

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH:



SHARK DIVING UNLIMITED

MIKE "SHARKMAN" RUTZEN

as seen on BBC, National Geographic etc.

You've seen the documentaries where that 'crazy' guy swims outside of the cage with great white sharks?
That is Mike Rutzen of Gansbaai's most esteemed cage diving company.

SHARK DIVING UNLIMITED



SDU's Mike Rutzen and SAUK's Alex Wright



In his own words, Mike tells us about current shark and ocean situations and what we can all do to make a real difference.
Life risking or life saving? Please read on.

SAUK: Currently, what mission are Shark Diving Unlimited embarking on?

Mike: Currently SDU are carrying on with Mike's mission of showing to the large public what white sharks really are. We refuse to run adrenaline trips, trying instead to break the mindless-killer myth that these animals carry due to human ignorance. But truly, the sharks do most of the job themselves, we just have to bring the people on their location.

SAUK: What are your aims and goals for Shark Diving Unlimited?

Mike: Our aims are to change people's perceptions upon these magnificent animals, through daily trips, international conservation talks, transferring of knowledge and documentaries. In the meantime with the incomes from both cage diving activities and documentaries we're supporting and sponsoring Sara's PhD project with Stellenbosch University, a research upon white shark population dynamics and genetics around the entire South African coastline. We believe that the lack of knowledge of these animals are the biggest obstacle to develop a long term conservation strategy.

SAUK: As a team, what would you like to achieve this year?

Mike: The work we're doing will take more than one year to archive tangible results, but in the meantime, Mike has been invited to Dubai, Switzerland, UK and Italy as the keynote speaker in conservation congresses conferences and University talks. He will present his talks during April and May 2012, upon current conservation and research status of the white sharks in South Africa and thereby advertising internationally the importance of improving the knowledge and protection of the white sharks. Through these talks we would like to make more and more people aware of the importance of protecting the sharks. In April 2012 Mike will also be part of a documentary about ocean conservation in Seashells, one of the last unspoiled region of the planet, with the same purposes.

SAUK: Have you got any new information on worldwide shark populations?

Mike: We can't release now the exact numbers, but preliminary studies suggests that, unfortunately, the white shark population is not anymore as big as it should be to be healthy.

SAUK: Do you think more and more people are taking notice of current shark situations?

Mike: We want to think that something is changing in the peoples interest for shark's situations, but is the economy that rules the world and at the moment the only weapon we have to make the sharks more worthy alive than death is eco-tourism. Unfortunately we need to change the mind of the people in power so that they will make the right decision, but they're mostly driven by economical factors.

SAUK: What do you feel is the strongest way to make a difference?

Mike: People use to fear the most what they don't know. For us the strongest way is to improve the knowledge through the research and then involve the large public, through documentaries (such as "A living legend") on our discoveries to make them understand and love these animals as much as we do. In the meantime to find affordable solution to help local governments taking action to protect these animals and their habitat.

SAUK: Where would you recommend an enthusiast to go, to learn more about shark species?

Mike: Places like the Blue Planet Aquarium is not a bad place to start, if you're in the UK.

SAUK: Your opinion on long line fishing?

Mike: It needs to stop! They actively target sharks species, protected or not and on the sea there's no real control.

SAUK: our views on modern restaurants that sell shark fin dishes?

Mike: We are obviously against this practice, sharks are not species that can support such a high fishing pressure, they're at the top of the marine food chain. As for land top predators, they are already small in numbers, they give birth to few individuals and they slowly reach sexual maturity (a female white shark must be at least 4.5m to be sexually mature, a blue shark more than 2m in length). We hope that people will stop asking for sharks-based dishes and as consequence the restaurants will stop selling them.

SAUK: What can people do to help stop the major mistreatment of sharks?

Mike: People should spread out the information that the oceans just cannot survive without sharks. Top predators keep the rest of the ecosystem healthy and balanced, if we take top predators out of the system, it will soon collapse. People can avoid buying sharks products, just that on a large scale will make a difference. Another important thing will be to write to the local politicians asking to stop shark fishing. At the end of the day (...the election day) it is the people who drive politicians' decisions.