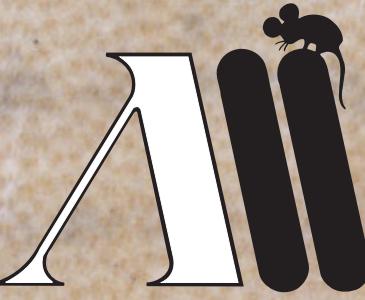


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VSEBINA / INDICE GENERALE / CONTENTS 2020(1)

SREDOZEMSKI MORSKI PSI
SQUALI MEDITERRANEI
MEDITERRANEAN SHARKS**Deniz ERGÜDEN, Deniz AYAS &
Hakan KABASAKAL**

Provoked Non-Fatal Attacks to Divers by Sandbar Shark, *Carcharhinus plumbeus* (Carcharhiniformes: Carcharhinidae), Off Taşucu Coast (NE Mediterranean Sea, Turkey)
Izzvani napadi sivega morskega psa, Carcharhinus plumbeus (Carcharhiniformes: Carcharhinidae), ob obali Taşucu (SV Sredozemsko morje, Turčija)

1

**Jeanne ZAOUALI, Sihem RAFRAFI-NOUIRA,
Khadija OUNIFI-BEN AMOR, Mohamed
MOURAD BEN AMOR & Christian CAPAPÉ**
 Capture of a Large Great White Shark, *Carcharodon carcharias* (Lamnidae) from the Tunisian Coast (Central Mediterranean Sea): a Historical and Ichthyological Event
Ulov velikega primerka belega morskega volka, Carcharodon carcharias (Lamnidae) ob tunizijski obali (osrednje Sredozemsko morje): zgodovinski in ihtiološki dogodek

9

**Mohamed Mourad BEN AMOR, Marouène
BDIOUI, Khadija OUNIFI-BEN AMOR &
Christian CAPAPÉ**
 Captures of Large Shark Species from the Northeastern Tunisian Coast (Central Mediterranean Sea)
Ulovi velikih morskih psov ob severovzhodni tunizijski obali (osrednje Sredozemsko morje)

15

**Fernando LOPEZ-MIRONES, Alessandro
DE MADDALENA & Ricardo
SAGARMINAGA VAN BUITEN**
 On a Huge Shortfin Mako Shark *Isurus oxyrinchus* Rafinesque, 1810 (Chondrichthyes: Lamnidae) Observed at Cabrera Grande, Balearic Islands, Spain
O opazovanju velikega primerka atlantskega maka Isurus oxyrinchus Rafinesque, 1810 (Chondrichthyes: Lamnidae) v bližini otoka Cabrera Grande, Balearsko otočje, Španija

25

**Okan AKYOL, Tevfik CEYHAN &
Christian CAPAPÉ**

Capture of a Bigeye Thresher Shark *Alopias superciliosus* (Alopiidae) in Turkish Waters (Eastern Mediterranean Sea)
Ulov velikooke morske lisice Alopias superciliosus (Alopiidae) v turških vodah (vzhodno Sredozemsko morje)

31

**IHTIOLOGIJA
ITTOLOGIA
ICHTHYOLOGY****Saul CIRIACO, Marco SEGARICH,
Carlo FRANZOSINI & Spiros KONSTAS**

A Record of Rare Spiny Butterfly Ray, *Gymnura altavela* (Linnaeus, 1758), in the Amvrakikos Gulf (Greece)
Zapis o pojavljanju redkega skata vrste Gymnura altavela (Linnaeus, 1758), v zalivu Amvrakikos (Grčija)

39

**Khaled RAHMANI, Fatiha KOUDACHE,
Nasr Eddine Riad MOUEDDEN, Lotfi
BENSAHLA TALET & Roger FLOWER**
 Spawning Period, Size at First Sexual Maturity and Sex Ratio of the Atlantic Horse Mackerel *Trachurus trachurus* from Béni-Saf Bay (Western Coast of Algeria, Southwestern Mediterranean Sea)
Obdobje drstenja, spolna zrelost in spolni delež šnjurov Trachurus trachurus iz zaliva Béni-Saf bay (zahodna obala Alžirije, jugozahodno Sredozemsko morje)

43

**İnci TÜNEY-KIZILKAYA, Okan AKYOL &
Aytaç ÖZGÜL**

On the Occurrence of *Pseudocaranx dentex* (Carangidae) in the Turkish Aegean Sea (Eastern Mediterranean Sea)
O pojavljanju trnoboka Pseudocaranx dentex (Carangidae) v turškem Egejskem morju (vzhodno Sredozemsko morje)

