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## Help record shark sightings

SHARK researchers are calling on Esperance residents to become citizen scientists and help them identify and record shark sightings.

Locals who come across sharks are asked to use a camera phone to record the encounters, or submit sightings seen in the news or internet in a bid to help shark researchers in their work to gain an understanding of their population status, to better understand the distribution and population structure of sharks around the world and also advance community education.

The researchers from the Neuroecology Group at the University of Western Australia are asking for the public's help to identify and record shark sightings from around the world, using their new Citizen Science project, SharkBase, [shark-base.org](http://shark-base.org).

SharkBase is a new global shark encounter database established to help in the process of mapping the distribution of sharks worldwide through the help of citizen scientists.

Without even encountering a shark in the wild, it is still possible to contribute to SharkBase by submitting sightings seen in the news or on the internet.

Lead researcher behind the project Dr Ryan Kempster said researchers spent countless hours and dollars trying to find and study sharks, but with advances in modern technology almost everyone now had access to a camera phone that they could use to record wildlife encounters.

“Through SharkBase, we now have a place to bring all of these sightings together, to be used by scientists, to better understand the distribution and population structure of sharks around the world,” Dr Kempster said.

“Effective management of sharks starts with an understanding of their population status, which will ultimately instruct their future conservation.

“Unfortunately, many shark species are at significant risk of unrecoverable decline, with some species having declined to near extinction in recent years.

“We believe that citizen science could hold the key to improving our understanding and management of shark populations, while also advancing community education.”

Fellow researcher Channing Egeberg said SharkBase would build a global network of citizen shark scientists collecting vital information about the distribution of shark species worldwide.

“Using the data gathered by SharkBase, we will not only be able to map the distribution of sharks globally, but, as sharks play a vital role in marine environments, we can also use this information to infer patterns of marine ecosystem health,” Ms Egeberg said.

The researchers are also appealing to dive clubs and other marine societies to encourage their members to get involved and start submitting their shark sightings.