50TH LEOPARD SHARK RELEASED IN RAJA AMPAT

FIRST LEOPARD SHARKS RETURN TO THE ANDAMAN SEA

NEW SCIENCE FROM BYRON BAY AND NOUMÉA

the ReSharker

ISSUE 7 · DECEMBER 2025

CONTENTS

COVER StAR Project Thailand team successfully releases Toty. Photo by WildAid / Ocean Blue Tree.

MAIN Spotty Dotty was released off Pantai Cinta, with local Southeast Misool high school students observing her swim. Photo by Mark Erdmann.

IN THIS ISSUE

01. MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Dr. Mark Erdmann

02. IN FOCUS: StAR PROJECT INDONESIA
Nesha Ichida

03. IN FOCUS: StAR PROJECT THAILAND
Metavee Chuangcharoendee

04. LATEST: RESEARCH & NEW SCIENCE
Dr. Mark Erdmann
Dr. Christine Dudgeon

05. LATEST: HUSBANDRY & BREEDING PROGRESS
Leah Neal
Lise Watson

06. OUR GLOBAL COALITION

MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

by **DR. MARK ERDMANN** | RE:WILD
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As 2025 comes to a close, marking five years of ReShark's flagship *Stegostoma tigrinum* Augmentation and Recovery Project (StAR Project), it is timely to reflect on how far we have come as a hard-working "coalition of the willing" since the seminal workshop hosted by Georgia Aquarium in December 2019. Several key numerical milestones to consider:

- ReShark is now powered by more than 100 partners across 19 countries worldwide.
- StAR Project Indonesia has two nurseries now running like well-oiled machines in Raja Ampat, cared for by 11 passionate young "shark nannies" and over 40 interns.
- A total of 164 eggs from 9 approved breeding institutions have been successfully received by our Raja Ampat nurseries, including 93 shipped in 2025 alone, with 51 pups released into the wild to date.
- The StAR Project expanded to Thailand in 2024, where the team secured strong government support and, within just 12 months, released its first 7 pups in 2025!
- Impressive post-release monitoring results show conclusively that pups released in both countries are surviving and thriving after rewilding.

Looking ahead to 2026, ReShark is aiming to bring on additional affiliate projects focused on rewilding of other threatened shark and ray species, while also continuing to foster the expansion of the StAR Project across the species range of *S. tigrinum*. We've certainly come a long way, but there is still much to be done! Please enjoy Issue 7 of *The ReSharker*, and best wishes for a relaxing holiday season and a joyful new year!

Sunny, the 50th shark, shortly after being released in Misool. Photo by Mark Erdmann.

IN FOCUS: StAR PROJECT INDONESIA

by

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Project Manager, StAR Project Indonesia

50TH SHARK RELEASED IN RAJA AMPAT

Since September, StAR Project Indonesia has completed two major release rounds of Indo-Pacific leopard sharks (*Stegostoma tigrinum*) in Raja Ampat. The first release, conducted on Sept. 1, 2025, saw four females — Erin, Matilda, Lisa, and Alice — return to the wild.

All four sharks were born and raised at the Raja Ampat Research and Conservation Center (RARCC) nursery and were released into the Dampier Strait. The event was attended by guests from Child Aid Papua, the Raja Ampat Women Marine Conservation Group, and Papua Diving Resorts, adding a celebratory and community-centered spirit to the milestone.

Between Oct. 25 and Nov. 2, 2025, a second cohort of pups — Hugo from the RARCC nursery and Sheila, Sunny, and Spotty Dotty from the Misool Foundation nursery — were released. This release marked a historic moment, as Sunny became the 50th leopard shark pup released since StAR Indonesia's inception.

This achievement highlights the program's accelerating momentum, with 4 releases in 2023, 18 in 2024, and 29 already in 2025 — a clear testament to the growing capacity and success of the rewilding effort.

Hugo, the 48th pup released, measured 92.5 centimeters in total length and just under 2 kilograms at the time of release. He was fitted with a microPAT archival satellite tag using a specialized dorsal fin–mounted harness, a method recommended by Dr. Steven Kessel (Director of Marine Research, Shedd Aquarium). The microPAT — the smallest satellite tag produced by Wildlife Computers — was introduced only earlier this year and has already been trialed with pups released in Misool in May, including Syafri, Geo, and Patrick.

For Hugo, the tag is programmed to detach in mid-January 2026, coinciding with a planned visit to the RARCC nursery by Dr. Lisa Hoopes (Senior Director of Research and Conservation at Georgia Aquarium and ReShark Council member) and Leah Neal (Chair, StAR Project Husbandry Working Group), during which I will also be on site. The team hopes to recover the tag upon its release, offering valuable insight into Hugo's early post-release movements and habitat use.

TOP RARCC aquarist team with guests during September releases. Photo by Tim Laman.

MIDDLE Hugo fitted with a microPAT archival satellite tag. Photo by Mark Erdmann.

BOTTOM Misool Foundation aquarist team with students during November releases. Photo by Pambajeng Putro.

