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PRESS RELEASE

3m Great White Shark breaches into Research Boat

Oceans Research Team gets a little too close for comfort

Mossel Bay, 18 July, 2011: Mossel Bay — The Oceans Research team, a marine research organisation working in Mossel Bay, got the surprise of a lifetime today when a 3 meter great white shark breached into their research vessel, shocking a field specialist and her crew.

Field Specialist Dorien Schroder of Mossel Bay, and six crew members had been chumming since 7:30 this morning with sardines off of Seal Island, conducting research for a population dynamics study that has been ongoing for the past three years. They had been chumming for over an hour and had a fair amount of activity around the boat, taking data on at least 4 sharks, including a shark named Pasella, which has been frequently seen in the bay since 2008.

Activity around the boat had ceased for about five minutes and all was pretty quiet at the stern. Schroder describes the incident; "Next thing I know I hear a splash, and see a white shark breach out of the water from side of the boat hovering, literally, over the crewmember who was chumming on the boats portside." Schroder automatically sprang into action and pulled the crewmember quickly away towards the stern of the boat's platform into safety. The crewmembers all jumped towards the stern of the boat as the 3m, 500kg, shark landed on the top of the fuel and bait storage containers. The shark had landed with only half of its body onto the boat and Schroder and her team hoped that as it thrashed it would make its way back into the water. But instead the panicked shark worked itself into the boat getting stuck in between the 1.5x2m area behind the container and boats stern. The shark began thrashing around, destroying equipment and cutting the fuel lines as it twisted and turned on the boats deck.

In the meantime, Schroder was able to calm her stressed crew and direct them to walk along the railing towards the bow of the boat to safety. Schroder immediately radioed Enrico Gennari, and Ryan Johnson, both Directors of Oceans and world renowned shark scientists about the incident. Gennari and Johnson quickly assembled a team as they raced to assist Schroder and her crew. Schroder then began pouring water over the shark's gills consistently until Johnson, Gennari, and their crew of field specialists Riley Elliott and Rob Lewis arrived 15 minutes later. They immediately pulled their boat Lamnidae, alongside the vessel Cheetah, and climbed aboard. Once aboard they made sure that no one was injured, all crew members were safe, and the environment was secure before working their best to figure out how to get the shark back into the water quickly and safely. Johnson and Gennari secured a rope around the tail of the shark and tied the other side of the rope to the vessel Lamnidae and attempted to use the side of the boat as leverage to tow the shark out of the boat into the water but were unsuccessful. They then tried this method again using Lamnidae to tow the shark off the platform through the opening in between the motors, but both methods failed. Port authority was then contacted regarding the incident and was requested to assist in getting a crane so that the 500kg shark could be safely lifted off of the boat and released. Since the fuel lines in the vessel had been cut by the shark, Lamnidae had to tow Cheetah back from the island into the harbour with the shark still onboard.

Once back in the harbour, Cheetah moored next to a fishing boat and they assisted giving the crew a water hose which was immediately placed inside the mouth of the shark so that water could further ventilate the gills. The Smit Lombok then moored alongside Cheetah and they connected one of their large lifting hooks to the rope which was secured to the shark's tail and began to lift the shark off of the boat and into the water. The shark immediately began thrashing as soon as it hit the water and Johnson and Gennari quickly cut the ropes as the shark swam away from the stern, and underneath the Smit Lombok. The shark was then seen swimming towards the harbor mouth.

The Oceans team had hoped that the shark would be able to orient itself out of the harbour however about 30 minutes later the shark had beached itself onto a small beach inside the harbour. Enrico Gennari and Ryan Johnson returned to aid the shark in its orientation by physically trying to walk it however the shark was unable to orient itself and again veered towards the beach. The team of scientists then decided to fasten the shark to Lamnidae using two ropes attached to both the tail and behind the pectoral fins with the sharks head tilted upwards in order to ventilate the gills properly and slowly made their way out of the harbor. About one kilometer from the harbor the shark began to regain its orientation and strength and as the ropes were cut the shark powerfully swam away.

“When working with animals this large you have to take every precaution possible to ensure the safety of the scientists and sharks. However, it is impossible to predict

everything that can happen. What is important is how you respond to such situation. No one was injured and the shark survived, this is a credit to our team, the port authorities and members of the community who assisted".