

SIDE EVENTS

SHARKS INTERNATIONAL SRI LANKA 2026

NOTE: This is a list of all expected side events at Sharks International 2026, in alphabetical order. They will take place during lunch breaks and the early evenings after sessions end. The dates and timings will be made available when the final schedule is published in early 2026.

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Amplifying Voices: Youth-Led Efforts for Elasmobranch Conservation

Summary:

An interactive event that will showcase the importance of youth-led efforts in elasmobranch conservation

Description:

Over the years there has been increased focus and studies carried out on elasmobranch (sharks and rays) conservation and fisheries management. Efforts are being taken to better understand and fill data gaps on elasmobranchs which are one of the most threatened and vulnerable groups in our marine ecosystem. They face a number of challenges. Leading this change are a number of passionate young individuals. Many of whom are now finding innovative approaches and working closely with Indigenous People and Local Communities to find effective solutions for species/ecosystem conservation and sustainable livelihoods. Conservation efforts to protect these species, in general, often overlook the power and potential of youth-led initiatives, which are emerging as effective and dynamic forces for change.

This side event will aim to spotlight the impactful and transformative work of young conservationists who are actively driving change to conserve elasmobranchs. It will showcase how youth-led projects powered by innovation, grassroots action, and collaboration, are making significant contributions to elasmobranch conservation worldwide. Through this platform, young leaders will share their experiences, strategies, and challenges, offering valuable insights into how they are filling critical gaps in conservation efforts.

The side event will include 2-3 presentations focussed on successful youth-led conservation efforts such as on community-based conservation, use of innovative technologies and methodologies and in policy advocacy for elasmobranch conservation. This will be followed by an intergenerational panel discussion and a Q&A session with the audience. The panel will bring together youth leaders, policymakers, and marine conservation experts to discuss both the challenges and successes of youth-led conservation, including issues related to funding, representation, and the need for greater institutional support. Panellists will also share strategies for scaling up youth efforts and fostering stronger collaborations with governments, NGOs, and both the local and scientific communities. The outcome of the session would be a call to action for different stakeholders, organisations and agencies to invest in youth-led elasmobranch conservation initiatives.

Through tangible, youth-led solutions, this side event aims to inspire greater involvement of young people in marine conservation and highlight their capacity for driving meaningful impact. It will foster intergenerational and cross-sector connections, promote knowledge exchange, and emphasise the need for increased recognition and support of youth efforts in

elasmobranch conservation. Ultimately, the event seeks to empower the next generation of conservation leaders to continue advocating for and protecting these vital marine species.

ASRA: A Regional Network for Supporting Shark and Ray Research and Conservation in Asia

Summary:

An engaging side event to mark the official launch of the Asian Shark and Ray Alliance (ASRA), an initiative to strengthen collaboration and drive regional efforts in shark and ray research and conservation.

Description:

This side event is proposed to promote the recently established Asian Shark and Ray Alliance (ASRA)—a new initiative dedicated to strengthening regional collaboration in chondrichthyan research and conservation across Asia. While the shark and ray research community in Asia is steadily growing, it continues to face significant challenges, particularly limited access to funding, equipment, and cross-border communication. Recognizing the urgent need for a regional platform, a 2024 survey of 77 researchers and conservationists from 14 countries was conducted to gauge interest in forming such a society. Respondents from diverse sectors—including academia, government, industry, media, non-profits, and NGOs—overwhelmingly supported the idea. Our main goals are to empower emerging scientists, strengthen conservation capacity, and foster collaboration across sectors to safeguard sharks, rays, and their habitats. This 2.5-hour side event at the Sharks International Conference will formally introduce ASRA to a wider audience, share survey insights, and create a dynamic networking space to engage with the broader shark and ray community. The session will begin with a presentation on ASRA's mission, vision, and structure, followed by interactive segments designed to encourage dialogue, networking, and collaborative planning.

