SSTP Final Report 2012-13
1. Background

The Scottish Shark Tagging Programme (SSTP) was set up by the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network (SSACN), an independent Scottish registered charity, in 2009. The programme was developed to provide direct feedback to Scottish anglers, encourage increased participation in the tagging programme within Scotland and to emphasise the conservation issues facing sharks in Scottish waters. The local economies of many rural coastal areas of Scotland are heavily predicated on recreational sea angling – particularly for sharks on a catch-and-release basis – it is hoped that conservation efforts could help safeguard the sustainable use of Scotland’s shared marine resources.

With funding secured from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Argyll and the Islands LEADER, phase 1 of the project enabled a full time Project Officer in Argyll, James Thorburn, to develop the project in 2010-11. With a second phase of funding secured from SNH, Argyll and the Islands LEADER and Dumfries & Galloway LEADER programmes for phase 2, Project Coordinators Julie Hope and Lewis Cowie were appointed in 2011. More information on phase 1 and 2 of the SSTP (including end of year reports) can be found in our reading room at http://www.ssacn.org/reading-room.

In 2012 funding from SNH and D&G LEADER was secured and Lewis Cowie was appointed as the Project Coordinator for phase 3 of the SSTP which aimed to build on previous work with a focus on the Dumfries & Galloway region. During phase 3 the D&G LEADER programme provided £23,005 (46.33% of the total project costs). This was matched by SNH and the remaining project costs contributed by SSACN in-kind. The project ran from July 2012 to July 2013.

Phase 3 of the SSTP aimed to:

- Collect data on shark species in Dumfries & Galloway.
- Develop and deliver educational outreach materials, events, workshops and school visits in Dumfries & Galloway with a focus on the marine environment and conservation issues.
- Increasing angler participation in the tagging programme; for both local and visiting anglers.
- Provide a free training programme to new and existing anglers and developing this material in line with new developments in legislation and available resources.
- Hold events to increase engagement with local angling communities and extend local community involvement.
- Initiate the interest of academic institutes or Government in the region.

Figure 1: Sharks like the tope (Galeorhinus galeus) shown above are considered data deficient. It is hoped that volunteer led tagging projects can help fill this knowledge gap.
2. Phase 3 Summary

Phase 3 of the SSTP achieved the following outputs and outcomes:

- Angler participation in the SSTP increased from 270 (May 2012) to 315+ (May 2013).
- In total 7 Dumfries & Galloway primary schools and 112 children took part in the educational visits, games and eggcase hunts on local shorelines and many more children were involved in fun days and events.
- The number of tag entries on the database was increased from 5,027 (May 2012) to 5,345 (July 2013). The total number of entries on the SSTP database – including all recapture data – is now 6,574.
- Initiated a partnership with the Isle of Man Wildlife Trust to help start the Isle of Man Small Shark Tagging Programme.
- The SSTP’s Facebook page now has 1,182 “likes” and each post reaches on average 800 users with an average weekly reach of over 1,700 individual users.
- Delivered presentations at various events including the Marine Alliance for Science and Technology for Scotland (MASTS) marine science evening as part of the Edinburgh Science Festival (200+ attendees) and the Logan Botanic Gardens as part of the D&G Wild Spring Festival.
- The SSTP and SSACN websites continue to grow at an average rate of 5.2% per month.
- Phase 3 saw the start of our sea angling taster sessions allowing children to gain more hands on experience in sea angling techniques and best practice.
- Development of sea fish identification guides to facilitate tagging programmes and responsible angling practices.
- Continued attendance at relevant conferences, stakeholder meetings and consultations to ensure that the work of the SSTP is promoted and data is used to contribute to national marine management plans.
- Awareness of the sharks and conservation issues was raised throughout the entire project through various press releases and information leaflets distributed to SSACN members, primary school pupils and the general public. All material is available in our online reading room below: http://www.ssacn.org/reading-room.

Figure 2: The SSTP’s Facebook page has grown from strength to strength in phase 3 and is a vital tool for engaging with anglers and sharing news.
3. Phase 3 Successes

- Phase 3 funding allowed the SSTP to purchase sets of beginners angling equipment meaning we were able to extend outreach activities beyond anything that had been possible before. With this new equipment we were able to deliver hands on recreational sea angling taster sessions allowing participants to try angling first hand. By providing equipment we were able to work with participants from any background and any level of ability. Feedback from all schools and youth groups has been extremely positive with many schools requesting additional visits or visits every term to teach their pupils about the fascinating marine life that is often just on their doorstep.

- During phase 3 we began working alongside the Isle of Man Wildlife Trust to aid the development of a Manx Small Shark Tagging Programme targeting tope and bull huss (two shark species that are extremely important for recreational sea anglers in the Solway). Given the proximity of the Isle of Man to the Solway strong linkages between the two areas are expected and it is hoped that tagging and management plans in Manx waters will ultimately benefit both areas.

