

per cent of people who do not own a dog and might welcome a clean natural retreat.

Mary Robins, Weymouth

*Melissa Harrison replies: 'Thinking of the wildlife' is the best reason to allow dogs at reserves – albeit with clear, on-site guidelines. We need to reconnect people with nature by widening access to it.*

Thank you to Melissa Harrison, as her piece raises an important discussion about dog disturbance on nature reserves – and whether to ban or engage? It's timely, as my local water vole population is suffering due to dogs in the river, but I agree that community conversation is the solution.

Iain Green, via Twitter

*Melissa Harrison replies: Most of the UK's 8 million cats roam unattended. As obligate carnivores and instinctive hunters a high percentage kill birds and mammals, and their faeces, which nobody picks up, carry a far higher health risk than dogs'. Drastically reducing cat ownership is the community conversation I'd like to have!*

As a dog owner, I read Melissa's article with interest. The main issue is how the dogs are perceived by wildlife. To birds and small mammals, they are seen as predators and cause stress. Remember Bill Oddie approaching a fairy tern when the hidden microphone indicated the bird's increasing heart rate. Unfortunately, I agree that dogs should be kept out of reserves.

Mervin Nethercoat, Beverley

*Melissa Harrison replies: Humans are also predators, and our presence causes stress to animals. Unless we can remove ourselves, we must accept that all our activities cause harm of some kind.*

Melissa takes Scout for a walk



## TALES FROM THE BUSH

# Meet Rasta, the friendly great white shark

Shark conservationist Kathryn Curzon has encountered many great whites, but one defied all her expectations.

Have a wild tale to tell? If so, please email a brief synopsis to [wildlifemagazine@immediate.co.uk](mailto:wildlifemagazine@immediate.co.uk)



**Making a splash:** Rasta pops up in South Africa's False Bay.

I remember the first time I met Rasta as if it were yesterday. It was the middle of a cold South African winter and we were in our tiny boat, buffeted by winds and bracing ourselves against the swell at Seal Island in False Bay. The island is home to around 64,000 noisy Cape fur seals and the bay is famous for great white sharks that hunt the young seals each winter. Wrapped up against the biting pre-dawn cold, we watched the sharks hunting each day before dropping anchor and attracting the sharks to our boat.

Shark personalities are as distinct and varied as people and I came to know sharks that were confident, chasing the bait and twisting their bodies at speed, plus cautious sharks that kept their distance. Black White Black, named after his tag's colour, was an incredibly fast shark who kept the bait handler on his toes and didn't pause for a moment. He was typical of what people expect of the great white, but then Rasta arrived and changed everything.

I had heard a great deal about Rasta from the skipper and crew when we were waiting for sharks to appear. I had hoped to see her all week, as she was clearly a favourite shark of theirs and sounded very unique. Without

**“Rasta rolled onto her side and exposed her large white belly to us all.”**

warning she was suddenly there. She cruised slowly, leisurely, to the back of the boat and paused, looking up at us. Ignoring the bait completely, she swam slowly along the side of the boat and spy-hopped; lifting her head high out of the water and peering into the boat before dipping down into the cold

water. We were mesmerised by her as she repeated this action and moved to the other side of the boat. She rolled onto her side and exposed her large white belly to us all.

Returning to the back of the boat, Rasta lifted her head and placed her chin on the dive step. I couldn't believe it and watched as the skipper crouched down inches from her snout. They looked at each other for what felt like a lifetime. That interaction defied every image of great whites I had ever seen in the press. Rasta, named because of how laid-back she was, always behaved that way around the boat and she continued to do so in the years to come as we watched her grow. It was the greatest privilege of my life meeting such an intelligent shark. 🐡



**KATHRYN CURZON** is a marine writer and is co-founder of Friends of Sharks. See [friendsforsharks.com](http://friendsforsharks.com)

Kathryn Curzon

### QUIZ ANSWERS (see p91)

The Wild Words are: 1C, 2B, 3A, 4B, 5B, 6A