

The Turtle and the Tiger Sharks

Description

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I have been working with tiger sharks for many years and, while they can become a bit aggressive near the baiting station, I have found them to be remarkably docile for a shark with the reputation of a dangerous â??man-eaterâ?•.

For a number of years we would attract tiger sharks by placing bait on the reef. This meant spending many hours in a strong current, often with little reward in the way of good footage. The breakthrough came with the drifting bait drum. This produces fast results and the cameraman drifts effortlessly in the current with the drum. However, as tiger sharks swimming around in a blue void can become repetitive, we still try to entice the sharks to the reef by slowly dropping the bait drum. Images of these very impressive sharks swimming over reef adds a welcome variation.

While on a shoot for German Television channel ZDF, we were discussing how great it would be to have a dead turtle as bait. We had a single tiger shark working actively at the bait drum with the occasional glimpse of others. Then an amazing call came through. A large turtle carcass has been found on the beach close to where we were working. Before long we had a large turtle on our boat that smelt as if the â??sell byâ?• date was long gone.

The anticipation mounted as the turtle was attached to the bait line and for some time nothing much happened so we released the carcass and allowed it to drift in the current. A sole tiger shark that had swum up to the carcass a few times and given it a tentative bump, finally took a bite at a fear flipper and swam off. I battled to keep up with it but got some good close up sequences. In spite of the fact that the carcass was quite old, an impressive volume of blood seeped out. This seemed to excite the tiger shark that started shaking the turtle, creating the illusion that it was still alive.

The current was strong and, by now, the action was fast. As a result I was unable to position myself correctly and was now up-current of the action. In other words I was working in the chum slick. I was so engross with the filming I was only vaguely aware that more tiger sharks had arrived. The introduction of turtle blood into the water had a rapid and impressive affect on the sharksâ?? behaviour. The first thing that I noticed that the tiger sharks were turning fast and with purpose back onto us after being pushed away. This reaction was very different to their normally relaxed behaviour.

I felt myself being pushed forward. I was told afterwards that a large tiger shark had my diving cylinder in its mouth. At the same time another shark was taking a great interest in my camera. Not wanting to scratch my expensive glass dome port, I turned the camera around to hit the shark side on. When reviewing the footage later, that movement revealed Mark kicking and hitting a third shark that was going for both of us. It was impossible to work safely in these condition so we made for the boat.

Once I had composed myself, I leant over the boat, camera in hand, just in time to film a shark swimming towards the camera with the bleeding turtle in its mouth. Soon the turtle was dragged towards the seabed and all went quiet on the surface.

The amazing thing about this encounter was that, in the space of a few minutes, one relaxed tiger shark became nine very hyped up tiger sharks. Evidently sardines in a bait drum are rather boring compared to a ripe turtle. During all of the previous days we had never had more that a few tiger shark around the bait. How quickly things change when the right stimulus is used: rather like whale blubber with white sharks.

