



Vancouver

Sharks honoured on new Canadian postage stamps

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VANCOUVER—The shark is joining the ranks of beloved Canadian animals like the beaver and grizzly bear on a postage stamp.

Canada Post unveiled new stamps Thursday that feature five sharks that either live in or are visitors to Canadian waters: the Greenland shark, basking shark, blue shark, mako shark and the great white shark. Sharks are found in all three oceans that touch Canada's shores.

The often misunderstood animals deserve more love, said researcher Madeline Cashion, who just completed a master's thesis at the University of British Columbia.

"I think they are more charismatic than whales," she said. "They have been on this earth longer than trees. They have perfected every type of lifestyle in the ocean."

But scientists say sharks all over the world are now threatened by rising ocean temperatures, overfishing and byfishing, through which sharks are accidentally caught in fishing gear.

Changing ocean conditions may push sharks like the great white shark to places where they have never been seen before. They may one day be spotted as far north as Canada's arctic, said William Cheung, an associate professor with UBC's Institute of Oceans and Fisheries.

"These large sharks, they have really strong ability to follow ocean conditions," said William Cheung, an associate professor at the Institute of Oceans and Fisheries at the University of British Columbia.

"When ocean conditions become suitable for them, it is not unrealistic that they can shift to a new range within a short time period."

For now, the great white shark remains an infrequent visitor to Canada. But the charismatic fish are ambassadors for their kind and some even have Twitter accounts, managed by scientists who record their movements. Savannah, George, Norris, and Hilton are all white sharks that researchers have tracked up and down North America's east coast.

Three of the sharks featured on the stamps unveiled Thursday are indigenous to Canadian waters — the blue shark, the basking shark and the Greenland shark.

The migratory blue shark frequents Canadian waters and feeds mostly on other fish, including herring, tuna and swordfish. It is often accidentally caught in fishing gear, said Cashion.

Basking sharks are gentle giants that graze near the ocean's surface for plankton. They were once common in B.C. but were hunted to near extinction in the 1900s. In recent years, there have been a handful of sightings in the Pacific, according to Cashion. Scientists hope it's a sign the bus-sized fish are making a comeback.

The elusive Greenland shark is an apex predator that lives on the eastern side of Canada's arctic. It can live up to 500 years, according to Danny Kent and Lee Newman, curators at the Vancouver Aquarium.

The two researchers helped Canada Post pick out which five sharks would be featured on the stamps. There are about 30 sharks that either live in or are visitors of Canadian waters.

“What we ended up with is a nice mix of truly Canadian sharks and a couple of visitors,” Kent said.

Wanyee Li is a Vancouver-based reporter covering urban affairs and new technology. Follow her on Twitter: @wanyeelii

Canada Post released a set of five stamps featuring sharks species at the Vancouver Aquarium on Thursday. Jessica McDonald and Max Watty, 8, unveil the shortfin mako stamp. Children take a look at the newly unveiled stamps featuring Canada's sharks.

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