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# medsharks

la baia delle mamme-squalo mediterranee

## Programming the satellite tags on the eve of our departure...

postato da [eleonora](#)

Sabato 1 Maggio 2004 ore 09:49:56

Leaving tomorrow morning, there's still so much to do!

Simona and I are programming our sat tags, those state-of-the-art electronic chips we are going to put on sharks to follow them as they swim around the Med.

They are minute, highly sophisticated computers built to stay underwater for a year and withstand water, pressure and salt. They know when it's time to leave the shark and float to the surface. Then they start trasmitting all the data to a satellite.

Our friend Jimmy Montanti will insert these tags spearfishing and is getting all the equipment ready. His is probably the most important role in our expedition.

MedSharks is made possible by the generous help of [Project Aware](#) Foundation and private sponsors. Satellite communication is provided by [World Communication Center](#) via the Iridium network.

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## medsharks

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### I'm a bit depressed

postato da [eleonora](#)

Sabato 1 Maggio 2004 ore 23:51:25

Because these wonderful jewels, these sophisticated micro computers which can dive to 1000 meters as well as talk to satellites floating in space; these jewels we were so eagerly waiting...

...well, there's no better way to put it:

They don't work.

We've spent the whole day trying to set them up, then we got on the phone and called the manufacturer in the US. They too did their best. But quite simply, the tags will not talk to the computer. They cannot get our instructions. And so they are utterly useless.

Ramon, one of the world experts in sharks research, had warned us: don't get your expectations too high. This technology is magic, but it is still very delicate - too delicate.

OK, I'll leave you now and go to sleep. We are leaving tomorrow at 1.40 to Istanbul (without the tags, probably). Anyway, there's still a lot to do in the field.

The next posting will come from Turkey - I hope our spirits will have lifted by then.

PS - I almost forgot. It's raining over there. Lucky, huh.

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**1 commento all'articolo**

**Pagina 1**

[Dani Botton](#)

[Domenica 2 Maggio 2004 ore 09:06:30]

Wish you a super stay in Turkey (without rain underwater!) and hope you will have a successful campaign in spite of the tags. Never trust computers: I worked with them all my life! Next time I may join...

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**Today's another day**

postato da [eleonora](#)

Domenica 2 Maggio 2004 ore 09:40:03

I just couldn't leave last night's posting out there. I am no longer depressed, although our tags still won't work. I am stressed by all the things that need be done before leaving, tons of them, so there's little space for despair. And besides there is still a lot to be done in this campaign: we are still going to tag the sharks, although with more conventional tags. This wway we will have even more experience when the sat tags will be ready. Must rush now, Turkey here we come!

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**Yessssssss**

postato da [Eleonora](#)

Lunedì 3 Maggio 2004 ore 18:07:01

'There are a thousand suns over the darkest clouds' the Indans say. Well we have plenty of good news today. The sharks are here in their bay (I would have never admitted it, but I was a bit nervous about it)! Not only they are here, but the very first one we saw was an old acquaintance of ours! Not only that, this year there are males in the bay - last year there were none! If there are too many excluded marks in these past few lines, well forgive me but after so many bad news we feel really good today. And who cares about the satellite tags!

Well that's not true of course. But the manufacturers are doing their best to replace them and ship them in time before Jimmy leaves, so meanwhile we'll use the normal tags and then... we'll see how it goes.

This place is magic.

... but now that think about it, I just told you that a. the sharks are here; b. that we had two (possibly three) resightings and c. that males are here. What am going to tell you in the coming days??



**I commenti all'articolo**

Pagina 1

Dani Botton  
Cara Eleonora,

[Mercoledì 5 Maggio 2004 ore 14:13:57]

Bottondoro - in turco altyn-tomurcuk (si pronuncia tomurgiük; se avessi una tastiera turca scriverei più facilmente la y di "altyn" che come puoi vedere non è puntata, e si pronuncia diversamente dalla i): che ONORE !! Chissà che non la possa "adottare" uno di questi giorni. Vediamo se genererà qualche... Bottoncino!

