

SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



save our seas
foundation

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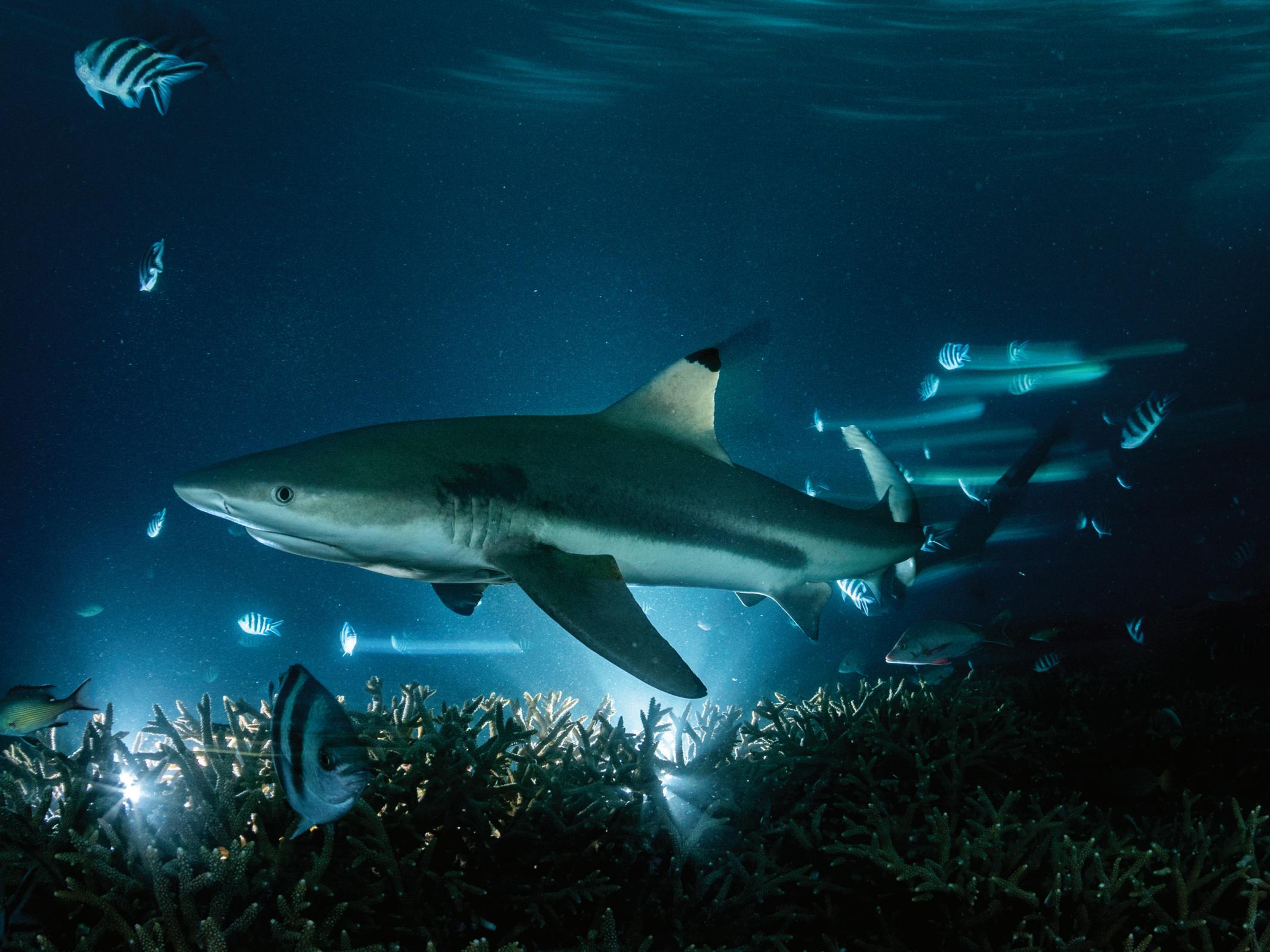
ANNUAL REPORT 2024





**“AS LONG AS THERE ARE
PEOPLE WHO CARE AND TAKE
ACTION, WE CAN AND WILL
MAKE A DIFFERENCE.”**

THE FOUNDER | SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION



Today, we understand more about sharks, rays, and chimaeras than ever before, but the scale of their declines threatens to outstrip improvements in research and policy. The conservation, education, and scientific efforts of our project leaders have trained the spotlight on these threatened animals; the SOSF is determined to maintain momentum to secure their future.

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People are fishing sharks into extinction; we are altering and destroying key habitats, making the seas noisier, polluting life-giving waters, and pushing our climate into uncharted territory. But our efforts in 2024 remind us that people are also concerned, dedicated, and innovative. There are many who care, deeply, and are taking action to rewrite the future of our oceans.

