

This mako shark is about to be fitted with a satellite tracking tag and released. The expedition allowed anglers to fish alongside scientists from the Guy Harvey Research Institute in a coordinated research effort. Photo: GHOF.

# Shark Hunt

CHASING MAKOS OFF  
ISLA MUJERES IS  
ABOUT FISHING FOR  
THE GREATER GOOD.  
BY CAPT. NED STONE

Dr. Harvey's passion for marine animals has led him on numerous tagging expeditions over the years with scientists from the Guy Harvey Research Institute. This year, a new concept was developed—Guy Harvey Outpost Expeditions. The idea was to bring interested anglers to fish alongside the research vessel and assist in the catch, tag and release process. The first expedition—aimed at mako sharks—proved to be “wildly” successful.



*The Keen M was fitted with a special boom and platform that allowed sharks to be examined, tagged and released as safely and quickly as possible.*



To help ensure the survival of makos, the scientists at the Guy Harvey Research Institute (GHRI) want to know where mako sharks go. Where do they feed? Where do they mate? What jurisdictions do they pass through during their lives? In March of 2014, GHRI and GH Outpost (GHO) partnered on a tagging expeditions to Isla Mujeres, Mexico to help answer these questions. Captain Ned Stone, of GHO, submitted the following report:

Our expedition team arrived into Cancun and quickly learned that you need to complete both the top AND THE BOTTOM of the Customs Declaration Form. After that embarrassing confusion was cleared up, our driver delivered us to the Gran Puerto Juarez ferry terminal in about 30 minutes. The ferry across to Isla Mujeres leaves on the hour and half hour and takes about 20 minutes. You can ride inside in the air conditioning or on the upper deck. We were treated to a live saxophone player who was doing his best “Gato Barbieri plays the Pops.” Rolling luggage makes the 15-minute trek along the beach and up to the Hotel Playa Media Luna—a Guy Harvey Outpost Expedition lodge—an easy walk. Pedi-cabs or taxis are also available. Life moves at a different pace on “Isla.” Sandals, golf carts and bicycles replace cars for transportation.

After settling in, we regrouped at the Bally-Hoo cantina for a cold beverage. Our group included: Chris Peterson, Steve Schniedman, GHO President Mark Ellert and myself. The *Keen M* team included: Dr. Guy Harvey, Dr. Mahmood Shivji of GHRI, Dr. Brad Wetherbee, videographer George Schellenger and Capt. Anthony Mendillo. Also included for a couple days each were TV host Diego Toiran of *Pescando en los Cayos* and photographer Scott Kerrigan.

We sipped our drinks and awaited the arrival of Guy and his team—who were already on the water—to hear about the day’s catch. A sense of anticipation was definitely in the air. The plan was to fish two boats and double our chances of catching enough makos to tag. The *Keen M* would hold Drs. Harvey and Shivji, and the rest of the tagging team. We would be onboard the *Lilly M* and pass off any fish we landed.

Day One: Off the dock at 0700 on board the *Lilly M* for an hour’s run to the drop-off where we would fish. Our spread consisted of two brightly painted wooden dorado teasers and three large swimming bonitas. The teasers were made from ¾” thick planks cut to resemble the profile of a small, male dorado. The larger makos had been skyrocketing on the teasers and taking the wooden tails right off them. Around 10:30am, the *Keen M* had a fish in the baits and got a bite; unfortunately, they pulled the hooks shortly afterwards. At 11:30am, it was our turn, and after a 5-minute fight, we, too, were scratching our heads. The *Keen M* was never too far from sight, as we were both working the same rip. We had another bite early in the afternoon and Chris Peterson put his standup technique to the task. Thirty minutes later, a 125-pounder was alongside.

Once you have a mako, now what do you do with it? Capt. Anthony and his



*For the expedition, two boats worked together. Once a mako was caught, anglers fishing from the Lilly M would attach a line and float to the leader, then let out the drag on the reel so the Keen M crew could move in to intercept the fish and fit it with a tag.*

crew had worked out a simple, yet elegant, solution. The mate clips a spring clip into the snap swivel at the leader, which is attached to 75 feet of 7/16-in. nylon line with an 18-inch diameter fish float on the other end. The angler reduces drag and lets the mako back out while maintaining light drag. The captain motors ahead a bit to put some distance between the angling boat and the mako. Then the *Keen M* pulls up alongside of the float and hooks the line with a gaff. Once the mate on the *Keen M* is wiring the mako, the angler can lessen his drag even more. The *Keen M* crew either disconnects the snap swivel from the leader or cuts the line at the snap swivel, allowing the angler to retrieve the line.