Invece lascio volentieri Boccastorta a qualche altro volontario. Preferirei essere sott'acqua, visto che qui a Milano non è molto diverso, data la pioggia ininterrotta che ci sta inzuppando dal 1.o Maggio.

Buon proseguimento e buon divertimento! Dani

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## Two sharks tagged today

postato da [Eleonora](#)

Giovedì 6 Maggio 2004 ore 11:28:43

Tuesday 4 May 2004

I feared I wouldn't have much to report, but today was actually quite an interesting day. We think we saw "scarface", another old friend - tonight we'll download the video and find out. The big news is that Jimmy was able to tag two sharks! We are using fixed tags from the US National Marine Fisheries Service: they are coordinating a huge project, which will tag many species all over the seas. We are the only ones working with grey sharks in the Mediterranean Sea, so that if a shark with this kind of tag ends up in a fisherman's net (which of course we don't wish to happen) we would know where the sharks go after they leave the bay. This would only tell us the end point of its travels, not the itinerary - but it's better than nothing! Anyway, these tags will help us identify these two animals much more easily than looking for a telltale light or dark spot.

The important take-home message of the day is that the sharks are not easily scared: both sharks were seen again and again swimming placidly in the bay even after the tagging. This piece of information will be useful when we have satellite tags.

We gave up on satellite tags, at least for now: our American colleagues were really helpful, trying hard to send the tags before our official tagger, Jimmy, left to join us - but it didn't work out. We'll try again another time. Our Iridium satellite telephone, provided by World Communication Center, was priceless in managing this emergency, enabling us to talk to the US and Italy from this remote place. We are technology people!

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la baia delle mamme-squalo mediterranee

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### It's a boy! It's a girl! Baby sharks in the bay!

postato da [Eleonora](#)

Lunedì 10 Maggio 2004 ore 11:07:02

Yesssssssss! It's the news of the century! We found small sharks, so small that they still had the umbilical cord and placenta hanging from their bodies! We saw newborns which were, unfortunately for them, lifeless and lying on the seabed. It's sad but it's Nature: it is normal that some are born dead or die at birth. We rather want to think about those - who knows how many- which made it and are now swimming somewhere in the bay.

We can hardly believe the implications of this piece of news. For now, we concentrate on the fact that this bay is a nursery for grey sharks, the only one known in the Med! We thought this was the case - the presence of females with a large bellies was a strong hint - but now we know for sure. We took samples for DNA testing. We would need many more in order to give a genetic name and surname to these sharks, understand if they come from all over the Med or only from nearby waters, or from the Atlantic ocean. But since we know nothing about them -the genetic analysis of these sharks in the Med has never been done - this is surely a good starting point. We also took the dimensions of newborn sharks, which were never previously recorded for the Med. And: as the sharks were born over the last few hours, new births may happen in the next few days. We'll need a lot of luck to witness the birth of a shark - so we thought we'd help our luck by doubling our shifts in the water. We have two videocameras, two cameras, four sets of eyes and ever more enthusiasm - if that were possible - and eagerness to steal other secrets from this bay and from these animals. Keep your fingers crossed!

We are thrilled and moved and would like to thank again all the people who believed in our project (which we should now rename "Sharks' cradle") and helped us financially and with technical support: Project Aware Foundation, our generous private sponsors, World Communication Center, Centro Data and Nimar. We would also like to thank you, our readers: your support is a real boost.

Sorry for the long blackout: we had a few technological problems, which we finally solved.



stella marina

[Lunedì 10 Maggio 2004 ore 23:25:37]

Complimenti ragazze, il lavoro che state svolgendo è notevole. Mi spiace che avete perso il cuoco e spero vi basti il cous-cous con le cilek, specialità di Lele. Un abbraccio dall'altro mediterraneo.

[Dani Botton](#)

[Lunedì 10 Maggio 2004 ore 11:44:06]

Astounding NEWS !! I'm sure it will deserve worldwide attention.

