

## So many enticements

*Palm Springs' lineup includes Paul Verhoeven and sharks*

By Robert Abele, *Los Angeles Times*

Biologist and underwater photographer Rob Stewart isn't waiting around for legal protections pertaining to his cause—stopping shark killing—before taking his passion to theaters. *Sharkwater* is Stewart's first-person documentary about the legendarily demonized sea predators (who, we're told, don't come anywhere near the human-killing statistics of, say, elephants) and the mass slaughter that threatens the world's ecological balance.

A little too often, Stewart, whose narration has a Spicoli-surfer tinge, indulges in embarrassing codependent confessions about the beauty of sharks' ocean-dominating Darwinian perfection: You half-expect his description of hammerhead sharks as “incredibly sensitive” to mean they live with crippling self-consciousness about their looks. But for the most part, this is an eye-opening account of one 400-million-old species' recklessly hyped image as a killing machine, and how that perception may be influencing its absence from the rolls of protected sea creatures. Stewart is no mere spectator, either, in the fight, documenting his time with dedicated Greenpeace activists who boldly, dangerously confront renegade fishing boats and the countries benefiting from illegal shark fin trade.

The calmer sequences of Stewart's quality time underwater with sharks are beautifully captured and make for rapturous nature-flick idylls in between the talking-head, pro-shark lobbying and stop-the-killers adventures above water. *Sharkwater* may not go so far as to convince you that your enjoyment of *Jaws* is shameful, but it has an invigorating determination about its warming, one decidedly at odds with the beach-horror TV news coverage we get in summer.