

Preface

There is no other marine creature, except maybe the great whales, that attracts man's interest and stimulates his imagination as the shark. Indeed, sharks are wonderful animals that can be described as living artworks, with their perfect hydrodynamic shape, shining skin and silent graceful movements. Additionally, some sharks are the largest fish swimming in the oceans and among the largest animals that ever lived on Earth. Consequently, it is normal that we are fascinated by these fishes.

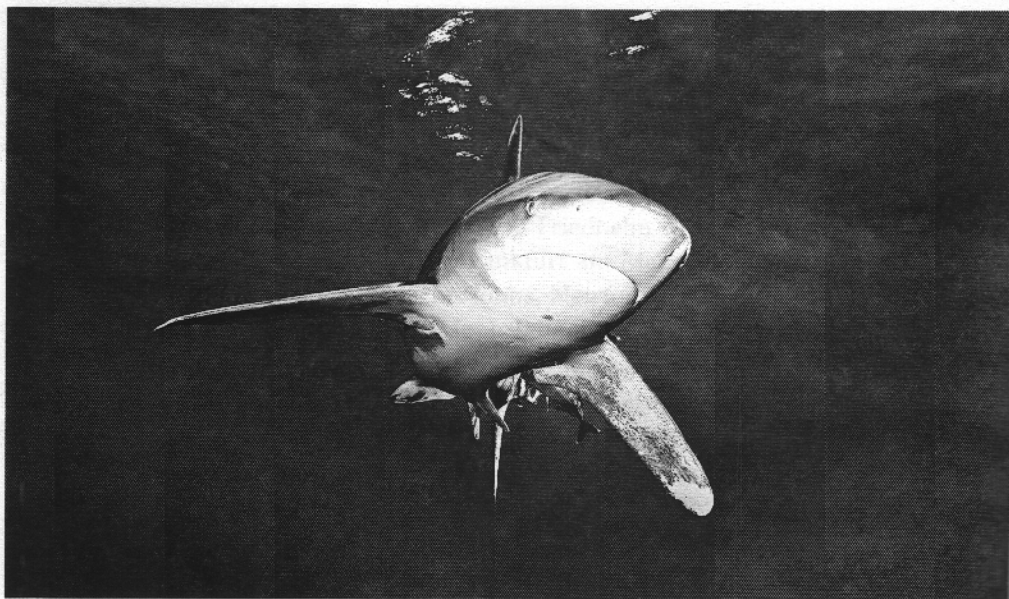
For a long time, research on these fascinating predators in European waters was scarce compared to the many wide and long term studies conducted in the United States on the same animals. However, the situation is rapidly changing and the number of interesting and detailed studies on sharks inhabiting the Mediterranean has grown. We are now filling in the gaps in our knowledge of morphology, biology, ecology and etology of the Mediterranean sharks.

This research is due to the efforts of the few dedicated ichthyologists, because the interest shown by European governments for marine biological research is very scarce (unfortunately, the same lack of interest is shown by the same countries for other natural resources). Most studies (and funds) on fish are concentrated on the few species considered to have high economic importance. The conservation of the natural world, the world we also inhabit, and their living components are considered as "optional." If we kill the marine predators we kill the marine world. According to recent estimates, we have already destroyed 90 percent of the sharks in the past few decades.

The aim of this book is to present a concise, accurate and up to date compendium of our knowledge on the sharks that inhabit the Mediterranean Sea. The content is widely based on the work made by many shark specialists who worked on the sharks described in the Mediterranean. The authors themselves are long-time researchers on sharks.

We wrote this book primarily for the general public. Of course, the text is scientific and detailed, but all technical terms are explained. We avoided preparing a technical work directed toward ichthyologists. We suggest that readers interested in digging deeper into the study of the Mediterranean sharks find a copy of the excellent books "*Tiburones del Mediterráneo*" by Joan Barrull and Isabel Mate and "*Requins de Méditerranée et d'Atlantique*" by Jean Cadenat and Jacques Blache. Also, take a look at the references in the bibliography.

The text is supported with many pictures, and the illustrations are the result of a lifetime portraying sharks. To produce the numerous drawings, Alessandro De Mad-



An oceanic whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) (photo by Dominique Barray).

dalena examined an immense amount of shark specimens at fish markets and museums of natural history in Europe, as well as many hundreds of photographs. The book also features beautiful photos of live specimens taken by Harald Bansch and other photographers from around the world. There are also several pictures of rare Mediterranean specimens from several sources.

We hope that the readers will find this book interesting and useful. Through these pages and illustrations, we hope to be able to pass a little bit of the love and passion we have for these wonderful and mysterious creatures.