

**Lunar cycles play a vital role in fishing and nowhere in Belize as grandiosely as at Gladden Spit Marine Reserve off the coast of Placencia in southern Belize.**



Local fishermen recount the stories of Placencia and Hopkins fisherman in the 1920's who congregated at the "Spit" during the ten day period of the full moon between March and June and landed huge catch. During these fishing trips fishermen observed clouds of "white-milky" substance in the water and mammoth whale sharks swimming through the clouded waters. In 1997 a team of scientists and local fishermen confirmed that the snappers came together to spawn, filling the water with cloud of eggs and sperm, and that the whale sharks -- filter feeders -- had come to feed on the eggs. This is a combination of events that is both biologically important and thrilling.

The site was declared a protected area in 2001 and is co-managed by the Fisheries Department and a local NGO, "Friends of Nature."

### **Notable Features**

- Being one of the largest fish species, measuring between 40ft- 50ft, the whale shark has a life span expectancy rate of seventy years. They are not efficient swimmers since they use their entire body to swim. Even though they are large creatures they pose no significant danger to man, they are considered to be very gentle and playful animals and have been known in some instances to lie still with their torso's up, so divers can remove parasites from their belly.

### **Visitor Experience**

Today "diving or snorkeling with the whale shark" thrills those that are fortunate to have this experience.

Diving, fishing or snorkeling in this area can be arranged with licensed tour operators based based in Placencia, Hopkins, Seine Bight, Monkey River, Dangriga , Belize City and with hotels on islands in the area.

Tickets are reserved by licensed dive operators who participate in a lottery where they are allocated time slots during the days the whale shark are most likely to be feeding.

