



FOR THE LOVE OF SHARKS!

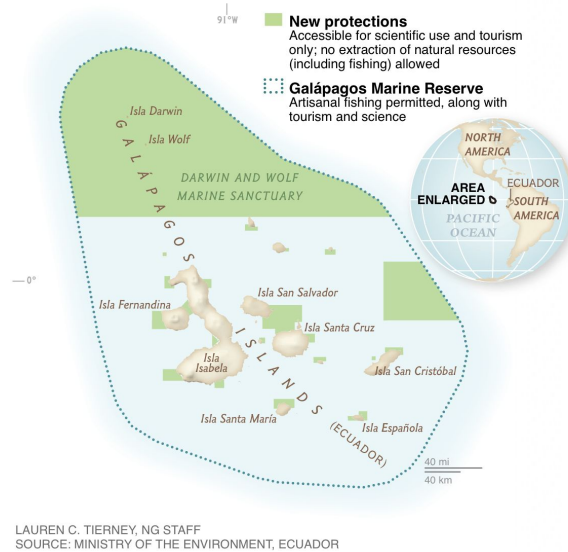
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Do you have a passion for all the beautiful nature on this planet? Do you love the vast blue ocean and all its abundant life? Do you care for our fellow members on this Earth, with whom we as humans form an incredibly biodiverse community?

If yes, this is a story you need to read. This is a true and perhaps difficult story to read, but it is one that teaches the importance of care, sympathy, action and striving beyond our current laws which place humans as owners of the rest of Nature.

This story begins on a Sunday in August 2017. At 6 in the morning, the captain on a Galápagos National Park patrol ship noticed a large Chinese vessel on the radar. The captain tried to connect with the vessel but all he heard was silence. Shortly after, the captain with three others decided to get on an inflatable boat and reach the suspicious vessel located about 64 km, 40 miles, northeast of the island San Cristóbal.

What is absolutely fundamental to understand here is that the area where the vessel was located is a *deeply* sacred space of the Galápagos National Park, especially for the fellow being we are learning about in this story. This area is a natural heritage and a marine sanctuary with the [world's highest abundance of sharks](#), specifically of rare and endangered species that need this sacred and protected space for mere survival. Hence, fishing is strictly off-limits here. However, this area where it is illegal to cross the marine sanctuary waters and catch, trade or transport sharks, has become a spot for fisherman striving to supply Asian markets with shark fins as a delicacy.



Source: [National Geographic News](#)

So, back to the story. The captain realized that the inflatable boat could not take them to the boat fast enough so he decided to cut their pursuit and report the vessel to park headquarters instead. Ecuadorian navy and park authorities decided to find the suspicious vessel sailing through the sacred marine sanctuary and board it. As they boarded the boat, they had no idea what to expect. As they began to investigate the vessel, they found around *300 tons* of marine species in huge piles on the vessel, including the brutally high number of *6626 dead endangered sharks* - including pregnant sharks and baby sharks.

This turned out to be the biggest seizure of sharks (and vessel) in the history of the Galápagos Islands, one of the world's natural heritage sites with such an essentially unique biodiversity that it cannot be found in any other part of the world. It was later revealed that the vessel, serving as a 100 meter long fridge, was in fact the “mothership” of many other smaller fishing boats which allowed them to fish illegally for a longer time out at sea. The crew, made up of 20 fishermen, were arrested, convicted of transporting protected species and [put in jail for only 1-3 years](#) of the killing of over 6600 protected and endangered sharks. Following the [verdict of the Provincial Court](#), the vessel was confiscated by the Ecuadorian state and the crew members got fines totalling [6.1 million US dollars](#).

In the end of January 2019, the environmental lawyer Hugo Echeverría, together with [CEDENMA](#) as the petitioner, handed in a [legal brief](#) of 26 pages - a document of arguments - based on the Rights of Nature to the Supreme Court ¹of Ecuador. This is the first case ever reaching the Supreme Court of Ecuador through a request related to Rights of Nature in a Galápagos context. However, this is not where the story ends, but rather where it transcends into the currently unwritten, where hope and action are the puzzle pieces for defining the end of this story.

¹ In Ecuador, this court is officially referred to as the National Court (Corte Nacional).



So, why am I telling you this story? Why do I think that this story is important for you to read? Why should we care about the sharks and why does it matter for the oceans and for us?