## Tagging

We now had a ringside seat to watch the whole process. Video and still cameras were also going all over the place. Even in calm seas, handling a 150-plus-pound wild animal is a challenge. Give that animal incredibly strong jaws and a few rows of teeth and you understand the need to respect them.

The *Keen M* crew tail-roped the mako and guided it to the custom cradle on her transom. Anthony designed the cradle and hoist specifically to aid in Guy’s mako research. A saltwater hose fed raw saltwater into the mako’s mouth via a 2-in. diameter PVC pipe. A wet towel over the animal’s eyes helped keep it calm.

Among the data gathered about each mako are its sex, length, time of day caught and time on the cradle. Each tag is tested multiple times before it is installed on the shark’s dorsal fin with four nylon bolts. Whenever the shark’s dorsal breaks the surface, the tag reports its location to the satellite. The Guy



Harvey Research Institute plots the results on a map and keeps a special website showing the tracks of each animal tagged ([www.nova.edu/ocean/ghri/tracking/](http://www.nova.edu/ocean/ghri/tracking/)). If the mako does not surface for a month, then no intermediate points are reported. When the mako next surfaces, the tracking site simply shows a straight line between reporting points.

With our first fish tagged, we stay on the hunt. By the afternoon of the first day, the *Keen M* had several more fish in the baits but could not keep them on the line. We had another bite on the *Lilly M* as well, but could not keep it on the hook.

Day Two: Stroll down to Bally-Hoo for breakfast burritos, Mexican omelets and some fraternal rivalries between the boats. It is prettier and even a little calmer than the day before. The current rip is even more visible on the calm sea. Mark Ellert is first up today and he gets a serious strike before 10 am. This fish is estimated at closer to 400 pounds and has no interest in playing our game. After 40 minutes down and tight, the mako rolled up the leader to the mono wind-on. It might as well have been dental floss in the mako’s mouth. Tough luck, but the big fish do not get big by being easy to catch.

I was up next up. Never having caught a mako, I wanted to be ready. I tried on the harness and adjusted both the belt and Aftco shoulder harness in case I got a chance. The edge was looking very fishy—with flying fish and frigate birds evident, something was bound to happen. Patience paid off—his dorsal cut the surface on the left side of the spread before disappearing and then reappearing behind the center bait. Then he was gone again (watching some of George Schellenger’s video, these fish do not give up easily. One mako stayed in the pattern for over five minutes on the dredge cam.) Without warning, the center reel





**Isla Mujeres**

Isla Mujeres is known for fabulous light tackle sail-fishing January through April. White and blue marlin and swordfish are around in sufficient numbers to make Grand Slams and Super Slams a better prospect than other fishing hotspots. Good snorkeling and diving are also available year-round. The annual whale shark migration runs June through September and the *Keen M* fleet's whale shark snorkel trips have become more popular than their famous sailfish season, so book early. For more information on Guy Harvey Outpost Expeditions call 888.256.2856 or email [editor@guyharveymagazine.com](mailto:editor@guyharveymagazine.com).



*Tags must be well secured to the mako's dorsal fin.*

eventually the mate grabbed the leader, clipped in the ball-float's lead and tossed the ball over. I eased off the drag and the *Keen M* slid over to pick up the ball.

We watched as mako #2 was fitted with new jewelry for his dorsal fin. With the baits back out, we settled into our seats, chatted and ate. The calm was quickly broken as another mako moved through the baits, disappearing and charging. Then he was gone. Our captain made another pass through the area. *Bang!* The left rigger went off. Steve Schniedman got suited up. As a practiced angler, he put steady pressure on his fish and had him to the boat in under 30 minutes.

We had one more shot that afternoon. The fish stayed with us for a several passes but we could not quite get the bite we needed. In the meantime, the *Keen M* was hooked up and busy deploying one more satellite tag. We trolled over their way as the wind picked up, and the setting sun suggested we make our way back.

Sharks are not always given their full due in angling circles, but makos are certainly gamefish. Consider these facts: makos can jump over 10 feet in the air; they are incredibly fast swimmers; they grow to over

1,200 pounds; and they travel in the same circles as blue marlin. From an angling perspective, the 100- to 200-lb. fish we fought took 30–45 minutes on 30- to 50-lb. stand-up tackle. When fishing for blue marlin, what is the typical catch? Between 100–200 lbs. How long does a blue marlin fight last on 30–50# stand-up? About 20–50 min. Makos are also more readily accessible to many anglers. This is true in the mid-Atlantic, and one of the reasons our other expeditions have been based in Ocean City, Maryland.



