



The State of the Ocean's Animals



Introduction

We have always been drawn to the edge of the sea, to the rhythms of nature, the power of the surf, and the urgency of the tides. Above all, we were tempted by the mystery of the unknown. But when we finally found ways to venture into the deep, what we discovered was beyond our wildest imagination.

Beneath the surface was an unspoiled universe of natural beauty, a living tapestry of biological diversity, a landscape overflowing with the promise of an inexhaustible resource. But contrary to what we always believed, the abundance of ocean animals is in reality, an environmental illusion.

Today, our oceans are fast becoming dead zones, and marine animals are telling us that something is going terribly wrong. Their mute pleas speak volumes about the unfolding drama. What was once ablaze with color, is rapidly becoming a world without life. How could we have allowed so many of our marine animals to be on the brink of extinction?

Our search for an answer to this question begins seventy-five miles off the coast of New England where a sixty-foot trawler is in search of Atlantic cod. Tony Sao Marcos is on the first leg of a two-week trip. At first light the crew begins setting the first drag of the day. They work with a sense of urgency. To cover the cost of the trip, and earn a decent wage, they must catch at least 3000 pounds of fish each day. Once the drag is set, all they can do is wait. These are uneasy hours, everyone knows that New England's Cod catch is at its lowest point in recorded history. But the crew has few options. This is the life they have chosen.

Tony fishes out of New Bedford, Massachusetts. Today much of the commercial fleet here lies idle. Marine scientists have found that the cod fishery, once the richest in the world, has almost disappeared. Peeling paint and rusting hulls are symbols of an industry and a community in trouble.

Back on board, after almost two hours of trawling the crew anxiously waits for the drag net to come aboard. When the catch is finally counted, it becomes clear that this will not be their lucky day. Instead, they have become victims, struggling to survive in world where many ocean species are nearly gone.

Stalking the world's oceans are thousands of giant 400-foot trawlers. Some people call them floating "fish factories", others call them "killing machines." With nine thousand foot nets sweeping up everything in their path, these ocean monsters are literally clear-cutting the deep sea. They can catch as much as one million pounds of fish in a single day. Ironically, the commercial fishing industry calls it "the harvesting the world's oceans." But harvesting implies planting. The reality is the industrial trawlers of the world simply wander the seas, scooping up whatever they can find.



The urgency to avoid the loss of the world's ocean animals presents us with enormous challenges. Day and night these floating factories process and freeze everything right on board. Whatever is unsaleable is discarded. The amount of by-catch is staggering. Each year over 50 billion pounds of fish are killed and then thrown back into the sea. The impact on the developing world is enormous, particularly on the fisheries off the coast of Africa, in places like Senegal. There, local fishermen can't possibly compete with mechanized trawlers from distant shores. The result is severe food shortages for those living along the coast.

This raises a fundamental question that is at the very heart of our investigation. What is it in our nature that has allowed us to put so many people and the animals they depend upon in such peril?

The urgency to avoid the loss of the world's ocean's animals presents us with enormous challenges. What we need now are the efforts of people everywhere, all those who are willing to find ways to strike the right balance, between what we want, and what nature can provide.

Though separated by distance and culture, for the six and a half billion people who draw sustenance from the rich diversity of the natural world, there are common bonds. Bonds that are renewed by each generation, bringing new ideas, new attitudes, new hope for the state of the ocean's animals.



Explore the program chapters:

- New England Cod
 - Our oceans are fast becoming dead zones due to overfishing and pollution. Most of the New Bedford commercial fishing fleet lies idle.
- The Killing Machines...
 - Stalking the world's oceans are thousands of giant 400-foot trawlers with 9,000-foot nets sweeping up everything in their path – clear-cutting the deep sea. Twenty-five percent of everything caught is not marketable and gets thrown back overboard – dead and wasted.
- Sharks
 - Each year nearly 100 million sharks are slaughtered. Most often their fins are cut off while they are still alive. Then the sharks are thrown back into the ocean where they drown or bleed to death. Thriving economies and the demonization of the species make it easy to ignore the scale of the slaughter. Peter Benchley laments writing the novel “Jaws” – later the movie of the same name – that demonizes sharks. “If there is one thing I know for dead certain is that I couldn’t possibly write Jaws today. I could not turn this beautiful beast into a villain.”



- Sea Turtles
 - Like most other marine species, sea turtles are desperately trying to survive the perils of the industrial age. Each year hundreds of thousands are drowned in fishing nets or killed as by-catch by the fishing industry. This has put an entire species on the brink of extinction.
- Emperor Penguins
 - Global warming is beginning to melt the sea ice surrounding the Antarctic and it could lead to the extinction of the Emperor Penguin species.
- Climate Change and the Oceans
 - Climate change affects everything. All the organisms that live in the ocean are used to being bathed in it, are used to its temperature, are used to where the ocean currents flow and all those things change with global climate change. The way whales for example move back and forth. Where they feed, where they breed is set in their migratory brains but how are they going to figure out where to move when the climate changes.
- Klamath River
 - Along the Klamath River watershed, forests were clear-cut and wetland ecosystems were destroyed. A series of dams were built to generate electricity and irrigate farmland. The Yurok Tribe, native fishermen for millennia, have lead the fight to remove the dams along the Klamath and bring the river back to its natural state where salmon are plentiful.
- Dolphins
 - Photojournalist and activist Hardy Jones works to inform the world and put an end to the annual dolphin slaughter in Taiji, Japan.
- Sea Otters
 - California's Monterey Bay overlooks one of the most diverse marine ecosystems in the world. But until recently it was a dead zone lacking the kelp forest needed to support life. The protection and revitalization of the sea otter population, which was nearly extinct, has brought back the health and ecosystem of the Bay.



Points of View:

Sylvia Earle, Deep Ocean Exploration and Research

Although we talk about harvesting the sea, it's a misuse of the word if ever there was a misuse. We don't plant fish in the ocean. We go out like hunters and gatherers, track them down, find them, extract them.

In half a century we have lost on the order of 90 percent of the big fish in the ocean. I say lost, actually, we haven't lost them. We've consumed them. We've eaten them. We've captured them.

Though our fish markets may give the impression of an inexhaustible resource, what we are really seeing is the consumption of the final 10 percent of the world's fisheries.

Carl Safina, The Safina Center at Stony Brook University (Blue Ocean Institute)

About a quarter of everything that is caught in the ocean, is not wanted or not marketable or not as valuable as some of the other catch so it goes overboard.

As northern waters have been depleted some of the fishing boats from places like Europe are turned south and have started fishing very intensively off African countries.

It's sometimes very easy to get depressed about a lot of bad news in the ocean. And the oceans are sick but they are not dying yet. They, they may be down but they are by no means out.

Roger Payne, Ocean Alliance

One point eight billion people have as their principal source of animal protein fish from the sea, seafood basically, and what happens if you remove from those 1.8 billion people their major source of animal protein? Well, I think you have a problem.

We could be the most beloved generation that ever lived or we could be the most vilified generation that ever lived because people will know that we understood the problems and didn't do anything about them.

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