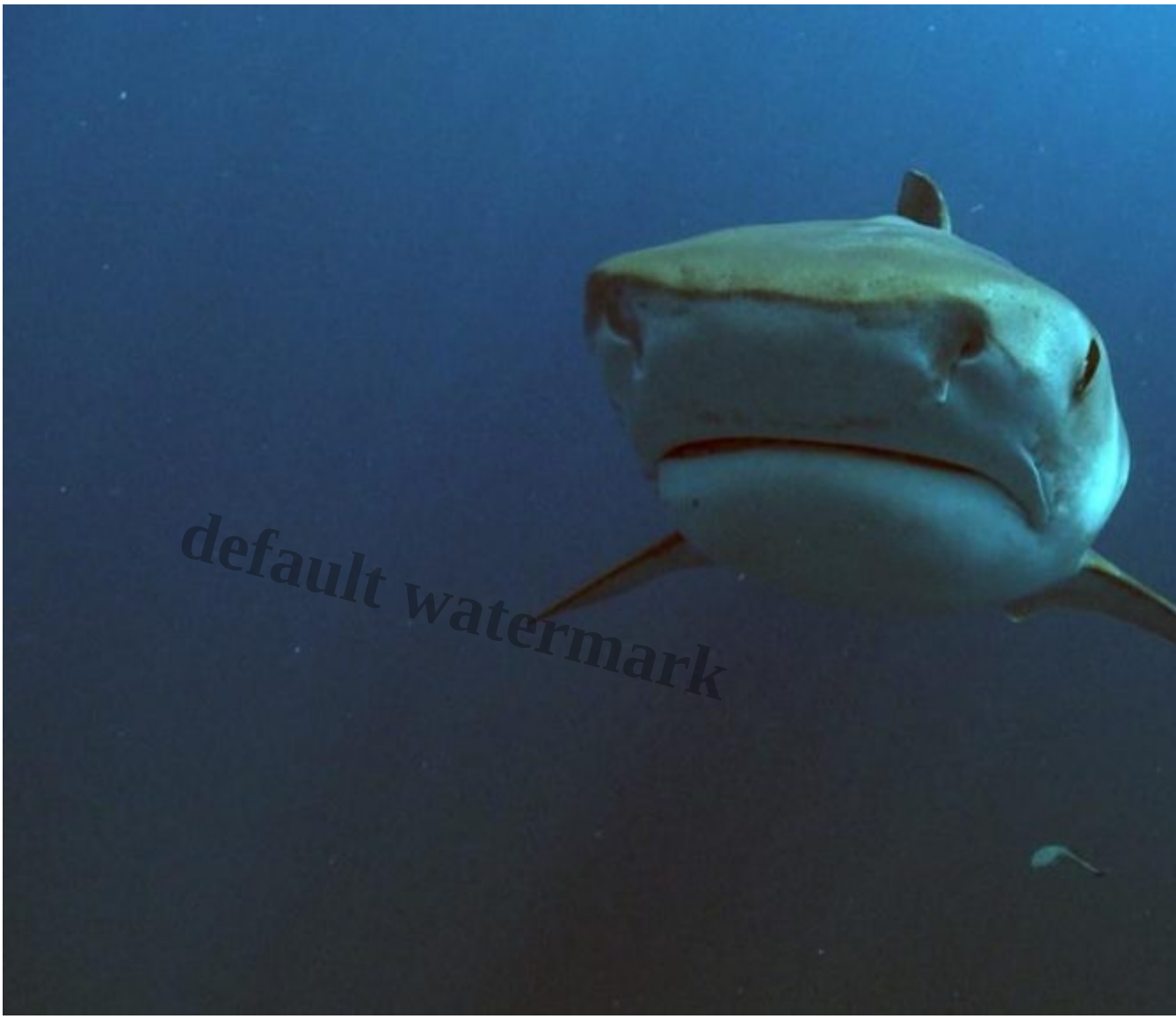
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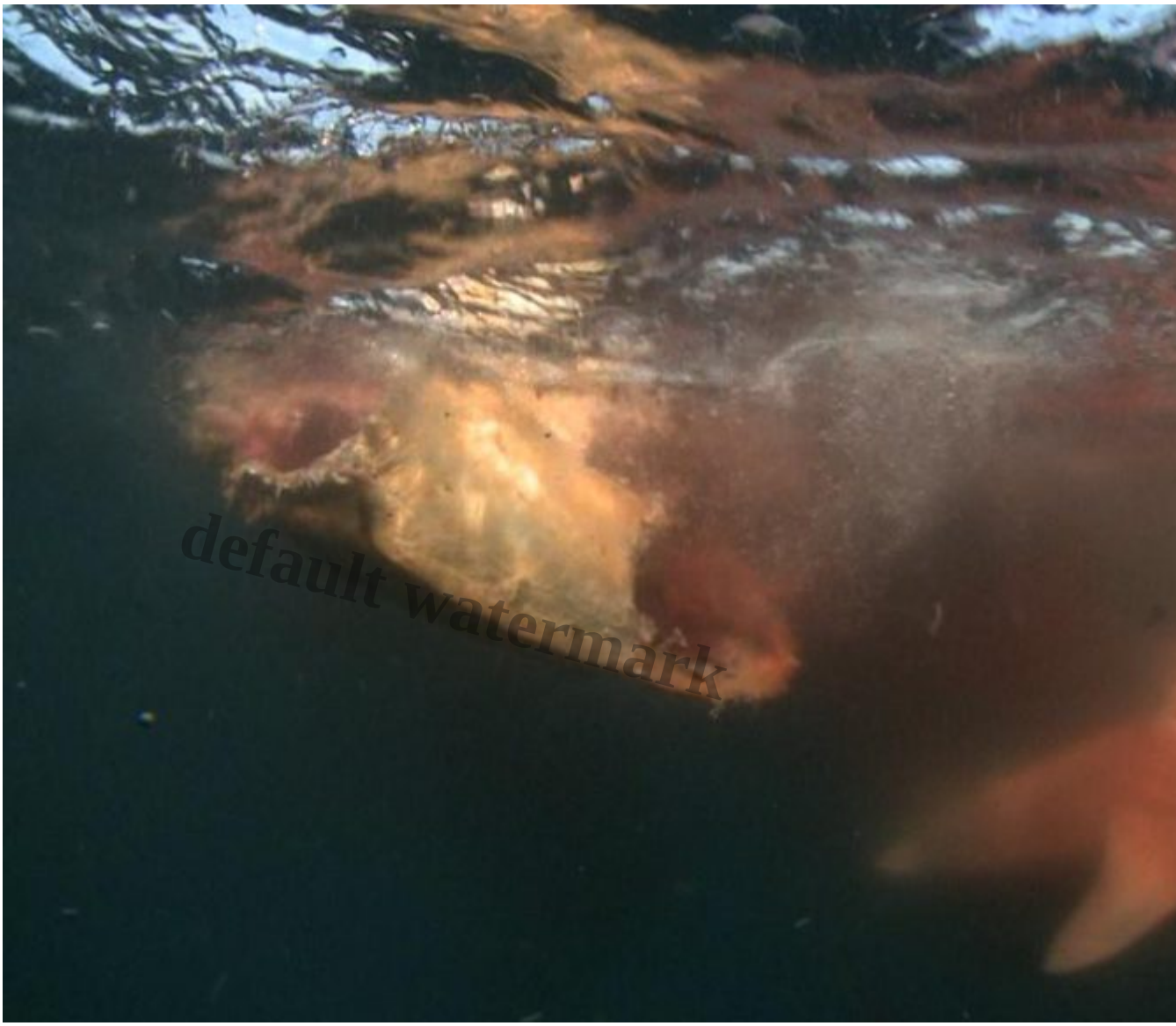
A large and very dead turtle joins the director and I for a short boat ride



A hesitant tiger shark eyes the turtle suspiciously



Finally the tiger shark comes in for the â??killâ?•



After a good few mouthfuls the tiger shark lets go



Once committed the tiger shark becomes more aggressive

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