CEO'S SUMMARY

2024 was just as busy – if not more so – as our 20th anniversary! After two decades of facilitating shark and ray conservation at a global scale, we have started our third with a renewed commitment to sustainability for sharks and rays.

Grants

Key to achieving our vision is enabling shark conservationists to do their work. Grant-making remains our core strategy, and we supported a further 56 projects globally. This included 26 new Small Grants that support early-career conservationists. We have now assisted a total of 519 projects in more than 90 countries worldwide.

It is difficult for shark and ray conservationists to also sustain themselves. This is especially true for researchers from regions that lack resources and opportunities. We were therefore pleased to announce the SOSF Conservation Fellowship this year. This grant provides financial support to individuals working on shark and ray conservation projects, enabling them to retain and develop their expertise in the sector.

Our project leaders continue to make notable contributions to conservation. Noémie Coulon received the L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science 2024 Young Talent France Award for her work on how warming oceans may impact shark reproduction. Aristide Kamla, who founded the Africa Marine Mammal Conservation Organization in Cameroon, won the Whitley Award for Nature, which recognises outstanding conservation leaders. Michael Grant was awarded the Huntingford Medal from the *Journal of Fish Biology* for his work on finding new ways to trace the habits and habitats of river sharks and rays in Papua New Guinea.



UNICEF posits that the intertwined environmental crises (climate change, biodiversity loss, and increasingly toxic land/sea/air pollution) impact nearly every child on the planet. Nurturing a resilient generation who will confront the worst of climate shocks requires empathy, sensitivity, and thoughtful guidance.

“Research projects tell us what we need to do to assist the recovery of sharks and rays, but storytelling helps people to want to do this.”

That is why we continue to develop our Storytelling Grants to inspire ocean stewardship. We awarded two Photography Storytelling grants: Nicholas Hahn will be telling the story of Angola’s sharks, and Pier Nirandara will learn about shark callers and conservation efforts in Papua New Guinea.

Centres

We operate three centres worldwide: the SOSF Shark Education Centre in Cape Town, the SOSF D’Arros Research Centre in Seychelles and the SOSF Shark Research Center in Florida.

SOSF Shark Education Centre

Our Shark Education Centre inspires people to protect the ocean by fostering positive connections through education that focuses on sharks and local marine ecosystems. It hosts school groups and is also open to the public. The education programmes are aimed at schoolchildren from under-resourced communities that typically lack enrichment opportunities. They span short-term lessons, longer-term after-school programmes, public visits, digital communication and the distribution of educational resources. In 2024 the centre welcomed more than 4,700 learners and hosted over 1,130 members of the public for tours. It also co-developed strategies for improving external stakeholder connections with a team from the Henley Business School. There are many opportunities for growth in 2025, including stronger collaboration with the Western Cape Education Department.





The Western Indian Ocean has been highlighted by the IUCN as a region rich in biodiversity, with a high concentration of endangered and important species. The importance of Seychelles – and of D'Arros Island and St Joseph Atoll in particular – in this context, can't be overstated.



SOSF D'Arros Research Centre

The D'Arros Research Centre is a field station that works to preserve the biodiversity and habitats of D'Arros Island and St Joseph Atoll and to support healthy, well-managed shark and ray populations in Seychelles. This is achieved through various efforts, from long-term monitoring projects on sharks, rays, turtles, corals and seabirds to educational experiences. For example, we know from a decade of manta ray research that D'Arros and St Joseph are a key aggregation site in Seychelles. Information like this helped secure D'Arros Island its status as a marine national park and identified it as an Important Shark and Ray Area. Another publication this year showed that a previous rat eradication programme on D'Arros island has helped the local wedge-tailed shearwater population recover to 10 times pre-eradication levels. Some of this work was highlighted in a feature article in *Oceanographic* magazine, with striking imagery from Storytelling Grantee Shane Gross.

The D'Arros Research Centre also hosted the D'Arros Experience in collaboration with the Island School Seychelles. Sixteen schoolchildren from Mahé spent a week on D'Arros immersed in nature and research activities.



SOSF Shark Research Centre

Our Shark Research Center in the USA, which is an integral part of Nova Southeastern University, focuses on global shark conservation genetics. A key output this year was the publication of the full genome sequences of mako and great hammerhead sharks. The populations of these species have plummeted, and great hammerhead sharks show low genetic variation that reduces their capacity to adapt to our changing world. But while the news was worrying for hammerheads, mako sharks showed higher diversity and limited inbreeding. Another important paper highlighted how even remote, small-scale artisanal fisheries can reduce shark numbers. Small-scale local fisheries are often assumed to be sustainable compared to large-scale industrial fisheries.