Misool Resort guests observe a release.
Photo by Pambajeng Putro.

Following Hugo's (#48) release, efforts shifted to Misool, where three pups — Sheila (#49), Sunny (#50), and Spotty Dotty (#51) — were successfully released into Raja Ampat's waters. Sheila and Sunny were released into the lagoon at Misool Resort's Batbitim Island, where resort guests witnessed the event and celebrated this growing tradition. After spending time exploring the lagoon and swimming through a resident school of scad, both pups eventually ventured off the reef edge at approximately 40 meters depth.

The next day, Spotty Dotty was released off Pantai Cinta, a small uninhabited island, with students from Southeast Misool high schools participating. The students enthusiastically followed her for about 15 minutes before she descended over the reef edge.

Spotty Dotty is also equipped with a microPAT tag scheduled to detach in mid-January 2026, and researchers anticipate that the data will help clarify early dispersal patterns observed in the May and October releases.

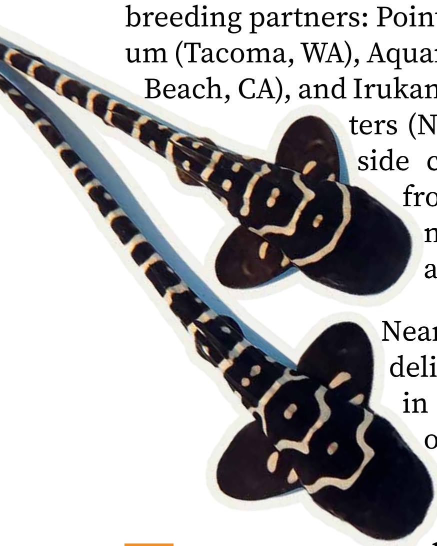
IN FOCUS

TOP Aerial view of the RARCC nursery with the expanded sea pen (left) and ReShark Lodge (right). Photo by Mark Erdmann.

RIGHT RARCC aquarist team with the newest egg shipment. Photo by RARCC.

LATEST EGG SHIPMENTS

Our recent egg shipments have pushed the cumulative total of Indo-Pacific leopard shark eggs transferred to Raja Ampat past 150 — a major milestone for the program. The Oct. 31 and Dec. 11 shipments included eggs from three new breeding partners: Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium (Tacoma, WA), Aquarium of the Pacific (Long Beach, CA), and Irukandji Shark & Ray Encounters (New South Wales), alongside continued contributions from long-standing partners in the United States and Australia.



Jelly and Powertee, the first two hatchlings from PDZA. Photo by RARCC.

Nearly 100 eggs have been delivered to the nurseries in 2025 alone. This level of production brings the program close to meeting the "Optimistic" scenario benchmark outlined in the Population Viability Analysis (Traylor-Holzer 2021), reflecting the strong commitment and increased output of all breeding partners as we work toward future release targets.

UPGRADES OF *IN-SITU* NURSERY FACILITIES

Significant facility improvements have also been made to support the growing demands of the rewilding program. At the RARCC nursery, the sea pen has been expanded to double its original size, now capable of accommodating a larger number of animals. A new landing site for visiting boats has also been constructed. These upgrades were generously supported by the Djinda Foundation and MAC3 Impact Philanthropies.

In addition, funding has been secured to transition the RARCC nursery to 100 percent solar power. Generously supported by the Rumah Foundation, construction is also underway for a larger, solar-powered Misool Foundation nursery at Kalig Island, where the ranger station is situated.

MAKING WAVES THROUGH EXPANDED OUTREACH

StAR Indonesia continues to strengthen its outreach through nursery tours, school engagement, and food collection and children's book distribution initiatives across the Dampier Strait and Misool. This includes our recent visits to Yarweser Village (Batanta Island) and Yenbekwan Village, along with regular engagements with long-standing partners like Child Aid Papua and Raja Ampat SEA Centre.

A recent highlight came during the Sept. 1 release event, when Child Aid Papua students adopted a newly hatched pup named Cap — after the acronym for Child Aid Papua. The following week, the StAR Indonesia team received a box of letters from the students. Their messages were filled with excitement, gratitude, and a growing understanding of sharks' importance to healthy marine ecosystems. One student wrote: "Thank you for letting us name a pup. I love Cap so much. That was my first time seeing a leopard shark. I was so excited and I hope the StAR Project will continue its success!"

Playing a major role in such conservation outreach are the interns — recent graduates or university students from across Indonesia. Since the program's launch in early 2024, nearly 40 interns have completed or are currently completing their placements at the two nurseries. Beyond outreach, interns support the aquarists with core animal-care responsibilities, including daily feeding, measurements, sampling, deployment and retrieval of acoustic receivers, assisting with releases, and guiding nursery tours for visitors.

One of these interns whose journey has now come full circle is Yolanda Wamaer, a former RARCC nursery intern, who has joined the team as Thrive Conservation's Raja Ampat Education Coordinator. She will lead StAR-related school tours at the nurseries and support ReShark's wider education programs — including a new solar-powered conservation education catamaran, which will begin operating in early 2026. The catamaran will bring hands-on learning directly to villages and transport students back to the nurseries.

