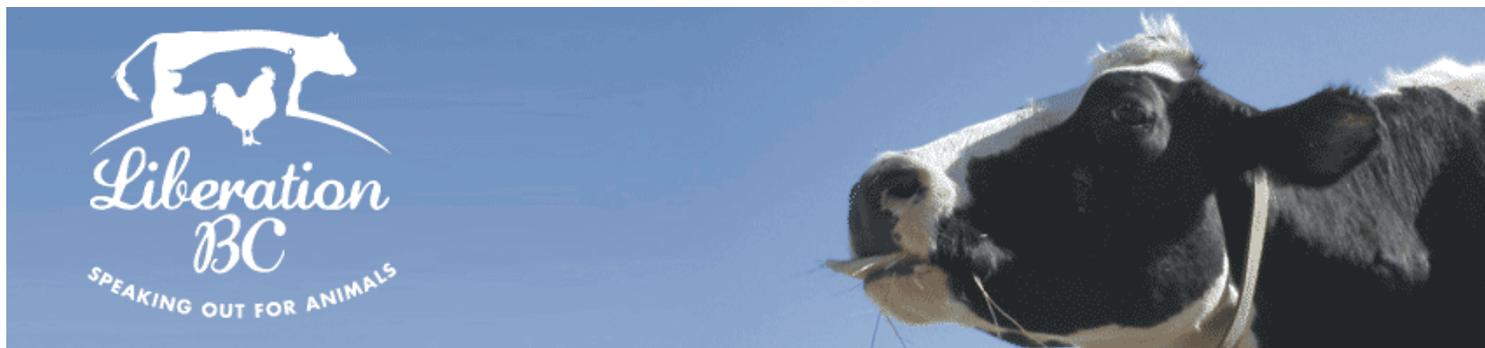


- [Home](#)

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# Aquarium captures endangered sharks for “educational purposes”

Written by Becci on October 15th, 2012

Despite the fact that sand tiger sharks are endangered, hunters working on behalf of Ripley Entertainment, Inc. recently received clearance from the United States government to capture ten of them “for educational purposes”. ([The Toronto Star](#)) Biologists claim that dozens of trips will be necessary to capture the 13,500 total specimens of fish, rays, and sharks, who will then be transported over the border to Ripley’s Aquarium of Canada, set to open next year in Toronto.

What do aquariums and zoos have to do with conservation and education?

Surprisingly little.

Despite outwardly confident claims of educational value, even the American Association of Zoos and Aquariums [the American counterpart to the Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums] admits that while there “...is some evidence of zoo experiences resulting in changes in visitors’ intention to act, there are few studies demonstrating actual changes in behavior.” Existing studies, however, indicate that zoos and aquariums do little to increase the public’s knowledge of animals and of conservation-related issues. ([more](#))

And did you know that...

...fewer than 5% to 10% of zoos, dolphinarium, and aquariums are actually involved in what would qualify as substantial conservation programs either in the wild or in captive settings, and even then, the amount spent on these programs is a “mere fraction” of their overall income. A study conducted in 1999 showed that parks belonging to the Association of Zoo and Aquariums donated about one-tenth of 1% of their annual operating budgets on conservation efforts. ([more](#))

Sand tiger sharks are in particular danger from shark finning, which is why the work of groups like [Shark Truth](#) and [VADL](#) is so important. (On a very related and positive note, Toronto recently banned the sale and possession of shark fin, as have the cities of Maple Ridge, Nanaimo, and North Vancouver right here in BC! If you’d like to help, you can sign a petition [here](#).) Similarly crucial is the protection of our oceans and their inhabitants, the majority of whom are in desperate straits thanks to our avarice for [seafood](#) and our continued indifference to pollution.

Ripley’s Aquarium of Canada claims that it will use the sand tiger sharks as a tool to educate people, especially children. “Sand tigers look like a mean, nasty shark, which makes them a powerful educational tool,” [vice-president of husbandry with Ripley Entertainment Inc., Joe] Choromanski said. “We get to say, hey, that’s not a man-eater.” ([article](#))

It's a nice sentiment, but it's also a pretty empty one. Sharks are not being killed en masse because we are afraid of them but because we are indifferent to their suffering and to the destruction of their home as long as it continues to benefit us. Teaching children that sharks exist to swim in circles in big fish tanks does nothing to protect and preserve them; in fact, according to David Hancock, former zoo director, "Zoos have painted themselves as saviors of the wild...I fear this has instilled a false sense of security in the public mind. Many people now believe they don't have to worry about saving animals, because zoos are doing the job."

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- [August 2012](#)
- [July 2012](#)
- [June 2012](#)
- [May 2012](#)
- [April 2012](#)
- [March 2012](#)
- [February 2012](#)
- [January 2012](#)
- [December 2011](#)
- [November 2011](#)
- [October 2011](#)
- [August 2011](#)
- [July 2011](#)
- [June 2011](#)
- [May 2011](#)
- [April 2011](#)
- [March 2011](#)
- [February 2011](#)

- [January 2011](#)
- [December 2010](#)
- [November 2010](#)
- [October 2010](#)
- [September 2010](#)
- [August 2010](#)
- [July 2010](#)
- [June 2010](#)
- [May 2010](#)
- [April 2010](#)
- [March 2010](#)
- [February 2010](#)
- [January 2010](#)
- [December 2009](#)
- [November 2009](#)
- [October 2009](#)
- [September 2009](#)
- [August 2009](#)
- [July 2009](#)
- [June 2009](#)
- [May 2009](#)
- [April 2009](#)
- [March 2009](#)
- [February 2009](#)
- [January 2009](#)
- [December 2008](#)
- Blogroll
  - [Animal Rights and AntiOppression](#)
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  - [Animals on Change.org](#)
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  - [Exposing the Big Game](#)
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  - [Vegan Dietitian](#)
  - [Vegan Soap Box](#)
  - [Vegans of Color](#)
  - [What the Hell Does a Vegan Eat Anyway?](#)
- Local blogs
  - [dawn of a new era](#)
  - [Hearts on Noses blog](#)
  - [Plate+Simple](#)
  - [The Face on My Plate](#)
  - [Vegan Mischief](#)
  - [Vegan Spoon](#)
- organizations
  - [Act Now For Animals](#)
  - [Action for Animals](#)
  - [Food Empowerment Project](#)
  - [Humane Myth](#)
  - [Let Live Foundation](#)
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