

14 July 2024

## WORLD SHARK DAY: AN OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT

Sharks have always inhabited our sea (one of the most species-rich in the world) and contrary to what one might imagine, they have drastically declined in recent decades.

Sharks and rays are endangered in all seas due to pollution, habitat destruction, and fishing.

Precisely for this reason, on 14 July, on the occasion of World Shark Day, the partners of the LIFE ELIFE project, co-financed by the European Commission under the LIFE programme, are dedicating a series of activities aimed at learning more about sharks living in the Mediterranean Sea.

In Italy, the Acquario di Cattolica and Acquario di Genova invite their audiences to participate in special events included in the entrance ticket.

The Cattolica Aquarium celebrates International Shark Day by dedicating the bull shark feeding sessions, scheduled during the week, to informing and raising awareness among visitors on the problems linked to sharks by catch.

On Wednesday 10, Friday 12 and Sunday 14 July, at 3.15 p.m., a biologist will inform the visitors about the contents and objectives of the LIFE ELIFE project, using the large bull sharks in the tank as ambassadors of these fragile predators of the seas, which deserve to be respected and protected to the best of our ability.

At the Acquario di Genova the appointment is scheduled for 14 July, with the special in-depth event "Monster to who? Sharks- predatory/prays": at the Shark Tank, at regular intervals from 11.00 am to 1.00 pm, a scientific guide will illustrate to the public the biology of sharks and will highlight the importance of their conservation, with special reference to the activities carried out within the LIFE ELIFE project.

Beyond the Italian borders, on Friday 12, two events organised by the Greek partners are scheduled: one at the Gulf of Amvrakikos and one at Thessaloniki between 11:00 and 13:00. Both locations will host experts from the LIFE ELIFE project, in collaboration with iSea, to conduct open information sessions aimed at raising public awareness about shark conservation. In addition to these informative meetings, participants will have the opportunity to engage in various educational activities.

In Cyprus, Marine & Environmental Research (MER) Lab is hosting an educational event on Saturday, July 13, at the Psarolimano Fishing Lodge in Larnaka, from 17:00 to 21:00, designed for both adults and children. Shark experts will be present to provide insights into shark conservation and the urgent need to protect these vital marine creatures. The event will also feature hands-on activities for children, and local fishermen will share their unique experiences with the underwater world, including fishing techniques and shark encounters. These events are free to attend and offer a unique opportunity for the community to learn about and contribute to shark conservation efforts.

## The LIFE ELIFE project

The initiatives are organised as part of the LIFE ELIFE project, which aims at improving the conservation of elasmobranch species (sharks and rays) promoting best conservation practices in the context of the EU professional fishing, in the Mediterranean Sea, carrying out pilot and demonstrative actions in Italian and Greek harbours.

The project, which started in 2019, has a duration of five years and involves ten partners in Italy, Greece and Cyprus: the Zoological Station Anton Dohrn, coordinator of the project, the Marine Protected Area of the Pelagie Islands (Lampedusa and Linosa) and that of Tavolara-Punta Coda Cavallo (Sardinia), Costa Edutainment, with particular reference to the Aquariums of Genoa and Cattolica, the Mediterranean Consortium, the National Research Council, Legambiente, the Marine & Environmental Research (MER) Lab, Algowatt and the University of Padua.

The priority species considered at risk or highly threatened included in the project are: spiny dog fish (*Squalus acanthias*), porbeagle shark (*Lamna nasus*), thresher shark (*Alopias* spp), sandbar shark (*Carcharhinus plumbeus*) also affected by illegal fishing in the Pelagie Islands Marine Protected Area, basking shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*) and kitefin shark (*Dalatias licha*). Other vulnerable species that may be targeted by LIFE ELIFE conservation actions are the smooth-hound shark (*Mustelus* spp), the blue shark (*Prionace glauca*) and the mako shark (*Isurus oxyrinchus*).

All project information and initiatives are available at <https://www.elifeproject.eu/> or on FB.

World Shark Day is an opportunity to forge alliances between LIFE projects committed to the common goal of safeguarding these fascinating yet threatened marine predators.

The LIFE EUROPEAN SHARKS project, co-financed by the European Union through the LIFE programme, also involves numerous Mediterranean partners with the aim of involving citizens in the common effort to safeguard sharks and rays in the Mediterranean Sea. Coordinated, like the LIFE ELIFE project, by the Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn, it brings together different realities in Croatia, France and Italy and will end in 2027.

The Acquario di Livorno, partner of LIFE EUROPEAN SHARKS, organises on the weekend of 13-14 July, at 11.30 am, an in-depth meeting (included in the entrance ticket) entitled "A shark for a friend".

An expert will guide the audience to discover sharks, which have always been considered the most fearsome creatures in the sea, and today need our help to survive.