

Can ecotourism save this threatened species?



Ningaloo Marine Park, Western Australia

Whale shark ecotourism industry licensed since 1993

Regarded internationally as an example of 'world's best practice'

Is it sustainable?

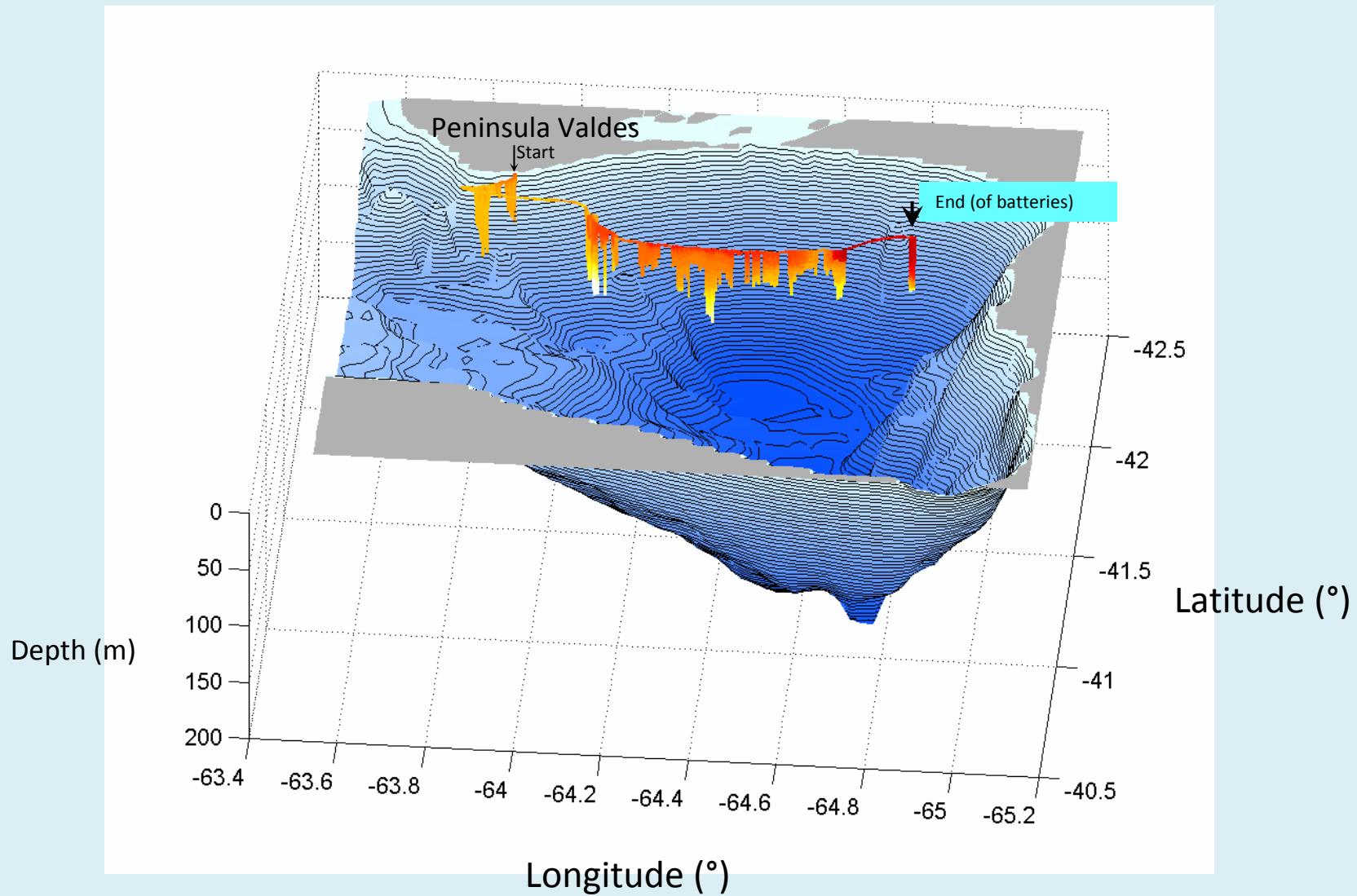
Talk to any of the industry at Ningaloo, and they will tell you shark numbers are very good

Look at the results from the comprehensive data set that is within the ECOCEAN Library... numbers are stable for those philopatric sharks returning to NMP (Holmberg et al. 2008)