LEFT Students with the children's book *Ma'ya of Raja Ampat: A ReShark Story*. Photo by Raja Ampat SEA Centre.

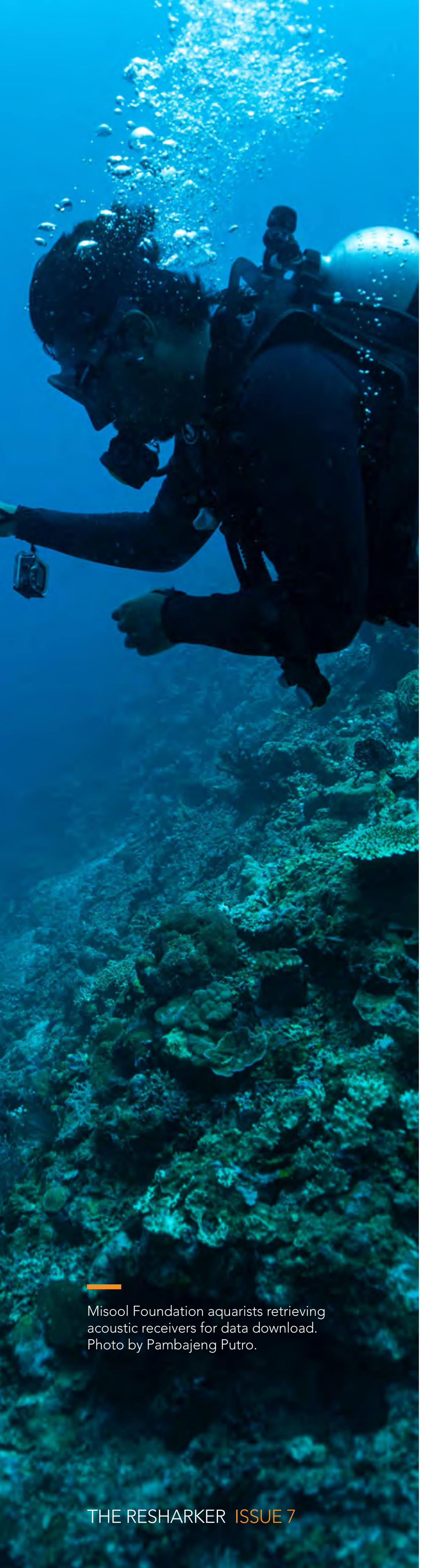
RIGHT Food collection activity with the kids of Yarweser Village. Photo by Nesha Ichida.

IN FOCUS

Christina holds the record for the longest acoustic resighting track of over 10 months. Photo by Mark Erdmann.

Patrick recorded a remarkable 166-meter descent — likely the deepest for the species to date. Photo by Mark Erdmann.

Danea was the first released shark to be opportunistically recaptured, allowing for a thorough post-release health check, swabs, and measurements. Photo by RARCC.



Misool Foundation aquarists retrieving acoustic receivers for data download. Photo by Pambajeng Putro.

RECORD-BREAKING INSIGHTS FROM POST-RELEASE MONITORING

Post-release monitoring capacity in Raja Ampat has also expanded substantially. The acoustic array now includes 31 receivers across the Dampier Strait — 10 of which are new NexTrak R1 units — and 24 receivers in Southeast Misool.

During the releases in early November, we recovered and downloaded all receivers within a 15-kilometer radius of the RARCC nursery and deployed the 10 new NexTrak R1 units. Initial detections tracked the early movements of the four pups released on Sept. 1 (Alice, Matilda, Lisa, and Erin). Lisa and Erin disappeared after the first day. Matilda was detected by receivers five days post-release. Alice continued to ping for 10 days, traveling at least 25 kilometers before also appearing to move beyond the acoustic array.

Excitingly, Christina, released on Oct. 1, 2024, unexpectedly reappeared on Aug. 5, 2025, at the Northwestern Wai receiver — 10 months and 4 days post-release — marking the longest acoustic resighting on record for the program. Previously, Karen held the record with an 8.5-month physical resighting by a fisherman in Batanta.

In Misool, 20 of the 24 receivers detected pups released in May 2025, with the 10 NexTrak R1 receivers showing notably stronger performance. All nine tagged and released sharks from May — Dudgydorf, Geo, Henry, Lego, Mike-Light, Patrick, Roozen, Syafri, and Waza — pinged multiple receivers over a two- to three-week period post-release before moving outside the array boundary.

Additional insights were provided by Patrick in particular, who carried both an acoustic tag and a microPAT satellite tag. After nine days within the array, he swam more than 50 kilometers north before the tag detached, recording 15 dives exceeding 100 meters, including a remarkable 166-meter descent — to our knowledge, the deepest recorded dive for a leopard shark!

The release of Spotty Dotty's and Hugo's satellite tags in January 2026 is poised to shed more light on the broader dispersal behavior of the sharks. If their movements mirror the long-distance patterns observed in earlier releases, the findings will help inform future decisions regarding expansion of the acoustic array to improve monitoring capability.

