

Sharks, tuna provide big game fishing in N.S.



JOE FITZGERALD CHASING PISCES

The boat was travelling at medium speed, and just beyond its wake a large, triangular rig dragged the surface like a rake. Staggered along the rig were artificial squidlike lures, each about as big as my forearm.

One of the crew turned to me and said, "There's nothing like seeing a bullet hit one of those squid."

What he meant by "bullet" was bluefin tuna, the largest species of tuna in the world and a treasured prize for the hardcore saltwater angler. I was taking part in the Nova Scotia International Tuna Tournament, a resurrection of the old International Tuna Tournament held in Wedgeport from 1937 until 1972. Bluefins gather off Nova Scotia like no other place in the world, and big game sportsmen have always come chasing them. Ernest Hemingway, Zane Grey, and Franklin D. Roosevelt are among notables who fished off Nova Scotia for bluefin tuna in the early part of the century.

Today, bluefin stocks have declined, and expensive limited licences are required to catch them, but for those with the means, it is



IT WAS THIS BIG: This 1,200-pound mako shark caught off Brier Island during the Yarmouth Shark Derby in September, 2005, set a Canadian record.

possible to arrange a charter and a chance at one of the world's great game fish.

Speaking of great game fish, the notion that sharks do not inhabit Maritime waters has been dis-

FACTS ON TUNA AND SHARKS

- Bluefin tuna are the largest tuna species in the world, and migrate up the Atlantic coast annually. They arrive in numbers off Nova Scotia in late summer and fall.
- The world record for bluefin tuna caught with rod and reel was set in Aulds Cove, Antigonish Co., in 1979. The fish weighed 1,496 pounds.
- Bluefin tuna are caught with heavy tackle, including a belt with holster for the rod and sometimes a fighting chair. They are strong fish, and may take hours to land.
- Considered high-grade sashimi tuna, bluefin fetch extraordinary prices from Japanese fish buyers ready to ship the fish immediately from docks around the province.
- Sharks that are most commonly caught by anglers in Nova Scotia are blue, porbeagle, and dogfish. However, mako and thresher sharks are caught each year.
- Mako sharks are spectacular fighters, perhaps the world's fastest fish. They leap into the air when hooked, and there are recorded instances of hooked makos jumping and crashing into the boat chasing them.
- Unlike trolling for tuna, fishing for shark entails setting out a chum slick — a mixture of oil, blood and ground fish — to attract them. Using their keen sense of smell, sharks home in on the odiferous trail and then take natural baits such as mackerel or squid.

pelled. It was only two years ago off Yarmouth that a boat participating in the Yarmouth Shark Derby hooked a fish that proved to be the stuff of dreams — or nightmares, to some. The nearly 1,200-pound mako shark was the largest caught yet in Canadian waters.

Mako sharks are considered to be one of the top ocean game fish in the world, right up there with bluefin tuna and the marlin species. While most sharks caught off Nova Scotia are blue sharks, makos are hooked every year.

And last year, for the first time, a great white shark was hooked off Antigonish.

Fishing for shark is not as exclusive as fishing for tuna. A \$25 licence from the Fisheries and Oceans Department will make you

legal, though you must release any shark caught. Shark derbies are popular in Nova Scotia, and give anglers a chance for a unique angling and learning experience.

As awareness grows on the angling opportunities, so, too, does the realization that conservation and good management are desperately needed for these much-maligned creatures.

Though I was hoping for stiff muscles and an aching back from reeling in a world-record bullet, it was not to be. However, I know next year that the bluefin will be back, sharks will be swirling under the swells, and so will the looming chance for an epic battle.

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