In-person events around the world fostered connections between scientists, conservation practitioners, communications professionals, and members of the public. These regular and diverse touchpoints serve to bridge the SOSF's message between the online world and the very real community of humans who care to make a change.

Communications & Sponsorships

“Communication is crucial to conservation efforts and is a cornerstone of the Foundation’s activities.”

While we still translate science in accessible and engaging ways, we increasingly create positive stories that connect people with nature and encourage behavioural change. We also create tangible connections to audiences at physical events and empower people to be part of the solution.

A key output in 2023 was the award-winning short film *Older Than Trees*, which reached audiences at festivals throughout 2024 and won Best Science Film at the Blue Water Film Festival. This earned it a screening at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival. The film was also screened at the International Ocean Film Festival, reaching more than 75,000 people. Film continues to be an emotive tool for reaching a broad audience, which is why we continued our partnership with the Wildscreen film festival as a main sponsor. Our session ‘Science in Storytelling’ was rated in the top 10 (out of more than 60) sessions by delegates. We also helped produce WildPhoto, a photography extension of Wildscreen, which featured a keynote from our Director of Storytelling Thomas Peschak on his recent assignment in the Amazon.





Communication efforts extended to Seychelles, with the premiere of the feature film *Coconuts to Conservation* made by our very own Dillys Pouponeau. The film charts the transition of D'Arros and St Joseph from coconut plantation to dedicated conservation centre and is now airing on SBC and Telesesel, the two primary television channels in Seychelles. We also produced two vibrant murals on Mahé: one outside the Ministry of Education and another in the centre of Victoria, which was painted by alumni from the D'Arros Experience. We were headline sponsors of the Seychelles Ocean Festival, a public event that celebrated Seychelles' ocean heritage.

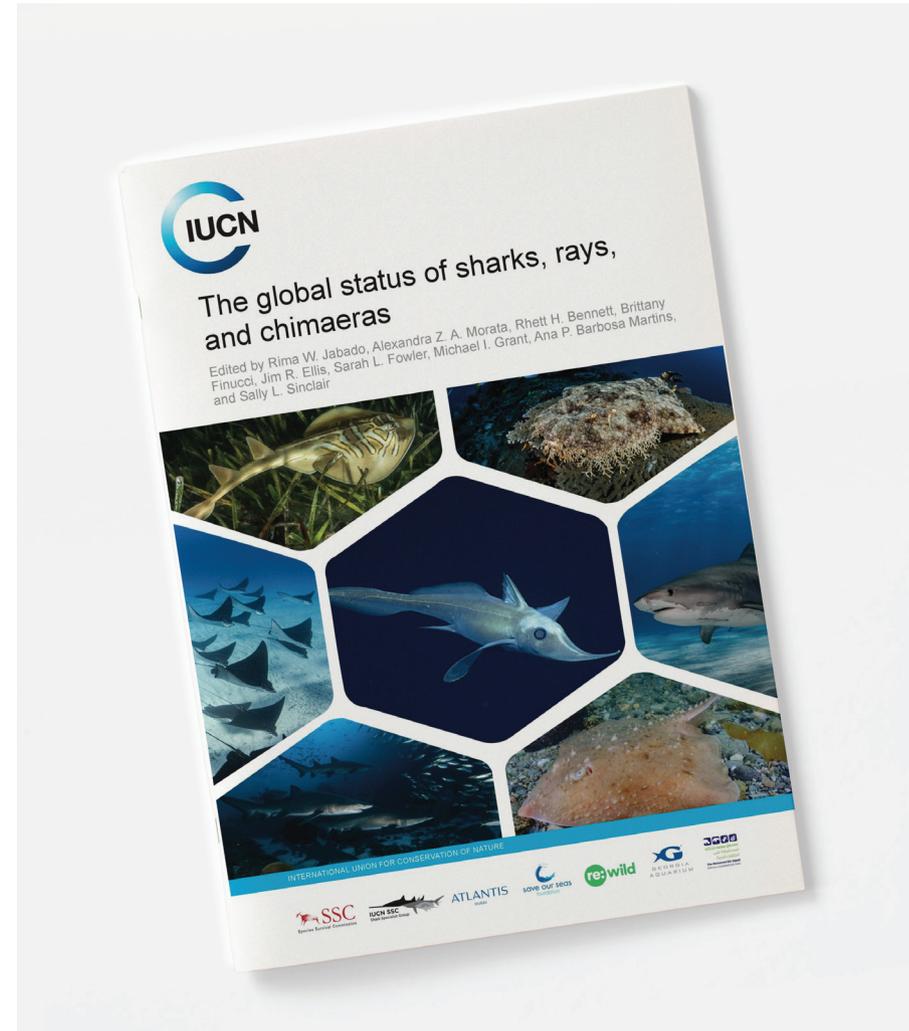
Supporting scientific conferences throughout 2024 helped us promote collaboration with the scientific community and identified the latest conservation developments and needs. We continued to sponsor the primary conferences in Europe (European Elasmobranch Association), the USA (American Elasmobranch Society) and Australia (Oceania Chondrichthyan Society), expanded into supporting the 7th International Marine Conservation Congress in Cape Town and headlined the inaugural Seychelles Marine Science Symposium. We also supported for the first time the Street Whale Festival in Cameroon, which unites people from across western Africa and beyond to strategise on marine conservation issues in the region.

