

Return to White Shark Heaven

Text & Photos by Sandy Sondrol



Luck was with me twice. I made a trip to see the Great White Sharks at Guadalupe Island, Mexico in September of 2006 and to then got to go back again in September of 2007.

You will find a review of the boat that I was on this year (Nautilus Explorer) elsewhere in this issue. This article is devoted to the variety and diversity of conditions that I experienced under the water between the two trips.

The trips were within a week of being the same time both years, roughly the middle of September. Sea conditions were relatively the same during both trips, a light to medium chop in the bay where the Great White Sharks hang out. There was, perhaps, just a bit more chop this year.

Our boat was anchored within ½ mile of the same location on both trips; about a quarter mile off shore, near the navigation light tower, in about 350 feet of water.

Given the similarity of conditions and time of year, the results were remarkably different.

Last year (2006) the visibility was extremely long. I estimate that the horizontal visibility was 200 feet, plus and the vertical visibility was at least that much, as well.

This year (2007) the visibility was, at best, 75 feet horizontal and 100 feet vertical.

The reduced visibility was due to particulate in the water. I could not tell if it was plankton or run off from the island, but it was definitely present. And...so were the Great White Sharks.

Last year, in the long visibility, we always saw one shark at a time, never multiples. A shark would appear and hang around the boat and baits for 15 or 20 minutes, and then leave. Then, it would be quite for 30 minutes or so before the next shark would appear. There was activity, but it was consistently sporadic.

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This year, with the reduced visibility, there was much more going on. During some time of every day, there were two, three or four sharks hanging around the boat and bait at the same time. Plus, during the times that there was only one hanging around, a shark presence was nearly always occurring.

Also, this year, the sharks were coming closer to the divers and cages, much closer. Many times the sharks would pass the cages by only a few feet, which is an awe inspiring experience.

On the last morning of our trip this year, things started out slowly. After a period of time, the boat crew determined that it would be wise to change locations. This was done, and after a wait of about 45 minutes, sharks again began appearing. The move was clearly a good idea. The final day ended up being the best day for sharks during the entire trip. I think that the sharks were bigger and went for the baits much more aggressively.

All in all, a totally marvelous experience.

Was one year better than the other? No, I don't think so. The long visibility of the first year gave the divers more of a chance to watch the sharks approach and witness some behaviors that were probably not seen during the second trip.

The multiple sharks at the same time occurrences of the second trip were exciting, but there were times that it was almost sensory overload with that many Great White Sharks visible and active at the same time.

What is most significant to me is having had the opportunity to see these magnificent creatures up close. One at a time or more at a time is not really the issue. Seeing Great White Sharks up close and personal is.

If you love sharks, or are fascinated by them, this is a trip that you must do.

Don't miss it. Sign up now. It's worth every moment of time and every dollar that you devote to it.