IN FOCUS

IN FOCUS: StAR PROJECT THAILAND

by

METAVEE CHUANGCHAROENDEE | WILDAID

Project Manager, StAR Project Thailand

Aerial view over Maiton Island off Phuket's southeast coast, home to the sea pen site. Photo by Mark Erdmann.

FIRST RELEASES FOR StAR PROJECT THAILAND

In May 2025, StAR Project Thailand officially launched as the second rewilding initiative for Indo-Pacific leopard sharks, following the success of StAR Indonesia in Raja Ampat. Within months, the program reached a major milestone with the release of its first cohort of seven pups from Maiton Island, located nine kilometers southeast of Phuket's mainland.

The first three pups — Maya, Ginger, and Similan — were released on Sept. 9, while the remaining four — Maiton, Hope, Spot, and Toty — followed on Dec. 8. Before each release, we held a blessing ceremony, pouring flower-adorned seawater into the ocean as a symbolic wish for the sharks' safe return to the wild.

These seven pups were originally bred by aquarists at Aquaria Phuket, the first institution in Thailand to successfully breed Indo-Pacific leopard sharks. They were then transferred to the Maiton Island sea pen, where they spent several months preparing for life in the wild. This included acclimating to currents and tides and learning to forage naturally. Once they reached an appropriate size and passed their health assessments — at about 1.5 years old and over one meter in length — they were finally released.

TOP LEFT DMCR Director-General Dr. Pinsak Suraswadi helps release a leopard shark in September. Photo by Sirachai Arunrugstichai / WildAid / Ocean Blue Tree / Vital Impacts.

TOP RIGHT StAR Thailand aquarist Mapang demonstrates RFID identification to the media. Photo by WildAid / Ocean Blue Tree.

BOTTOM Project partners speak at a press conference before the December releases. Photo by WildAid / Ocean Blue Tree.

Bidding farewell to Maiton as he makes his way into the wild.
Photo by WildAid / Ocean Blue Tree.

> "THIS RELEASE IS NOT ONLY A SYMBOLIC MILESTONE, BUT ALSO A REAFFIRMATION OF THE STRONG COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT OF ALL SECTORS TO RESTORE THAILAND'S MARINE ECOSYSTEM AND PRESERVE THEIR BALANCE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

DR. PINSAK SURASWADI

Director-General, Department of Marine and Coastal Resources

IN FOCUS

POST-RELEASE MONITORING AROUND PHANG NGA BAY

Veterinarians from the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR) and Ocean Park Hong Kong conducted full health assessments and implanted each shark with an acoustic transmitter before their release. The tags have a battery life of roughly five years and emit unique signals detected by a network of 20 underwater receivers deployed across Phang Nga Bay.

The array, developed in collaboration with DMCR, the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP), and the StAR Thailand team, spans Hin Musang (Shark Point), Hin Bida, Koh Phi Phi, and other reefs identified through citizen science as hotspots for the species. Each receiver detects tagged sharks swimming within about 500 meters.

A four-day retrieval mission confirmed detections from all three sharks released in September. Ginger was recorded at Koh Dok Mai on Sept. 13, about six kilometers from the release site. Maya was detected on multiple dates at Koh Khai Nok, 14 kilometers away. Similan was logged at Hin Musang on Oct. 29–30, roughly 16 kilometers from Maiton Island. These detections indicate the sharks are actively exploring beyond their release site and independently foraging almost two months post release.

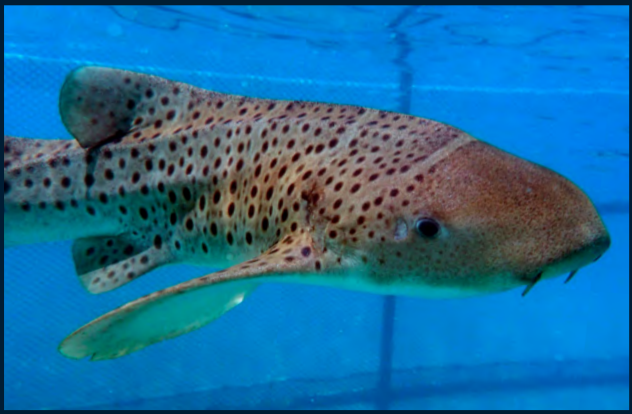
Once common in Thai waters, leopard sharks have declined sharply due to bycatch and coral reef degradation in recent decades. As we begin the repopulation of the species, StAR Thailand is also working closely with dive communities through the *Spot the Leopard Shark (SLTS) – Thailand* citizen science initiative, which encourages divers to report their sightings.

We have begun targeted outreach to dive operators around Chalong Pier — a busy departure hub on Phuket's southeast coast — by distributing our newly developed STLS handbook for divers. Interest has been overwhelmingly positive, and we plan to expand distribution across Phuket next year.

Retrieval of acoustic receivers around Phang Nga Bay by the WildAid team, with DMCR and DNP officials. Photo by Little Princess.

Locations of acoustic receivers in the array that detected pings from released sharks.

