

Rare shark caught in Donsol-WWF

by ANNA VAMERO
Inquirer.net

MANILA—A rare shark was caught along the eastern coast of Burias Isle in Donsol by fishermen trawling for mackerel on March 30, officials from the World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature said.

According to WWF, local fishermen brought the megamouth shark to Dancalan village in Donsol, Sorsogon for assessment.

Elson Aca, Donsol Project Manager for WWF-Philippines, later identified the rare shark, according to WWF.

Megamouth 41, as named by the Florida Museum of Natural History, measured 4 meters and weighed 500 kilograms.

Facial scars indicated a protracted struggle with the fishers' gill-nets while stomach contents revealed it was feeding on shrimp larvae.

The megamouth shark or *Megachasma pelagios* is named for its big mouth measuring almost a meter-wide and lined with a brilliant silver band to attract deep water planktons, jellyfish and small fishes it feeds on, said Aca.

It is one of the rarest sharks, with just 40 recorded encounters worldwide since its discovery in 1976 at Oahu, Hawaii, said Aca.

"The presence of two of the world's three filter feeding sharks—butanding and megamouth shark—warrants special

attention for the Donsol-Masbate region," said Aca.

"Whale and megamouth sharks, manta rays, dolphins and other charismatic giants indicate that the region's ecosystem is still relatively healthy. By protecting megafauna, we help maintain the dynamic balance of our seas, and ensure the entire ecosystem's resilience and natural productivity," Aca added.

Gregg Yan, information, education and communications officer for WWF-Philippines, said there are three filter feeding sharks—or those that strain suspended matter and food particles from water—whale sharks, megamouth sharks and basking sharks.

The megamouth shark is classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources as data deficient because so few have ever been studied, noted Yan.

He added it is a poor swimmer which ranges sporadically throughout the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. Males average four meters while females grow to five.

Of the 40 recorded encounters, eight megamouth sharks have been caught in Philippine waters.

Four were caught in Cagayan de Oro and one each in Negros, Iloilo and Cebu. Megamouth 41 was the very first caught in Luzon, said Aca.



Donsol fishermen from Sorsogon bring to shore this rare megamouth shark which they caught March 30. Photo by WWF-Philippines.

Against Aca's counsel, the Masbate megamouth was butchered and cooked as Bicol delicacy "kinunot" (shark sautéed in coconut milk), said WWF.

Fisheries Administrative Order 208 provides that after documentation, the carcass of all endangered marine animals should promptly be buried.

Yan added, "We cannot blame fishermen for catching megamouth sharks—hauls are almost always classified as accidental bycatch, meaning the sharks were sadly at the wrong place at the wrong time. The minute number of megamouth sharks also makes target fisheries practically non-existent."

Yan said megamouth sharks are "extremely rare finds."

He urged anyone who hears of sightings or even encounters one to contact WWF-Philippines and local authorities.

Yan said WWF has also been doing extensive satellite tagging research on whale sharks.


"A chance to tag a living megamouth shark will greatly advance our knowledge of these most secretive of animals," Yan added.

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RP robotics team readies for world finals

MANILA—After a successful win at the regional FIRST Robotics Competition in Hawaii, a Filipino team is set to compete against 300 foreign teams in the world championships in the US.

Team Lagablab (Filipino term for "flame") is sending its entry, a robot named "Larry Labuyo," to Atlanta, Georgia in the US.

They expect to compete with teams from Brazil, Canada, Chile, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands and Mexico.

The FIRST Robotics Competi-

tion Championships will start on April 17 to 18.

Team Lagablab is composed of about 20 students from the Philippine Science High School (PSHS), one of the science high schools managed by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST).

The team already won the Highest Rookie Seed Award and the Rookie All-Star Award at the regional finals in Hawaii, the latter award giving the Philippines the slot for the world championships.

DOST Secretary Estrella Alabastro said the Philippine team's achievements at the regional finals hope to spark public and private sector support for the country's science education programs.

She stressed the importance of building a culture of science among young Filipinos, as it is an integral part of nation-building.

"As of now, we're still far from what is recommended in building a culture of science. So far, we only have 106 scientists per million people. The UNESCO

(United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommends 360 scientists per million people," Alabastro said.

DOST Undersecretary Fortunato de la Peña said the agency is hoping to raise at least P3 million to send all of the team members to the US.

So far, the agency has raised about P1.5 million.

Ogena said a standard robotics kit would be introduced during the National Science and Technology Week celebrations in July. (Inquirer.net)

Environmentalists explore Negros rainforest

BACOLOD CITY—A team of environmentalists from the United Kingdom and the Philippines set off on Sunday on a two-week biological expedition into the interior of the North Negros Natural Park to explore uncharted areas.