Using art as activism and for education brings the oceans – in all their splendid colour and otherworldly whimsy – to audiences who might never look beneath the waves. Murals are an accessible way to make conservation messaging available, free, to a variety of audiences.

The IUCN Shark Specialist Group's report *The global status of sharks, rays and chimaeras* updated the 20-year-old publication and comprised more than 2,000 pages of detailed information about the status of sharks in 158 countries. It was compiled by 353 authors and highlighted successes and gaps from the past two decades. We collaborated with the IUCN to produce all the communication materials that translate the findings of this critical but technical report into digestible infographics. These were the primary tools for communicating this seminal work to the world.

We maintained longstanding partnerships with the Two Oceans Aquarium in Cape Town, the Museum of Discovery and Science in Florida and the Underwater Photography of the Year Award, which help us reach a diverse audience as we communicate about sharks.

Communicating the conservation status of sharks, rays, and chimaeras is critical. Global demand for shark meat has nearly doubled, and overfishing is the overwhelming driver of declines. Inroads in new regions, like Cameroon's Street Whale Festival, and sharing globally relevant findings like the IUCN's report, were key milestones of 2024 to highlight the urgency of implementing solutions.



“It was an unexpectedly busy year, but 2024 has strengthened our resolve to bend shark and ray population curves from decline into recovery.”

The momentum for shark conservation really feels like it is shifting in their favour, and it remains a humbling privilege to facilitate the world’s leading and emerging conservationists to realise a future for sharks and rays.

Members of the SOSF HQ, DRC, SRC, SEC and Communications teams, and Scientific Advisors gathered in Cape Town, South Africa during the IMCC conference (below). There is urgency to our collective work as we approach – and surpass – critical conservation tipping points. But the resolve and resourcefulness of project leaders and our team keep hope alive, and positive momentum moving into 2025.



James Lea

Chief Executive Officer





21 YEARS OF THE SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION

RESEARCH EDUCATION CONSERVATION

SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 2003, THE SAVE OUR SEAS FOUNDATION HAS FUNDED 519 PROJECTS IN MORE THAN 90 COUNTRIES WORLDWIDE AND HAS REMAINED ON THE PULSE OF CURRENT RESEARCH, CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION PROJECTS THAT FOCUS ON SHARKS AND RAYS



