EXPEDITION PROFILE

December 10th-16th, 2020 aboard DISCOVERY Yacht Mystique

The International SeaKeepers Society assisted Dr. Austin Gallagher and Beneath The Waves in conducting field research in the Bahamas aboard DISCOVERY Yacht Mystique, an 87' Warren from the Sport Fleet of Fleet Miami. The team, consisting of Dr. Gallagher, Brendan Shea, Capt. Jason Halvorsen, Tony Gilbert, and Jeff Pankey conducted shark tagging, Baited Remote Under Water Video system (BRUV) deployments (in both shallow waters and extreme depth), and finally, underwater photographic surveys as well as aerial drone surveys to map the sea grass meadows of the Great Bahama Bank. In summary:

- Four tiger sharks were safely tagged and released
- All four sharks are equipped with long term acoustic tags and pop-off satellite tags, to help us understand where their most important habitats lie in the region.
- Twenty Two BRUVs were deployed – resulting in fourteen sharks seen on camera so far, including a male tiger shark.
- Thirty square miles of seafloor was mapped
- Twenty square miles of seafloor were surveyed from above, via drone flights

In addition to all that can be learned from the sharks in the area about this seagrass habitat, researching seagrass in general can also help us understand more about blue carbon. Blue carbon refers to carbon dioxide removed from the atmosphere by the world's coastal ocean ecosystems, mostly mangroves, salt marshes, seagrasses and macroalgae, through plant growth and the accumulation and burial of organic matter in the soil.

This expedition represented a major launching point for Beneath The Waves' initiatives in 2021. Last but not least, a crucial part of the success of this mission is due to the professionalism and commitment to excellence displayed by Captain Stephanie Sykora, mate Collin Patrick, and stew Brooke Gowers.

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