**Why the world needs sharks**

**Ocean Ramsey**

September 2015

|212K views

What if we were to redefine the relationship we have with sharks, to one based on scientific fact, reality, and logic, rather than the current one, based off of limited and biased information? I want to talk about how changing the way we perceive sharks and interact with them could change our environment, economies, and lives for the better. But first, I want to introduce you to someone who has positively influenced and inspired my life's work, passion, and focus. She's intelligent, she's graceful, beautiful, efficient, but what I admire her most for is her very important work and role. What most people don't know is that without her work and influence, none of our lives would be the same. And I wanted to describe her to you first, before I showed you her photo, because I've come to find that, oftentimes, we make snap judgments, prejudice, based off of very little factual information. I've personally found this because oftentimes I'm judged solely off of my appearance or work as a professional model, rather than my primary work in science, conservation, and business. So, please keep in mind the truth that often there's more than meets the eye, and when you take time to get to know someone and better understand them, maybe you can better value them. And sometimes it's a little more interesting than you think too. So, without further ado, my beautiful role model, Bella, which means beautiful, and yes, she's a great white shark, or more accurately termed, a white shark, Carcharodon carcharias. Now, I know you might just be noticing her nice teeth and thinking something along the lines of "monster, " but tonight, put your prior beliefs about sharks on hold, while I explain why Bella is an ideal role model, why we should seriously take action to redefine the relationship we have with these animals, to one based on scientific fact, to that or reality, rather than appearances, snap judgments, and fictitious Hollywood movies. Bella and her kind are extremely intelligent. I've observed her, and her kind, outsmarting even humans within a matter of moments by adapting her behavior even in novel situations. This ability to quickly adapthas likely led to sharks' resilience over time. They evolved before dinosaurs, before trees. They evolved two more known sensory systems than we even have to aid them a high level of efficiency in their very important role in the ecosystems, shaping, influencing them, and making them stronger, and better. Now, even though they are highly cognitive, cautious, and take in multiple factors before they take action, it is true that on rare, rare, rare, much more rare, occasions than we make mistakes, sharks do make mistakes, and, unfortunately, someone does get bit. Still, considering the millions of people that enter the water, the oceans, every single day, and the average number of fatalities is five to seven . . . Now, I feel extremely lucky. I get to spend almost every single day diving with sharks, over 30 different species around the world on a diversity of research programs and conservation campaigns. My work in marine biology focuses on ethology, which is animal behavior and psychology, and cognitive ecology, where I study the way the animals interact with one another and their environment. I've come to observe and learn some of the most fascinating things I wish I had more time to share with you tonight. But in my limited time with you, what I've come to appreciate, what I feel is most important and urgent, and if I could speak up for sharks, what I'd want to share with you, is their very important role and work, and how it affects all of our lives. Essentially, imagine sharks as the ocean's immune system, the white blood cells. They pick up the dead, dying, weak, sick, injured animals, leaving only the healthiest to reproduce, keeping lower trophic levels and populations in balance. We all rely on our immune systems, and the scientific evidence for the importance of sharks is mounting. There are so many studies that show one after the other that the removal of sharks has environmental and economic negative impacts - Ransom A Myers, Bascompete - effects all the way down to coral reef systems. The removal of sharks has been attributed with starvation. Throughout the respected scientific community, there's no denying the importance of sharks, their effects on our environments, our economies, even the air that we breathe. 70-80% of the air we rely on to continue living comes from our oceans. Either directly or indirectly, we all rely on the oceans. Billions rely on it for seafood, over 200 million rely on it for direct employments. Our lives, our futures, are interconnected. In the words of one of my human role models, the wonderful Dr Sylvia Earle, "With every drop of water that you drink, every breath that you take, you're connected to the sea. No matter where on the planet you live. " But sharks are still scary, right? So that's kind of the problem. Most peoples don't know many factual things about sharks, except they have teeth, and many more people don't know that sharks are actually being decimated, globally, at a rate of over 11, 000 every single hour. That's more than three sharks every single second. That translates to 70-100 million sharks killed every year. That's like killing everyone in Spain, Austria and France every single year. Now, according to fishing records, over 90% of sharks have been depleted. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, over a third of all large sharks have been wiped out, or are facing extinction, or are vulnerable to extinction. So, why such a mass slaughter of such an important and keystone species? Well, some of it is due to silly things like souvenirs and pharmaceuticals. Some of it is due to men and their inferiority complexes . . . I'm guessing. 80% of long-lining is bycatch, and most of it is sharks. Culling, which is probably this least intelligent reaction a country can have to an adverse shark-human interaction;basically, like shooting yourself in the foot, from a behavioral standpoint, also a waste and indiscriminate killer. But the number one killer of sharks, globally: a bowl of soup. Yes, we are trading the health and productivity of our oceans-reliant environment and economies for a bowl of soup. What's worse, it's not even nutritious; it's actually toxic. It's merely for the Chinese culture belief that when they serve that soup, it means that they're prestigious or important. But what is classy about catching a shark, hacking off its fins, oftentimes while it's still alive, wasting 95% of the animal just to make yourself feel better about your social status. Consider: sharks have been evolving for over 400 million years; humans, 200,000, and their culturals, far less. We can live without culture, but not without our oceans, and our oceans cannot live without their immune systems. Like rhinos killed just for their horns, and elephants killed just for their tusks, sharks are being killed, slaughtered, globally, just for their fins. Now, I love traveling the world and experiencing the diversity of cultures, but there has to be a point when we re-evaluate the relationshipthat we have with sharks and animals, and look at how our cultures can adapt and evolve honorably. An ancient Chinese proverb says when you do not change your direction, you may end up where you are heading. So what if we were to adopt this ideaand change the way we interact with sharks? What would that look like? Well, the great news is we already have concrete examples, places like Palau, Bahamas, areas like Cabo Pulmo, and Palmyra. In those areas, reef and fish stocks are thriving. Ecotourism is bringing in over US $314 million to local economies, directly employing over 10, 000 jobs. This study by Dr Michele Barnes and the University of British Columbia is actually showing that that number will increase, more than double, in less than 20 years. So $780 million, far outweighing the global fin trade. So put at the most basic terms, even on just the monetary level, which is usually what politicians care about, a live shark is worth more than a dead shark. And what's great is, these shark ecotourism programs, they can support research. I was working out with Dr Mauricio Hoyos, we were tagging, taking biopsies, and I was wondering: Is any of this conservation-based research going to make a difference before these guys are just wiped out off the planet? Then one day, 20 meters underwater, doing a population count surrounded by these beautiful sharks, I was realizing by the time I gather, process and publish my studies, another 3-6 million sharks will be killed. So why study something that's being eradicated the rate the sharks are and not do anything about it. So I opened my research to the public. I developed a program, where people could come to learn about sharks from a scientific perspective. I collaborated with @juansharks, who is a well-known shark and marine photographer and shark specialist. We developed this program that's research- and conservation-based, and opened it to the public so they could learn about their biology, physiology, behavior, how to interact with them safely, answers all those questions people don't know about sharks. The cool thing is people actually get to get in the water with us and see for themselves, eye to eye, what sharks are really like. It's such a successful program as people can speak up for sharks from a first-hand perspective and also influence their networks, and change people's minds. We are also able to fund educational outreach through this, reef and beach cleanups, local conservation campaigns, and international conservation campaigns, like stopping the cull in Western Australia, a story for another time I'm honestly rather glad I don't have time to share tonight as I'd end up crying. But we were able to save one of the juvenile sharks. She was under three meters, and she would have just died, even though she was cattle tagged improperly, and, you know, for 90 minutes, I swam with her, looking her in the eye, and trying to tell her it was going to be okay as blood was spilling out of her head, and kind of trying to tell myself it was going to be okay. After 90 minutes, she swam off: and it was that effort. This is another conservation campaign, a little better known. It reached over 2 million people in 2 days and featured none other than the lovely role model, Bella, who is so great for her species, a great representative. At the time when we released it, it was because there was a study put