Robert Harland, a director of the Negros Forest and Ecological Foundation Inc., said the 13-man Negros Interior Biodiversity Expedition team included scientists, biologists, mountaineers, teachers and logistics experts.

It is led by London-based James Sawyer, a veteran of many similar expeditions to 25 countries and in environmental protection projects, including five years of managing the Negros Rainforest Conservation Project.

"This is the first biological exploration of the interior of the NNNP, a unique area not scientifically explored to date," Sawyer said.

With a land area of 80,454 hect-

ares, the NNNP is the largest forested area on Negros Island and is home to many rare, endemic and endangered species.

It covers the cities of Talisay, Silay, Victorias, Cadiz, Sagay and San Carlos and the towns of E.B. Magalona, Murcia, Toboso, Calatrava and Don Salvador Benedicto.

Sawyer described the NNNP as "a biodiversity hotspot of great importance." But its rare and endemic species "are under grave threat from illegal logging, hunting, exotic pet trade and unauthorized land use," he said.

Rated as one of the top ten most important areas of forest in the world, the NNNP is home to a multitude of rare and endemic species, while also playing a vital role in watershed protection for surrounding communities, Harland said.

"We all feel very privileged to have the opportunity to be part of this ground-breaking expedition," Sawyer added.

The expedition is partnered by the Negros Forests and Ecological Foundation, Inc (NFEFI), which undertook biodiversity surveys between 1999 and 2006 with Coral Cay Conversation in parts of the NNNP covering Talisay, Murcia and Silay, which are all part of the watershed of Bacolod City, Harland said.

Paul Lizares, chairman of NFEFI, said they supported the initiative as it would raise the profile of the park's threatened habitats.

"As a key recipient of data from the expedition, and of all other benefits, we will work with the team to ensure that maximum benefit comes from the venture," he said.

The expedition also includes seasoned British filmmaker Tara Watney, who has produced many documentaries, dramas, feature films and commercials. She will make a documentary that is expected to be aired by television stations in many countries. (Inquirer.net)

'Halo-halo' business refreshes after 73 yrs

Pagsanjan tour includes stop at Aling Taleng's

PAGSANJAN, Laguna—Selling "halo-halo" during summer may be common for most local households, but not for Rita Zaguirre who inherited a trademark made popular by her grandmother over the past 70 years — Aling Taleng's Halo-halo.

At 58, Zaguirre hopes to preserve the enterprise, which is 15 years older than she is, that has been handed down to her.

"When tourists arrive in Pagsanjan, they usually ask where Aling Taleng's is located," says Rita, who was tasked to manage the business after her mother died in 2004.

Now, Aling Taleng's not only offers the halo-halo that has made it famous, it is serving up other dishes to customers as well. It has also expanded from its base in Pagsanjan, Laguna, 92 kilometers south of Manila, to nearby towns.

Grandmother
Aling Taleng's Halo-halo was started in 1933 in this town by Catalina Zaguirre, Rita's grandmother.

"My grandmother started a 'halo-halo' store in front of their house. It was just like [other such stands] that you see among local households," Rita shares.

There were no tables for customers then. The only table in the store was the one that contained all the ingredients and utensils used to make the iced dish.

"The orders were all for takeout," she adds.

When she was growing up, Rita observed how her

grandmother managed the small business, which started with only P10 as capital.

The customers, mostly neighbors, she says, kept on coming back as they found the recipe of Aling Taleng's Halo-halo to be different from all the others.

We combine different ingredients, setting our halo-halo apart from the ordinary ones served up in other stores or even fast-food chains," says Rita.

Traditional "halo-halo" is composed mainly of sweetened banana, sweet potato, "gulaman," sago and crushed ice.

But Aling Taleng's Halo-halo takes pride in its seven main ingredients: "kaong," "leche flan," mongo beans, "macapuno," sugar cane bits, "kondol" and "ube."

"The recipe that Aling Taleng developed is still used up to now," Rita says. "We have not bothered to change what the customers have learned to love."

Rita belongs to the third generation of the family handling the business, located in Maulawin village here.

When Catalina died, Rita's aunt handled the business that was later turned over to her mother.

Rita describes how overwhelming the patronage of local residents and tourists has been through the years.

"My grandmother, Aling Taleng, had indeed left a great legacy, not only to our family but also to the whole town," Rita says, adding that "the business has also been closely associated with the town of Pagsanjan." (Inquirer.net)

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