

VAL'S THE GAL!

On 4 April 2005 we successfully released our second large female ragged-tooth shark, Val, off Saxon Reef near Arniston. This release follows the release of Maxine on 18 March 2004 and was part of the Save Our Seas Foundation Maxine, Science, Education and Awareness (M-Sea) Programme, an AfriOceans Conservation Alliance initiative.

After a long, slow journey from Cape Town, we were met by a crowd of curious bystanders at the Struisbaai harbour where we proceeded to transfer Val from the truck into a holding tank on the boat. Mike Meyer of Marine and Coastal Management tagged Val with a satellite PAT tag, an ultrasonic tag and a spaghetti tag.

The ride through choppy seas to the release point seemed to take forever, but eventually we found a reasonably sheltered spot off Saxon Reef. Val was launched off the side of the boat and she quickly sank to the sandy bottom at about 7 metres in about 3 –4 metres of visibility. She was somewhat disorientated and required help from Aquarium aquarists Gerhard Beukes and Claire Taylor, and AfriOceans Conservation Alliance Director, Lesley Rochat, to keep her from rolling onto her sides. She took longer to perk up than Maxine, but soon enough her instincts kicked in and she bolted to the surface for air, leaving the divers behind.

Fortunately, one of the underwater photographers, Chad Henning, found her again and continued to swim with her for a few minutes. He reported that she was swimming strongly and he eventually could not keep up with her.

The following day a team from the Aquarium as well as Lesley Rochat and Mike Meyer went out to sea again to catch a wild raggie to tag and release. After much fishing, they finally caught a handsome raggie of around 2 and half metres in length and weighing an estimated 160kg (Val was approximately 3m in length and weighed about 215kg). Once again Mike Meyer attached a PAT tag, an ultrasonic tag and a spaghetti tag to this shark. We hope that the tags on Val and on Sam (the name given to the wild shark) will both successfully surface and download their data so that we can compare the behaviour of the released captive animals to that of the wild shark.