519 projects
since 2003

6

**Long-Term
Partners**

*The Acoustic Tracking
Array Platform*

*Bimini Biological Field
Station Foundation*

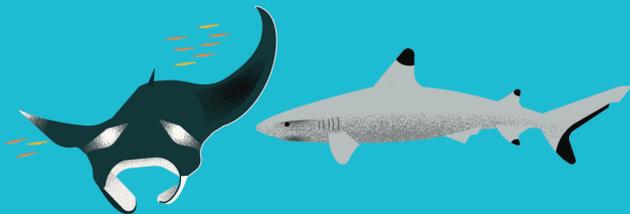
The Manta Trust

Shark Spotters

*Cape Eleuthera
Institute*

*North Coast
Cetacean Society*

SPECIES FUNDED



226 sharks
and rays



8 sea
turtles



12 marine
mammals

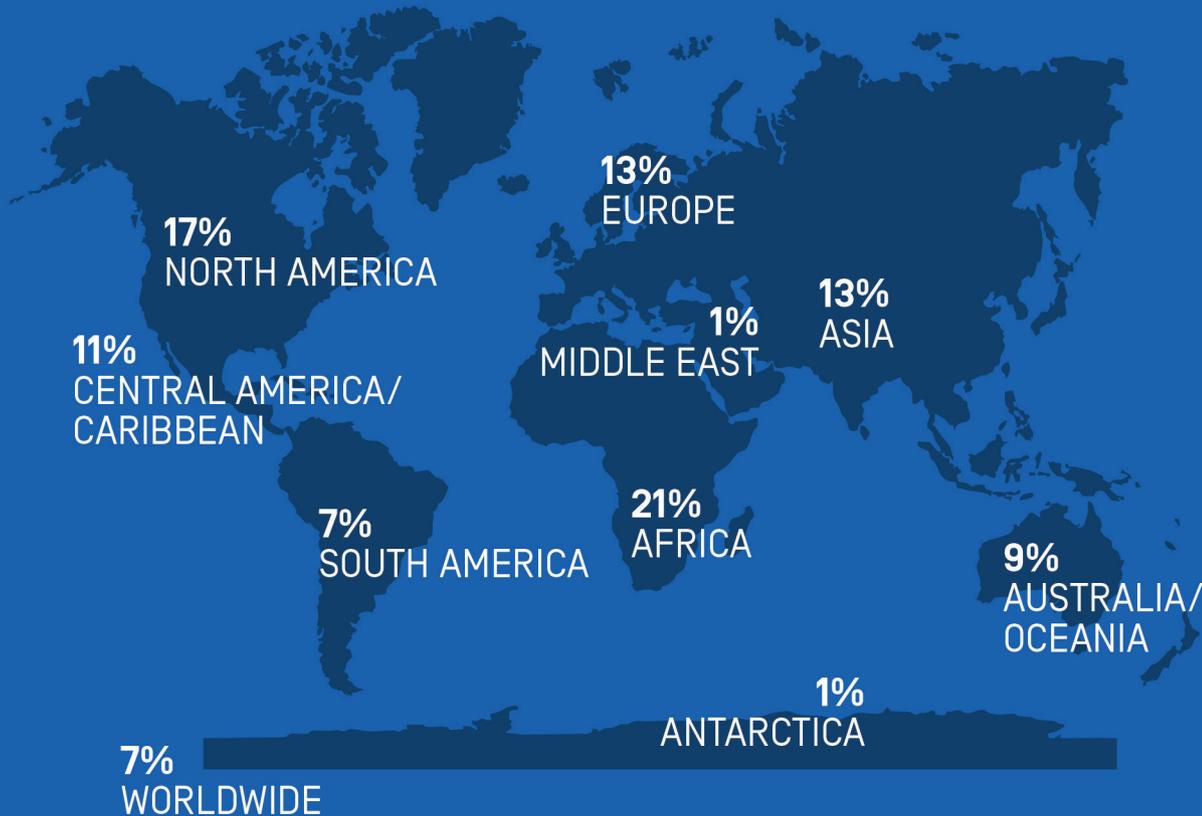


6 chimaeras



57.3%

Of the shark and ray species funded can be considered vulnerable to extinction



31



Average age of early career professionals supported by small grants in 2024

49.8%

Women



50.2%

Men

SOSF 2024 FUNDED PROJECTS

Small Grants

- 1 **Alghozali** | Rhinorays, Karimunjawa, trade, diet, reproduction
- 2 **Birnie-Gauvin** | Telemetry, conservation, connectivity, reproduction
- 3 **Biskis** | Sawfish, microchemistry, trophy, distribution, fisheries
- 4 **Cohen** | Development, chimaeras, nursery, shark, reproduction
- 5 **Romagnoli Correa** | Catch report, conservation, bycatch
- 6 **Dawdy** | Behavior, movement, endangered species, telemetry
- 7 **Do** | Sharks, exploitation, conservation, DNA barcoding
- 8 **Fernández-Cisternas** | Humboldt kelp forest, nursery area
- 9 **Finotto** | Pollution, sharks, impacts, biomarkers, health
- 10 **Fola-Matthews** | Hammerhead shark, fishing practices, community engagement, survey, conservation
- 11 **Furtado Soares** | Shark, ray, conservation, guitarfish, Africa
- 12 **Green** | Liver oil, deepsea sharks
- 13 **Hasenei** | Climate change, elasmobranchs, adaptation, acclimation
- 14 **Hernández** | Fishery surveys, deep-water, Chondrichthyes, conservation
- 15 **Hlavin** | Guitarfish, genetics, isotopes, elasmobranch, conservation
- 16 **Ichsan** | Wedgefish, fisheries, biology, population, Indonesia
- 17 **Labyedh** | Conservation, small-scale fisheries, threatened elasmobranch, South Cameroon
- 18 **Madrigal-Mora** | Management, aggregations, protected area, telemetry
- 19 **McInturf** | Fishery, bycatch, decline, stock assessment
- 20 **Midinoudewa** | Elasmobranch, MPA, Benin, health
- 21 **Musila** | Elasmobranchs, community engagement, conservation, education
- 22 **Naasan Aga Spyridopoulou** | Aggregations, nursery, PRM, bycatch
- 23 **Rock** | Sevengill, tope, estuary, pollution, bioaccumulation
- 24 **Ruiz-García** | Deepwater, mortality, capture-response, physiology, fisheries
- 25 **Soro** | Data, guitarfish, conservation, MPA, Grand-Béréby
- 26 **Vazquez** | Freshwater, elasmobranchs, tagging, migratory movements