IN FOCUS



Maya was detected several times at Koh Khai Nok (A), 14 km from her release site, more than 40 days after being released. Photo by WildAid / Ocean Blue Tree.

Similan was detected at Hin Musang or Shark Point (B), 16 km from her release site, more than 50 days after being released. Photo by WildAid / Ocean Blue Tree.

Ginger was detected several days after being released at Koh Dok Mai (C). Photo by WildAid / Ocean Blue Tree.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND GLOBAL RECOGNITION

In September, Dr. Mark Erdmann (Executive Director, ReShark) and Nesha Ichida (StAR Indonesia Project Manager) visited Bangkok and Phuket, where my team and I hosted them. The visit included meetings with government partners, the shark aquarists — Hathaichanok Kaewserm (Yok), Ramanya Mithara (Yam), and Wansiri Meemana (Mapang) — as well as representatives from Aquaria Phuket. The trip underscored the strong governmental support for the project, particularly from the DMCR, whose Director-General, Dr. Pinsak Suraswadi, reaffirmed the agency's commitment to leopard shark conservation in Thai waters.

Recognition for the project has also continued to grow. StAR Thailand recently received the coveted DMCR Award for Outstanding Marine Conservation on the occasion of the agency's 23rd anniversary. Dr. Petch Manopawitr (WildAid Thailand Advisor) and Sirachai Arunrugstichai (Shin) (Conservation Photographer) accepted the award on behalf of the team.

In addition, Shin was recently named "Ocean Conservation (Hope) Photographer of the Year" for his striking image of an Indo-Pacific leopard shark embryo. The winning photograph, published in *Oceanographic Magazine*, shows an aquarist holding a glass jar with an early-stage embryo from Aquaria Phuket's breeding program, which has produced more than 40 pups since 2023.

Reflecting on the image and on documenting StAR Thailand's first releases in September, Shin shared in his interview with *Oceanographic*: "It's stories like this that keep me hopeful. The people around me, the communities, the stakeholders I get to connect with and connect to each other — we all feel a sense of place, a shared purpose, and a shared goal for what we want to see happen here."

An aquarist holding a jar with an early-stage Indo-Pacific leopard shark embryo. Photo by Sirachai Arunrugstichai / WildAid / Ocean Blue Tree / Vital Impacts.

TOP LEFT StAR Thailand accepting the 2025 DMCR Award for Outstanding Marine Conservation. Photo by DMCR.
TOP RIGHT Smiles all around with the StAR Thailand aquarist team. Photo by Patranan Suphangkanan.
BOTTOM LEFT Handing out the STLS handbook to dive operators. Photo by Patranan Suphangkanan.
BOTTOM RIGHT Retrieving and redeploying acoustic receivers across Phang Nga Bay. Photo by WildAid / Ocean Blue Tree.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026

Following the successful release of seven sharks this year — and encouraging early detections — the Maiton Island sea pen will undergo renovation and maintenance to prepare for the next group of pups from Aquaria Phuket, expected in early 2026.

Dive operators, and boat crews across Phuket, Krabi, and Phang Nga are encouraged to report any leopard shark sightings through the STLS platform and to avoid disturbing the deployed acoustic receivers. These devices are safe, non-hazardous, and critical for long-term monitoring.

StAR Project Thailand continues to advance the goals of Thailand's National Plan of Action for Sharks (NPOA–Sharks) through science-driven breeding, release protocols, and expanded post-release monitoring. The program is steadily growing as a model for shark rewilding — integrating government leadership, private-sector support, scientific expertise, and strong community participation to help restore one of the Andaman Sea's most iconic species.

LATEST

Two's company: A white-spotted wedgefish next to an Indo-Pacific leopard shark. Photo by Mark Erdmann.

LATEST

LATEST: RESEARCH & NEW SCIENCE

by

DR. MARK ERDMANN | RE:WILD
Executive Director, ReShark

DR. CHRISTINE DUDGEON | BIOPIXEL OCEANS FOUNDATION
Co-Chair, StAR Project Research Working Group

FINDINGS FROM BYRON BAY

Satellite tag data from adult Indo-Pacific leopard sharks tagged in Byron Bay, Australia last April (at the end of the austral summer) have recently provided some of the first long-term satellite tracks from wild leopard sharks.

The two tags, deployed on separate adults, popped off after six months, offering unprecedented insights into their movements. One tag detached nearly 900 kilometers north of Byron Bay, in the Swains region of the Great Barrier Reef, while the second tag surfaced approximately 140 kilometers north of Byron Bay, at the well-known leopard shark aggregation site of North Stradbroke Island. The latter tag was recovered by colleagues, allowing for high-resolution data analysis.

Dr. David Robinson (Co-Owner, Sundive Byron Bay), a ReShark collaborator, is analyzing the recovered tag data. Initial findings suggest that the adult female tracked may have traversed roughly 1,200 kilometers along a north-south transect of Australia's east coast. Notably, these adult sharks remained largely in coastal waters and never exceeded 100 meters in depth — leaving the deep-diving record to the Raja Ampat pup, Patrick. These findings complement shorter-term satellite tag data from New Caledonia collected by postdoctoral researcher Dr. Hugo Lassauce, who leads the Zebra Shark Project New Caledonia.

