**Mako Mission for Research**

Arguably the most wildly fascinating of all sharks in our waters is the mako. There are two modern day species of mako - the shortfin (*Isurus oxyrinchus*), and the less common - the longfin (*Isurus paucus*). From an angling standpoint, mako sharks in general are perhaps some of the most glorified creatures in the shark family. The unique electric-purple and silver coloring in addition to a harshly menacing look only add to their majestic beauty. This is a species that above all others in the animal kingdom were biologically engineered to thrive as one of the most impressive predators to ever exists in the ocean. The swimming velocity and ability to leap meters high into the air are unrivaled by any other shark. Each interaction in the wild with this fish is considered a moment to treasure. Whether an angler is able to observe the surface prowling of this species or the indescribable airborne acrobatics, the awesomeness of each encounter often leaves one speechless. Just has been the case for millions of years, the mako shark is truly the king apex predator of our gulf and will always command respect.

I hold the mako species very close to my heart and for good reason. In December of 2003, I was fortunate enough to be only the 2nd person ever to land one from a Texas beach. Two years later, another was also landed from the south Texas surf. Out of the three surf-caught makos, my fish to this day remains to be the only landbased tag-and-released mako west of the Mississippi. From the moment of my very first encounter with this species, this magical creature had consumed my respect. As I had gazed vividly at my beach mako, I observed the finer details of this species. The wide muscular posterior keel that was responsible for propelling this shark was unlike anything I've ever seen. The lit-up iridescent color jumped off the torpedo shaped body and became etched in the memory of the encounter. And of course, the teeth... vicious teeth that protruded out like a monster in a horror flick. Absolutely everything about this shark was designed to perfection for survival. Since my landmark catch over a decade ago which initially put myself in the media mainstream amongst the angling community, I have been fortunate to catch several other makos and even be there to assist others in landing theirs.

Angling history for the mako goes back nearly a century, spanning the entire globe. Specimens from the Atlantic and Pacific have both attained massive weights of over 1000lbs. Even mythical fish weighing over a ton were rumored in countries such as Italy and Turkey during the past century. Nonetheless, makos are impressive in every aspect. Locally, there are a small handful of anglers that eagerly wait for the 'cooler' part of the year when makos can be readably targeted. The Shindle brothers have been on Texas' forefront of Mako fishing. Jeff Shindle's 707lb state record from 2002 still stands proud today. Myself and others have learned a great deal in regards to makos from Mike and Jeff Shindle. As of recent years, shark anglers like Chris Sessions have come onto the scene and proven very successful. Aside from Capt. Billy Sandifer, Chris Sessions is a long-time beach fishermen that had reigned as one of the best big-shark fishermen over the past couple of decades. Nowadays, Sessions has allocated the majority of his sharking time to the offshore venue. Both Sandifer and Sessions have mentored and shaped myself into the shark master people claim me to be.

This past season has been no different. Despite the window of action being a little shorter due to the very mild and warm winter, myself and others were still able to get out. As historically shown, February was consistent with mako action from offshore waters off Port Aransas on south. On Chris Session's vessel, they reported action on numerous trips. While average size was smaller than years past, the mako action was red hot. I was able to hop on board with Chris and partake as a member of the crew for his last couple of mako trips. Up to this point, February had been presenting itself with a rare mako window on the beach. For this to happen, multiple variables have to line up perfectly, and those did very closely. I did make a valid attempt at a mako from the beach but at that point none could be found. Coinciding during this same time-frame, the HARTE Research Institute was once again seeking my help in putting a satellite tag on a fish. If there was one sure chance to tag a mako, I knew I had to take the offer from Sessions and find them offshore.

On February 24th, Chris Sessions, Ricky Torres, and myself embarked on a mission to see if we could achieve the desired goal bestowed upon us. A calm, clear morning had greeted us as we broke the Packery Channel jetties. Our goal of course was a mako, but our most productive times have always been in the late afternoon. Therefore we would go out early and troll and essentially try to stock up on bonito and other bait. Trolling immediately provided a massive wahoo. We continued the morning troll and about an hour later get another quick knockdown. I hand Ricky the rod and the line is getting dumped exceedingly fast. After a few seconds the fish breaches the surface and it is none other than a mako shark! We knew this occurrence was rare, and knew landing it would be even more rarer. After all, we had this shark hooked on a trolling setup, could we possible expect to land this fish without leader failure? Ricky would battle the shark for over 15 minutes as it would make multiple jumps. As he would close in on the finale of the battle, Chris and I would get the tagging gear setup. Ricky would get the shark calm and stationary alongside the boat and when the time was right, Chris would get a tail rope on the fish.

Now is go time! Unlike traditional passive tags, this one had to be fixed to the dorsal via four bolts, which had to be drilled through the shark. We get the shark through the door of the transom and immediately begin work on tagging. After a short time, everything goes relatively smooth and the tag is successfully mounted. We get the shark back in the water and it immediately swims away seemingly unphased. High fives rolled across the boat as we realized what we just achieved. Ricky's mako is now swimming around with a hi-tech satellite tag aiding in research for the Center of Sportfish Science and Conservation Program. Within 24 hours, the tagging had proven success as it already transmitted data. These 'SPOT' (Smart Positioning or Temperature) tags transmit locations of the shark when at the surface. The tag relays coordinates to the satellites when the wet/dry sensor at the top of the tag becomes dry. The longer the tag is out of the water, the more messages sent and the better the location quality of the “ping”. Sharks tagged by CSSC (including this mako named 'Daymond') are put up on the OCEARCH Shark Tracker for anyone to follow. You may view the tracker on the official website (<http://www.ocearch.org/>) or you can download the OCEARCH Shark Tracker app.