*Clockwise from top left: Guy swims with a mako to ensure a good release. A view from a camera trolled behind the boat. Guy hooks up! The team at work: securing, tagging and filming all at once. Photos: George Schellenger.*

In Isla, the Outpost team finished with three makos caught and released out of five solid bites. We had three more fish in the baits. Any time you encounter eight fish over 100 pounds in two days on the water, well that goes in my book as high quality fishing. Of the eight makos successfully tagged during the 2014 GHRI Isla Expedition, several have ventured into the Gulf of Mexico. Over three mako-tagging trips to Isla, about half of the animals make passages into the Gulf and then return to Isla. A smaller number go south or southeast but also return to Isla. One fish, dubbed “Bad Guy,” left Isla Mujeres on an eastbound run past Guy's home waters of Cayman and Jamaica and headed north to the waters off the mid-Atlantic coast. Two others have since been caught and harvested in Isla Mujeres. Thankfully, the satellite transmitters were recovered and can be re-deployed.

Success has also come in two seasons (10 days of fishing) from Ocean City. Thirteen makos have been successfully tagged. These animals largely stay in the north Atlantic, but two have cruised south to the Bahamas and one almost reached

the South American coast before turning around and heading back north.

While “Bad Guy” is just one animal, it indicates that the fish seen off the eastern seaboard do overlap with those off Isla Mujeres. One hypothesis is that these animals are of a single breeding stock. More studies and DNA research will need to be conducted to answer that question. Makos tagged in both locations traveled well beyond the waters of the countries where they were tagged. As mako populations decline, it is likely they will become more regulated. A successful conservation program for makos of the northwestern Atlantic will require the participation of the U.S., Mexico, Canada, the Bahamas, Cayman Islands, Jamaica and other nations as well.

*Guy Harvey Outpost and the Guy Harvey Research Institute will return to Isla Mujeres in March 2015 and Ocean City, Maryland, in May for another round of mako tagging. If you are interested in being an active participant or want to fish with the Keen M fleet, contact Guy Harvey Outpost at (800) 513-5257. 🐟*





## 5 Tags, 5 Marlin, 1 Day

Isla Mujeres is not just a hotspot for makos, but also sees plenty of traffic from other blue water species. In May of this year, Guy and company targeted white marlin, looking to decorate five fish with satellite tags for research. Here's his report:

We headed down to Isla Mujeres, Mexico, to try and tag some white marlin. With an average size of 45–65 lbs. they are the smaller cousin of the blue marlin, but still a strong and exciting fish to catch. Our aim was to deploy pop-up archival tags, or PAT tags, on five white marlin. Whilst on the fish, the tag collects and stores data such as water depth, temperature and light levels. These streamlined tags have an antenna on one end and a dart on the other. The dart allows attachment to the fish, and at a preprogrammed time (sometimes up to 12 months), the tag will detach and float to the surface to upload its stored data to

satellites so we can see the natural range of this fish.

We headed out with Captain Anthony Mendillo, trolling behind us an impressive array of 11 lines out to attract our marlin. Starting slow with a few dolphin fish and some beautiful sailfish in the afternoon, we were in for some unexpected action. It started with a double-header. We caught and tagged two white marlin together, but the action wasn't over. Within half an hour we had another. All the while, our dedicated film producer George Schellenger was filming the action. With three tags out we thought we had had a pretty good day, but before the afternoon was out, we had caught and tagged another two white marlin, bringing our total to meet our target of five white marlin tagged—and all on our first day! It should be noted that we caught five marlin on Cinco de Mayo—we couldn't have asked for more. One the way back in, we even encountered some whale sharks. It was a great day to start off the trip!

Having deployed our tags on the first day, we spent the next few days focused on getting some great shots documenting the white marlins and sailfish. We filmed them topside doing some amazing acrobatics as well as jumping in the water at every opportunity. Up close, you can see firsthand how graceful these fish are under the water, and the range of colours they display is amazing. A great expedition all in all, five new tags out there and some great footage and photos taken. We will anxiously wait for the results from our tags.

*Editor's note: Since the tags were deployed, GHRI reports at least one white marlin traveled more than 1,000 miles over 65 days to the coast of North Carolina. Tracks for multiple species and tagging projects can be seen at [www.nova.edu/ocean/ghri/tracking/](http://www.nova.edu/ocean/ghri/tracking/). 🐟*

*Isla Mujeres is a hot spot for many species, including white marlin. Guy and the GHRI team joined Captain Antony Mendillo in May for a white marlin tagging trip and celebrated tagging five fish in one day—Cinco de Mayo. Photos: Guy Harvey.*