Lets begin with our our fellow beings that journey with us - the sharks - including the scalloped hammerhead shark that was the main species found on the vessel. The vast magical ocean has been the home of sharks for more than 400 million years and with the current [rate of around 100 million sharks being taken away from their home each year](#) - that is over *10,000 sharks every hour*, we might see a future without sharks, which is something to be gravely alarmed about. They are declining in population and more shark populations are in danger of extinction every year. What many do not know is [the essential role of the sharks](#) in the oceans, as they help to manage and maintain the health of marine ecosystems, provide essential food sources for scavengers, regulate species abundance, distribution and diversity. It is getting increasingly clear that healthy oceans undoubtedly depend on sharks.

In the report [Predators as Prey: Why Healthy Oceans Need Sharks](#), studies about what oceans would look like without sharks are presented. These studies argue that coral reefs would shift to algae dominated systems which affect the very survival of coral reefs, seagrass beds would decline, ecological chain reactions would be activated and there would be severe loss of habitat in the oceans. [As Sea Shepherd Australia puts it](#); *“They are a critical component in an ecosystem that provides 1/3 of our world with food, produces more oxygen than all the rainforests combined, removes half of the atmosphere’s anthropogenic carbon dioxide (greenhouse gas), and controls our planet’s temperature and weather.”* Let’s face it; our existence is, in many ways, dependent upon theirs.

According to [Galápagos Conservation Trust](#), over 100,000 tonnes of sharks have been taken from the Galápagos waters since 1950 when the fishing industry took off in the region. The irresponsible and reckless human impact on the marine ecosystem reveals something very important; we need to take responsibility in our actions as humans, and as part of a global Earth community which connects us all through a web of life. No matter if one wants to accept it or not, the truth is that the Earth and its species can and will survive without us. However, we are fundamentally dependent upon all of these ecosystems which we ourselves are destroying, irreversibly in many places, through our choices and human systems of law.

This story, and our fellow beings that share this natural space with us, the sharks, represent something bigger than a pure confiscation of a vessel and imprisonment of 20 fishermen. This goes much more beyond that. This story represents an urgent need for change, the importance of a balanced harmonious relationship between humans and the Earth, and an improved concept of justice where using a sanctuary for sharks, a sacred space, to transport



6626 dead sharks is not something that can even occur. Yes, Ecuador reacted positively and in favor of Nature in the sense that there was a case, a verdict and a penalty but the Supreme Court of Ecuador has the obligation to reason their decisions for crimes against Nature based on the Rights of Nature. Meanwhile, humanity itself has a responsibility as part of this planet's web of life to respect all of Nature, which includes this sensitive and vital sanctuary.

The reason for why the legal brief is such a milestone for the case regarding the illegal transportation of 6226 sharks through the Galapagos Marine Reserve is that it is the very first time that civil society has applied [article 71](#) of the Ecuadorian Constitution in a legal case, at Supreme Court level. So, what article 71 basically says is that Nature, where life is reproduced and carried out, has the right to be fully respected, and that *any* person, community, town or nationality can demand the fulfillment of the Rights of Nature from public authorities - such as the Supreme Court. Through article 71, the legal brief requests that judges of the Supreme Court of Ecuador ground their decisions on the Rights of Nature when they address crimes against Nature. It also requests these judges to ensure that the Rights of Nature are upheld and respected, as it is an obligation of the Ecuadorian State. This is a tremendous step forward for not only the shark case itself but for all of Nature as it attempts to defend, guarantee and solidify Nature's stand in human courts.

This milestone shows the level of true impact that you and I, and others who together with us shape civil society, can have if we only look further and reflect upon the notion that, when all is said and done, there is no real separation between humans and "nature". It's an idea of the mind, shaped through our own perception of the relationship with the world around us. At the end of the day, we are not defending nature but *we are in fact nature defending itself*. Hence, the time has come to unite, support and generate a deeper understanding of our relationship with the Earth so that we can connect the fundamental dots and protect the diverse web of life on Earth - for the love of sharks.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Share this article in your networks and channels.
- Learn about Rights of Nature as a legal concept and cultural vision [here](#).
- Create a petition requesting improved shark management, the ending of shark finning and/or the recognition of the rights of marine ecosystems and oceans.
- Inform and raise awareness by talking to your community about the shark case and the ocean perspective of the Rights of Nature.
- Mobilize your community together with NGOs and lawyers for the drafting of laws that recognize the rights of rivers, lakes, mountains and other vital ecosystems in your region.