERENT ISLANDS OVER THIRTY DAYS. THIS WAS A TRUE SOUTH SEAS ADVENTURE: EXPLORING THE RICH AND VARIED UNDERWATER WILDERNESS OF FRENCH POLYNESIA.

STORY BY MICHAEL SALVAREZZA AND CHRISTOPHER WEAVER.  
IMAGES BY ECO-PHOTO EXPLORERS

TODAY, WE WERE IN SEARCH of grey reef Sharks at a place called Muri Muri, an exciting open ocean dive just outside the reef on the idyllic island of Bora Bora. With seas running 5 feet, the small inflatable bounced wildly as we approached the site. Before long, it was time to roll over the side into the warm cobalt blue water, escaping the rollers for the relative peace underwater.

The sharks were there instantly. First, a fleeting glimpse of a curious Blacktip Reef Shark, swimming furtively just a few feet below the surface. Then, almost as quickly, a pack of Grey Reef Sharks, some looking to be upwards of 6 or 7 feet in length, emerged from the distance. Dozens of them, circling, eyeing us with wary pale green eyes. They filled the water column... sharks were everywhere, above, below, in front and behind us. A note from our journal captured the moment perfectly: *"Its very hard to focus on f/stops, exposure and strobe controls settings when there are dozens of sharks circling inches away from your mask!"*

Muri Muri is but one of several dives at Bora Bora where sharks can regularly be seen. Bora Bora is most famous for its indescribably beautiful lagoon and dramatic volcanic peaks, but its underwater adventures should not be taken lightly. On this

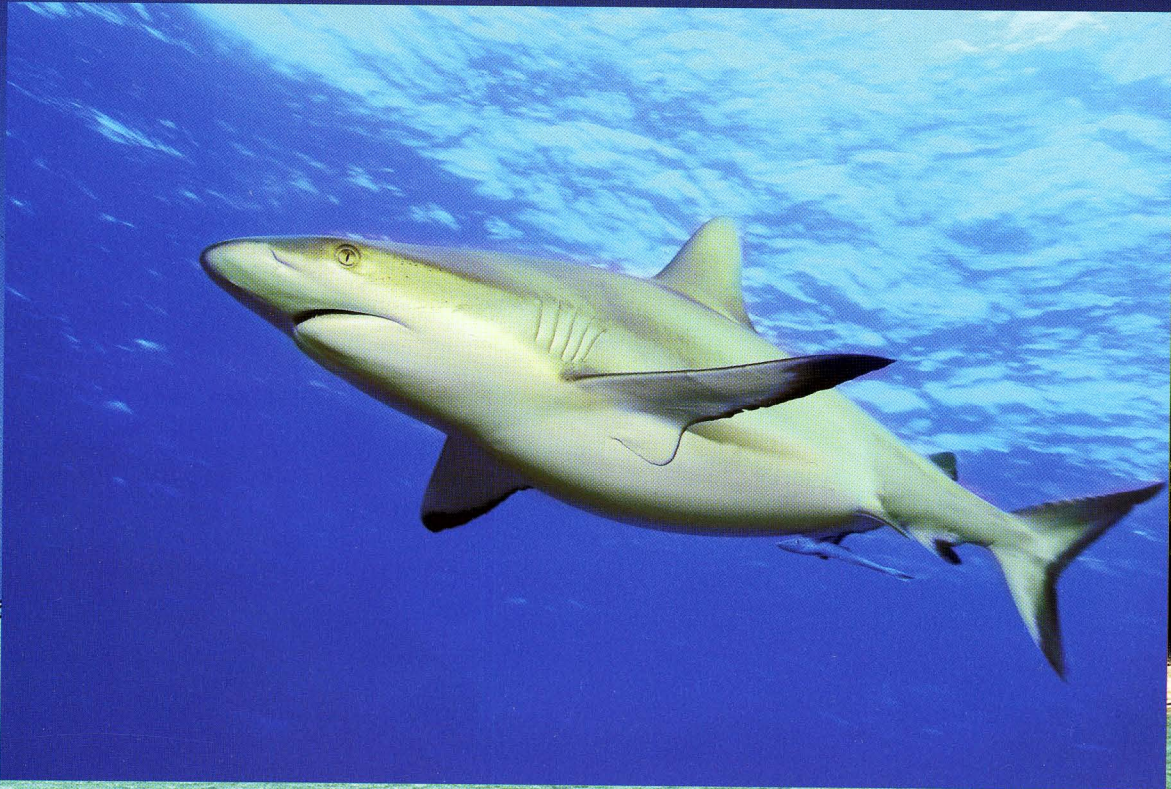
dive, we swam along a wondrous drop-off with dozens of Blacktip and Grey Reef sharks, along with schools of Barracuda and Jack in about 100 FSW. These sharks are very accustomed to scuba divers. In fact, some of the local operators actually feed them, which accounts for both their boldness and their curiosity.

Bora Bora's lesser-known cousin, Moorea, affords divers with an opportunity for some adrenaline-fueled dives with Sickle Fin Lemon Sharks. Here, we dove at a spot called the "Drop-off", a lovely reef just a few short minutes away from the resort by boat. With Lionfish, turtles and large schools of butterfly fish to occupy our photographic attention, we almost forgot that we were looking for sharks...until an 8-foot Lemon Shark suddenly appeared over a ridge and almost caused us to skip a breath. These sharks are immense and can often be seen swimming close to the bottom searching for their next meal. In "Jaws", Captain Quint describes the black doll-like eyes of the Great White Shark. Lemon Sharks in contrast, have a yellowish tinge to their eyes...the reason for their name.

