

# How a wandering white shark's epic journey could provide clues for protecting them

March 12 2024, by Patrick Whittle

---



In this photo provided by Chip Michalove, LeeBeth, a white shark, is tagged on Dec. 8, 2023, off Hilton Head Island, S.C. Scientists say the animal has been tracked further into the Gulf of Mexico than any white shark they've ever tagged before. Credit: Chip Michalove via AP

As sharks go, LeeBeth is something like a long-haul trucker with gills and giant teeth.

Swimmers at the beach might not be excited to see the 14-foot (4.3-meter) [white shark](#), but scientists following LeeBeth's movements are thrilled that the big fish's epic journey could provide valuable clues to help the species. And they're curious where she'll go next.

White sharks, often referred to as great whites, were made famous by the 1970s hit movie "Jaws." They roam the ocean searching for their favorite food, marine mammals, and were once hunted without discrimination. Some scientists believe growing populations of seals in parts of the Atlantic Ocean are helping the sharks, which were designated a protected species in 1997.

Since getting her [tracking device](#) near South Carolina in December, LeeBeth has traveled more than 2,000 miles (3,200 kilometers) south and into the Gulf of Mexico, the scientists monitoring her every move said Monday. They watched as she made history in late February by traveling further into the Gulf than any previously tracked white shark. A signal showed her off the coast near Matamoros, Mexico, just across the U.S. border from South Padre Island, Texas.



In this photo provided by Chip Michalove, LeeBeth, a white shark, is tagged on Dec. 8, 2023, off Hilton Head Island, S.C. Scientists say the animal has been tracked further into the Gulf of Mexico than any white shark they've ever tagged before. Credit: Chip Michalove via AP

The shark's presence so far west indicates that this part of the Gulf of Mexico could also be important to other white sharks, said Megan Winton, a senior scientist with the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy, based in Chatham, Massachusetts. International cooperation is important to protect the sharks, whose worldwide populations are recovering from decades of overfishing, she said.

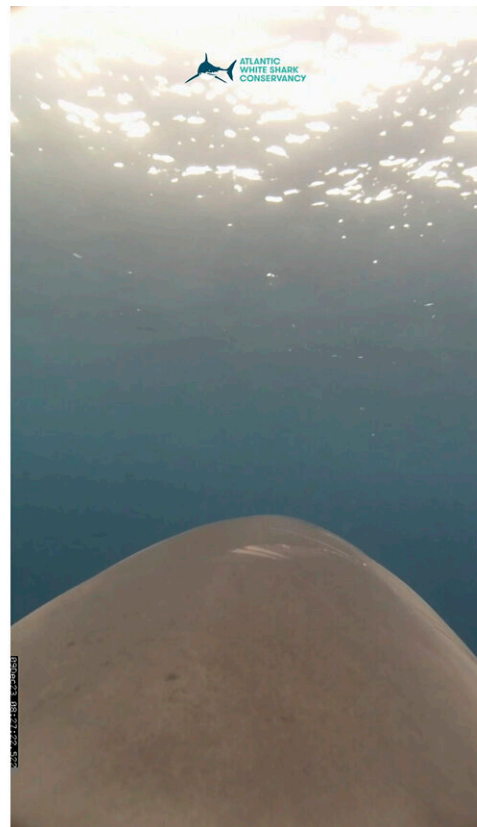
"We don't know how many white sharks travel that far west, but it's a good indication they do," Winton said. "There are only a handful of sharks that have been tracked west of the Mississippi."

The Atlantic White Shark Conservancy collaborates with Massachusetts state government to tag white sharks, with more than 300 tagged so far. Thousands more have been tagged by other organizations worldwide, Winton said.

The conservancy paired up with fishing charter Outcast Sport Fishing of Hilton Head, South Carolina, to tag LeeBeth.



In this photo provided by Chip Michalove, LeeBeth, a white shark, is tagged on Dec. 8, 2023, off Hilton Head Island, S.C. Scientists say the animal has been tracked further into the Gulf of Mexico than any white shark they've ever tagged before. Credit: Chip Michalove via AP



This Dec. 9, 2023 image provided by the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy shows a white shark tagged off South Carolina that has traveled further west into the Gulf of Mexico than any tracked white shark in recorded history. The shark was outfitted with a transmitter that sent a signal from near Mexico in late February. Scientists said the data from the shark can provide valuable clues about where in the ocean the giant fish live. Credit: Atlantic White Shark Conservancy via AP

Chip Michalove, who owns Outcast, said LeeBeth turned out to be an advantageous shark to tag, as she had sent more signals back from the tracking device than most. The tracker sends a signal whenever the shark breaks the surface of the water.

"Not only one of the biggest sharks we've caught, but she's the best-pinging shark as well," Michalove said. "We definitely hit a home run with LeeBeth."

The last time LeeBeth checked in was on March 7, when tracking data showed the great white to be about 100 miles (160 kilometers) off the coast of Galveston, Texas.

© 2024 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: How a wandering white shark's epic journey could provide clues for protecting them (2024, March 12) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-03-white-shark-epic-journey-clues.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.