

Tourism - a force for good for biodiversity?

The South African Blue Flag Experience of Creating Conservation Value through Voluntary Action



WESSA
PEOPLE CARING FOR THE EARTH

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People Caring For The Earth

Introduction to WESSA

WESSA (the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa) is a 96 year youthful NGO which aims to initiate and support high impact environmental and conservation projects to promote public participation in caring for the Earth.



WESSA joined FEE in 2001 to become the proud implementor of the Blue Flag Programme in SA. Later added Green Key, Eco-Schools, YRE and LEAF.



We develop action competence for the Sustainable Development Goals through enviro-education and training.



WESSA promotes sustainable tourism while providing solutions to the challenges of biodiversity loss, pollution, unemployment, poverty and inequality.

Impacts of Tourism

Tourism undoubtedly has many positive impacts, including:

- Job creation & upskilling
- Rural economic development

But it also has negative impacts:

- Development over sensitive ecological habitats
- Noise, light & disturbance impacts
- Pollution from waste & sewage
- Exclusion of local communities
- Unequal and increased exploitation of local natural resources



Advent of Blue Flag in South Africa

WESSA needed a 'carrot' to encourage municipalities to improve coastal management.

In 2001 we introduced the international Blue Flag Beaches, Marinas, and Sustainable Boating Tourism Operators Programme (FEE).

BF is one of the world's most recognised voluntary eco-labels awarded to over 5050 sites in over 48 countries. In South Africa, BF operates in 18 coastal municipalities, at 58 beaches, marinas and boats; with 19 more in development.

In order to qualify annually for BF status, 33 stringent criteria must be met and maintained in:

Enviro-Education



Enviro-Management



Safety & Services



Water Quality



What's in it for BF Operators?

Primarily Goal: Competitive advantage in attracting tourists and their spend.

Secondary: meeting their own environmental standards

BF draws visitors because of their lifeguards & security, clean swimming water, safe tap water, clean surrounds and ethical business practices (all for marine tourism boat operators).

Outcomes:

- Higher visitor numbers, with their spend in local businesses
- Increased coastal property values -> rates in
- Improvements in sewerage infrastructure has led to improved local investment
- National government has invested further in coastal environmental management
- BF has promoted inclusive access to coastal areas.





Why does WESSA Promote BF?

- Coastal waters face severe pollution from poor sewage discharge quality and spills, stormwater drains and general litter.
- WESSA promotes BF to municipalities, marinas and boats because they voluntarily invest in sewerage, stormwater and local environmental management to meet the high BF water quality standards



- Local and National government has invested heavily in coastal clean-ups, through youth job creation projects, promote beach tourism and BF

- BF has encouraged Operators to invest in coastal environmental management



- BF has encouraged Operators to invest in alien invasive plant removal and dune/dune forest rehabilitation



- BF requires Operators to educate on coastal biodiversity and environmental issues