outshowing there were less than 350 great whites, in the area from California to Alaska to Hawaii to Mexico, an area where juansharks and I grew up diving with sharks, with white sharks specifically. We knew many of them, had spent much time with them, studying behavior, working with them. So what do you do when you hear someone you love, care about, understand, is being eradicated?Something. So, we thought, with Water Inspiredwe'd try and use inspiring photography and videography to inspire people to care. We needed people to give white sharks a second look, a second chance. They don't make the news very often. When they do, I'm sure you guys all know, it's not usually good press. So we were successful. We wanted to show the natural beauty of sharks. But most often, when people see a beautiful image like this, they just think it's just on its way to eat the next person, right? So, we want to do the anti-Jaws. The little blond girl, she gets eaten in the fictitious movie, right? So what's it like in reality?Well, I've been working with them for a long time, right? We dive to get receivers and other things like that, so I wanted to show a connection, I wanted people to be able to connect, see another side of these animals, realize that we can coexist. But in order to coexist, they have to exist, and there's so much more to these animals than meets the eye. When you take the time to get to know somebody, you know, you can understand that maybe there's more to them. And so I wanted to share that with the world. And I have to give the disclaimer - I mean, there's just so many things that I would love to share with you guys -- but I do have to give the disclaimer that they deserve a lot of respect . . . not fear, but they are apex predators, they do have a role . . . and we need them for that role, it's very important. I mean, I could cite study after study after study, showing the importance of that. You know, if I wanted to go out into the African savanna and pat a lion, you know what I would do? I would call up the lion whisperer, and I'd go hang out with him, and I'd learn, and I'd study from him, out of respect for the animal because of its reputation. So, while I understand that, especially the way that they are portrayed in the media, that people are afraid of them, you shouldn't be afraid of them; you should just respect them. they are beautiful animals, there's so much more to them. So if there's one thing that Bella has taught me, it's that, like Bella, we can all positively change and influence our environments for the better. All we need to do is take action. In the words of Jane Goodall: Every day we make an impact. It's up to us what kind of an impact we want that to be. Now, this was just one successful collaborative program that we collaborated with GoPro on. They were very true to the message and released a beautiful piece, but there are so many other things, other media pieces we could do, even just writing to a restaurant, asking them not to serve shark fin soup. New campaigns, political policies, the ideas are endless. What it comes down to is: Yeah, knowledge is powerful, but it's nothing without action. I love Nike. I get up every morning and go running. It's like, just do it. You may not feel like it, but any effort is better than no effort. [We may feel like what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean, but the ocean would be less without that drop. ] So I want to ask you guys tonight, to take action for your future. Sharks and the oceans affect us all. I'd like to see a raise of hands for all those that are willing to take a small, small action for a better future. Raise your hands if you are willing to take that action. Oh, I so see all those hands. Okay, I'm going to call you out on it. I want you guys to use that hand and grab your phones. I'll do it with you. Grab your phones. I know it's usually rude to grab your phones during a talk, but you'll be helping me. This is really good. This is good. This is your call to action. Let's do it! So I want you guys to grab your phone, and we're going to spread great ideas globally. I want you guys to Tweet, Facebook, Instagram, something. Spread an idea, share a fact about a shark. I'm going to do it with you because it's actually really fun. Even though you guys are kind of dark - Okay, ready? Smile! Okay. So don't get distracted with the missed call or text. This'll only take a minute, and I'm off the stage, so . . . All right, let's do this together. We're going to make a difference, a measurable impact for sharks. So I'm going to Instagram. This is how the world is now, right? We all just walk around on our phones. I think I saw that on a talk earlier. This is all good. Okay next. So I'm going to use a hashtag. #HelpSaveSharks. Okay. #HelpSaveBella. Here with the amazing group at TEDx conference in Europe, helping spread great ideas and ways we can help save sharks and our future. Sharks are important. Redefining the relationships we have with sharks. #SharkConservation, #HelpSaveSharks, #NoSharkFinSoup, #TEDSavesSharks, #TEDTalksonSharks. Okay. And I will share that. Awesome! And this is the best part. I get to thank you all for being a part of the force that redefines the relationship we have with sharks for a better future. Thank you, guys. (Applause)