Celebrating Community Science in the Shark World

Summary:

A casual lunch time mixer event to network and mingle with other chondrichthyan community/citizen science projects.

Description:

Community – or citizen - science projects are a fantastic tool for public engagement and education, harnessing volunteer time to gather or validate data beyond the usual capacity of the host organisation.

This side-event aims to celebrate the diversity of projects and methodologies used within the shark science community, and bring project organisers together during a focused networking event. We envisage that this session will allow for greater global collaboration between projects, identifying overlaps and data-gaps, as well as increasing awareness of which projects exist among the community. Attendees are invited to bring and share examples of their community science resources.

Ahead of this event, online surveys will be used to capture initial information on the breadth of community science activities which focus on sharks, rays and chimaera. During the event, collated information will help guide initial discussions. As part of the open discussions attendees will be encouraged to cover key topics including: maximising the time given by community scientists, handling and processing data, methodologies, ways to increase project profiles and impact, and wider lessons learnt. Discussions will be captured to inform a brief summary report to be shared with the wider shark community.

From Science to Policy: Regional Collaboration for Shark Conservation in the Eastern Tropical Pacific

Summary:

An informal cocktail to connect, share, and learn about the science, policies, and partnerships behind shark conservation and the 30x30 goal in the Eastern Tropical Pacific.

Description:

The Latin-American nations of Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, and Ecuador have become global leaders in marine conservation in the past two decades. Together, they have formed the framework of what is known as the Marine Conservation Corridor of the Eastern Tropical Pacific (CMAR) and have increased marine protection of oceanic areas in their combined 2.14 million km² of Exclusive Economic Zones from 150,000 km² in 2004 to 720,000 km² in 2022. This extraordinary leap has been guided by the science generated by members of the MigraMar regional network of scientists since 2006, who have tracked thousands of marine migratory animals, most of which are endangered shark species.

The CMAR is a priority area for marine conservation, especially for endangered shark species of high commercial interest such as hammerhead sharks, silky sharks and thresher sharks, among other elasmobranch species. These species move between oceanic islands such as Galápagos, Malpelo and Cocos islands using marine corridors that MigraMar has named as “Swimways”. These corridors have been the basis for the recent creation of Bicentenario, Coiba Ridge, Malpelo-Yuruparí and Hermandad Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and the expansion of Coco Island and Malpelo MPAs.

As formal protection has increased, so has the need to design and implement monitoring strategies that not only measure the effectiveness of the conservation targets of each individual MPA but also feed into the broader CMAR initiative. With the support of the Bezos Earth Fund and Re:wild, MigraMar has become the leading organization on a regional project (2021 – 2026) aiming to generate the science and policy advice needed, to achieve the goal of effectively protecting 30% of the marine region by 2030. By providing a nested virtual repository for performance indicators, this project enables CMAR authorities to measure their impact at scales ranging from individual MPAs to the entire regional MPA network, and to adapt their management strategies to respond to periodic evaluations. By supporting research teams across the region, this project has ensured that baseline values for indicators are generated and fed into this repository to identify where new spatial protection measures should be placed to meet the 30% target in the most effective manner, in particular establishing links between oceanic and coastal habitats for early life stages of endangered elasmobranch species. Finally, by developing a climate change biogeochemical oceanographic model for the region, and by applying species distributions and movement data to this model, this project has provided a climate smart blueprint for spatial protection for the next 50 years.

On the Sharks International side event MigraMar plans to integrate the participation of key members, funders and collaborators and present the impact and relevance of this project in terms of its scientific achievements (BRUVS data, eDNA, satellite tagging and genetic studies), management and policy strategies (virtual platform to integrate and visualize indicators and climate-smart roadmap for marine conservation), financial sustainability mechanisms (the role of conservation trust funds) and interinstitutional collaboration (regional cooperation frameworks).