KUDOS to our wonderful sea-wanderer and to your team! You kept us guessing for the last 48 hours and now the curiosity from many of us is well repayed.

Inbar, who is an expert at genetic analysis may help... although she did her thesis work on leopards in Israel. However DNA is DNA !

Who knows ?!

Cheers and keep up the good work !  
Dani

Apologies for too many !!!!!!! Tou've earned them

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### About sharks

postato da [Simona](#)

Martedì 11 Maggio 2004 ore 14:43:00

Since we have no news today on the sharks, I take this opportunity to tell you something about their biology. Some of you may have been puzzled in reading about the placenta, thinking that the placenta was an "invention" of Mammals. Ages before them, some sharks had instead developed it. But let me explain it a little better. Amongst the over 400 species of sharks, there are three main ways of having babies.

The first group is the OVIPAROUS sharks: they lay eggs directly on the sea bottom.

Embrios of the second group, the APLACENTAL VIVIPAROUS sharks, develop inside their mothers eating from the yolk sac until they are ready to be born. In some cases the first embryo to develop may eat his siblings which are later in development. Thanks to a very special electronic microscope, a thresher shark embryo was found with perfectly formed teeth and ready to use.

In the third group, the PLACENTAL VIVIPAROUS sharks, embryos get their food from their mothers through a placenta. This is what happens to our baby sharks.

The placenta is not the only similar evolutionary choice sharks and mammals have evolved independently: both reach sexual maturity later in life (12 years, for sandbar sharks), both have a low number of babies (as opposed to the thousands and even millions of offspring produced by other fish, for instance) and very long gestation times. Sandbar sharks have a gestation period from 9 to 12 months.



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### We filmed the birth of a shark!!!

postato da [Eleonora](#)

Giovedì 13 Maggio 2004 ore 16:12:26

We made it! After days of observations, long hours spent in the water in shifts so we would be with the sharks all day long... the biggest gift, the most incredible thing this sea could ever give us.

Luigina Aggio, or Gigia, has had the privilege to observe, AND FILM, the birth of a baby sandbar shark!

We all are overwhelmed with emotions. There will be time in the coming days for all sorts of comments on this outstanding experience, but now it's Gigia's moment to share with you her incredible experience.

"I was filming "our" sharks in this incredible bay.

It's a long and tiring work: you hold your breath, lie on the bottom and disappear amongs the rocks... and the sharks simply are not around.

But moments later, when you are the surface out of breath and not yet ready to go down again, here they come, two or three at the time.

But then the moment is lost and one can only watch them swim by, marvelling at their beauty and wondering what do they do, where do they go...

So here I am at the surface getting ready to dive, so as to get some footage that may help our research.

Here they come: one, two and a third one which keeps just a little further away from me.

I have it in my camera for a few moments and then...then I see something coming out of the shark!

I frame it in the camera and I am totally out of my mind! It's a baby shark, a perfectly formed baby shark with tail, fins and everything, a small-scale replica of those that swim in the bay, save for the fact it's just 20 cm. long.

A baby shark born just in this very moment!

I breathe hard and dive again, the baby is trying to get free of his placenta.

I can't believe what I am filming, I fear it's a dream...

I had wished so hard to be able to witness such an important moment, that I was now afraid it may not be real.

And then I look again this little thing struggling to swim and breath, with the dangling umbilical cord that snatches around the rocks and anchors it on the bottom every now and then. You can imagine what moving moment this was, and how much I wanted to share the news with my friends.

Long after the camera battery is drained I remain with the baby shark.

I wonder if it saw me or felt my presence - I just like to think that in that moment it felt a little less alone."