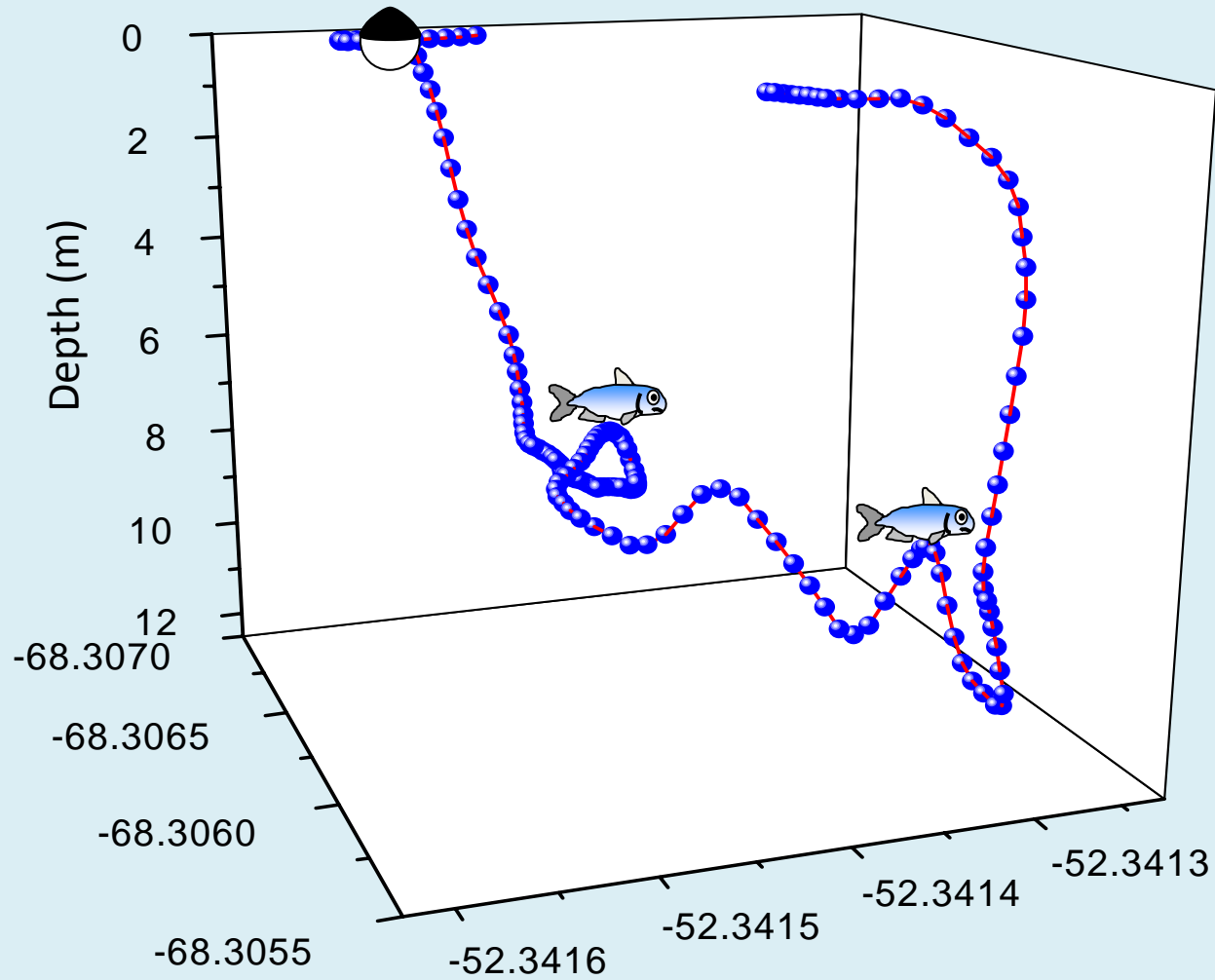
Informing our knowledge of the biology of the species and the impacts from tourism

- New tool – the 'Daily Diary' - the 'daily diary' can help us – by reviewing behaviour changes under 'essentially 'natural' and 'ecotourism-influenced' conditions
- 'proof of concept' (2007) then 'field testing' at Ningaloo (2008)
- University of Swansea, Murdoch University, ECOCEAN collaboration
- Opportunity to initiate this program at several locations worldwide (*collaboration – please see me during the course of the conference*)
- Does ecotourism have a negative or positive effect on whale sharks?

GPS



Fine scale; single dives



Daily Diary deployed



Perhaps suggest locations where we hope to deploy these tags (?)

- Philippines
 - Seychelles
 - Mexico
 - Etc.
-
- Nb. Both at ecotourism locations and at non-ecotourism locations

What's the economic incentive
to embrace whale shark
ecotourism?

Results from Curtin University/ECOCEAN whale shark tourism research 2006

In 2006 participants' expenditure in the region was:

- \$894 per trip,
- total expenditure was \$6.0 million,
- between \$2.4 and \$4.6 million would have been lost to the region if whale shark tourism did not exist

Export of Knowledge

- Ningaloo Reef whale shark industry – an example of ‘world’s best practice’
- Sustainable
- Opportunity to ‘export’ this knowledge to assist fledgling ecotourism industries as they establish elsewhere – especially developing world
- Opportunity to ‘sell’ the message of conservation – in a positive way for the species/environment and for the economics of local community

Opportunities for uptake of whale shark ecotourism in other locations

Successful to date in:

- Philippines
- Mexico
- Seychelles
- etc.

