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Bill Goldschmitt and Marisa Mangani

Killing sharks

Author bases opinions on personal experiences

By MADISON CHAPMAN
H-T Intern

Captain Bill "Sharkman" Goldschmitt is a character with a personality far larger than the gargantuan sharks he used to catch for a living. And his opinions are as colorful as the vibrant reefs he dives during his free time.

Unapologetically controversial, the shark fisherman has written a book with wife Marisa Mangani titled "Sharkman of Cortez" (\$23.95 sharkmanof-cortez.com/Amazon.com, \$17.96). The core of the book, and the focus of Goldschmitt's life, is hunting sharks.

The now 60-year-old came to the Sarasota area as a teenager, when he became a fisherman and first encountered sharks.

"They were pests, nuisances. I went to my fellow fishermen and said why don't we just kill them and sell them," Goldschmitt said in an interview. "Nobody really commercially fished for sharks in Florida back then. I dug

out a niche by selling them to crabbers for bait and at restaurants."

He also began bringing live sharks to scientists at Mote Marine Aquarium & Laboratory.

Early in his career, Goldschmitt was swimming off his boat with a girlfriend and his German shepherd when a hammerhead shark killed the dog.

"When you see a violent trauma like that, it really puts reality in perspective," Goldschmitt said. "I certainly don't look at them like cuddly creatures like Bambi." The book highlights the incident, which he says was an "emotional" and "defining" moment.

His attitude toward sharks goes beyond a healthy respect; he never swims in the ocean. Excitement, dislike verging on hatred and even admiration are present in Goldschmitt's voice when he talks about sharks. And it's his view of them as animals prone to consciously attacking that has generated controversy.

"The people at Mote always wanted to claim that the sharks really didn't mean to attack humans," said Goldschmitt. "Any time

I see some college educated idiot put out some theory, I think, he doesn't know what the hell he's talking about."

Scientists report that shark attacks are rare and easily avoided.

According to the International Shark Attack File (ISAF) run by the University of Florida, there have been 11 unprovoked attacks in Manatee and Sarasota counties in the last 127 years. Just 13 of the past 629 unprovoked attacks in Florida have been fatal. The average person is more likely to die of a lightning strike, alligator bite or tornado than a shark attack.

Goldschmitt said that his crusade against sharks is an effort to protect people. "So many of these environmentalists, they're really brutal, nasty, insensitive people. They act like they're concerned about animals but they look at humans like the scourge of the earth," Goldschmitt said.

He also blames sharks for the decline in the turtle population. And he supports Japanese whaling, wolf shooting and African elephant hunting. Yet Goldschmitt says he considers himself an environmentalist who believes in "sustainable use" of eco-systems.

Scientific data that shark populations have severely declined in recent years has led to restrictive laws on commercial shark fishing licenses and quotas.

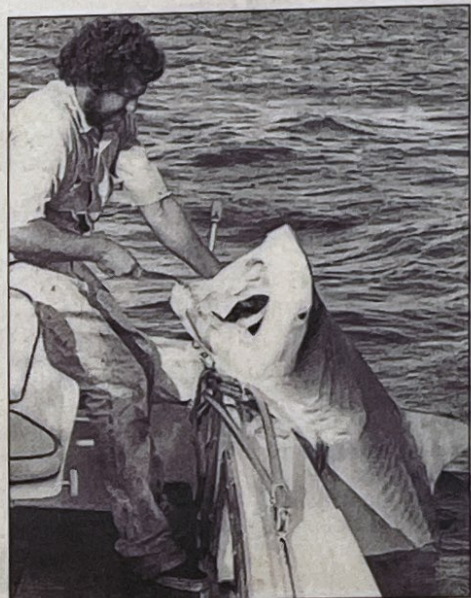
"We're at a different age now when it comes to shark conservation," Robert Hueter, Mote's director of shark research, told the Washington Post. "A lot of these species are in seriously bad shape."

Goldschmitt, who claims to have more than 4,000 kills to his name, still takes his wife and children shark fishing, but the hunt is not what it used to be. The once popular method of longlining sharks is illegal, many species such as dusky sharks are protected, and, apart from the few who obtain licenses, fisherman are restricted to rod-and-reel fishing from the shore.

However, Goldschmitt believes that the government has ulterior motives for protecting sharks.

"It's tied to the tourism industry," he said. He believes that the risk of shark attacks is downplayed in an effort to attract visitors.

"That is an absurd assertion. The fact is shark bites are very rare in our county," said Virginia Haley, president of the Sarasota Convention & Visitors Bureau. "When a person enters the ocean, you are entering a world of Mother Nature that is inhabited by creatures big and small. You are sharing



Bill Goldschmitt

those experiences with wild animals and visitors must always respect that."

Mangani is aware that her husband's views are controversial, but she believes his story is one that "needed to be told."

"There's scientists, there's press and then there's what people listen to. Things are getting stirred up a bit and I think that's great," she said.

In addition to Goldschmitt's opinions of sharks, Mangani wove tales from his love life into the book in the hopes of appealing to women. The authors say that the book has generated interest in creating a film about Goldschmitt's life. For now, the couple are working to promote the book and help tell what they call "the other side of the story."

"In the beginning, before the book was published, I was getting mostly negative response," Goldschmitt said. "Since the book has been out, the response has been totally reversed."