53

JADRANSKA MORSKA FLORA
 FLORA MARINA ADRIATICA
 ADRIATIC MARINE FLORA

Claudio BATELLI & Neža GREGORIČ

- First Report of an Aegagropilous Form of
Rytiphlaea tinctoria from the Lagoon of
 Strunjan (Gulf of Trieste, Northern Adriatic) 61
*Prvi zapis o pojavljanju vrste Rytiphlaea
 tinctoria v kroglični obliki v Strunjanski
 laguni (Tržaški zaliv, severni Jadran)*

**Sandra BRAČUN, Maximilian WAGNER,
 Kristina M. SEFC & Stephan KOBLMÜLLER**

- Seasonal Growth Patterns of
Cymodocea nodosa and
 Diversity of its Epibionta in the
 Northern Adriatic Sea) 69
*Sezonska rast kolenčaste cimodoceje
 (Cymodocea nodosa) in pestrost njenih
 epibiontov v severnem Jadranu*

BIOINVAZIJA

BIOINVASIONE

BIOINVASION

Ahmet ÖKTENER & Sezginer TUNCER

- Occurrence of *Gnathia* Larvae (Crustacea,
 Isopoda, Gnathiidae) in Three Lessepsian
 Fish Species in the Southern
 Turkish Coast of the Aegean Sea 87
*Pojavljanje ličink vrste iz rodu Gnathia
 (Crustacea, Isopoda, Gnathiidae)
 pri treh lesepskih selivkah v južnih
 turških vodah Egejskega morja*

Raouia GHANEM & Jamila BEN SOUSSI

- Additional Record of the Alien Crab *Actaeodes
 tomentosus* (Brachyura: Xanthidae: Actaeinae)
 from Tunisian Marine Waters 99
*Novi zapis o pojavljanju tujerodne
 rakovice Actaeodes tomentosus
 (Brachyura: Xanthidae: Actaeinae)
 iz tunizijskih morskih vod*

**Sami MILI, Rym ENNOURI, Sihem
 RAFRAFI-NOUIRA & Christian CAPAPÉ**

- Additional Record of Golani Round
 Herring, *Etrumeus golani* (Osteichthyes:
 Dussumieriidae) from Tunisian Waters with
 Comments on its Distribution
 in the Mediterranean Sea 105
*Nov zapis o pojavljanju vrste Etrumeus
 golani (Osteichthyes: Dussumieriidae) iz
 tunizijskih voda s komentarji o njeni
 razširjenosti v Sredozemskem morju*

ONESNAŽEVANJE OKOLJA
 INQUINAMENTO DELL'AMBIENTE
 ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

**Ouassima RIFFI, Jamila FLIOU, Ali AMECHROUQ,
 Mohammed ELHOURRI, Mostafa EL IDRISI,
 Fatimazahra BENADDI & Said CHAKIR**

- Research and Characterization of Determinants
 Controlling the Accumulation of Certain Metals
 in the Leaves of *Dysphania ambrosioides* 113
*Raziskava o dejavnikih, ki vplivajo na
 kopiranje nekaterih kovin v listih
 vrste Dysphania ambrosioides*

DELO NAŠIH ZAVODOV IN DRUŠTEV
 ATTIVITÀ DEI NOSTRI ISTITUTI E SOCIETÀ
 ACTIVITIES BY OUR INSTITUTIONS AND
 ASSOCIATIONS

Valentina TURK

- Srečanje Znanosti o oceanih (Ocean Science
 Meeting - OSM) 123

OCENE IN POREČILA
 RECENSIONI E RELAZIONI
 REVIEWS AND REPORTS

Milena MIČIĆ

- Book review: A Miniature Ocean 129
*Kazalo k slikam na ovitku 130
 Index to images on the cover 130*

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ON A HUGE SHORTFIN MAKO SHARK *ISURUS OXYRINCHUS* RAFINESQUE, 1810 (CHONDRICHTHYES: LAMNIDAE) OBSERVED AT CABRERA GRANDE, BALEARIC ISLANDS, SPAIN

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ABSTRACT

A huge female shortfin mako shark, Isurus oxyrinchus, was observed on 28 June 2018 near Cabrera Grande, in the Balearic Islands, Spain. Its total length was carefully estimated at 500 cm based on a comparison with a 520-cm inflatable boat. This specimen is therefore the largest mako known alive and the second largest mako ever recorded worldwide.