- Unfortunately this year’s Sharkatag event (our largest national angling and tagging event which takes place in the Solway from bases at Brighouse Bay, Isle of Whithorn and Drummore) was marred by bad weather and south-westerly gales. As a result of the weather we were forced to cancel Friday and Saturday of the event however the weather improved for the Sunday allowing around 45 boats and over 100 anglers venture out to collect data on the sharks they catch. Anglers reported good catches of spurdog and three recaptures of tagged fish were recorded over the course of the event. We will have our fingers crossed for better weather next year!

- Over the past year we have maintained our involvement in the Scottish Marine Protected Area (MPA) Project, the aim of which is to establish a network of well managed MPAs in Scotland by
2016. SSTP data has been used by Marine Scotland and SNH in developing MPA sites for critically endangered common skate (Dipturus batis) populations. During phase 3 we have been part of the project advisory group and in July 2013 MPA sites were put to public consultation identifying the SSACN and SSTP as an important body in the future monitoring of MPA sites for skate.

- Continued involvement with academic institutes and providing data for two ongoing PhD projects with the University of Aberdeen. One project is using SSTP data as a foundation for genetic research into tope (Galeorhinus galeus) at a European level and one is using SSTP data to model the movements of common skate around Scottish waters.

- Creation and distribution of pocket-sized fish identification books: these key ring sized waterproof booklets are available to anglers to help aid correct identification of fish species increasing the quality of data collected through the SSTP.
4. Phase 2 Expenditure & Marketing

Marketing of the SSTP during phase 3 was undertaken in several ways, the most significant of which is through the distribution of fliers at events, in local tackle shops and at tackle trade shows/exhibitions. This was in part aided by working alongside tackle distributors to ensure that leaflets and booklets are distributed to tackle shops.

We have continued working alongside the Glasgow Angling Centre (GAC). The GAC is the largest fishing tackle company in Europe and much of its work is carried out on a mail order basis. During phase 3 we were able to circulate SSTP fliers inside GAC catalogues which are sent out directly to their mailing list of over 35,000 individuals. In addition the GAC included SSTP fliers in all sea angling tackle mail orders resulting in an overall circulation of more than 50,000 SSTP fliers between February and June 2013. Posters advertising SSTP events were displayed in many major fishing tackle shops throughout Scotland.

Sharkatag received good press coverage as shown below and was featured in The Sun, The Galloway Gazette, and Dumfries Courier. Unfortunately the poor weather on the weekend of the event meant that a designated press day boat trip had to be cancelled (the trip would have included reporters from D&G Life, Dumfries Standard and The Sun who were preparing pieces on the event).

Figure 7: SSTP A5 fliers advertising the programme and our Sharkatag event in the Solway were distributed to over 35,000 individuals through the Glasgow Angling Centre. Fliers were also distributed at events and through local tackle shops contributing to an overall circulation of over 50,000 fliers and several hundred posters during SSTP Phase 3.
Figure 8: Scanned copies of SSTP Phase 3 press coverage from the Dumfries Courier (top left), The Sun (top right) and Galloway Gazette (bottom).

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5. Project Activities

5.1 Outreach
A total of 112 children from six primary schools and one secondary school participated in the educational visits which included presentations on sharks and native marine life, marine and outdoor activities, shark egg-case hunts, rock pooling, and sea angling taster sessions.

School visits proved extremely popular with pupils and teachers alike and as a result the numbers reached exceeded SSTP phase 3 Leader target groups. As part of the project we also attended several events including talks at the Logan Botanic Garden and gala days though we were unable to accurately record attendance we estimate that more than 50 individuals were involved.

Due to the popularity of the educational visits and the numerous requests for return visits, the educational pack has been updated throughout phase 3 and will soon be available on the SSTP website for teachers to download for in-house lessons and activities based on sharks, marine life and conservation. Our educational pack now includes sections on responsible behaviour (e.g taking home all your litter from the beach) and recreational sea angling.

5.2 Tagging Events
The popularity of SSACN’s national tagging events continues to grow. A total of three tagging events were held throughout phase 3 around Scotland. Tagging events are non-competitive and friendly, as a result they have proved extremely popular with non-anglers or beginners who see the events as a way to try something new.

Figure 9: SSTP educational sessions focus on outdoor activities related to marine conservation and recreational sea angling.

Figure 10: Anglers launch their boats on Drummore beach for the start of Sharkatag 2013.
Our flagship event, known as Sharkatag, is held in Dumfries & Galloway from 3 main bases in Brighouse Bay, Isle of Whithorn and Drummore. Sharkatag regularly attracts more than 300 anglers (boat, shore and kayak) who target sharks in the Solway and tag the fish they catch.