Potential for implementation in:

- Taiwan
- India
- Indonesia
- etc.....?

Added benefit – associated increase in public awareness

(aided through citizen science monitoring program – the ECOCEAN Library)




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Whale Shark Video

Whale sharks at Ningaloo
Rolex Award for Enterprise 2006



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Engage....

more people worldwide to take an active role in whale shark conservation.....



JOIN THE DOTS...
HELP SOLVE THE MYSTERY

www.whaleshark.org



Educate....

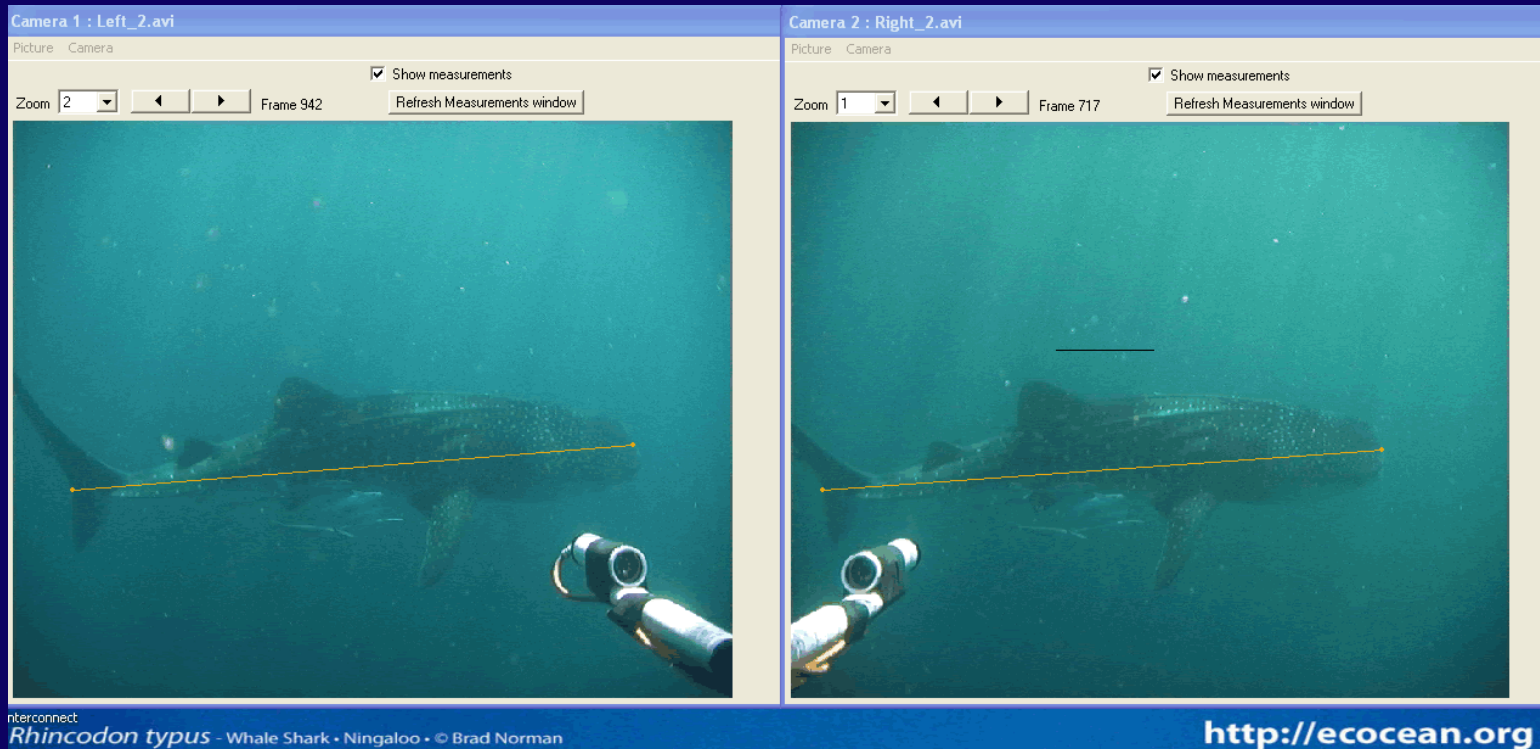


Whale shark ecotourism activities provides outstanding opportunities to undertake basic research on whale shark life history

Development of specialised photogrammetry equipment for whale sharks



Accurate measurements of whale sharks



Collaborators

UNEP

GALAPAGOS NATIONAL PARKS

CHARLES DARWIN FOUNDATION

MIT

WWF

WILDLIFE TRUST OF INDIA

EARTHWATCH

UNIVERSITY OF SWANSEA

MURDOCH UNIVERSITY

Conference Committee

Call for establishment of an International Whale Shark Conference
Committee for meeting #3

thanks



Rhincodon typus - Whale Shark • Ningaloo • © Brad Norman

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