Key words: shortfin mako shark, *Isurus oxyrinchus*, maximum size, Spain, Cabrera National Park, Mediterranean Sea

IN MERITO A UN ENORME SQUALO MAKO DALLE PINNE CORTE *ISURUS OXYRINCHUS* RAFINESQUE, 1810 (CHONDRICHTHYES: LAMNIDAE) OSSERVATO ALLE ISOLE BALEARI, SPAGNA

SINTESI

Un'enorme femmina di squalo mako dalle pinne corte Isurus oxyrinchus, fu osservato nei pressi di Cabrera Grande, alle Isole Baleari, in Spagna, il 28 giugno 2018. La lunghezza totale dell'esemplare fu stimata con accuratezza pari a 500 cm sulla base delle dimensioni di un gommone di 520 cm. Tale esemplare è pertanto il più grande mako mai osservato vivo ed il secondo più grande registrato a livello mondiale.

Parole chiave: squalo mako dalle pinne corte, *Isurus oxyrinchus*, dimensioni massime, Spagna, Parco Nazionale dell'Arcipelago di Cabrera, mare Mediterraneo

INTRODUCTION

The shortfin mako *Isurus oxyrinchus* Rafinesque, 1810, inhabits temperate and tropical waters of the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans. It is pelagic, coastal and oceanic, occurring at a depth range from 0 to 500 m (Compagno, 2001). The shortfin mako is present in the entire Mediterranean (De Maddalena & Baensch, 2005), where it is caught mainly by tuna longline fishery and occasionally by swordfish fishery using longlines and driftnets (Celona et al., 2004; Megalofonou et al., 2005). Although the majority of shortfin mako catches are recorded in pelagic fisheries, in a recent report, Kabasakal (2015) emphasized that new-born and juvenile specimens of *I. oxyrinchus* can be incidentally captured by coastal stationary netting and bottom longline fishing, as well.

In the present article we report a record of a huge shortfin mako spotted in June 2018 by the team of Alnitak Marine Research and Education Center in the Balearic Islands, in Spanish Mediterranean waters.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The observation took place from the research vessel Toftevaag, an 18-metre LOA converted historic Norwegian fishing boat, and from a 520-cm-long inflatable boat. The shark was encountered during a shipboard survey in the waters of the proposed extension of Cabrera National Park (Parque Nacional del Archipiélago de Cabrera), while tracking cetaceans, sea turtles, seabirds, devil rays and bluefin tuna. The crew of the Toftevaag at the time of the encounter was composed of Ricardo Sagarminaga van Buiten as captain, Fernando López-Mirones as biologist and filmmaker for ORCA-Films, and Beat von Niederhaeusern as boatswain. A few volunteers were also on board, including Sam Laederach, Georgina Stevens, Doris Juen, Cornelia Luxner, Susanne Luxner, Naim Lasgaa and Miguel Félix.

On 28 June 2018, at 07:00 UT, three hours after sunrise, at $39^{\circ} 5.35' \text{N}$ and $003^{\circ} 4.31' \text{E}$, with wind force 0 (Beaufort) and sea state 0 (Douglas), the dorsal



Fig. 1: Map showing the exact location where the estimated 500-cm TL female shortfin mako shark was observed on 28 June 2018.

Sl. 1: Zemljevid obravnavanega območja z označeno lokaliteto, kjer so avtorji 28. junija 2018 opazovali na 500 cm dolžine ocenjeno samico atlantskega maka.

fin was observed of a shark gliding slowly through the surface in 700-m-deep waters of the Emile Baudot escarpment, 5 nmi ESE of the Cabrera Grande Island (Fig. 1).

On the same day, a small juvenile loggerhead turtle *Caretta caretta* (Linnaeus, 1758) had been seen basking just one hour before 3.8 miles north from the sighting position, and a pod of 40 Risso's dolphins *Grampus griseus* (Cuvier, 1812) was observed slowly travelling north at a distance of 1000 m just after the encounter with the shark.

According to data from the Balearic Islands Coastal Ocean Observing and Forecasting System (SOCIB) and observation by Alnitak, 14 days prior to the shark encounter there had been particularly numerous observations of bluefin tuna *Thunnus thynnus* (Linnaeus, 1758), giant devil rays *Mobula mobular* (Bonnaterre, 1788), sperm whales *Physeter macrocephalus* Linnaeus, 1758 with calves, and large dolphin groups, while 7 days before the shark encounter there had been an important reduction in the number of sightings, except for turtles and Risso's dolphins, while sperm whales appeared to be silent, not clicking, just frequently breaching.



