

Playing tag with sharks off the west coast of Scotland

August 27 2013



Basking shark. Credit: Colin Speedie

Twenty-seven basking sharks have been tagged in the second year of a project to find out more about their life cycle.

The work, which uses small tags attached to the sharks to track their movements, was carried out around the islands of Tiree and Coll by a team of scientists from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the University of Exeter, came to an end in early August.

The movements of 15 of the sharks can be followed live online. So far most have stayed around the Inner Hebrides, one has ventured to the

Outer Hebrides and back again, and two headed to the north coast of Ireland.

The work is part of a wider programme of marine research led by SNH and Marine Scotland, to help the Scottish Government and others to manage our future use of the sea. A Scottish Government consultation 'Planning for Scotland's Seas' is currently underway and in the longer term, results from the tagging project will help them decide whether a Marine Protected Area should be put in place to help safeguard the sharks.

Dr Suzanne Henderson from SNH, who is managing the project, said: "We had an ambitious target of tagging 27 basking sharks this summer. They were slightly later to appear than in 2012 - this may be due to the availability of [plankton](#), which they feed on. However we're delighted to have successfully tagged all 27 and now we're looking forward to seeing where they go over the next few months.

"Although we know a lot about [basking shark](#) biology and worldwide distribution, surprisingly little is known about their seasonal movements. The information we get from these tags will add to the results from the work we did in 2012, helping us build up a picture of the sharks' behaviour throughout the year."

Dr Matthew Witt from the University of Exeter said: "it's great to be able to learn more about the seasonal movements of these enigmatic animals, which play an important role in the [food chains](#) of our coastal seas. Working together our two organisations are helping to determine how important the Hebrides area really is for these sharks."

The research team are asking for help in naming the 14 of the sharks that are being tracked online. Suggestions should be sent to baskingsharks@snh.gov.uk

They are also appealing to anyone who finds a tag around the shores of the UK to get in touch. The tags are silver grey, torpedo shaped and 15 to 18 cm in length with a small antenna. If found please pick up and contact the SNH office in Oban on 0300 244 9360, or email baskingsharks@snh.gov.uk. There is a reward available for each tag returned.

Track the basking sharks [online](#).

Provided by University of Exeter

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