



MAKING WAVES IN CONSERVATION

Hanli Prinsloo, an iconic South African freediver and creator of the I AM WATER Trust, travelled to Cocos Island as part of an international expedition and high profile documentary film project to raise awareness about the plight of the sharks in our oceans. Eugene Yiga caught up with her to find out more.

Could you tell us more about yourself?

My path to the sea was a roundabout one. I grew up on a horse farm outside Pretoria, studied acting and filmmaking in Sweden, and came back to South Africa to focus all my energy on ocean conservation.

What does I AM WATER do?

At I AM WATER, we believe in ocean conservation through human experience. Our projects focus on getting youth and children who have never had the chance to swim or snorkel in the ocean. I measure privilege by a child's access to water: from clean drinking water to learning to swim and experiencing the world below the blue surface.

How was your trip to Cocos Island?

Peter Marshall and I were invited to join Dr Sylvia Earle and Mission Blue on this incredible expedition to highlight the marine life, and especially the sharks, of Cocos Island. We were joined on the boat by Adrian Grenier (Entourage actor, activist and currently working on his 'Lonely Whale' project), Ocean Ramsey ('One Ocean Diving', freediver and 'Water Inspired' shark researcher), and Julie Andersen (founder of 'Shark Angels'). As well as, Stephanie Ruhle (the face of Market Movers on Bloomberg TV), Professor Jorge Cortes (our intrepid storyteller from Fusion Network), and Nicolas Iburguen (coral reef expert and author).

Five magnificent days of diving saw us meeting the enigmatic hammerhead sharks,

an elusive tiger shark, juvenile whitetip reef sharks, huge schools of jack fish, and electric bait balls alive with sharks, dolphins, and booby birds. On the DeepSee submersible, we saw the largest ragged-tooth shark I had ever seen. The next day, freediving through 25-metre deep and more than 30-metre long tunnels with raging current, we were met by eaglerays on the way up.

Could you tell us more about your work with sharks?

I love teaching people about freediving and giving them the opportunity to encounter sharks; it's an immediate understanding that we aren't on the menu. My passion is telling stories that touch hearts and change minds. If there's a creature out there that needs to touch hearts and change minds, it's the shark!



Image courtesy of Hanli Prinsloo

What surprising things have you learned about sharks?

The diversity! There are so many different kinds of sharks, with as many different kinds of personalities. It's almost like different kinds of dogs being unique. I sometimes play this game where I compare sharks to dogs. It's a language many people understand better than philosophical descriptions about the natures of specific shark species.

What is being done to save the sharks?

There are many great organisations working with shark conservation, research and awareness, from big organisations such as WWF to small enigmatic ones such as Shark Angels and Water Inspired. In South Africa, we

have the Shark Spotters in Cape Town who offer a groundbreaking alternative to shark nets like those that we have in Durban.

What is your ultimate goal for the foundation?

I AM WATER is dedicated to ocean conservation through human experience, teaching underprivileged kids and youth to swim and snorkel, and getting them to experience and love our beautiful oceans. We have projects in South Africa, Mozambique, and Bermuda, while getting set up in Maldives, Ecuador, and California.

What is your ultimate goal for yourself?

My goals and those of I AM WATER have

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become interwoven. However, I want to stay motivated and happy in my work, find a balance between work and play, and spend as much time in the ocean I can!

Hanli believes that education is the key! She encourages you to help share knowledge about sharks, their behaviour, and vulnerability. To stay in touch with I AM WATER and their projects, they often do outreach work in South Africa, go to www.iamwaterfoundation.org

I AM WATER Trust is a registered Charitable Trust with NPO number : 081-667-NPO. R