Keystone Continuation

- 27 **Foster & Landschoff** | Great African Seaforest Biodiversity
- 28 **Salinas** | Shark ecology conservation Galápagos
- 29 **Mortimer** | Turtle Mortimer
- 30 **Vel** | Environmental Education
- 31 **Crockett** | Shark research grants
- 32 **Awruch** | Maugean skate Macquarie Harbour
- 33 **Basson-Hull & Boggio-Pasqua** | Pygmy devil ray data
- 34 **Bonfil** | Mexican coastal shark nurseries
- 35 **Charvet & Faria** | Largetooth sawfish
- 36 **Ebert** | "Lost shark" taxonomy
- 37 **Finucci** | Gulper sharks and longline fisheries
- 38 **Guttridge** | Smalltooth sawfish conservation
- 39 **Hegg** | Sawfish tooth chemist
- 40 **Kessel & Feldheim** | Caribbean reef shark connectivity
- 41 **Mohan** | Shark life history from cartilage
- 42 **Morris** | Juvenile lemon shark populations
- 43 **Prendergast** | Sicklefin devil ray movements
- 44 **Rogers** | Cowsharks and climate change
- 45 **Saygu** | Protecting guitarfish hotspots
- 46 **Seidu** | Conservation strategies
- 47 **Soekoe** | Eagle ray ecology
- 48 **Swezey** | Dried blood spot sampling
- 49 **Weng & Chaing** | Critical habitats for wedgefish and guitarfish

New Keystone

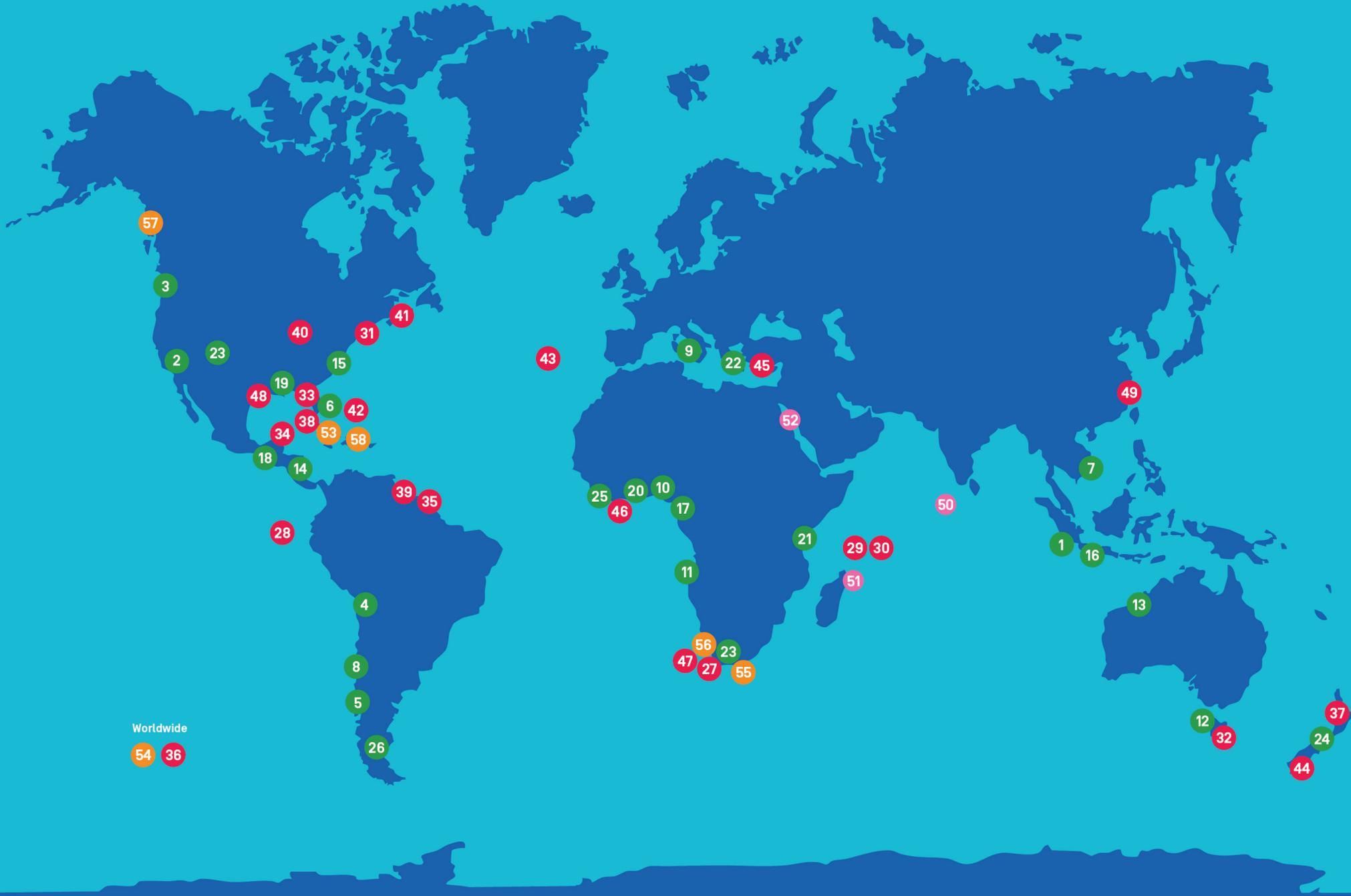
- 50 **Hilbourne** | Oceanic Manta Ray Connections
- 51 **Williams** | Tracking pregnant silky sharks in the Red Sea
- 52 **Diamant** | Tracking whale sharks to protect their habitat in Madagascar

