

Shark

in the Bowl

mysabah.com

By TADPOLE



Copyright © WWF-Malaysia/Eric Madeja



Copyright © WWF-Malaysia/Eric Madeja

When shark kills a man, it makes headline and is described as a blood-thirsty monster; but when a human massacres millions of sharks for its fin, it is just a statistics. In fact, less than 15 people worldwide become victims of shark attack every year. This means we have a much better chance of being stroked by lightning or murdered by another human being.

Shark fin soup is a traditional delicacy in Chinese wedding banquet. Most elders call this soup, which is made of around 20 sharks for every 200-pax banquet, a “must-have” cuisine. If the guests don’t have shark fin soup to ‘wash their mouths, they would badmouth that the dinner is “cheap”, thus risking the dignity to the couple’s parents.

Eating shark fin soup is more than a sign of wealth and rank because shark fin soup used to be an exclusive food for the Chinese emperors, though today everyone can afford it. The fin itself is tasteless. A shark lover says, “It’s like eating fingernails and hair!” I don’t quite agree with him. Shark fin soup tastes nice, but this is only because it absorbs flavours from other soup ingredients, and due to its interesting textures.

Since shark is not evil, its fin has no taste and it is not really a symbol of prosperity, the fin is best left on the shark then. Of course there are more reasons that convince me to stop eating shark fin, not that the shark is as adorable as Nemo.

5 Reasons Why I Say NO

1. Sharks are near the edge of extinction FAST. About 30 to 70 millions of sharks are killed every year for its highly priced fin. However, the reproduction rate of shark is very low and it takes a long time for a baby shark to reach maturity. The population of some shark species has declined by more than 90% in only half a century. As China is getting more affluent, there is then an astronomical demand for shark fin soup.

The supply has to catch up with the skyrocketing demand, so it leads to unsustainable levels of shark fishing. The recent introduction of longline fishing boat, which is known to be deadly to sharks and turtles, will worsen the situation. Unfortunately, shark finning is not illegal in Malaysia, so consumer is the only one who can make the change.

2. Shark is a keystone species for a balance marine ecosystem. Sharks have been the top predator since the age of dinosaurs. If they are removed from the food chain, it will create overpopulation of its preys, which feed on some of our favourite seafood. The extinction of one species leads to another. As a result, the chain reaction will make more and more seafood disappears from the menu. There is a real story that farmers in an Asian country ran a killing sparrow campaign. They wiped out the sparrows and thought that their crops would be safe. On the contrary, without predator, the population of grasshoppers rose tremendously and became an uncontrollable threat to the agriculture. For years, thousands of people die of hunger. Once shark is extinct, it is gone forever and a huge disaster will follow behind.

3. It is a brutal business. Shark meat has little commercial value. In shark finning, the shark is finned alive and its body is dumped into the sea, to save space for other more valuable fishes. Without fin, the shark can’t move and will die slowly and painfully. Their fins make up only 2% of their bodyweight. Such wasteful activity may not be very common in Malaysia, but you can’t tell from the soup. In Chinese culture, “cruelty begets ill fortune.” Animal lovers will not give a second thought to condemn such terrible act and reject this cruel delicacy. Every Chinese wedding is a horrifying news to sharks.

See page VI



Copyright © WWF-Malaysia/Eric Madeja



Copyright © WWF-Malaysia/Eric Madeja

Sharks have been the top predator since the age of dinosaurs. If they are removed from the food chain, it will create overpopulation of its preys, which feed on some of our favourite seafood. The extinction of one species leads to another