Gulper shark international trade regulation

Summary:

An event comprised of several short presentations on the liver oil trade, with particularly focus on gulper sharks, and tools to better inform conservation and trade regulations.

Description:

Gulper sharks are highly threatened by the international shark liver oil trade. Their highly valuable squalene-rich livers make them the most sought-after species in the shark liver oil trade. Consequently, they are targeted and increasingly retained from bycatch for their liver oil in mostly unregulated fisheries which has driven dramatic and rapid population declines of >80% of many of the species. Their extremely low biological productivity means they have very limited ability to withstand exploitation and regulation of their international trade is critical to ensure their populations do not further decline. This event will highlight identification and implementation tools for trade regulation.

“IYO ANG DAGAT” (The Sea is Yours) Documentary Film Screening and Discussion Panel

Summary:

Join us for a special film screening of the documentary “Iyo Ang Dagat” (The Sea is Yours) followed by a discussion panel on the film and impact campaign.

Description:

“IYO ANG DAGAT” (The Sea is Yours) is a documentary film that explores the relationship between people and sharks in the Philippines. Through the eyes of fishermen, park rangers, tour operators, enforcement officers, and conservationists, the film reveals how people interact with sharks and rays in their everyday lives—and why now is a critical moment for their protection.

Set across four locations on the island of Palawan in the Philippines the film covers multiple topics including: deep sea shark research, telemetry research, shark fishery and bycatch, marine protected areas and enforcement, human-wildlife interaction and livelihoods, and the illegal wildlife trade. The running time of the film is 1 hour and 16 minutes. The language of the film is Tagalog and English, with English subtitles throughout.

The film which is produced by the Large Marine Vertebrates Research Institute Philippines (LAMAVE) and funded by Save Our Seas Foundation is part of an impact campaign designed to enhance shark and ray conservation in Palawan, Philippines. Designed using behaviour change models, it aims to shift attitudes and increase ecological knowledge about sharks and rays and promote community- and site-specific conservation actions. The film’s narrative and outreach strategies were developed based on prior research into local conservation challenges, knowledge gaps, and cultural attitudes toward sharks and rays.

The post-screening panel will focus on topics discussed in the film and will share insights from the impact campaign, including qualitative and quantitative results. The panel will include the Project Lead and other contributors to the project. A Q&A session with the audience will follow the discussion.

Read more about the film and campaign: <https://www.lamave.org/iyoangdagat>

Meet MCAF: An Evening with the New England Aquarium's Global Conservation Community

Summary:

A casual event (with refreshments!) to network with the Marine Conservation Action Fund community and learn about **our work as a small grants and fellowship program focused on community-based conservation.**

Description:

Join us for a special evening event hosted by the New England Aquarium's Marine Conservation Action Fund (MCAF). MCAF is a small grants and fellowship program that offers multi-faceted support to leaders from low- and middle-income countries who are spearheading community-based ocean conservation initiatives. This side event offers an opportunity to connect with members of the MCAF global community – including Project Leaders, Fellows, and staff – to learn more about the program's mission, approach, and funding opportunities.

MCAF community members will gather to create a space for informal exchange with anyone interested in learning more about their work and the MCAF program. It will also feature a panel discussion during which MCAF Fellows and Project Leaders will share insights into their shark and ray conservation work and experiences with the MCAF program. MCAF staff will share how the program is advancing accessible and equitable approaches to ocean conservation funding, along with practical information on how to get involved and apply.

This event is both a celebration of our community and a chance to build new connections. Whether you're a longtime member of the MCAF community or learning about the program for the first time, we invite you to join us for an evening of networking and conversation over food and drinks.

Minorities in Shark Sciences Mixer

Summary:

An evening reception to connect and celebrate BIPOC gender minorities in shark science through shared stories and authentic community-building.

Description:

The Minorities in Shark Sciences Mixer is an onsite evening reception designed to foster meaningful connection, visibility, and celebration of BIPOC gender minorities in shark and ray science. This event offers a warm, welcoming space for conference attendees to gather in solidarity, reflect on shared experiences, and build lasting professional relationships.

