

Students in Yap Prepare to Swim with the Sharks

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COLONIA, YAP, FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA, February 26, 2019 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Did you know that sharks kill fewer than four humans on average each year, while humans kill an estimated 100 million sharks annually? That you're more likely to be killed by a lightning strike, bee sting or while sitting on the toilet?

Ten students from Yap High School sat rapt in front of the overhead screen as Cheryl McCarron, outreach director for the New York City-based nonprofit organization, Shark Angels, taught them about sharks during the Skype-in-the-Classroom lesson.



Students of Yap High School received an official "Shark Angels" certificate of completion as well as an invitation to snorkel with reef sharks during the Yap Divers 4 Sharks event in October 2019

[Manta Ray Bay Resort](#), Micronesia's premier dive resort, co-hosted the lesson as part of a yearlong program to highlight shark conservation and awareness among both scuba divers and local students. The culmination of the first year of what will become an annual event will be held October 12 – 26, 2019 when divers from around the world are expected on the Micronesian island for a two-week-long program titled [Yap Divers 4 Sharks](#) to learn about international shark conservation and marine ecology from well-known conservationists, and to swim with the resident sharks that inhabit the island's protected reef.

Micronesia has the second largest shark sanctuary in the world, McCarron explained, and six of the twelve species are endangered. In some parts of the world, up to 90 percent of sharks have been decimated due to pollution, commercial fishing and "human diets," she added. Shark fin soup, a traditional Chinese delicacy associated with prosperity, honor and good fortune, is served at banquets, weddings and other important celebrations. The popularity of shark fin soup requires the collection of fins from live sharks that are tossed back into the ocean where they suffocate and die. A bowl of shark fin soup, she explained, can cost up to \$100 and is often served to show off how wealthy the host is. But the fin is made of cartilage that has no actual taste, which requires the addition of fish or chicken broth, and contains high levels of mercury. "So, the soup is poisonous, as well," she said.

The value of sharks is not in killing them, McCarron told the students, but in using them to stimulate local economies through tourism. Why kill one shark for a bowl of soup when that same shark can bring in several million dollars of revenue from dive enthusiasts over its lifetime. But the main reason is for the maintenance of a healthy, balanced marine environment and the students can help, they were told, by talking with people about sharks, being careful to control

pollution and eliminating the use of plastics that get into the ocean.

At the end of the lesson, the students took a ten-question test. Those who got 95 percent correct would be invited to go snorkeling in October during the event announced Ruud van Baal, general manager of the resort. Just before boarding the bus to go back to school, they were excited to learn that they all will be going snorkeling later this year. The snorkeling trip will be conducted by the Divers 4 Sharks Foundation under the supervision of Paulo Guilherme, one of the most renowned environmental activists and a co-founder of the Onda Azul Marine Studies Center in his home country of Brazil.

The students also received certificates for their participation in the class and a pizza lunch in the resort's popular restaurant, Mnuw, that's located on an old Indonesian schooner. Other schools scheduled to participate in the Shark Angels program include Yap Catholic High School and Yap Seventh-day Adventist School. "It starts with the people who live on these islands," van Baal told the students, "and with the youth who are the future. That's why it's so important for you to be knowledgeable about sharks and other marine life right here in Yap." It is hoped that at least one student of those attending the class will become a marine scientist and return to Yap in the future to continue the island's strong commitment to marine conservation.

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