



Yap

Yap students get set to swim with the sharks

February 15, 2019 | By Joyce McClure

Colonia, Yap-- Most Yapese believe that sharks are dangerous to humans and should be killed due to the plethora of popular horror movies about killer sharks, according to Yap High School principal, John Tamngin. So it was a surprise to Tamngin and ten top, hand-picked YHS students when they learned the truth during a Skype-in-the-Classroom lesson on February 15 at Manta Ray Bay Resort in Colonia.



Sponsored by Shark Angels, a New York City-based nonprofit dedicated to saving sharks, the students were amazed when instructor Cheryl McCarron, outreach director for the organization, stated that there were only four human deaths from sharks in 2018 but 100 million deaths of sharks by humans worldwide.

The lesson was part of a yearlong program sponsored by the resort to highlight shark conservation and awareness among both scuba divers and local students. The culmination of the first year of what will become an annual event will be Oct. 12 – 26, 2019 when divers from around the world are expected in Yap for a two-week-long program titled *Yap Divers 4*

Sharks to learn about international shark conservation and marine ecology from well-known conservationists and to swim with the resident sharks that inhabit the protected reef around the island.

According to Ruud van Baal, general manager of the resort who welcomed the students, the purpose of the school outreach is to educate divers about marine life and how to protect it. "It starts with the people who live on these islands," he told the students, "and with the youth who are the future. That's why it's important for you to be knowledgeable."

Micronesia has the second largest shark sanctuary in the world, McCannon said, with twelve species of which six are endangered. In some parts of the world, up to 90 percent of sharks have been decimated due to pollution, commercial fishing and "human diets," she added. The popularity of shark fin soup in some cultures results in the collection of fins from live sharks that are tossed back into the ocean where they suffocate and die. A bowl of shark fin soup, she explained, can cost up to \$100 and is often served at weddings and banquets to show off how wealthy the host is. But the fin is made of cartilage that has no actual taste, which requires the addition of fish or chicken broth, and contains high levels of mercury. "So, the soup is poisonous, as well," McCannon noted.

The value of sharks is not in killing them, she told the students, but in using them to stimulate local economies through tourism. Why kill one shark for a bowl of soup when that same shark can bring in several million dollars of revenue from dive enthusiasts over its lifetime. But the main reason is for the maintenance of a healthy, balanced marine environment and the students can help, they were told, by talking with people about sharks, being careful to control pollution and eliminating the use of plastics that get into the ocean.

At the end of the lesson, the students took a ten-question test. Those who got 95 percent correct would be invited to go snorkeling in October during the event, van Baal announced. Just before boarding the bus to go back to school, they were excited to learn that they all will be going snorkeling later this year. The snorkeling trip will be conducted by the Divers 4 Sharks Foundation under the supervision of Paulo Guilherme, one of the most renowned environmental activists and a co-founder of the Onda Azul Marine Studies Center in his home country of Brazil.

The students also received certificates for their participation in the class and a pizza lunch in the resort's popular restaurant, Mnuw, that's located on an old Indonesian schooner. Other schools scheduled to participate in the Shark Angels program include Yap Catholic High School and Yap Seventh-day Adventist School. It is hoped that at least one student of those attending the class will become a marine scientist and return to Yap in the future to continue the island's strong commitment to marine conservation.

For more information about Yap Divers 4 Sharks, go to www.mantaray.com/package/yap-divers-for-sharks/

In the Manta Ray Bay Resort conference room: John Tamngin, Principal, and Angie R. Yanruw, Administrative Officer award certificates of completion to Yap High School students for participation in Shark Angels lesson (Photo: Joyce McClure)



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