

BEST SUMMER EVER: a video grab of two whale sharks chasing a baitball in the Red Sea near Sharm El Sheikh, where record numbers have been sighted this year

'WHALE SHARKS ROCK!' – RECORD SIGHTINGS IN SHARM

THE WORLD'S biggest fish has turned up in record numbers in the northern Egyptian Red Sea this year – with dive guides and instructors in Sharm El Sheikh hailing the summer of 2008 as the best ever for whale shark sightings.

The end of July has been marked out as a major highlight, after four large whale sharks spent the whole day cruising around a local reef with divers. Guides and guests dived with the whale sharks throughout the day of 30 July until the creatures eventually moved on in the late afternoon.

'There are many experienced professional divers in Sharm El Sheikh who will swear that 30 July was one of the best day's diving they have ever experienced,' said

Mark Frankel, spokesman for Red Sea Diving College. 'Four massive whale sharks chased a huge baitball all day long at the Middle Garden dive site.

'Nik, one of our experienced guides, said that swimming among the baitball had left him in darkness, but suddenly a whale shark appeared in front of him, and then four for the whole dive. He said it was without a doubt his best-ever dive.'

Camel Dive Club guide Poli Fernandez, who has worked around the world as an instructor since 2001, said it was definitely one of her best days in the water: 'When I looked out of the boat, I saw this huge dark shadow in the water. We all got in and there was this massive ball of sardines

and, just under them, two beautiful whale sharks. Sometimes we thought one of them had gone, but then it appeared again.

'They were all over the place, in and out of the fish ball, around us, and so close that – if we were naughty – we could have touched them. One of the best dives of my life, and, for sure, also for the divers that had the privilege to be there. Whale sharks rock!'

The large plankton feeders have been spotted throughout the Sinai coast this summer, from north of Taba down to Sharm. It is thought that the whale sharks were attracted by an exceptionally prolific plankton bloom in the northern Red Sea, which has also brought in a high number of manta rays this year.