

Expedition Profile

December 11-18, 2019

The International SeaKeepers Society teamed up with Dr. Neil Hammerschlag and his team from the Shark Research and Conservation Program (SRC), as well as Dr. James Sulikowski of the Sulikowski Shark and Fish Research Lab. The team set out to find and identify pregnant tiger sharks and determine where and when they give birth using new technologies to ensure gravid females and the next generations are protected.

The research team consisted of Dr. Hammerschlag, Dr. Sulikowski, Assistant Director of SRC Steve Cain, shark biology students Chelsea Black, Shannon Moorehead, and Hannah Verkamp. Additionally, media specialist Tanya Houppermans and Tony Gilbert of SeaKeepers were there to photograph and document the trip as well as provide assistance. The Birth-Tag, a groundbreaking technology developed in part by Dr. Sulikowski is a novel intrauterine satellite tag designed to pinpoint the timing and location of pupping of highly mobile shark species. When it has been determined via ultrasound that a tiger shark is pregnant, she was then fitted with a finmount satellite tag and the Birth-Tag, which will be carefully inserted into her uterus where it will remain (inactive) until birth. At birth, this tag will be shed along with the pups, and become activated via light sensors to transmit a location to a passing satellite. While the team was able to gather data from ten different tiger sharks, we found three pregnant tiger sharks among them. Overall, 40 sharks were encountered in the field, seventeen of which were tiger sharks, and three of which were pregnant. In a few months' time, we should know, for the first time in history, where specific individuals are giving birth.

This was a follow-up to a previous expedition conducted in January of 2019. While SeaKeepers usually facilitates marine research by procuring yachts and vessels to be the main platform for the research, this trip was a little different in that the yacht became unavailable. SeaKeepers then contributed lodging arrangements as well as help in the field. The expedition was a complete success, due in no small part to the unfailing determination and work ethic displayed by the research team.

Program Director:

Tony Gilbert
Tony@seakeepers.org
255 Aragon Ave. Third Floor
Coral Gables, Florida
Tel: 305.448.7089

SeaKeepers Media Contact:

Media@seakeepers.org
255 Aragon Ave. Third Floor Coral Gables, Florida
Tel: 305.448.7089