

Dear colleagues,

We are writing to invite you to participate in a new research program that aims to synthesize all available information on the feeding habits of large pelagic predators. As you know, predatory fishes (tunas, sharks, billfishes) and marine mammals (dolphins, toothed whales) play unique roles in pelagic food webs, and the populations of most have been reduced throughout their range by longline and purse seine fisheries.

Our immediate aim is to answer the question whether the productivity of some commercially-important tuna species may have been enhanced by the reduction of other species that prey upon them. To achieve this end, we seek to create a comprehensive database of the food habits of a variety of pelagic predators. We are asking for your help in adding to this database.

We have already gathered data from over 30 published manuscripts and created the first such database of its kind. These “secondary data,” consisting of diet data summarized from numerous stomach samples, give us information on broad geographic and temporal trends. We intend to share this database with interested colleagues. However, we presently lack detailed primary data (*i.e.* “raw” data) that would allow us to perform more detailed analyses on the size-structure of predator-prey interactions and to detect finer-grained spatio-temporal variation.

We are hoping that you would be willing to share data that you have collected or that may be archived at your institute. We are particularly interested in obtaining the raw data (stomach by stomach) of out-of-date or previously-published studies that are possibly sitting in notebooks in someone’s office or in storage. We would be happy to key punch such hand-written data and return it to you in digitized form. We envision multiple uses for such a database. We therefore intend to create an organized system for individuals to seek permission to use others’ data and to distribute these data among colleagues. We have created a website, <http://fish.washington.edu/tunapred/>, which will soon be updated to include our database and contributed data from other colleagues who have indicated their willingness to share their data with the broader scientific community.

We see this as an opportunity to preserve valuable data that might otherwise be lost to the scientific community, and to promote its use for ecosystem-based fisheries management. Please feel free to contact either Bob Olson (rolson@iattc.org, 858-546-7160) or Tim Essington (essing@u.washington.edu, 206-616-3698) if you have any questions. We look forward to your participation in this project!

Sincerely

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