Unfortunately this year’s event on the weekend of 14-16th June was hindered by bad weather: unseasonal gales and extremely rough seas forced the cancellation of the event on Friday and Saturday in the interest of ensuring the safety of all participants. Thankfully the winds eased on Sunday allowing around 100 anglers and 45 boats to venture out. Anglers from Brighouse Bay and Isle of Whithorn enjoyed good catches of spurdog (*Squalus acanthias*) and bull huss (*Scyliorhinus stellaris*) whilst those out of Drummore reported good catches of tope. Interestingly three tagged fish were recaptured during the event having been originally tagged in the Solway between one and two years previously. This data helps show that although many of our sharks migrate thousands of miles each year they do come back to the same places year after year.

5.3 Training Sessions

Many individual or small training sessions have been held during phase 3 to teach interested anglers how to handle small sharks and to collect data and use SSTP tagging equipment safely. In addition larger training sessions have been delivered including sessions with the Silver Lure Sea Angling Clubs and talks with the Ayr Sea Angling Clubs, two of the largest and most active angling clubs in Scotland. In total full data was recorded for 63 attendees, well exceeding our goals for phase 3 of the SSTP, the actual number of attendees was higher but not all participants completed attendance forms.
6. Budget and D&G LEADER

The final spend for the project was £44,219.80 (of £49,654 grant awarded), the slight under-spend on the project was largely a result of internal cash flow issues that limited the money available to SSACN spend each quarter prior to receiving money back from D&G LEADER.

Phase 3 was applied for under the LEADER issue to “Safeguard, improve and promote habitats for wildlife”, which has undoubtedly been addressed. Most significant amongst our achievements has been our continued involvement in the ongoing Scottish MPA Project has also been a significant step forward. At the time of writing, our MPA proposals (based on the conservation of critically endangered Common Skate) for the Sound of Jura, Firth of Lorne, Sound of Mull and Loch Sunart have progressed to the next stage of the process were put to public consultation in July 2013. Following the consultation period advice will be provided to Scottish Ministers with the goal of having a coherent, well managed network of protected areas in Scottish waters by 2016.

Crucially, in SNH’s recommendations to Scottish Ministers the contribution of SSACN and SSTP data is recognised and SNH propose “discussion with SSACN on the sharing of the SSTP data in order to monitor the site” - [http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A1002794.pdf](http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A1002794.pdf). In addition to our MPA work, SSTP data was used to contribute to the ongoing Luce Bay Management Plan consultation which was supposed to be finalised by November 2011. At the time of writing the outcome of this consultation is still unknown.

Perhaps most significantly this work has helped local communities (and in particular children) explore and enjoy their local marine environment in a way that might not have been previously available. Integral to this was the new equipment and resources made available to us through the funding from the D&G LEADER programme and SNH. By providing equipment we are able to ensure that nobody is excluded from our educational activities, something that is a permanent goal of SSACN.

Our work has also helped show the gaps that exist in current knowledge; as a result the Government has stated that further research on Common Skate will be carried out over the next few years with a particular focus on the Western Isles and Orkney (areas shown to be important through voluntary tagging). It is hoped that phase 4 of the SSTP might help aid this work. Many lessons have been learned through phase 3, foremost of which is that people are eager to get involved and explore their local marine environment when the appropriate resources and expertise and made available. We have received overwhelming support, particularly from primary schools, with almost all schools involved asking if SSTP visits could become an annual event.

Figure 12: School visits have once again proved extremely popular with pupils and teachers alike. Practical sessions have covered topics from rock-pooling to bait collecting and angling however all practical sessions have a strong focus on behaving responsibly and respecting the environment.
7. The Future of the SSTP

SSACN is currently in the process of seeking funding for phase 4 of the SSTP: phase 4 will aim to build on previous successes and will focus on:

- Expanding the project to new areas of Scotland: to date effort has been focused on Dumfries & Galloway and the Argyll regions, however phase 4 will aim to expand into the north-west of Scotland and Isles.

- Increase sharing of data and establish a process to share data and work alongside other elasmobranch tagging projects.

- Improved accessibility of the SSTP educational outreach programme by developing partnerships and maximising the use of internet technologies.

Please keep up to date with all developments and show your continued support at [www.ssacn.org](http://www.ssacn.org) and [www.tagsharks.com](http://www.tagsharks.com).

We would once again like to say a huge thank you to all our members, volunteers and funders for your support during phase 3 of the Scottish Shark Tagging Programme – without your support none of this would have been possible.

Thank you!!

The Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network - [www.ssacn.org](http://www.ssacn.org) – [contact@ssacn.org](mailto:contact@ssacn.org)
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