

Bimini and Cat Island Sharks

by Albert Kok

Underwater photographers visiting the Bahamas have a choice between three locations for meeting different apex predators: the Tiger shark at Tiger Beach (West Point), the Great Hammerhead at Bimini and the Oceanic white tip at Cat Island. In the right season and suitable weather conditions, one can be pretty sure of close encounters with these fabulous creatures.

There are two reasons why: most female sharks tend to return to their specific habitats in certain months of the year, and the dive operators use bait to bring them in to the boats. In April this year April Jack Bernstein and I visited two of these locations, Bimini and Cat Island. We flew in from Atlanta to Nassau, and then used local flights for transfer to the two islands.

Western Air took us from Nassau to Bimini to meet the legendary Great Hammerheads (GHs). At the end of April most of them have already started their migration to the east coast of the US or even the Bermudas, where the males are eagerly anticipating their arrival. We were lucky that a couple of 'hammies' were still around. In the winter months they often show up

quite soon, but now it took some patience and subtle baiting by Neil Watson to bring them in. Although it's somewhat against my principle, I now tried the 'open mouth trick' after my more placid shark portraits of last year February. You need to get close to Neil and wait for the moment when the hammerhead swims in to take the bait he is handing out.

The golden rule at Bimini is to be over-weighted, kneel down without kicking away the sand and anticipate the action. But with a moderate current it can still be a bit difficult to remain stable. I liked using the Nikon D7200 with mini dome and Tokina 10-17, and to take a sequence of shots of the shark coming in, getting closer, opening the mouth and then turning away. I did not use the viewfinder but aimed the camera and just clicked away. At Bimini many GHs have a tag in their big dorsal fin, inserted by researchers of the Shark Lab to study their migratory patterns.

The GHs are a rare species indeed. But recently the GHs of Bimini have become 'hot'. In past years visitors had a choice between two locations: the Bimini Sands Resort with Neil Watson on South Island and the Bimini Big Game Club



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Great Hammerhead Bimini. Nikon D7200, Ikelite, Tokina 10-17, F16, 1/160, ISO 200

Resort & Marina on North Island. Here Vincent and Debra Canabal from Epic run their hammerhead trips in the winter months, and then move to Cat Island in spring for the Oceanic

sharks. However, Neil Watson recently announced that he will also move his scuba diving operation to the Big Game Club Resort. Meaning that from now on North Bimini