After spending time in the more touristy and well known islands near Tahiti, it was time to venture north to the more remote Tuamotos. First stop: Manihi. This is a small atoll located just an

# PACIFIC

## FRENCH POLYNESIA



A very pregnant grey reef shark patrols the reef

hour or so by air from Tahiti but it feels like a world away. Rising just a few feet above sea level, the small strip of land that circles the lagoon is home to a few hotels, a small town and a few residences. The airport is a small open-air shack and arriving here sets the tone for the entire visit.

Inside the lagoon is a fabulous dive called "The Circus", which is really a Manta Ray cleaning station. Each morning, a dozen or more of these gentle giants emerge from the edge of visibility to circle several large rock outcroppings in the hopes of being "cleaned" by resident butterfly fish. Divers are brought to the bottom in about 75 FSW and, after just a few quiet moments of remaining still, the action begins in earnest.

Outside the "Pass" (a cut on the circling reef of the atoll), however, is where our senses were overwhelmed. As we rolled backwards off the small skiff, we entered a world of crystalline beauty. Unlike the water inside the lagoon, which was a bit cloudy, here we found almost gin-clear water. Hard corals in riotous colors of green, yellow, purple and fuchsia extended as far as the eye could see. We swam as if inside a Monet painting. Blacktip Reef Sharks greeted us at every turn, casting their curious gaze upon us as we drifted over the unspoiled wilderness.

Manihi, however, was but a prelude for the adventures to come.

**Next stop:** Fakarava, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, and home to some of the most breathtaking coral reefs we've ever encountered. Another atoll in the vast Pacific north of Tahiti, Fakarava boasts just a few pensions and hotels for guests and a small town near the north pass. Here, despite some heavy rains, we found ourselves diving with more Grey Reef Sharks, Blacktips and, on occasion the peculiarly shaped Napoleon Wrasse. One afternoon, as we drifted slowly along the Drop-off at 100 FSW, we literally stopped in our tracks. Ahead was a massive Manta Ray... maybe 15 feet wide, maybe more. We stopped... and she stopped. For several minutes, neither diver nor Manta moved an inch. Then, tentatively, the ray began to creep forward ever so slowly towards us. Inch by inch, while the divers remained frozen along the wall, the Manta gradually approached. This hesitant animal was clearly fighting an internal battle... and curiosity was getting the better of her! Finally, as she nudged to within inches of the lead diver, she made a slow, graceful turn, flashing her brilliant white underbelly, and then she was gone. An encounter like this comes along so rarely, and often so fleetingly, that it must be treasured as one of those truly special moments the sea only occasionally gives up. →



Pacific Blacktip Reef Shark in the waters of Bora Bora



Juvenile Pacific Blacktip Reef Shark swims in the shallows at the Blue Lagoon in Rangiroa



From Fakarava, it was time to journey to the fabled reefs and passes of Rangiroa. Like the rest of the Tuamotus, Rangiroa is a low-lying atoll, with a vast lagoon stretching over 30 miles in width. We were here to see sharks...but there was another surprise awaiting.

**The Tiputa Pass.** Cutting into the circling reef of Rangiroa is a Pass known as “Tiputa”. Famous for its rushing currents, Tiputa is a heart-stopping drift dive like none other. We entered the water on the ocean side and immediately began a descent to 120 FSW. Along the way, we saw the omnipresent Blacktip Reef Sharks and the larger Grey Reefs. Suddenly, we could hear the strident calls of the dive master as he pointed excitedly into the blue and screamed into his regulator: a large Silky Shark was cruising up from the deep and headed right towards us. Silky Sharks are sleek and beautiful underwater, even if they are a bit unpredictable. This was

an unexpected encounter...and just as soon as it began, the shark disappeared as we began to get swept up in the incoming current of Tiputa.

In a few short moments, we found ourselves flying over the bottom in a 9-knot current. Torrents of water flow through this pass each day, and on the surface large standing waves hint at the maelstrom below. We cruised over a bottom stripped bare of growth from the furious force of the water. Our hearts raced as we approached a rise in the bottom and, with computers screaming at all of us, we grabbed onto the rocks with all of our strength and pulled ourselves over and behind the rocky outcropping into the relative quiet of a small gully. As we crouched below the raging current spewing over the rocky ridge, small rocks rolled by and the roar of the moving water was distinct. But, even here, sharks carve a living as we spotted a dozen or so Whitetip Reef Sharks



**We could hear the strident calls of the dive master as he pointed excitedly into the blue and screamed into his regulator.**

A Sicklefin Lemon Shark comes in for a close look in Moorea

gathered under a rocky shelf, waiting out the tidal flow in calm water. Tiputa is a must-do dive but it requires great buoyancy skills and should only be attempted by those with the proper experience.

Outside the reef at “Avaturu Pass”, we found ourselves diving with Silvertip Sharks along a picture perfect reef and drop off. Silvertips are stocky animals that look as if they mean business. This was now our sixth different species of shark in the waters of Polynesia! Our final dives on this magnificent adventure were off the main island of Tahiti. We had not been enthusiastic about the prospect of diving there...after all, it’s the main population center and how good could the diving be? And would we see sharks?

After a quiet entry along a pretty reef called “St. Etienne’s Dropoff” we stopped and peered under a rocky ledge. There,

resting in the narrow confines of the wall was a small Whitetip Reef Shark! 30 days, 6 islands, 6 species of shark...and now we had seen sharks on every island!

The islands of French Polynesia are some of the most beautiful in the world. The lagoons, beaches, mountains and resorts are second to none. Underwater, divers are treated to encounters each and every day that would be the envy of divers the world over: sharks, turtles, rays, barracuda, Napoleon Wrasse, Tuna and Lionfish are just a few of the attractions awaiting the adventurous diver. So pack your gear, book a flight and make sure you bring enough memory for your digital camera to take lots of pictures...*because you’re gonna need it!* 