

Who is the Actual Killer: Jaws or Us?

Everybody has probably seen or at least heard of the movie *Jaws* by Steven Spielberg in their lifetime. In the movie, the main character, Jaws is an outrageous, ferocious shark that kills people. Even to those who have never seen *Jaws*, sharks are generally portrayed as a dangerous animal. However, they are deeply misunderstood. The fact is, sharks are actually just big fish and all they want is to accuse Steven Spielberg of libel. While it is true that they are dangerous, the fact that they are also endangered is a point that should be considered.

During the past 15 years, the decline of the shark population was dramatic. From 1996 to 2011, the number of shark species that were endangered increased from 15 to 140¹. Most shark species' populations declined about 60-70 due to human shark fisheries². On the other hand, ironically, shark attacks are not as common as people think they are. In an article by Viralnova, they listed the 19 most dangerous animals and sharks didn't even make the list.³ However, some animals that were on the list included horses, cows and even dogs. To compare the fatality, 6 people are killed⁴ by sharks while 100 million sharks die annually⁵. To go deep in to the reasons of their annual death there are some serious mistreatments that people should know and stop.

Shark fining is a constantly increasing and the most lethal reason of the

¹ <http://www.sharksavers.org/en/our-programs/i-m-finished-with-fins/learn-more/shark-fin-soup-destroys-shark-populations>

² <http://ocean.si.edu/ocean-news/shark-finning-sharks-turned-prey>

³ <http://www.viralnova.com/animals-that-kill-humans>

⁴ <http://www.sharktruth.com/learn/shark-finning/>

⁵ <http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-21629173>

extinction of sharks. Out of 100, 73 million sharks are killed by shark finning every year for the sake of quick profit.⁶ Especially in Asia, dishes made out of shark fins are beyond favored by many people. As an Asian myself, when I visited China I saw numerous sea food stores and restaurants that sell shark fins, shark fin soup, and shark fin dumplings as delicacies. Shark fins alone, cost about \$330 a pound, a single basking shark's fin can sell for up to \$50,000⁷ and one bowl of shark fin soup is approximately \$100. As time passes, with laws limiting shark hunting getting stricter and the shark's population declining, the prices of shark fins are increasing chronically. Automatically, as the value of it increases, more people tend to rely on it for a living. In these days not only in China but throughout the world, shark fins are becoming a luxurious food ingredient used in weddings, New Year's festivals, and other important ceremonies.

The way they get the shark fins is the point that people should focus on. Because other parts of sharks are not valuable, hunters only take the fin which is about 5% of the total weight when the sharks are alive. By doing so, they can save room for more fins or other fish. After the shark finning, they throw them back into the sea where they sink to the bottom, unable to swim without their fins. Later on, they die painfully, bleeding to death. Author of the novel *Jaws*, and a shark conservative, Peter Benchley once said, "I have seen the bottom of the ocean strewn with finless sharks; one of the most horrific sights ever seen". Also, Rebecca Regnery, deputy director of wildlife at Humane Society International was once quoted saying "It is like cutting off your limbs and leaving you to bleed to death". How can a human who self-claims to be rational and can think, do such cruelties to an inferior creature?

⁶ <http://www.livescience.com/1027-shark-slaughter-73-million-killed-year.html>

⁷ <http://www.sharktruth.com/learn/shark-finning/>

Killing them intentionally for the sole purpose of increasing edible fish is another aspect of mistreatments of sharks. As the average population of fish began declining more and more, fishermen started to butcher sharks to increase the number of fish for themselves. Researchers suggested that a one-ton shark could last a month on 30kg of food. The study turned out to be inaccurate when new calculation predicted that it would be about 2 weeks⁸. This new information caused people to feel even more threatened by sharks' consumption of edible fishes. Some even went further and abused this scientific research to vindicate their misdemeanor. However, it is necessary for them to recognize that the amount of fish that sharks eat does not grant people authority to kill them.