The evening will feature brief, informal reflections from a few invited participants who will share their personal journeys in shark science — highlighting not only the challenges they've faced, but the resilience, brilliance, and innovation they bring to the field. These spotlight stories will set the tone for a mixer grounded in authenticity and mutual support.

Attendees will also be invited to contribute to a “Visibility Wall” — a collaborative space where participants can share why representation matters to them, offer advice to future scientists, and visually mark their presence in the field. This quiet but powerful activity will serve as a reminder that community is strength.

To encourage connection in a relaxed way, we'll also provide a “Get to Know You” Bingo card — a lighthearted but meaningful activity designed to spark conversations and highlight shared experiences among attendees.

Please note: *There will be no refreshments served at this event. The focus will be on connection, community, and shared presence.*

While this mixer is hosted by Minorities in Shark Sciences (MISS), it is open to all SICB attendees and aims to be a welcoming space for all who wish to support diversity and inclusion in shark science.

We look forward to creating a space where BIPOC gender minorities and their allies can feel seen, supported, and inspired.

Mobulid identification as a tool for conservation management

Summary:

This hands-on session equips participants with practical skills to accurately identify manta and devil ray species – essential for anyone involved in species monitoring, trade enforcement, or ecological studies.

Description:

Manta and devil rays—are some of the ocean’s most captivating yet vulnerable species. All valid mobulid species are protected by international conventions such as CITES and CMS and are subject to fisheries retention bans. In addition, there are dozens of countries worldwide with dedicated protective legislation for manta and devil rays, although some only partially cover this species group. Accurate identification is critical for manta and devil ray conservation, fisheries management, and enforcement.

This session will provide a hands-on approach to distinguishing between species, their gill plates, and the challenges implicated in it, such as intraspecific patterning or post-mortem colour changes. It is designed for anyone involved in species monitoring, trade enforcement, or ecological studies, so whether you are new to mobulid identification or looking to refine your skills, this event will provide practical tools to improve accuracy and awareness.

Reimagining shark, ray, and chimaera conservation

Summary:

Join the IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group as we discuss how to shape the future of shark, ray, and chimaera conservation amid mounting threats and an urgent need for action.

Description:

Shark, rays, and chimaeras are facing a biodiversity crisis. With a third of species considered threatened according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, we urgently need collective and transformative action. Decades of science, policy, and advocacy have led to significant progress – national protections, finning prohibitions, trade regulations, shark sanctuaries and marine protected areas, and retention bans. However, these efforts have been insufficient; sharks, rays, and chimaeras remain under immense pressure from overfishing, habitat degradation, and the accelerating impacts of climate change. Successes have been overshadowed by persistent challenges, including inadequate enforcement, inconsistent political will, and limited global coordinated action. With the ongoing declining trajectory of many species' populations, we need a fundamental shift in how we approach conservation.

This interactive session will invite participants to reflect on successes, failures, and lessons learnt from shark, ray, and chimaera conservation initiatives thus far and, importantly, to help shape the way forward for the next generation of conservation efforts. Through facilitated discussions, participants will engage with critical questions to reimagine shark conservation in a way that goes beyond the status quo.

- What have been the biggest barriers that have hindered the success of shark, ray, and chimaera conservation over the past decades?
- How can we better integrate sharks, rays, and chimaeras into the broader aquatic conservation agenda, and align our conservation goals with other biodiversity and fisheries management efforts?
- What are the key gaps in policy, management, and science that are preventing effective conservation action and how can we fill them?
- What innovative partnerships and collaborative efforts can be built across sectors to ensure that sharks, rays, and chimaeras are prioritized on global conservation agendas?

