

Mako shark caught off California could be record (Update)

June 5 2013



This June 4, 2013 photo courtesy Ray Pacheco shows the 1,323-pound mako shark on the back of a boat trailer being taken for an accurate weight reading to Gardena, Calif. The huge mako shark caught off the coast of Southern California on Monday June 3, 2013 could set a record, but a critic said it should have been released because sharks are threatened worldwide. Jason Johnston of Texas caught the 1,323-pound shark off Huntington Beach after a 2 1/2-hour battle. (AP Photo/Courtesy Ray Pacheco)

A huge mako shark caught off the coast of Southern California could set

a record, but a critic said it should have been released because sharks are threatened worldwide.

Jason Johnston of Texas caught the 1,323-pound (600-kilogram) shark off Huntington Beach on Monday after a 2 1/2-hour battle, the Orange County Register (bit.ly/15FouAT) reported.

"I've hunted lions and brown bears, but I've never experienced anything like this," Johnston told the newspaper. "It felt like I had a one-ton diesel truck at the end of the line, and it wasn't budging."

If the catch is confirmed and meets conditions, it would exceed the 1,221-pound record mako catch made in July 2001 off the coast of Massachusetts, said Jack Vitek, world records coordinator for the Florida-based International Game Fish Association.

It takes about two months for the association to verify domestic catches, he told the Los Angeles Times (lat.ms/11hznu).

The shark should have been released, argued David McGuire, director of the California-based protection advocacy group Shark Stewards.

"I'm a little shocked by it," he said of the catch.

"People should be viewing these sharks as wonderful animals that are important to the ocean and admiring how beautiful they are" rather than "spilling their blood and guts," McGuire told the Times.

Only 23 of the 6,850 world records on file with the game association involve fish topping 1,300 pounds, Vitek said. The largest catch was a 2,664-pound (1,200-kilogram) great white shark that was taken in 1959 off the Australian coast.

"Seeing a fish over 1,000 pounds (453 kilograms)—whether it's a shark, a tuna or a billfish—it's extremely rare," Vitek said.

The shark was being kept on ice and will be donated to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association for research.

Johnston came to California to film a game-hunting television program called "Jim Shockey's The Professionals" for the Outdoor Channel.

Southern California is considered to be a nursery ground for mako sharks. But those caught are usually between 2.5 feet and 6 feet (0.7 meters and 1.8 meters) long, said Nick Wegner, a fisheries research biologist at Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego.

"Encountering one this big is rare," he said.

The catch was made aboard the chartered fishing vessel Breakaway, out of Huntington Beach.

"It's just like any other fishing," skipper Matt Potter told the Times. "The state limit for mako is two per person per day. We only kept one mako for a total of 18 passengers out there three days." The rest were released, he said.

Johnston also defended the catch.

"There are not that many sharks being taken out of the water," Johnston told the Times. "It's not hurting the population. If we pull four fish out of the water per year, that's just four."

Still, McGuire said sharks should be left alone.

"These kind of reality shows are not reality," he said. "The reality is

we're overfishing sharks and this macho big-game attitude should be a relic of the past."

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