



Nature Society
(Singapore)



FRIENDS FOR LIFE



Animal Concerns Research & Education Society
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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

SPCA says 'NO' to whale sharks in Captivity *International Whale Shark Day 30 August 2008*

Singapore, 30 August 2008 – In conjunction with International Whale Shark Day¹ on 30 August 2008, the Singapore Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) is saying 'NO' to have whale sharks for Resorts World at Sentosa. Along with Nature Society (Singapore) and Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES), SPCA had voiced its strong objections when news was first announced that a whale shark was to be part of Genting's International attraction (Forum page, Straits Times; 21 October 2006).

The SPCA also wrote to the Ministerial Committee in charge of reviewing the bids, against selecting any bid that would exploit wild, threatened or endangered animals for commercial purposes pointing out that it would be cruel to keep whale sharks in captivity.

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) replied to that letter stating that "the successful bidder for the Sentosa Integrated Resort will have to comply with all Singapore and

¹ The National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONAMP) announced August 30th as International Whale Shark Day during the International Whale Shark Conference, carried out in Isla Holbox on July 15-20th. Representatives from over 40 countries joined together to recognize the positive impact and benefits obtained from the arrival of the species.

(Source: <http://www.ftnnews.com/content/view/2750/32/lang,english/>)

international laws governing the exhibition of wild animals.” It said also that the concept of whale shark exhibits is not new and cited the Okinawa Expo Aquarium and Georgia Aquarium as having whale sharks as part of their exhibits. Although the STB stated that the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority would take all necessary steps to ensure that wild animals are kept in captivity safely (as per international standards), SPCA is of the opinion that no enclosure would be big enough to meet the needs of the whale sharks. In January 2007, “Ralph”, one of the whale sharks at the Georgia Aquarium Atlanta, died. ‘Norton’ another whale shark died five months later, proving that whale sharks are not meant for confinement to glass walls.

Ms. Deirdre Moss, Executive Officer of SPCA, expressed that the “SPCA sincerely hopes that Singapore learns from the tragic and unnecessary deaths of the two whale sharks which were taken from the wild. Confining these gentle giants is not without great risk to their welfare.”

For Singapore to follow suit and confine whale sharks knowing full well the risks to the animal, would reflect poorly on its regard for animal welfare in general, not to mention the international outcry it would face.

Mr. Louis Ng, Executive Director of ACRES said “We hope that Resorts World will reconsider their decision to keep whale sharks in captivity. They have already taken the progressive step of leaving sharks off their menu and surely recognize that these animals belong in the vast open oceans. To truly contribute to marine conservations, let us focus on keeping whale sharks safe in the wild and concentrate our efforts on protecting their natural habitat.”

Shawn Lum, President, Nature Society (Singapore) said “We still lack basic information on the whale shark – its range, population size, genetic structure, and much more. Understanding this majestic species better and protecting it and its habitat should be our priority. There seems little justification from a conservation point of view to keep whale sharks in captivity. They are not easy to keep, are not likely to ever breed enough (if they ever do) in marine parks to keep the species going, and the exhibit will be stocked and replenished by wild-caught individuals. With the new marine attraction at Sentosa, there is an opportunity to add to the proactive efforts already undertaken by Resorts World and to bring attention to critically under-funded marine conservation projects in the region. If we can help save whale sharks and raise awareness about them without

having to catch and display them, it would be a crowning achievement in Singapore's growing conservation drive."

The SPCA hopes to increase public awareness of the risks facing whale sharks in captivity with its specially designed T-shirt; priced at only \$6.00 each. The T-shirts will be on sale from mid-September at the SPCA and at SPCA booths which are set-up at selected venues on a regular basis.

Note to Editor: Please refer to Annex A for fact sheet on whale sharks.

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About Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA)

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) is the first registered animal welfare organisation in Singapore. The SPCA is a charity relying on the kind donations from our supporters to continue our important role as animal protector. The two main objectives of the SPCA are to promote kindness and to prevent cruelty to animals. For more information, visit <http://www.spca.org.sg>

About Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES)

ACRES is a local charity aimed at fostering respect and compassion for all animals. The society is driven by its concern for animals and adopts research projects on the use of animals in various fields. Research findings are then used to educate the public to promote active community involvement in the animal welfare movement, as well as strive towards synergistic partnerships with authorities and related parties. ACRES has been tackling the illegal wildlife trade since 2001 and has conducted more than 240 road shows and/or talks to raise awareness on animal welfare issues in Singapore and to create a more socially responsible community. It currently has more than 13,000 individuals on a supporter database.

About Nature Society (Singapore)

The Nature Society (Singapore), founded as the Singapore Branch of the Malayan Nature Society in 1954, is one of the oldest Non-Government Organisations in Singapore. Its diverse membership comes together from all walks of life to learn about, publicise, and help preserve our natural heritage. The Nature Society believes that making the natural world a part of our everyday life enriches not only individual nature enthusiasts, but that it strengthens and nourishes the lives of communities as well.

FACT SHEET

Common name / Scientific name	Whale Shark / <i>Rhincodon typus</i>
Size	12m and possibly up to 20m [The largest fish in the world]
Habitat / Distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Circumglobal distribution in all tropical and warm temperate seas;• Highly migratory and have been tracked over 13 000km;• And diving to depths of about 1000m.
Lifespan	Between 60 and 100 years
Conservation status	Listed as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)