Fig. 2: The estimated 500-cm TL female shortfin mako shark, observed near Cabrera Grande, Balearic Islands, Spain, on 28 June 2018. This mako is believed to be the largest of its species observed alive, and the second largest ever recorded worldwide (photo by ALNITAK/ORCA-Films).
Sl. 2: Pet metrov dolga samica atlantskega maka, fotografirana 28. junija 2018 blizu otoka Cabrera na Balearih (Španija). Avtorji menijo, da gre za največji živeči primerek in drugi največji doslej zabeleženi primerek (foto: ALNITAK/ORCA-Films).

Pictures and videos of the shark were taken with a Nikon D750 camera, a Panasonic AG-DVX 200 video camera and a GoPro Hero3 video camera for subsequent analysis (Figs. 2–4). Underwater videos were filmed from the inflatable boat by the second author, but in them

the shark was barely visible. A short, 25-second high-resolution aerial video was filmed by the first author from the mast of the boat from a height of 7 m, and was fundamental for identification purposes.



Fig. 3: Dorsal fin of the sighted shortfin mako shark (photo by ALNITAK/ORCA-Films).
Sl. 3: Hrbtna plavut opazovanega atlantskega maka (foto: ALNITAK/ORCA-Films).



Fig. 4: Close-up of the shortfin mako shark showing the whitish band visible at the base of the dorsal fin, which is a peculiar feature of very large shortfin makos (photo by ALNITAK/ORCA-Films).
Sl. 4: Bližinski posnetek atlantskega maka, na katerem je razvidna belkasta proga na korenju hrbtnje plavuti, ki je značilna za večje primerke te vrste (foto: ALNITAK/ORCA-Films).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The shark was observed by the first two authors for 70 minutes. The size of the shark was carefully estimated by the first two authors at 500 cm total length (TL), based on the size of the inflatable boat, which was 520 cm LOA.

Some evident morphological features of the animal, including markedly spindle-shaped body, pointed conical snout, presence of caudal keel, and long gill slits, allowed the authors to make an immediate identification of the shark as a representative of the family Lamnidae. Although the shark was initially identified as a great white shark *Carcharodon carcharias* (Linnaeus, 1758), after careful examination of the high-resolution video and the photos we were able to conclude that the species observed by the team of Alnitak was actually an unusually large shortfin mako shark.

Large individuals of shortfin mako may bear a similarity with the great white shark, considerably more conspicuous than small or medium-sized individuals, however the two species can be told apart by various features (De Maddalena et al., 2005). The identification of the Cabrera shark as *I. oxyrinchus* is therefore based on many morphological characteristics, which are listed below. Some of these also constitute a solid confirmation of the fact that the shark was indeed a shortfin mako of a very large size.

The estimated 500-cm size may seem barely acceptable for *I. oxyrinchus*, considering that only three other individuals of over 400 cm have been recorded to date worldwide (Kabasakal & De Maddalena, 2011), but on the other hand these records show that while the occurrence of such gigantic makos is extremely rare, it is still a reality.

The colouration is grey brown with a hint of blue. This can be observed in large makos, while smaller individuals display a much more brilliant blue colour with strong metallic reflection.

The shape of the first dorsal fin, high and more erect than in *C. carcharias*, corresponds to what is normally observed in *I. oxyrinchus* (Fig. 5).

The posterior margin of the first dorsal fin is mostly smooth and with only a few notches, which is typical of *I. oxyrinchus*, while *C. carcharias* shows a much more irregular posterior margin with a high number of notches (Fig. 5).

The whitish band visible at the base of the dorsal fin is a peculiar feature of very large shortfin makos and is not observed in great white sharks (Fig. 4).

The shape of the body, both the head and trunk stout and very massive, can suggest either a great white shark or a very large shortfin mako, but are definitely not compatible with small or medium-sized mako specimens.

The pectoral fins are long, conspicuously longer than in an average shortfin mako. It is known that neonate specimens of *I. oxyrinchus* have very short pectoral fins, however, these get conspicuously longer as the individual grows, up to the point of reaching a similar length as in *C. carcharias*.