Healthy oceans need sharks. Sharks existed more than 400 million years ago and have their own stable position in the animal food chain. Including sharks, their predators and prey, and for any other animals whether it is a sea animal or not, they are in a systematically organized fragile food web that humans should not disturb for their own good. The sharks' number precipitously declines and if this continues, the effect will not take long to reach human life.

We are superior to animals; nobody can say that we are not. The human race has achieved marvelous things and there seems to be no end for it. However, there also seems to be no limit. We have caused 322 animal extinctions over the past 500 years and two-third of them during the last two centuries⁹. As of now, it does not seem long until our decedents will see sharks in natural science museums next to the dinosaurs' column. Three-

⁸ <https://atlanticwhiteshark.wordpress.com/2013/03/20/how-much-do-white-sharks-eat/>

⁹ <http://news.discovery.com/animals/endangered-species/human-caused-322-animal-extinctions-in-past-500-years-140724.htm>

hundred and twenty-two species sounds like enough for one species to understand the importance of mutual efforts and understanding of one another.

It is not too late. We can still help sharks in various ways and recover from the earlier mistakes that we have made. But we should all keep this in our mind: Rather than few people yelling, it is more effective for everybody to say just one word. In other words, rather than few experts, scholars, and organizations trying to help sharks doing all sorts of things, if everyone keeps sharks in mind, it won't be long before sharks are returned to their previous state.

There are some organizations that provide opportunities for us to join that help sharks. Sharks Angel, a shark helping organization has programs for us to learn about sharks by sharing videos and images based on their actual experiences.¹⁰ Also, they offer Fin Free which is a grassroots, action-oriented campaign to enable individuals to become Fin Free themselves by addressing the real issue of shark's mistreatment. They are spread throughout the world such as US, Europe, Canada and Australia.¹¹ In Stop Shark Finning, they offer people, shirts and tote bags to persuade others by saying "No to shark finning, YES to shark conservation." Also, they connect those who want to actually play a role in the field, to campaigns; or for those who are interested in writing; they provide an opportunity to write a blog story about their love for sharks.¹²

All of these organizations appreciate our donations and would use them to make up for the mistreatments of sharks. And besides these, there are a lot

¹⁰ <http://sharkangels.org/what-we-do/give-sharks-a-chance/how-to-help-sharks-as-a-diver>

¹¹ <http://sharkangels.org/index.php/what-we-do/our-active-campaigns/fin-free>

¹² www.stopsharkfinning.net/help-stop-shark-finning/

more that aren't as fancy but still help sharks. Looking at videos such as the award-winning documentary, "Sharkwater",¹³ can also help by educating yourself about sharks and increasing its popularity to show support for banning the mistreatment of sharks. Sending letters asking companies and restaurants to stop serving shark fin soup or sign a petition asking your state or city to ban the shark fin trade is another marvelous and courageous ways to help sharks.

Sharks were always a very charming sea animal to me. I have loved them since I was in middle school. Before, I got to know about them, I liked shark fin soup or shark tooth ornaments. Later on, when I learned about sharks in middle school in Korea, I then realized that those fellows needed my help. First of all, I stopped eating shark fin soup or buying ornaments immediately. During my whole middle school year, in every pro-nature poster contest I would draw sharks and talk about the seriousness of the mistreatments of them. Also I joined the marine club and became the captain of my grade. Our club went to the ocean every 3 months and talked with divers or shipmen about the sea and visited the aquarium and saw all sorts of sea animals. I was always the one to talk about sharks and inspire others with my enthusiasm for them. As a result, I was able to persuade all of my club members to be and work as a shark conservatives like me. Sharks had been my best friend and I will not stop until the mistreatment is over.

It often makes me feel depressed when I realize there aren't a lot who actually care about sharks and still believes in the prejudice that sharks are killers. But I would like to ask you one more time
Who is the actual killer?

¹³ www.sharkwater.com

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