

Parting Shot

by Albert Kok

Some 20 years ago, encounters with a Great Hammerhead (Sphyrna mokarran; GH) in temperate tropical waters were very rare, in contrast to its smaller relative, the scalloped hammerhead (Sphyrna lewini).

The best place and opportunity to meet the GH was at Tiger Beach in the Bahamas, where they occasionally mingled with regular lemon sharks, Caribbean reef sharks, and tiger sharks. When a GH showed up, a crew member on the boat started yelling 'hammer, hammer,' a signal to rush into the water to meet the fabulous creature. Some were lucky, others not.

Some years later, the scene changed radically. At Bimini, not far from Tiger Beach, GHs became regular customers, increasing the chance that visitors could take home fantastic shots of this apex predator, which sometimes reached 6 meters. It is said that the GH's strange wing-shaped head with widely separated eyes enables a large, almost circular visual field, with electroreceptors underneath the head functioning as effective sensors for detecting the electrical fields of its favourite prey, sting rays hidden under sand.

One reason for their presence

at Bimini was that GH's researchers at the Bimini Biological Field Station (in short, Shark Lab) began baiting sharks to attach tags to their dorsal fins to study their migratory behaviour. Results obtained with satellite tags revealed large-scale annual returns of the GHs to their habitats, seasonal residence lasting 5-6 months, and numerous long-distance interstate movements. The locations at Bimini then became popular among shark photographers who joined Neal Watson's Hammerhead Safaris.

It's hard to describe the thrill of the first encounter with these sharks. Even the mighty tiger shark had to make way for the GH with its spectacular dorsal fin, the swinging wing-shaped head, and large tail.

Moving slowly in the clear blue water above a shallow, flat, and sunlit sandy bottom, sometimes willing to approach and 'pose' for the UW photographer. On such occasions, the fish-eye lens, like the Tokina 10-17, proved to be the ideal tool for shooting this large shark from close



Nikon D7100 in an Ikelite housing, a 5-inch mini dome, dual DS 125 strobes at half power, and a Tokina 10-17mm lens at 10mm, Settings: ASA 400, @11, shutter at 1/125 at 60 cm distance.

range, while pulling the strobes -set at half power- close and slightly backward to the housing. My interest was particularly drawn to the GH's big black eyes, partially covered by the nictitating membrane, which seemed

to fixate the photographer when it passed at close range.

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Do you have a shot which has a story within a story? If so e mail it with up to 750 words of text and yours could be the next Parting Shot.

Images can be any size bigger than 20cm (horizontal or vertical) @ 150dpi saved as jpeg format and about 500 - 750 words would be fine.)

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