The caudal fin's terminal lobe is not as prominent as in *C. carcharias*, and its size fits the one normally observable in *I. oxyrinchus* (Fig. 5).

The large size of the caudal keel may fit both *C. carcharias* and a very large *I. oxyrinchus*, but its angular shape definitely indicates the latter species.

The lower lobe of the caudal fin is as big as, or perhaps even bigger than, the upper lobe. In this regard we have to consider that while in *C. carcharias* the proportion of the two lobes tends to remain similar in small and large individuals, in *I. oxyrinchus* the lower lobe is much shorter than the upper lobe in juveniles, but becomes much larger when the individual grows bigger, and eventually it may match the size of the upper lobe.

On the head and the trunk there are bite scars that are likely the result of love bites by a mako, not by a great white shark.

The fast and somewhat nervous swimming pattern is typical of shortfin mako shark but not of great white shark.

Other features that differentiate *I. oxyrinchus* from *C. carcharias*, like the absence of a black tip on the underside of pectoral fins, the shape of the teeth, the respective position of the dorsal fin origin and pectoral fin free rear tip, the boundary between the colouration of the lateral and ventral surfaces, could not be observed. However, the totality of the observable features listed above, leads to a solid conclusive identification of the species as *I. oxyrinchus*.

While a study of 199 shortfin mako sharks showed an average total length of 171 cm (Kohler et al., 1996) this species can sometimes attain incredibly larger sizes. The largest shortfin mako reported to date worldwide was a female caught in the late 1950s in the Aegean Sea off Marmaris, Turkey, which was estimated at 585 cm TL with a 577–619 cm range (Kabasakal & De Maddalena, 2011). Other large specimens have been recorded in the Mediterranean area. A 445-cm-long specimen was caught off Six-Fours les-Plages, France, in September 1973 (Capapé, 1977). A 425-cm-long shortfin mako was caught off La Galite Island, Tunisia, on 24 September 1876, and its jaws are preserved in the Natural History Museum of Genoa, Italy (Doria & Gestro, 1877). Lawley (1881) reported a 4-metre-long specimen that weighed 1000 kg, which was observed in a warehouse of a fishmonger in Livorno and was caught off Piombino, Italy. A 400-cm-long shortfin mako captured off Caska, Novalja, Croatia, on 13 May 1882 was reported by Brusina (1888). A 390-cm-long shortfin mako was caught on 30 November 1991 off Bagnara Calabria, Italy (Storai et al., 2001). Another 390-cm-long specimen, weighing 513 kg, was caught on 20 September 2000 off Punta Alice, Italy (Storai et al., 2001). A 390-cm-long female was caught on 26 July 2003 off Scaletta Zanclea, Italy, and another female, measuring 370 cm TL, was caught between Portopalo di Capo Passero and Marzamemi, Italy, on 22 June 2004 (Celona et al., 2004). A 380-cm-long female was caught in summer 2012, by a commercial purse-seiner operating in İskenderun Bay, eastern Levantine Sea (Kabasakal, 2015).

Taking into account these records, the estimated 500-cm TL female shortfin mako shark observed near Cabrera Grande is believed to be the largest of its species observed alive, and the second largest ever recorded worldwide.

