



Year-round sexual harassment amongst sharks

Groups of female sharks hide away to avoid unwanted sexual attention from males, research has shown.

Dr Victoria Wearmouth and colleagues studied the small-spotted catshark *Scyliorhinus canicula* (also known as the lesser spotted dogfish) and found that while females squeeze together into nooks and crannies in shallow water by day, the males occupy cooler water at depth. Whilst this behaviour was previously known, the new study uncovers the reasons behind it.

Male small-spotted catsharks know the location of these 'ladies only' spots and hang around at dawn and dusk to try and mate with females as they head out at night to feed and return in the morning.

The males are rarely tender in their advances, however, and stoop to tactics such as biting the female to manipulate her position prior to mating.

The benefit of hiding in female-only groups to limit injury and energy expended during mating attempts appears to outweigh the cost of females spending their days in shallow, warmer water.

Electronic tracking shows that this behaviour occurs year-round despite a cost to female reproduction during the warmest months.

Dr Wearmouth said: "This behaviour has implications for the biology and ecology of wild animal populations, and a better understanding of the processes underlying it allows us to provide improved scientific advice for management."

Dr Wearmouth's paper has just been recommended by the Faculty of 1000 (<http://f1000.com/717961035>). F1000 is an in-depth directory to the top articles in biology and medicine.

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Notes for editors:

Read the article in Ecological monographs <http://www.esajournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1890/11-2052.1>

Read more about the work of the Behavioural Ecology Laboratory at the Marine Biological Association <http://www.mba.ac.uk/simslab/>

Images can be obtained from: Guy Baker

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The Marine Biological Association (MBA) is a professional body for marine scientists with some 1200 members world-wide. Since 1884 the MBA has established itself as a leading marine biological research organization contributing to the work of several Nobel Laureates and over 170 Fellows of the Royal Society.