

Distinguished work saluted

COTTESLOE residents Brad Norman and Stephen Van Mil are winners of the second annual Murdoch University Distinguished Alumni Awards held recently.

Mr Norman, a whale shark researcher and chief executive of Fremantle-based EcoOcean Inc, was recognised for his groundbreaking work indentifying whale sharks.

His method of recording distinctive spots on the skins of the world's largest but harmless sharks, which feed on plankton, is now being used in 46 countries.

His lobbying has resulted in whale shark hunting bans in the Phillipines, India and Taiwan after convincing governments and fishermen the gentle giants could generate greater income as ecotourism attractions.

"When you hunt you use up you resources as once-only kill, whereas well-managed ecotourism is a sustainable alternative," Mr Norman said.

Dr Van Mil, a filmmaker, graduated from the university in 1984 as a vet before being the resident pet expert on a commercial television breakfast program.

His exposure to media, the story-telling skills he had learnt working in TV and a desire to tell worldwide conservation stories lead him to sell his vet practice in 2003.

"And I've never looked back," Dr Van Mil said.



Wildlife film-maker and vet Dr Stephen Van Mil.

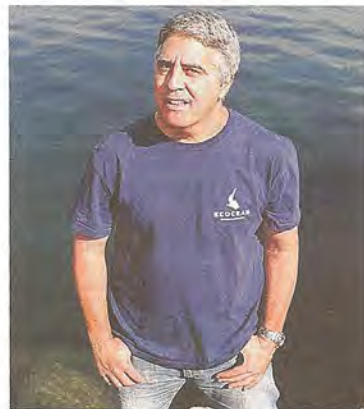
Picture: Macus Whisson

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His documentaries include *White Lions: Kings of Kings*, *Saving Orangutans* and *The Last Tirmate* narrated by Mel Gibson. He is currently working on new projects.

"*Big Fish* is with Brad Norman about whale sharks and we've already filmed in Kenya, Ninglao twice and India, and we'll be going off to South East Asia soon," Dr Van Mil said.

"*Elephant Wars*, filmed in Botswana and India, is about habitat destruction and the resulting conflict elephants have with humans."



Whales expert Brad Norman.

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