

Filming off the Cape of Good Hope

Description

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Cape Point is situated at the southernmost point of the Table Mountain National Park. This impressive sandstone headland, sculptured by the sea over millions of years, represents the theoretical boundary between the cold Atlantic and temperate Indian Oceans.

Sir Francis Drake, the first Englishman to round the Cape of Good Hope in 1580, described this unforgettable sight thus: *â??This Cape is a most stately thing, and the fairest Cape we saw in the whole circumference of the earthâ?•.*

While the inshore water is typically a cold and greenish 12 degrees C, the water about 40 kms offshore often 22 degrees C and blue, thanks to the Agulhas Current that sweeps southwards from the tropics. At this interface between cold and warm water is where much sealife is found. While famous for tuna and other gamefish, this area is also ideal for filming mako and blue sharks, seals, dolphins and pods of pilot whales.

The variety of sea birds life off Cape Point is astounding and includes penguins, gulls, cormorants, gannets, sheerwaters, various albatross and petrels. Little wonder that bird lovers from far afield come here to place more ticks on their bird lists.

We normally work near the â??Canyonâ?•, an area where the water depth quickly drops to 500 metres. However, the first quarter of 2009 has been a difficult time off our coast. The south easterly winds have persisted longer that normal and the water off Cape Point has often been cold and dirty with few tuna but with an increase in shark numbers.

I have been off Cape Point a number of times this summer. My most recent trip was on a day with green water and, therefore, I had few expectations but I had an interesting experience. On finding a raft of cape fur seals and some small blue sharks I jumped in with my camera. Below me I saw the familiar sight of longfin and yellowfin tuna darting in on our bait but the visibility was only about 6 metres.

We started throwing sardines into the water to bring the tuna to the surface, thereby making filming easier. As was usually the case, the seals were not interested in dead fish and only played with our sardine bait but the blue sharks had other ideas, darting in between the seals for the food. However,

every time a blue shark went for a sardine, the seals would chase it away, often flowing the sharkâ??s tail in a playful rather than an aggressive manner. This reminded me of the sardine run where I have witnessed seals â??tailgatingâ?• blacktip sharks feeding on sardine baitballs.

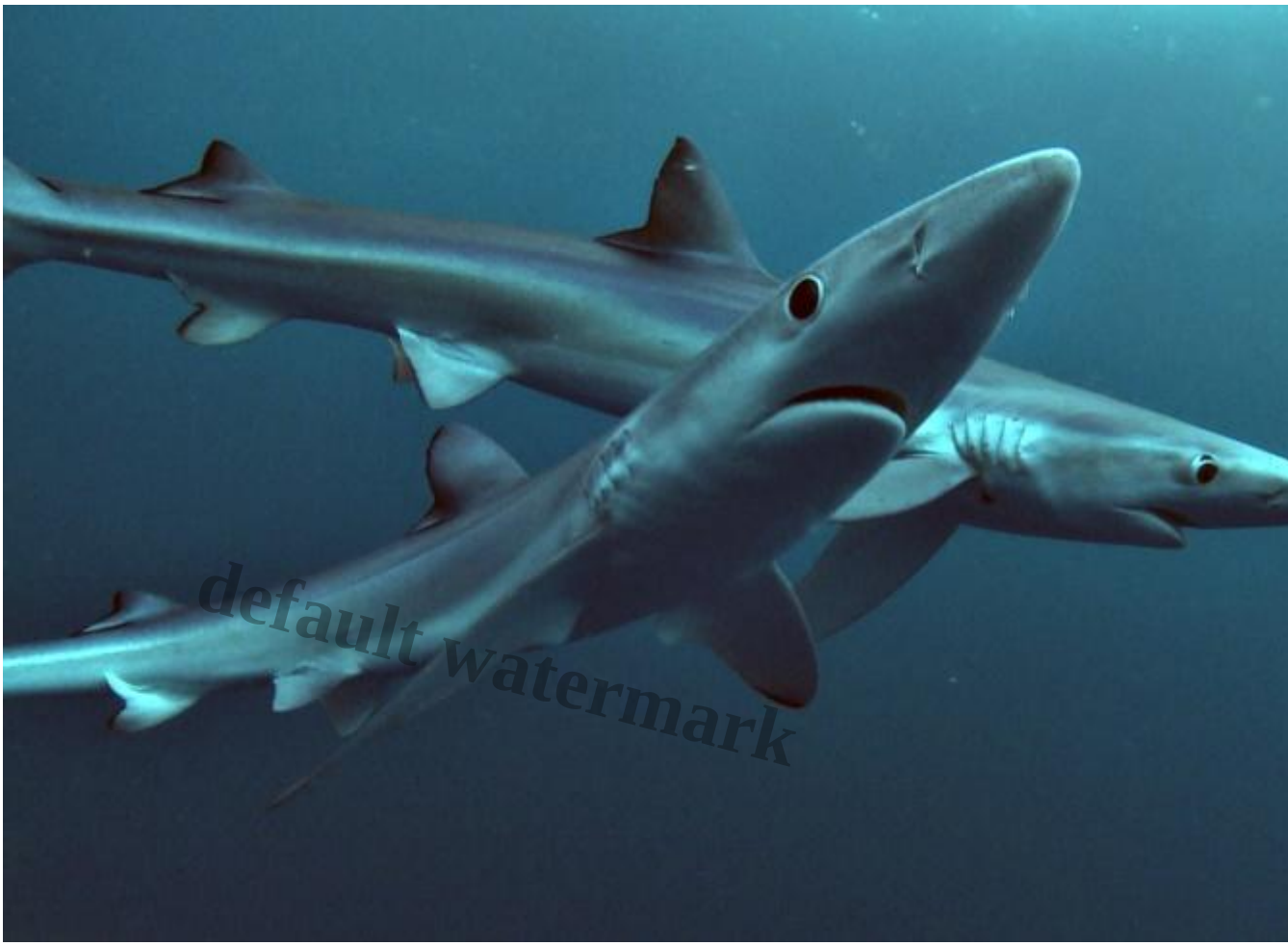
This appeared to be a case of seals having some fun but, when they react in a similar fashion with white sharks, it is a matter of survival. If a white shark is unsuccessful in its initial attack, the seal will position itself behind the shark and follow its tail until it sees an opportunity to make a break for the safety of the island. Could it be that the seals, when amongst non-threatening sharks such as blacktips and blue sharks, practice for the real thing?

A few weeks later I returned to the Canyon once more. On this occasion the water was blue, the underwater visibility was 20 metres and there were more blue sharks in the water than I had ever seen before. As far as the eye could see in any direction there were blue sharks. They bumped the bait drum, swam into me as if I was not there and kept biting the monitor on my underwater housing. No problem with close-up shots on that day.





Seals Chasing a Blue Shark


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Mako and Blue Sharks off Cape Point

Category

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