This session isn't just a conversation—it's a call to action. We need your ideas, expertise, and passion to shape the future of shark, ray, and chimaera conservation. It is clear that the status quo is not enough—meaningful change will require a bold, concerted, unified effort. We call on participants to bring their ideas, experiences, and energy to this important discussion. Only by engaging together and forging a shared vision of the future can we catalyze the collective action needed to ensure the long-term survival of sharks, rays, and chimaeras.

Rhino Ray Mixer

Summary:

A casual event with refreshments to network and mingle with rhino ray researchers.

Description:

The Sawfish Conservation Society (SCS) is hosting a social mixer for conference participants involved in research and conservation of rhino rays. The rhino rays (sawfishes, wedgefishes, giant guitarfishes, guitarfishes, and banjo rays) are among the most imperiled vertebrate groups on the planet. Most of these species occur in coastal waters in tropical and subtropical latitudes where fisheries pressure and degradation of coastal habitats has been intense. All species share traits of high susceptibility to capture in net fisheries owing to their unique morphology, and the fins of rhino rays are among the highest value in end-user consumer markets. Sawfishes are thought to be locally extinct in many tropical nations, and other families of rhino rays are following similar trajectories, with extremely high declines observed throughout these regions. This side event, paired with a special session of talks, will bring the rhino ray research and conservation community together in-person for the first time. This side event will open with an introduction and welcoming address from the SCS, followed by informal discussions and networking opportunities between researchers, educators, and conservationists who work on rhino rays. This event will support novel connections and open discussions to create pathways towards the development of a cohesive global network of rhino ray researchers in the future.

Saving our seas – getting your project funded and making it as an early career ocean professional

Summary:

An open discussion about the challenges faced by early career professionals and ways to develop your career (refreshments provided!).

Description:

Our oceans are facing a tipping point where urgent action is needed to combat overfishing, habitat degradation, and climate change. Often those regions and communities who will be affected most by diminished ocean resources and ecosystem services have limited support to try and combat these challenges. The momentum to make a difference is often carried by passionate, early career professionals, but they often find opportunities few and far between and can be faced with the difficulties of making a difference while also trying to support their own livelihoods. There is thankfully increasing recognition of these challenges, and we would like to take this opportunity to talk about the current funding space in marine conservation and how this can work and how it can be improved. This session would work through a series of case studies from early career professionals who are forging their own path in different ways. It is intended that this should lead to a constructive conversation about how early career ocean professionals can maximise their potential in the conservation space and how collectively we can redress the balance of access to opportunities in marine conservation.

This event will be hosted by the Save Our Seas Foundation (SOSF) and will feature Dr Andrew Chin (SOSF, James Cook University) as chair, alongside Dr Alifa Bintha Haque (University of Oxford), Faqih Akbar Alghozali (Elasmobranch Project Indonesia), Ghofrane Labyedh (AMMCO). After brief presentations from the panelists, the discussion will be opened up to the audience for a mediated discussion.

Shark Sanctuaries in Focus: Strengthening Conservation Through Collaboration

Summary:

Interactive Roundtable + Network-Building Workshop.

Description:

This side event will bring together representatives from declared shark sanctuaries for an informal, yet strategic, roundtable aimed at fostering honest dialogue and building lasting collaboration. Rather than focusing solely on success stories, the session will create space for participants to share their real-world experiences — including challenges in enforcement, emerging threats such as habitat degradation, unregulated tourism, and increasing reports of shark depredation or conflict with humans, as well as opportunities for more effective conservation. The roundtable will transition into a collaborative working session, where participants will co-develop a framework for ongoing cooperation. This includes mapping shared research and policy needs to better inform adaptive management of shark sanctuaries, as well as identifying key gaps in monitoring and stakeholder engagement. The session will culminate in the drafting of a cooperative roadmap and the initial design of a Shark Sanctuary Network — a long-term initiative that will help structure working groups around shared interests such as policy, science, tourism, or community outreach. Roles and coordination mechanisms will be discussed to ensure the network has practical value and remains action-oriented. Ultimately, this event aims to shift the conversation from isolated protections to a more unified and effective approach to shark conservation through collaboration, transparency, and shared knowledge.