Meanwhile, the second iteration of the Great Australian *Stegostoma* Semen Expedition (GASSE 2.0), scheduled for Dec. 8–14, 2025, has also successfully wrapped up, with preliminary results to be shared in the next issue.

LATEST

FROM LAB TO LIMELIGHT: CHECKING IN WITH RESHARK'S POSTGRADUATE RESEARCHERS

ReShark is proud to have a growing cohort of post-graduate researchers. Their research spans elasmobranch nutrition, movement ecology, reproductive biology, and Marine Protected Areas (MPA) management, providing critical knowledge that supports both the repopulation effort and broader conservation goals.

Congratulations are in order for Siobhan Houlihan, Julia Tapilatu, and Kyra Wicaksono. Siobhan, who recently passed her PhD confirmation seminar at Griffith University, will now advance her dissertation research, "*Investigating the reproductive biology and health of Indo-Pacific leopard sharks (Stegostoma tigrinum) for the advancement of assisted reproductive technologies*."

Two former shark aquarists from the StAR Indonesia nurseries — Julia from RARCC and Kyra from the Misool Foundation — recently graduated with their master's degrees. Julia completed her MS in Ecology and Conservation Biology at Texas A&M University, investigating "*Zebra shark growth rates in open and closed water systems*." Kyra earned her MSc in Marine Systems and Policies from the University of Edinburgh with her research, "*Balancing custom and conservation: Exploring enablers and barriers to co-management in Southeast Misool Marine Protected Area, Raja Ampat*."

After graduating, both Julia and Kyra have returned to Indonesia. Julia is supporting ocean conservation efforts in Papua and is a fellow in the Tanoto Fellowship 2025 Program, which nurtures emerging young leaders in the development sector, while Kyra focuses on policy work as an Environment Officer at the ASEAN Secretariat.

TOP Julia with one of the first sharks at the RARCC nursery in 2023. Photo by Indo-Pacific Films.

MIDDLE Kyra and Julia at their respective graduations. Photos by Kyra Wicaksono and Julia Tapilatu.

BOTTOM Kyra feeding Mali in the Misool Foundation sea pen in 2023. Photo by Alex Lindbloom.

First wild observation of group copulation among leopard sharks, documented at Aboré Reef, New Caledonia. Photo by Hugo Lassauce.

Dr. Hugo Lassauce, together with his colleagues from Aquarium des Lagons (Nouméa, New Caledonia) and the University of the Sunshine Coast, recently published the paper "*Observation of group courtship/copulating behavior for free-living Indo-Pacific leopard sharks, Stegostoma tigrinum*", in the *Journal of Ethology*.

For the first time in the wild, the team documented group copulation among stegs, capturing a rare 90-minute mating event involving two males and one female.

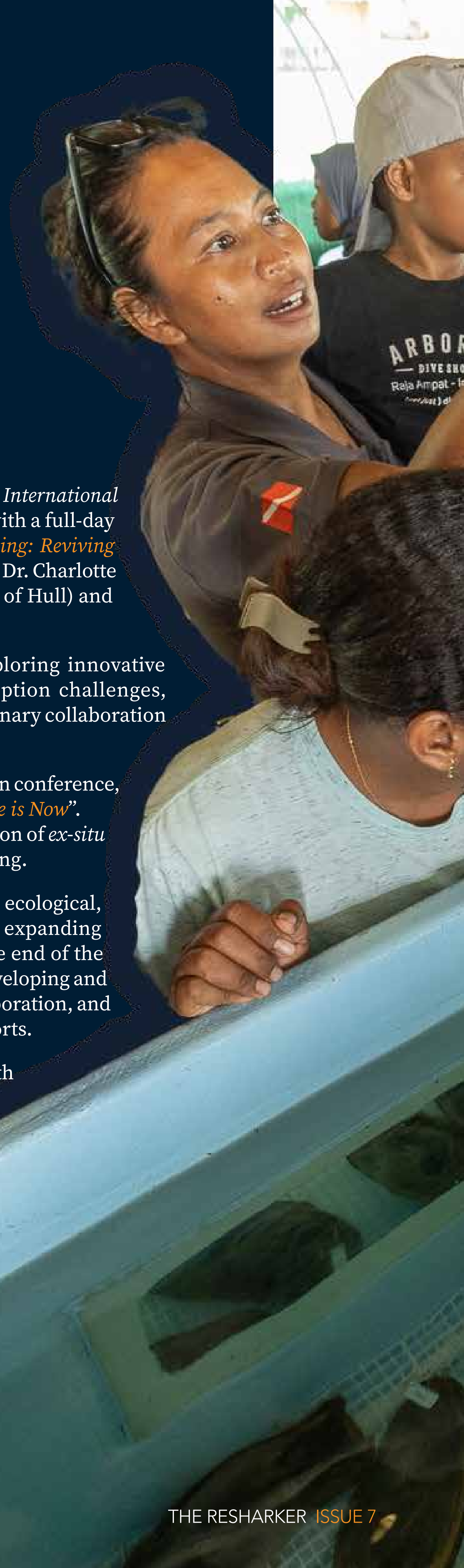
From fin-grasping to copulatory thrusting, the full behavioral sequence mirrored interactions previously recorded only in aquaria. These observations offer valuable insight into their reproductive ecology and underscore the importance of protecting critical mating habitats.