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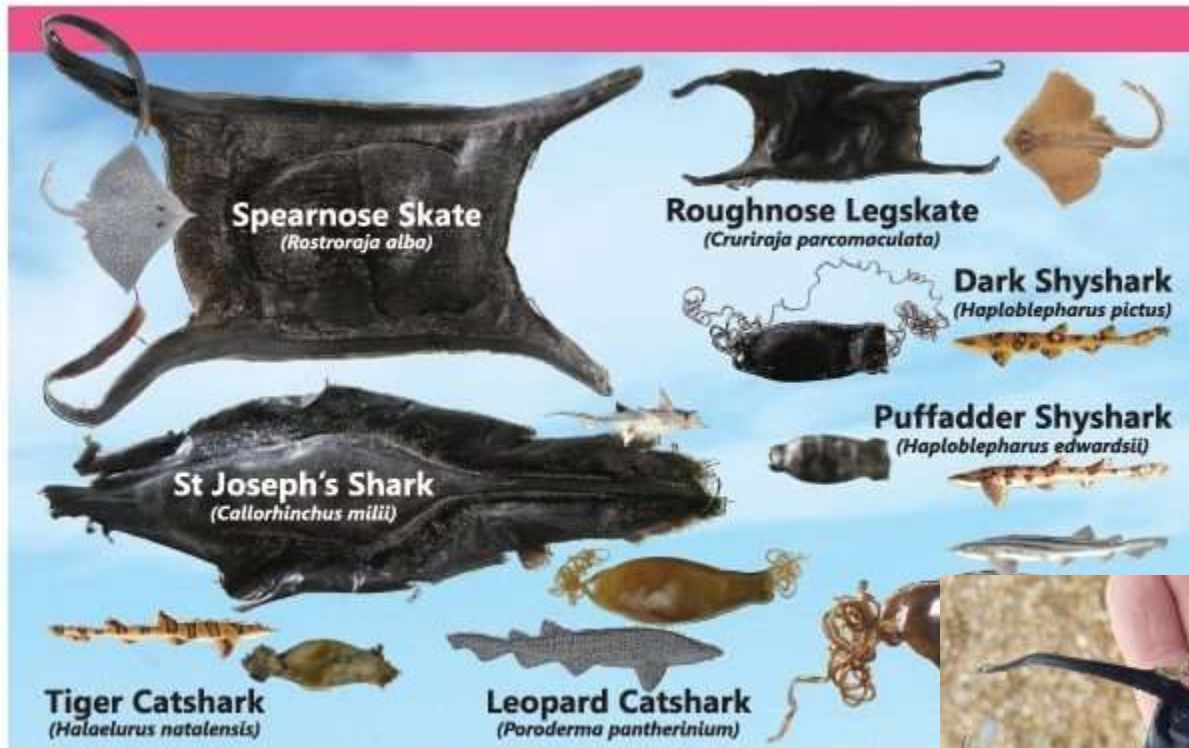


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Overstrand BF Beaches Shark-Egg Research Project

- An initiative of BF Operator involved many other operators, schools, NGOs and general public.
- The collection of washed up egg-cases was used for research on shark distribution and breeding grounds



Research into human-wildlife interaction



- BF Boat operators required to conduct themselves in ethical manner, including how they interact with wildlife
- Offshore Adventures is funding research into seal behaviour and the impact of human-seal interactions. Done in collaboration with provincial wildlife authority and university. Research has informed industry standards of conduct.
- The company has also supported numerous seal rescue and



Biodiversity Monitoring

- BF boat Operator Ocean Blue Adventures:
- Recording all sightings of whales, dolphins, seals, sharks and seabirds on their boat trips.
- Boat-based Humpback Dolphin (E) weekly surveys, collecting sighting and photo-identification data; in collaboration with Nelson Mandela University
- Cliff-top monitoring of seals, sharks, whales and dolphins in local MPA
- Monitoring of Cape fur-seals in the Keurbooms River Estuary, for impact of recreational fishing pressure
- Marine mammal stranding response and necropsy, in collaboration with Port Elizabeth M



Endangered Species Monitoring

- White Shark Ventures is a boat-based shark and whale watching company
- Guides record all sightings of sharks, whales and dolphins on their boat trips.
- Data collection: size, sex, scar markings, GPS position; with data shared national environmental department
- Involved in marine rescues – whales, seals, sharks, penguins.
- Focus on educating clients (and local schools) on shark issues and conservation.
- White Shark Ventures is a member of the Shark Trust, supporting and funding national shark conservation activities.
- White Shark Ventures owners & staff serve on many national and international wildlife conservation boards and trusts. Focus on sustainability of wildlife viewing activities.



Recommendations for Best Practice

- Utilise the power of voluntary compliance – it builds its own momentum, enthusiasm and custodianship of local biodiversity.
- Educate on the link between a healthy environment and a healthy human economy and society
- Encourage tourism companies to become involved in or initiate research or conservation actions that provide a feedback loop to the biodiversity on which they depend.
- If there aren't any local standards for conduct with wildlife or sustainable natural resource extraction, engage with the tourism companies to develop voluntary practices and standards.



FAIRTRADE
INTERNATIONAL



ECOTOURISM:
responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of the local people



- Tourists are more willing to direct their business towards responsible and/or accredited operators –

THANK YOU



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