SOSF Partners

- 53 **Cape Eleuthera Island School**
- 54 **The Manta Trust**
- 55 **Shark Spotters**
- 56 **The Acoustic Tracking Array Platform**
- 57 **North Coast Cetacean Society**
- 58 **Bimini Biological Field Station Foundation**

Worldwide

54 36



ALL 2024 SOSF FUNDED PROJECTS

SOSF CENTERS

SOSF D'Arros Research Center

Sponsorship | Conservation Fellowship Asia, Alghozali

Education | Survey to create safer culture for field scientists, Clemency White, UK

SOSF Shark Education Centre

Sponsorship | Conservation Fellowship South America, Charvet

Education | Workshop capacity building in Southeast Asia

SOSF Shark Research Center

Sponsorship | UPY Partnership with Marine Conservation Photographer of the Year 2024 | Daniel S Bolt

Education | Sound Off LLC for 'Our Sawfish Ancestors' Film

SOSF PARTNERS

Cape Eleuthera Island School

Conference | American Elasmobranch Society (AES), student travel bursaries and student event, Pittsburgh, USA

Education | Passion Planet Ltd for 'Living with Great Whites' Film

The Manta Trust

Conference | Oceania Chondrichthyan Society (OCS), student travel bursaries and student event, Melbourne, AUS

Education | Jade Hoksbergen for 'Mission Megamouth Shark' a scientific and film project

Shark Spotters

Conference | Sea Turtles Society for the 42nd International Sea Turtles symposium, Thailand

Event | Sharks in the City, Geneva, Switzerland, May 2025

The Acoustic Array Tracking Platform

Conference | Blue Ressource Trust for Sharks International 2026, Sri Lanka

Event | Wildscreen film festival, UK

North Coast Cetacean Society

Conference | European Elasmobranch Association (EEA), student travel bursaries, Keynote speakers and student event, Greece

Event | African Marine Mammals Conservation Organization (AMMCO) for the 2024 Street Whale festival, Cameroon

Bimini Biological Field Station Foundation

Conference | FREMER - French Research Institute for travel bursaries for the One Ocean Science Congress - special event of the UNOC3, France

Event | GM Events Pty Ltd for the Ocean Festival 2024, Seychelles

SPONSORSHIPS

Sponsorship | Museum of Discovery and Science (MODS) for the SOSF Distinguished Speaker Series & Shark Cart, Florida, USA

Sponsorship | ASRA - Asian Shark and Ray Alliance

Sponsorship | Conservation Fellowship Africa, Issah

Conference | The 7th International Marine Conservation Congress (IMCC7), Cape Town, South Africa

Event | Wavescape film festival, Cape Town, South Africa

SOSF OCEAN STORYTELLING GRANTS

Stoytelling Grant | Photography I
Nicolas Hahn

Stoytelling Grant | Photography I
Pier Nirandara

SMALL GRANT PROJECTS

Alghozali | Assessing the critically endangered Rhino Rays fisheries, trade, and ecology in Karimunjawa National Park, Indonesia

Birnie-Gauvin | The Forgotten of the North

Biskis | A novel approach to identifying sawfish rostra origin to fill knowledge gaps in distribution

Cohen | Discovery and development of chimaera nursery grounds in the Pacific Northwest

Romagnoli Correa | Assessing misreporting and underestimated catch magnitudes in sharks in Chilean artisanal fisheries

Dawdy | Social movement behavior of the critically endangered smalltooth sawfish in Florida, USA

Dinh Do | An investigation of sharks fished in Central Vietnam for conservation of threatened species

Fernández-Cisternas | Valuing kelp as nesting habitats for elasmobranch: a new perspective to protect Chilean kelp ecosystems

Finotto | SHEROS: Sharks are not superHEROS! Which are the consequences of pollution for these animals?