In addition to this publication, Hugo is also an author on a forthcoming paper on acoustic tracking of leopard sharks in New Caledonia, which will present early movement and habitat-use findings from the acoustic array.

The University of the Sunshine Coast's media team analyzed the reach of Hugo's leopard shark threesome story and accompanying video — which was featured by *National Geographic*, *The Guardian*, and *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* in late September — and the results are extraordinary. Based on the reach of the media outlets that publicized the story, up to 2.16 billion people may have seen it. Congratulations to Hugo and his colleagues for elevating *Stegostoma tigrinum* to a level of public awareness never before envisioned!

LATEST

SHARKS INTERNATIONAL
SRI LANKA 2026



ReShark will be hosting two events at the upcoming *Sharks International 2026* conference in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Activities will begin with a full-day pre-conference workshop on May 3, 2026 titled "*Shark rewilding: Reviving threatened elasmobranchs and the ReShark initiative*", cohosted by Dr. Charlotte Hopkins (Senior Lecturer in Marine Conservation, University of Hull) and Dr. Mark Erdmann (Executive Director, ReShark).

The workshop is designed as an interactive discussion exploring innovative strategies for shark rewilding, addressing data and perception challenges, introducing the ReShark initiative, and fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration to support the recovery of threatened elasmobranchs.

In addition, ReShark will host a standard session during the main conference, May 4–8, 2026, titled "*Elasmobranch Reintroductions: The Future is Now*". This session will bring together experts to explore the integration of *ex-situ* and *in-situ* conservation approaches in elasmobranch rewilding.

Discussions will highlight ongoing projects, address biological, ecological, and ethical considerations, and outline a path forward for expanding rewilding efforts for threatened elasmobranch species. By the end of the session, participants will have gained practical insights into developing and scaling shark rewilding programs, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and identifying opportunities to contribute to global recovery efforts.

While both sessions will feature presentations associated with the ReShark initiative, researchers, conservationists, and practitioners engaged in species restoration, population augmentation, and shark and ray conservation more broadly are warmly invited to present, attend, and contribute to the discussion, helping the ReShark coalition shape the future of elasmobranch rewilding.

Nesha demonstrating egg candling to members of the Raja Ampat Women Marine Conservation Group at the RARCC nursery. Photo by Tim Laman.

05

LATEST: HUSBANDRY & BREEDING PROGRESS

by

LEAH NEAL
Chair, StAR Project Husbandry Working Group

LISE WATSON | SHEDD AQUARIUM
StAR Project Husbandry Working Group

NEW StAR PROJECT BREEDERS

Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium (Tacoma, WA), Aquarium of the Pacific (Long Beach, CA), and Irukandji Shark & Ray Encounters (New South Wales) are the StAR Project's newest breeders, contributing their first *Stegostoma tigrinum* eggs in recent shipments that arrived at the RARCC nursery at Kri Island in October and December.

Meanwhile, Shedd Aquarium (Chicago, IL) has successfully passed parthenote testing — their final requirement to become an approved breeder for the StAR Project.

Congratulations to all teams, who devoted considerable effort to reorganizing their animal collections to reach this milestone. With these additions, the project now has 11 approved breeders that meet the rigorous standards necessary to ship eggs. The StAR Indonesia team anticipates receiving eggs from Shedd in early 2026.