Luigina



[Marco](http://www.cortesi.info) (<http://www.cortesi.info>)

[Martedì 18 Maggio 2004 ore 12:25:09]

wow! dev'essere stato bellissimo... cosa farete di questo video? sara' possibile vederlo sul sito? mi potete far sapere qualcosa via e-mail? nel frattempo penso se adottare uno squalo :-)

[Andrea Ghisotti](http://www.ghisotti.it) (<http://www.ghisotti.it>)

[Giovedì 13 Maggio 2004 ore 21:58:47]

Fantastico! State facedno un lavoro eccezionale e sono felicissimo per voi e con voi. Lele, sei grande! Un bacio grossissimo

Andrea

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### Our last days

postato da [Eleonora](#)

Lunedì 17 Maggio 2004 ore 12:42:39

Here we are in Istanbul, stuck at the airport for a strike in Rome which has delayed our flight - but at last we have some time to tell you something about our last days in the bay. Apologies for keeping you in the dark, but we worked around the clock to get as many info as possible before leaving. It was not easy as the sharks were nervous, even more shy than usual, bothered by some nets and, some say, for an earthquake. They would show up for a few minutes and then vanish for hours, coming back only when the seas were rough and swimming was hard.

Under these difficult conditions the bay showed us its last surprise. The day before yesterday we met an old acquaintance: Golden Dot, a shark which is the symbol of our research (or was the symbol, before the baby was born!). She was the first shark we gave a name to in 2002. She came back the following year and so she did now. Three years in a row that both she and us keep this untold appointment! When she showed up the other day, swimming lazily and escorted by yet another old acquaintance, Dot Behind Gills, really felt like meeting an old friend.

Apart from the tension of our work, these days were still pervaded by the intense emotions of the birth. The baby came to life in such a birsk, no frills and business-like manner. We watched that little 20cm fish struggling to swim for the first time, hindered by its own fins and the umbilical cord that, like a dangling anchor, kept catching the rocks. We saw these images over and over again, on video and in our minds. Even the thought of it still moves us: not only it is an extraordinary event (it seems it is the second time birth was videoed in the wild!) but it feels like a crown to our efforts, a recognition for all the energy and passion we poured in it.

I finish off these lines with the invitation to keep following us in the next few days (we'll put new photos and a short video of the sharks). And with an invitation.

If you were intrigued by our research, if you were disappointed for the mishaps of the sat tags, moved by the birth of the baby (which is still unnamed – any suggestions?), intrigued by the life and habits of these sharks.. help us!

Our research – supported by the University of Bologna and funded by generous private sponsors and organizations like the Project Aware Foundation, World Communication Center, Centro Data, Nimar, which we thank from the deep of our hearts, and by individuals like Massimo Fuccillo, who kindly put this weblog on line and my sister Stella, who translated it when I couldn't do my hurried ones – our research can only go on with the help of institutions and companies like these, but also to the help of people like you.

You have tow ways of helping us and contribute personally to the success of our research and to the discovery of the world of Mediterranean sharks: you can symbolically adopt a shark (the baby, Golden Dot, Crooked Mouth and Dot behind the Gills) and buy

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Medsharks T-shirts. Buy them for you and your family; tell you friends to do the same. If you have a dive club or a diving center, invite your members to support us!

It is worth it! As you have seen, we come back with some very important results which will be published in scientific journals (and popular magazines as well) in the coming months and which will be presented in October at the European shark research congress (EEA) in London. These findings already contribute significantly to the advancement of knowledge on Mediterranean sharks.

But there is still so much to do, o much to learn! Satellite tags will be fundamental. But as we all have seen, they are very delicate computers and we will certainly need more, besides the three we already bought (let me remind you – they cost 4000USD each). We must keep monitoring the coming and going of the sharks, staying there more than two weeks so we will have more chances to increase our database and possibly witness other births. We will then need to deepen our knowledge of the bay itself, trying to understand what it is that makes it so special for the sharks - that way we may be able to find other sharks' cradles elsewhere.

More details on this website in the coming days. For more information you can write us at [medsharks@tiscali.it](mailto:medsharks@tiscali.it) . Enter your email to be included in the mailing list, and receive updates on the resarch and events (Tv and conferences) .

That's it for now, time to board our plane to Rome. Ciao from all of us, leaving turkey very reluctantly.

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