

# 2004 Whitley Gold Award Winner

## Randall Arauz, Costa Rica

Conservation and management of Pacific Ocean sharks

Also Winner of The Whitley Award sponsored by The William Brake Charitable Trust



### The issue:

Shark finning is big business and threatens shark populations worldwide. A wasteful practice, fins are sliced from the live fish which is then tossed back into the ocean to die. Worth 100 times more than the shark's meat, the fins are destined for Asia where shark fin soup is an expensive traditional delicacy. The trade is completely unsustainable - slow to reach sexual maturity and producing as few as two offspring annually, sharks are being fished out. International fishing fleets trail lines up to a hundred miles long across the Eastern Pacific to catch shark but the hooks are indiscriminate, decimating other species, including turtles and albatross.

The waters off Costa Rica are renowned for marine biodiversity. Despite this, Costa Rica is a key player in Asian shark fisheries, and has the largest longline fleet of Latin America, with over 550 vessels. Over the past decade, Costa Rica has become an important port for the landing and exportation of fishery products, especially illegal shark fin.

Reliable data on the scale of shark fin exports from Costa Rica are lacking, but what is clear is that the fishing boom has occurred with little regulation. Political apathy, legal loopholes and a lack of

resources to prosecute violators have led to commercial fishermen operating within Marine Protected Areas, including Cocos Island National Park, a World Heritage Site. Foreign fleets pirate fish in the nation's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Most troubling is the scale of illegal shark fin landings in Costa Rica, where foreign boats – typically from Taiwan – can make millions of dollars from a single fishing expedition.

### The project work:

Winner of the 2004 Whitley Gold Award, Randall Arauz (pictured right) has campaigned for almost a decade to end unsustainable fishing practices in Costa Rica. In May 2003, Randall's marine conservation NGO, PRETOMA, secretly captured footage of a Taiwanese vessel landing 30 tons of shark fin at a privately owned Costa Rican dock under cover of darkness. Some 30,000 sharks were killed to provide this haul, and the footage provided irrefutable evidence of the extent of illegal fishing activity. Through campaigns, public education, government denouncement and fisheries research, Randall has worked hard to translate the shock of the international conservation community into national action. Education is key to Randall's work and by informing

Costa Ricans about the impacts of longline fishing he is empowering them to hold the government responsible for managing marine resources in a sustainable manner. He also collaborates with the fishery sector itself, directing observer programs onboard longline vessels to collect biological data on species composition, sex and size at catch in order to develop management action plans. Working with the University of Hawai'i, Randall is also developing shark tagging studies within the Costa Rican EEZ and at Cocos Island in order to gain greater understanding of migration patterns and how to protect shark populations.

### The future:

In 2005, PRETOMA celebrated a new National Fisheries Law introducing stricter regulations for landing shark fin. Despite this success, government commitment to fully enforce legislation remains lacking, presenting ongoing challenges. Randall continues to work to close private docks to international flag vessels in compliance with customs legislation. By raising the conservation profile of sharks and sharing the results of his research with fishermen, Randall is encouraging wider participation in the development of a national shark management plan. Long-term, Randall wants to see the UN declare a ban on longlining in the international waters of the Eastern Pacific. *"Costa Rica can spearhead the fight against shark finning"* says Randall, *"But not whilst we are still one of the culprits."*



Randall Arauz 2004 Whitley Gold Award Winner

**WFN** WHITLEY FUND FOR NATURE

AWARDS AND GRANTS FOR INTERNATIONAL NATURE CONSERVATION



**Leader Profile:**

Randall grew up in the Costa Rican capital of San Jose. Inspired as a youth by the work of Jaques Cousteau he knew from a young age he wanted to work with marine wildlife. He studied Biology at the University of Costa Rica and went on to become an Associate Researcher for The Pacific American Sea Turtles Program. In 1994, he became Central American Director of the Sea Turtle Restoration Project. Direct work with the Costa Rican fishery sector to protect and study sea turtles quickly revealed the extent of damage being caused by international longline vessels to the entire marine ecosystem. Randall established PRETOMA in 1997 and today, as well as being the NGO's President, is also member of the IUCN Shark Specialist Group. He is committed to continuing to lead international efforts to develop responsible fisheries policies that conserve marine resources.



**Key Threats & Objectives**

**Threats**

- **Foreign fleet encroachment** – foreign vessels enter Costa Rican waters to fish illegally and fin sharks, putting unsustainable pressure on marine resources.
- **Lack of education & data** – global apathy to marine conservation is a key issue, made worse by the lack of evidence to demonstrate the scale of overfishing.
- **Longlining by-catch** – Not just sharks but also albatross and sea turtles are killed by longlining, contributing to the decline of many threatened species.
- **Lack of enforcement** – despite a new National Fisheries Law in 2005, there are real concerns that the government will not effectively enforce fisheries regulations due to strong Taiwanese interests in Costa Rica.

**Objectives**

- **Greater fisheries regulation** – through concrete policy changes that reduce fishing effort, improve management practices and lead to full enforcement of National Fisheries Law.
- **A Central American Shark Conservation Action Plan** – to address fisheries management on a habitat level. PRETOMA aims for Costa Rica to become a centre for shark conservation to lead international policy.
- **Education programmes** – nationally and locally to promote shark conservation and create a demand for improved



management of fisheries.

- **Greater fishery sector collaboration** – to strengthen support from fishermen whose livelihoods are threatened by overfishing.
- **Further biological research** – through expansion of longline onboard observations is essential to inform future conservation action.



**Collaborative Organisations**

Ministry of Science and Technology  
 Papagayo Seafood, Playas del Coco  
 Ministry of the Environment of Costa Rica  
 The Sea Turtle Restoration Project, USA

**Key Project Team Members**

- Isabel Naranjo**  
Sea turtle biologist & Trade Coordinator
- Jorge Balletero**  
Fisheries biologist & Responsible Fisheries Campaign Director
- Noah Anderson**  
Communications & Policy Advocacy Manager
- Edgar Castrillo**  
Environmental Education & Public Campaign Coordinator
- Allan Bolaños**  
Responsible Fisheries Campaign Coordinator
- Andres Lopez**  
Responsible Fisheries Campaign Coordinator

**Project website**  
[www.tortugamarina.org](http://www.tortugamarina.org)

**Location of Project**

**Place/ Town** Cocos Island National Park and key fishing ports, including Puntarenas and Playas del Coco  
**Region/s** Costa Rican national waters of the Pacific Ocean  
**Country** Costa Rica



**Whitley Fund for Nature**  
 50 Queensdale Road, London, W11 4SA  
 t: +44 (0) 20 7602 3443  
 e: [info@whitleyaward.org](mailto:info@whitleyaward.org)  
 w: [www.whitleyaward.org](http://www.whitleyaward.org)

**Patron:** HRH The Princess Royal  
**Trustees:** Sir David Attenborough CH FRS, Catherine Faulks, John Laing, Edward Whitley  
 Company limited by guarantee, No. 3968699, registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Calder & Co., Regent Street, London SW1Y 4NW. UK Registered Charity Number 1081455