



Isle of Man
Government

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Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture

News Release

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Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture supports groundbreaking basking shark research

The Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture has issued a special licence to allow local research organisation Manx Basking Shark Watch to carry out more international-level research which will contribute to the conservation of this endangered species. Basking sharks are a protected species in Manx waters and should therefore not be caught, injured or disturbed. The special research licence permits a limited amount of research that may disturb basking sharks. This research has the potential to make an important contribution to the international conservation of basking sharks, justifying slight disturbance of individual animals in the course of the research.

The licence for Manx Basking Shark Watch (which is part of the Manx Wildlife Trust) permits the organisation to collect information about the size and gender of sharks and also to take small samples of slime from the sharks' skin which will allow researchers to study the DNA of basking sharks. The organisation has been licensed to carry out this research for a limited number of basking sharks and there are clear limits on disturbance permitted, particularly to groups of sharks or interacting shark couples!

Manx Basking Shark Watch is also required to record information on how basking sharks have responded to their research. Advice on the welfare of basking sharks and the best possible scientific protocols has been taken from international experts and officers from the Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture will be closely monitoring the research.

The Manx Basking Shark Watch boat is a small white vessel called Happy Jack and is clearly marked with the Manx Basking Shark Watch website.

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Research carried out by Manx Basking Shark Watch and co-funded by the Isle of Man Government and a variety of other foundations, companies and individuals has already made a great contribution to globally knowledge of the species. A shark tagged in 2007 revealed that basking sharks make trans-Atlantic crossings and last year the Isle of Man Government and Manx Basking Shark Watch hosted the world's first international basking shark conference, bringing together researchers and conservationists from all over the world.

This summer two additional licences have been issued to film companies who will be filming basking sharks for educational purposes. The BBC and a French film company will be filming basking sharks in July with advice and supervision from Manx Basking Shark Watch and the Department of the Environment.

Basking shark footage filmed under licence by a German team in 2009 recently featured in a 45 minute film about Manx basking sharks and the tireless work of Manx Basking Shark Watch. The film has already been seen by millions of people in France and Germany and will be seen globally in the near future. Basking shark filming has raised the profile of the Isle of Man as a marine destination and the perfect place to shark watch from shore. The high profile research of Manx Basking Shark Watch has continued the Isle of Man's reputation for marine biological research which was started by the Port Erin Marine Laboratory and also built on the conservation work of Ken Watterson's Basking Shark Project.

ENDS



Graham Hall of Manx Basking Shark Watch using a "polecam" to film a basking shark underwater to determine its gender.



Manx Basking Shark Watch research vessel Happy Jack in action

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