

MAINLAND MEXICO: Cold and green waters bring strange catches

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Topped by a 521-pound mako caught off Mazatlan

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MAZATLAN— Water temperatures have been cooler and greener than usual for this time of year in Mazatlan and elsewhere off mainland Mexico. The result being a change in species sighted and caught, as well as the lacking of a few

normally seen this time of year.

Pacific striped marlin were still found in their offshore waters. However, they have also been affected by the ever changing water conditions that normally don't show up until mid-February or early March. While anglers still had a daily shot at billfish, the changing conditions were evident. One example this past week that reflected cooler water conditions was that caught by the Bibi Fleet. The Paty C brought in a 521-pound shortfin mako shark measuring 10 feet, 8 inches and it took a forklift to move.

That day started out like most others this past week, with smooth gentle waves and very little wind. The water temperatures were holding at 72 degrees when the Paty C left the Bibi Fleet dock by the Lighthouse Hill at 6:30 on a fogless morning. Skipped by Alejandro Teno Sr. and his son Teno Jr., their goal for the day was to catch and release a striped marlin for their clients Don and Connie Hancock.

Morning fishing was slow with the occasional striped marlin showing here and there. But with no hook ups, dolphin, whales and sea turtles sightings were the highlight of the day. "The boat had five lines in the water and was 26 miles offshore," Tadeo Hernández Kelly, manager of the Bibi Fleet said. "At 11:30, just a few minutes before turning around to start back, Teno Jr. spotted a big fin some 200 yards away. From that moment on the adrenaline flowed constantly for almost three hours."



RARE CATCH FOR MAZATLAN — Looking for striped marlin to catch and release, Don and Connie Hancock got the surprise and fish of a lifetime, when Don Hancock boated this 521-pound shortfin mako shark. Not only a strange catch for the area, finding one this large was truly unusual. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BIBI FLEET

"It all started when it went straight for the first bait, a dead mullet, which the shark ate and in return broke the line a few seconds later," Kelly said. "Their disappointment did not last long though, as soon after the shark surfaced again. By then, the three lines with plastic lures had been taken out of the water so there was only one still in use. We had just changed baits on the outriggers a few minutes before the first strike so we knew our bait was good," he said.

After circling the area a few times hoping for the shark's return, it surfaced again and went aggressively for the remaining line in the water, swallowing the bait deep inside its mouth. "The crew's first estimate was that of a 125 kilo fish (275 pounds) which later turned out to be rather conservative," Kelly said.

As frequently happens, as soon as the shark was well hooked, several striped marlin showed up and came close to witness the event. "There were at least four of them jumping around the boat," Kelly said. "We wanted to try to catch them too, but it was too risky to try a second line at that moment and they decided to focus on the shark. We were very lucky as the line never touched its sharp teeth or it would have broken the line immediately. There was a big gap between each tooth, I think that's what kept it on," Kelly said.

The shark, a shortfin mako, fought hard for almost three hours before they finally brought it close enough to gaff. "Finally, it got close to the boat and Teno Sr. tried to gaff it unsuccessfully," Kelly said. "At that moment, it shook its head abruptly, easily getting rid of the flying gaff. A second, third and fourth time the shark came close to the boat, however, the position and distance to it did not provide a clear chance at gaffing it. On a fifth try, Teno Sr. finally had a shot. It was not an easy job for the crew or angler as the gaff broke during the action," he said.

The crew, although very experienced and knowledgeable, had never dealt with a shark of this size before as it is considered not only an outstanding catch but an uncommon one in Mazatlan waters. The gear used was a 9/0 Penn Senator with 80-pound monofilament and 275-pound steel leader on a 5-foot, 6-inch rod. After finally tying it to the boat, it was time to make the long, slow run home.

"I had arrived to the docks at 2:00 to welcome clients when I received a call from a boat to let me know that the Paty C had just landed the shark and it was going to take them until 6:00 p.m. to return," Kelly said. "I immediately called them on the radio and was told again, about 125 kilos. I got excited, as that was a big shark, but not as big as we later found out it really was," Kelly said.

When the boat finally showed up just before 6:00, Kelly knew straight away that it wasn't 275 pounds but his first guess of 450 pounds was still short. "It was very hard to even get the shark on the dock," Kelly said. "It took six of us to pull it out of the water. The rumor had spread quickly among friends and colleagues and even being a Sunday afternoon, around 20 people had gathered to see how big it was," Kelly said.

"We needed a forklift in to lift it to the scale, 521 pounds was the answer," Kelly said. "Everyone cheered when the weight was announced. It was around 6.30 by then and the Mazatlan night was falling; it was time to call it a day. Our anglers were happy, but very tired. It had been a long day and a heck of a fight; the fight of a lifetime." The meat was split between the anglers, crew and their families and not a single pound of fish was wasted.

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