

Shark Tagging with UM Summer Scholars

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By Jake Jerome, RJD Graduate Student and Intern

Last Saturday, the RJD crew headed offshore in hopes to collect more data for the ongoing research projects that are taking place. Leaving from Key Biscayne, we were joined by students from the UM Summer Scholars Program, a mix of high school students from across the country that come to the University to experience college for the first time and get involved in the fields that they are interested in. It was exciting to hear that many of them were not from coastal states and were getting the chance to see sharks for the first time! With the Miami summer sun beating down on us, we pushed off the dock and headed out on the Divers Paradise.



A participant helps with the measurement of a nurse shark.

After explaining to the group what we had planned for the day and how our gear worked, the students helped to deploy our first 10 drum lines in about 110 feet of water. While we let our lines soak with fresh tuna and barracuda, we collected environmental data with the help of our participants. Temperature, dissolved oxygen, and salinity are measured at each site that we fish at and after each set of 10 drum lines are deployed. While we were counting down until our hour soak time was complete, we briefed the group on our work up process and how they would be helping us collect data if we were lucky enough to catch any sharks. With spirits high, we headed to our first drum line to see if we had any luck on line number 1.

Our first 10 drum lines yielded a large nurse shark that we were able to quickly secure on the platform and begin collecting data from. After everyone got the chance to see the shark up close, we released it in healthy condition. The whole work up process took less than 5 minutes. With no luck on our second set of drums, we rebaited each line and headed back to the beginning for our final set. Like the first one, our last set of the day yielded a large nurse shark. With the help of our participants, we gathered our data quickly and watched another shark swim away in good condition.

Throughout the day, we set out and retrieved a total of 30 drum lines which gave us a good opportunity to catch sharks. We were able to collect data from two large nurse sharks with the help of our participants. We also managed to capture a green moray eel on one of our lines but successfully cut the hook and watched it swim back down into ocean in a healthy condition. In addition to assisting with data collection, the students of SSP were a huge help in pulling up our drums from our deep site, which take a lot of strength considering they weigh 45 pounds!

Towards the end of our day, we noticed a huge rain cloud just off in the distance. While some considered it good luck that we were never caught in the middle of it, I think most of us were secretly hoping that we could get a break from the hot sun and enjoy a nice rain shower to help cool ourselves off. Nonetheless, we had a successful day out on the water and were able to collect valuable data that will aid in the conservation of these awesome animals.



UM Summer Scholars and the RJD team.

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