Tagged mako shark takes amazing 13,000 mile journey

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Mako Shark. Credit: Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation

A male mako shark named Hell's Bay has broken a record, traveling

more than 13,000 miles, equal to over half-way around the planet, in 600 days. It is the longest track ever in the Atlantic Ocean by a mako shark tagged by researchers in Nova Southeastern University's (NSU) Guy Harvey Research Institute (GHRI)

"We've had some of our tagged makos take some pretty interesting tracks over the years, but this one swims above the rest," said Mahmood Shivji, a professor at NSU's Halmos College of Natural Sciences and Oceanography and the Director of NSU's GHRI. "Having Hell's Bay report for as long as he has is fantastic because we're able to really get a detailed look at mako migration behavior over a good amount of time. He was like the Energizer bunny – he kept going and going and going, and luckily did not get captured like many of our other sharks."

The 600-day track of Hell's Bay mako can be seen ONLINE at nova.edu/sharktracking (select Project 3 under the Mako Shark section.)

Hell's Bay was tagged in May 2015 off the coast of Ocean City, Md. In the first year, Hell's Bay traveled north along the east coast and then returned close to the tagging site. Hell's Bay spent 2016 hanging around the coast of Maryland and taking jaunts throughout the Atlantic traveling east of Nova Scotia to just south of Bermuda before returning to Ocean City. In 2017, it repeated a similar path closer to the coast. Hell's Bay showed clear seasonal patterns to its movements, spending the winter and early spring far offshore, and the rest of the year on or close to the continental shelf.

The closest relative to the white shark, makos are the cheetahs of the shark species. As the fastest shark species, makos can swim up to 60 mph.

The tags are funded by the Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation (GHOF), a non-for-profit organization that conducts scientific research and hosts

educational programs aimed at conserving the marine environment.

"These satellite tags allow us to follow sharks in near-real time," said Greg Jacoski, executive director of the GHOF. "Understanding where these animals travel and the habitat that they use is the first step to better conserving the species."

Hell's Bay was named after Hell's Bay Boatworks, a boat manufacturer based in Titusville, Fla. The tag was sponsored by Capt. Chris Peterson, who owns Hell's Bay Boatworks.

A new GHRI study has just reported that 22% of the makos that have been satellite tagged were caught or killed by commercial or recreation fishermen.

"That highlights what mako sharks face on a daily basis in their natural habitat," Shivji said. "It's something we have to work around, but every time we lose a shark we lose another opportunity to learn about these magnificent animals."

Shivji indicated that worldwide, sharks are being killed off in unimaginable numbers – some estimates say between 70-100 million sharks per year. Clearly, that is not a sustainable level of removal, since many shark species, including makos, reproduce at low rates.

Provided by Nova Southeastern University