Shark Diving in Fiji

Thanks to a spur of the moment email sent over 8 months ago, I spent my summer face to face with 50+ bull sharks on a daily basis. They, however, were just an added bonus to my time diving within the Shark Reef Marine Reserve - a shark provisioning site in Fiji – as the actual research work for my placement was to study species specific boldness in the less daunting blacktip, whitetip, and grey reef sharks.

After discussing how I would gather the data with my supervisor (who I am yet to meet!) and securing funding for the project I headed across the world at the end of June.

Any apprehension I had of diving into waters riddled with bull sharks was squandered within five minutes of my first dive thanks to the professional activity and friendly nature of the guys at Beqa Adventure Divers. I initially had to identify each individual reef shark and find the best position from which to record each dive with my video camera. Then, during each feeding session I would record the species, sex and name of each shark that approached and was hand fed by the dive guide “feeder”. The specific sharks who approached and fed from the feeder most often were classed as ‘bold’.

Over the following weeks a number of difficulties in collecting sound data within a
challenging environment became apparent. First a week of incredible surge over the reef made the shallowest feeding site inaccessible and then problems with my ears prevented me from diving deeper than 3m. Finally the presence of a tiger shark looming behind me was slightly disconcerting and needless to say my attention quickly turned away from the reef sharks which suddenly seemed almost puppy like in comparison!

In total I identified over 35 individual reef sharks, spent over 62 hours underwater and logged 75 dives within the marine reserve. I thoroughly enjoyed my placement; it was a great experience that gave me the chance to work independently on a subject which has never been researched before in sharks. The sharks in Fiji were awesome but it was really the people I stayed and worked with that also made my time there so enjoyable.