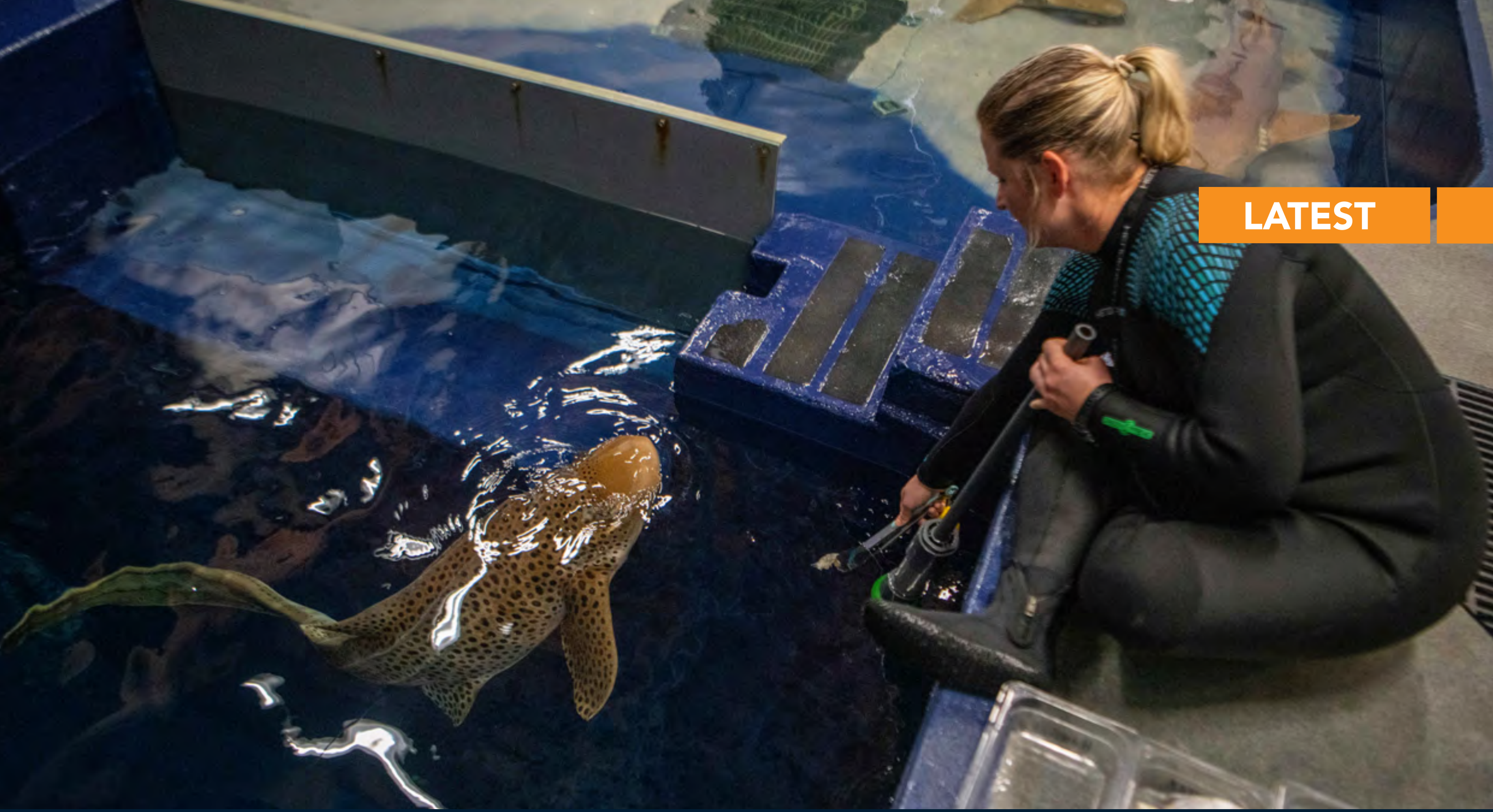
ADVANCING BREEDING SUCCESS THROUGH THE SSP

Behind the scenes, extensive work is continually underway through the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Species Survival Plan (SSP) for *Stegostoma tigrinum*.

The SSP focuses on conserving this endangered species by managing healthy, genetically diverse populations through coordinated breeding and transfer recommendations, studbook management, and advanced husbandry research. These efforts ensure that eggs produced for the StAR Project come from well-documented lineages, maximizing genetic diversity for this groundbreaking rewilding initiative.

In addition, SSP leadership provides guidance to participating institutions on best practices to improve reproductive success while maintaining animal welfare. By facilitating transfers and breeding loans between accredited facilities — many of which are current or prospective StAR Project breeders — the SSP optimizes pairings and supports collaborative research on reproductive biology, egg development, and parthenogenesis. This integrated approach strengthens long-term survival outcomes for this endangered species.

Over the past several years, several strategic transfers have been carried out to improve genetic diversity and increase egg production for both the SSP and the StAR Project.



These transfers include:

- A juvenile female from Minnesota Zoo (Apple Valley, MN) to Seattle Aquarium (Seattle, WA);
- An adult male from SeaWorld Orlando (Orlando, FL) to Georgia Aquarium (Atlanta, GA);
- An adult female from Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium (Omaha, NE) to Wonders of Wildlife National Museum and Aquarium (Springfield, MO);
- An adult male from Shark Reef Aquarium at Mandalay Bay (Las Vegas, NV) to Aquarium of the Pacific on a breeding loan;
- An adult male from SEA LIFE Kansas City Aquarium (Kansas City, MO) to Shedd Aquarium — which subsequently produced Shedd's first heterozygous eggs that will contribute to the StAR Project in 2026;
- A juvenile male from Aquarium of the Pacific to Seattle Aquarium.

Each move requires specialized vehicles, large air-cargo containers, extensive coordination, and the dedicated efforts of aquarium staff and the StAR Project Husbandry Working Group. Kudos to all involved for their meticulous work to support the long-term success of the breeding program.

TOP Dr. Karen Wolf (Head Veterinarian, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium) and team conducting ultrasound scans on eggs. Photo by Katie Cotterill.

BOTTOM Zoological aide Kelly Lietz with Peanut, one half of Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium's current breeding pair for the StAR Project. Photo by Katie Cotterill.

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Southwest Papua Provincial Government
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