The PADI AWARE Global Shark and Ray Census - connecting elasmobranch research and conservation with the global diving community

Summary:

An outreach event to SI participants to update them on the newly launched PADI AWARE shark and ray citizen science initiative.

Description:

The Global Shark and Ray Census is a new large-scale citizen science initiative designed to harness the power of the recreational diving sector to collect critical data on shark and ray populations worldwide. Launched by PADI AWARE Foundation in collaboration with James Cook University, the project represents one of the most ambitious efforts to date to systematically engage divers in elasmobranch monitoring across multiple regions and habitats.

This side event will introduce the Census to the scientific community, outline its data collection methodology, and invite discussion on collaborative opportunities. With divers contributing structured observations from thousands of dive sites around the world, the Census has the potential to address major knowledge gaps in species presence, seasonality, and distribution. It also supports repeated monitoring at fixed sites, enabling local population trends to be tracked over time. Importantly, the dataset captures not only sightings, but also species absence, allowing for more robust ecological interpretation.

The initiative combines structured diver training, digital reporting tools, and expert validation to ensure data quality and consistency. Early-stage findings and pilot results will be shared during the session, along with a proposed roadmap for data sharing, integration with existing monitoring efforts, and opportunities for scientific collaboration.

The event aims to:

- Raise awareness of the Census within the elasmobranch science community
- Present the initiative's structure, goals, and early results
- Seek input on research priorities and data use potential
- Explore opportunities for collaborative partnerships and co-authorships
- Build interest among funders, NGOs, and regional scientists to expand participation

While the Census is powered by citizen observers, its success depends on strong partnerships with research institutions and data users. This side event will provide a space for open discussion on scientific standards, practical applications, and how the Census can complement and strengthen existing monitoring networks.

The Student Force in Shark Conservation Panel

Summary:

An inspiring panel spotlighting student leaders driving shark conservation worldwide, showing that we don't need decades of experience to make a real impact.

Description:

The FINstitute would like to host a panel discussion featuring student leaders driving shark conservation initiatives worldwide. This side event will highlight the critical role students play in shaping the future of shark science and conservation, providing a platform for them to share their experiences, successes, and challenges. This is to emphasise the power we have as students at any stage of our career, and that we do not need to be well-established or highly experienced to make a difference in shark conservation.

This panel will feature student speakers representing various shark conservation initiatives from different regions, for example, founders of The FINstitute, a student-led shark conservation consortium. Each panelist will share insights into their work, including research, advocacy, outreach, and policy engagement. It will also highlight how students can get involved, and how professionals can support emerging student conservation leaders. During the panel, an interactive platform (via QR code) will allow attendees to ask questions, and an informal networking session after this panel will allow attendees to exchange ideas and explore ways to strengthen student involvement in conservation efforts.

Volunteerism as a Catalyst for Marine Conservation in Sri Lanka

Summary:

Volunteerism and its contribution towards marine environment conservation

Description:

Sri Lanka, an island nation rich in marine biodiversity, faces significant challenges in protecting its marine ecosystems due to pollution, habitat destruction, and illegal activities. Volunteerism has emerged as a powerful tool to address these challenges, with Sri Lanka ranking as the top country in the world for volunteerism (World Giving Index, 2021). The Pearl Protectors, a youth-led marine conservation organization, has harnessed this spirit of volunteerism to drive impactful marine conservation initiatives.

This side event at Sharks International will showcase how volunteerism has been instrumental in marine conservation efforts in Sri Lanka and focus on inspiring global case studies, focusing on key initiatives which have positively support the conservation efforts around the world. The event will highlight the role of volunteers as first responders, researchers, and community guardians in protecting marine ecosystems and species, including sharks and rays.