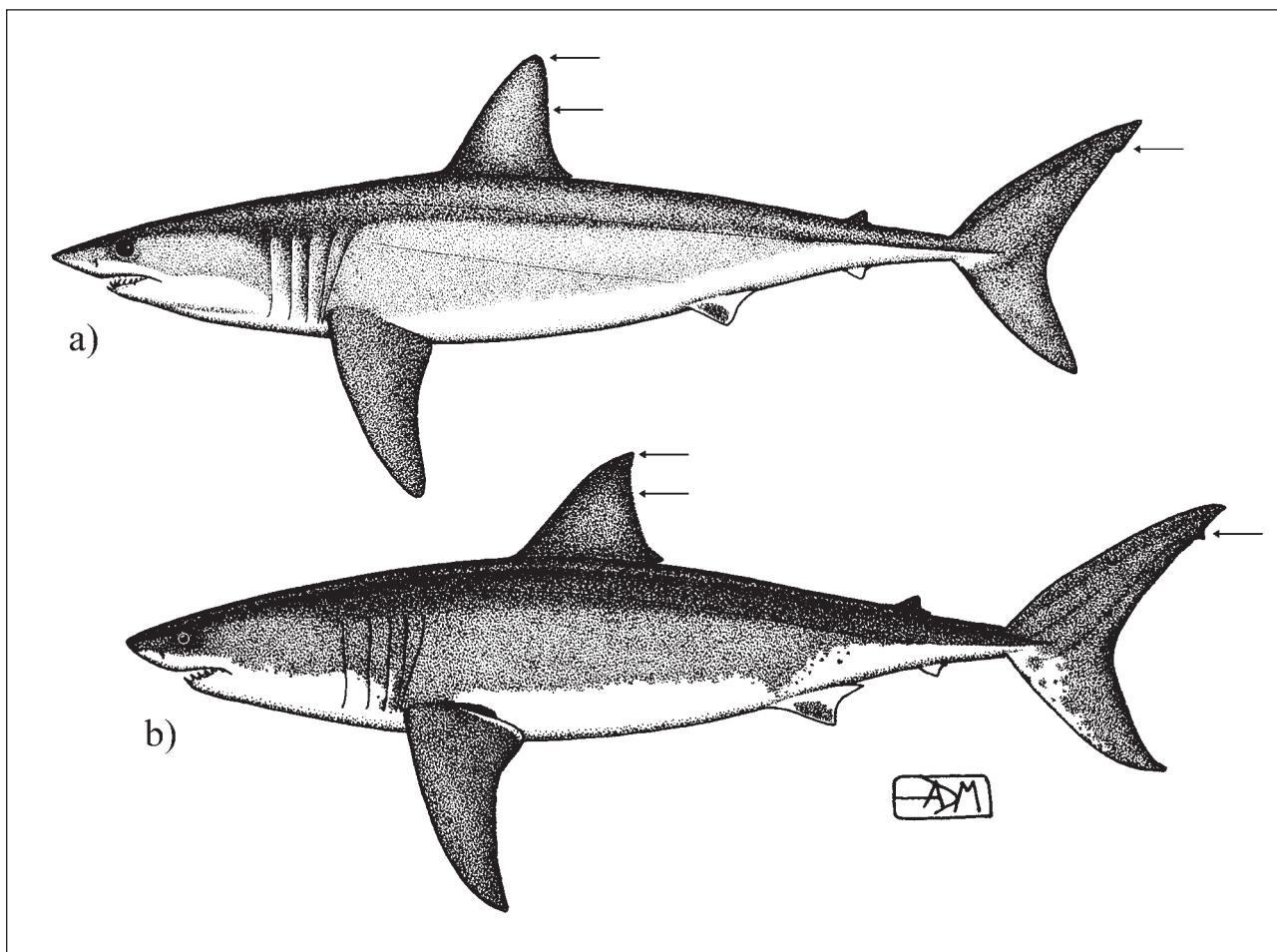


Fig. 5: Morphology of the shortfin mako (a) and the great white shark *Carcharodon carcharias* (Linnaeus, 1758) (b). The arrows mark some of the features that differentiate *I. oxyrinchus* from *C. carcharias*: a more erect first dorsal fin, a smoother posterior margin of the dorsal fin and a less prominent caudal fin's terminal lobe (illustration by Alessandro De Maddalena).

Sl. 5: Morfološke značilnosti atlantskega maka (a) in belega morskega volka *Carcharodon carcharias* (Linnaeus, 1758) (b). Puščice označujejo značilnosti, po katerih je možno razlikovati vrsto *I. oxyrinchus* od *C. carcharias*: bolj pokončna hrbtna plavut, bolj gladek zadnji rob hrbtne plavuti in manj očitna krpica na repni plavuti (ilustracija: A. De Maddalena).

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O OPAZOVANJU VELIKEGA PRIMERKA ATLANTSKEGA MAKI *ISURUS OXYRINCHUS* RAFINESQUE, 1810 (CHONDRICHTHYES: LAMNIDAE) V BLIŽINI OTOKA CABRERA GRANDE, BALEARSKO OTOČJE, ŠPANIJA

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POVZETEK

Osemindvajsetega junija 2018 so blizu otoka Cabrera Grande na Balearih (Španija) opazovali veliko samico atlantskega maka (*Isurus oxyrinchus*). Na podlagi primerjave z gumenjakom, ki je meril 520 cm, so ocenili, da je samica merila 500 cm v dolžino. Gre za največji živeči primerek te vrste in drugi največji doslej zabeleženi primerek.

Ključne besede: atlantski mako, *Isurus oxyrinchus*, največja dolžina, Španija, Nacionalni park Cabrera, Sredozemsko morje

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