

EXPLORER OF THE MONTH!

ANDREJ GAJIĆ

Find out how shark-loving scientist Andrej is protecting sharks, skates and rays in the Mediterranean Sea...

FACT FILE



Name: Andrej Gajić
From: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Europe
Job: Shark scientist, conservationist and National Geographic Explorer
Fun fact: Andrej grew up in the mountains, far away from the ocean. But he always longed to study the sharks he'd read about in National Geographic magazine!



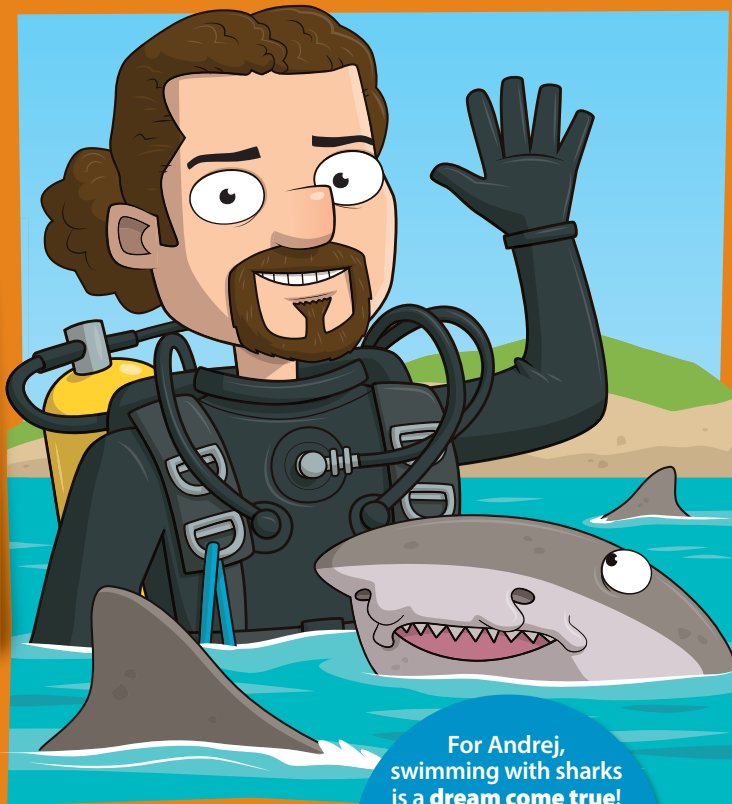
Shark scientist Andrej waits until **nightfall** to enter a shallow murky bay off the coast of **Albania** in the northern **Mediterranean**. He's on the lookout for **nocturnal** species of **sharks, skates and rays** that live and breed in these **muddy waters**. For most people, being in the dark with a load of sharks would be **terrifying** – but Andrej is in his happy place! As his **video camera lights up** the gloom, he observes the creatures swimming lazily around him and begins taking notes. The sharks **look healthy**, but Andrej knows they're **under threat**.

PLASTIC PROBLEMS

"Sharks are highly vulnerable to **pollution**," he explains. "If they eat **plastic** it can cause **severe injuries**." Tiny **microplastic particles** in the water can also carry **harmful chemicals** into the sharks' bodies, causing **diseases** that affect their **growth and reproduction**. By studying the creatures in his laboratory, Andrej is working out exactly how microplastics hurt them – and how the damage might be **prevented**.

A BETTER FUTURE

But that's not all he does. "What I love most is working in **unexplored areas**," Andrej says. "I discover key **habitats** and **nursery grounds** of very rare and highly threatened species across the **Mediterranean**." His team have used this information to develop **conservation plans** for more than **50 shark species**, protecting them from **overfishing** and **habitat loss**. **Fin-tastic!**



For Andrej, swimming with sharks is a **dream come true!** He grew up during the **Bosnian war**, and overcame many **hardships** to become a scientist and NG Explorer.

Andrej studies a blue shark in his lab



Andrej **never harms or kills** sharks for his research. All the creatures he studies in his lab are **bycatch** from local fisheries – animals killed when they're **accidentally caught in nets**.



Tiny microplastics cause big problems for sharks

Filter-feeding fishes like **whale sharks, basking sharks and manta rays** may each eat over **100 pieces of plastic** during just one hour of feeding. Oh no!



In the dark with a shark – Andrej gets up close to a deep-sea sixgill shark!



Giving a leopard whipray a health check!