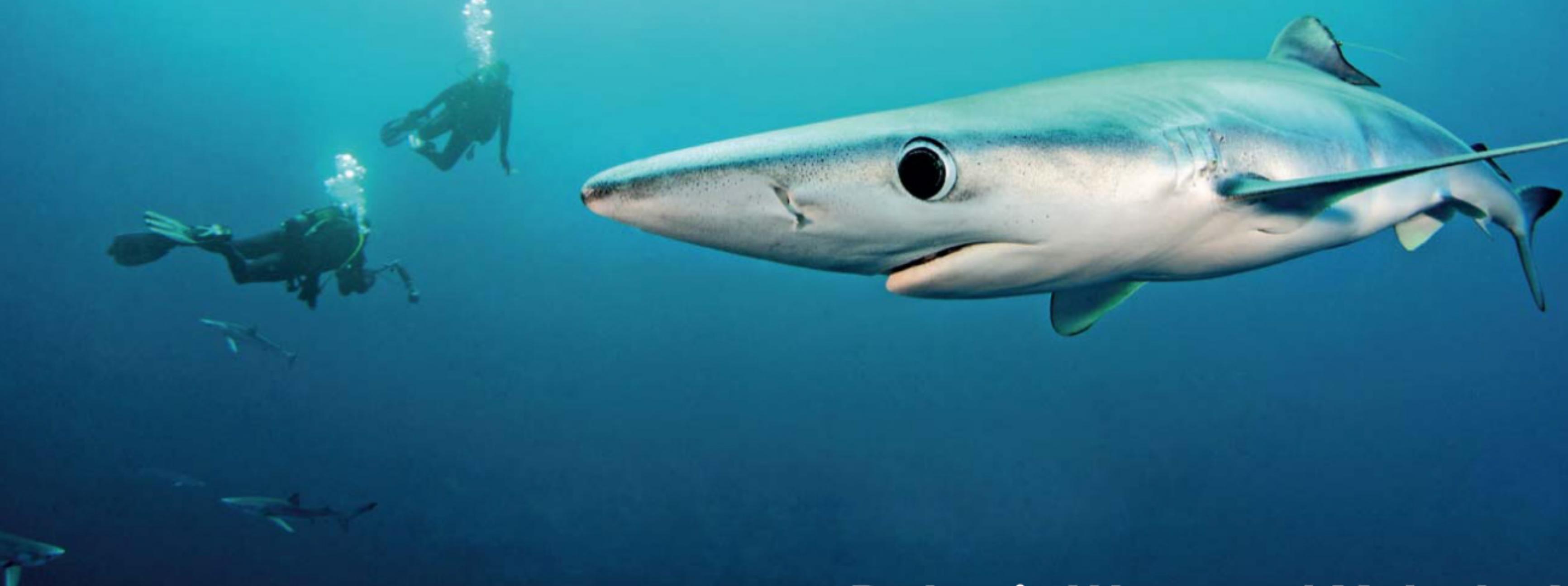


WHITE AND BLUE THE OPEN OCEAN WANDERERS



By Jamie Watts and Malcolm Nobbs

It came out of nowhere – out of the deep, infinite blue. One second there was nothing, then, gliding slowly and effortlessly just a few metres away just behind my shoulder, that shark. Meatier than a reef shark, yet with those big, swept-back fins, dipped in white paint, somehow sleeker and more elegant. It looked fast when it was almost standing still, and it cruised in for a closer look, clearly less afraid of me than any shark I'd seen before.

Individually they are not the biggest or most dramatic of the predatory sharks. On a global ecological scale, though, the oceanic whitetip and the blue are far, far more successful than the great white, the tiger shark or the bull shark. These two amongst all the sharks have become supreme travellers, foraging effectively across vast areas of open ocean. They are the most successful sharks on earth.

Smaller and less bulky than great whites, tigers and bulls, they are still pretty big animals; females of both species can (occasionally) reach 3.5 metres in length, maybe more with the big female blues, and two to three times the weight of an adult human. The tropical oceanic whitetip is significantly stockier than the slender, cool-water blue shark.

Both mature around age five, at the length of an adult human,