Fola-Matthews | Strengthening conservation efforts for the highly exploited scalloped hammerhead shark in Western Nigeria

Furtado Soares | Elasmobranchs of Angola: Assessing impacts of small-scale fisheries on sharks and rays

Green | Molecular monitoring of the shark liver oil trade

Hasenei | Can the epaulette shark outwalk climate change?

Hernández | Determining fishery impact and promoting the protection of deep-water chondrichthyans in the Guatemalan Caribbean

Hlavin | Trophic ecology and population genetic structure of South Florida's Atlantic guitarfish

Ichsan | Providing baseline information on critically endangered bottlenose wedgefish in West Kalimantan, Indonesia

Labyedh | Improving conservation of threatened sharks and rays along the southern coast of Cameroon

Madrigal-Mora | Aggregation dynamics of endangered Pacific nurse sharks, in the Costa Rican north Pacific

Mcinturf | Assessing the need for Protection in a critical bycatch species: Pacific spiny dogfish

Midinoudewa | Diversity of sharks in Benin's marine waters: metric to measuring MPAs' health

Musila | Protecting sharks, rays and guitarfish from overfishing through community engagement in conservation activities Watamu, Kenya

Naasan Aga Spyridopoulou | Protecting the endangered rough skate *Raja radula* in the Thracean Sea

Rock | Does anthropogenic contamination of estuaries impact bioaccumulation in seasonally resident versus transient elasmobranchs?

Ruiz-García | Developing a health assessment toolkit for predicting chondrichthyan survival

Soro | Provide data for the conservation of critically endangered guitarfish species in Grand Béréby's Marine Protected Area

Martín Vazquez | Unveiling seasonal movements for effective management strategies: engaging fishermen in conservation of giant freshwater stingray

KEYSTONE PROJECTS | CONTINUATION

Foster & Landschoff | 1001 seaforest species

Salinas | Protecting the sharkiest place on earth, Galapagos

Mortimer | Community monitoring of nesting sea turtles at D'Arros Island and the St Joseph Atoll, Seychelles

Vel | Environmental education in Seychelles

Crockett | Shark conservation funds

Awruch | The reproductive health of the endangered Maugean skate: steps towards conservation

Bassos-Hull & Boggio-Pasqua | Devils in our ocean backyard? Conservation research on the West Atlantic Pygmy Devil Ray

Bonfil | Future ISRAs: Evaluation of shark & ray nurseries in the Mexican Caribbean

Charvet & Faria | Turning the tide for sawfish on the Amazonian Coast

Ebert | Searching for lost sharks: extinct or alive?

Finucci | A glimpse into the world of gulper sharks and their vulnerability to New Zealand fisheries

Guttridge | Inspiring communities to protect sawfish

Hegg | Understanding largetooth sawfish movement, migration, and ontogeny using chemical records stored in rostral teeth

Kessel & Feldheim | Examining population structure at multiple scales in the endangered Caribbean reef shark

Mohan | Elements and elasmobranchs: laboratory validation of vertebral chemistry to improve life history studies

Morris | Empowering Youth: Creating access to science and education through hands-on field work to support conservation

Prendergast | Forecasting the regional distribution of endangered sicklefin devil-rays in a changing climate to promote conservation

Rogers | How will climate change impact broadnose sevengill sharks in Fiordland, New Zealand?

Saygu | A future for guitarfishes: Defining industrial fisheries threats and conservation actions in the Eastern Mediterranean

Seidu | Saving Ghana's remnant shark-like rays

Soekoe | Movement behaviour, population connectivity and taxonomic clarification of the Critically Endangered eagle ray *Myliobatis aquila*

Sweezey | Estimating feeding ecology of shark species using a novel technique within a remote marine sanctuary

Weng & Chaing | Spatial ecology of Pacific guitarfishes taken in commercial fisheries

KEYSTONE PROJECTS | NEW

Hilbourne | Genetics and isotope analysis of oceanic manta ray

Williams | Silky's reproduction in the Red Sea

Diamant | Madagascar Whale Shark Project

OUR TEAM

OUR CORE OPERATIONS ARE HANDLED BY A SMALL NUMBER OF PASSIONATE PEOPLE, DEDICATED TO MARINE CONSERVATION AND LOCATED IN VARIOUS OFFICES AROUND THE WORLD



MANAGEMENT & ADMINISTRATION GENEVA | SWITZERLAND

Julia Dufour | Administration Coordinator

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Sarah Fowler | Scientific Advisor

Dean Grubbs | Scientific Advisor

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Mahmood Shivji | Director

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Geoffrey Walker | Research Associate

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Communication Officer

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Clova Mabin | Education Centre Director

Karen Merrett | Education Coordinator

Claire Metcalf | Facilities Administrator

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