

# ANNALES



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## REPORT ON A GREAT WHITE SHARK *CARCHARODON CARCHARIAS* OBSERVED OFF LAMPEDUSA, ITALY

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### ABSTRACT

*A female great white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*) estimated at 500 cm was observed on 23 May 2020 near Lampedusa, in the Pelagie Islands, Italy. This record is of special relevance given the importance of the Strait of Sicily as a parturition ground and nursery area for this species, which is classified as critically endangered in the Mediterranean Sea by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).*

**Key words:** great white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*, Lampedusa, Italy, Mediterranean Sea

### SEGNALAZIONE DI UNO SQUALO BIANCO *CARCHARODON CARCHARIAS* OSSERVATO AL LARGO DI LAMPEDUSA, ITALIA

### SINTESI

*Una femmina di squalo bianco (*Carcharodon carcharias*) di lunghezza stimata pari a 500 cm, è stata osservata il 23 maggio 2020 presso Lampedusa, nelle Isole Pelagie, Italia. Tale caso è di particolare interesse a causa dell'importanza del Canale di Sicilia quale area di parto e di nursery per la specie che è classificata come in pericolo critico di estinzione nel mar Mediterraneo dall'Unione Internazionale per la Conservazione della Natura (IUCN).*

**Parole chiave:** squalo bianco, *Carcharodon carcharias*, Lampedusa, Italia, Mediterraneo

## INTRODUCTION

Since 1996, the Italian Great White Shark Data Bank (Banca Dati Italiana Squalo Bianco) has collected a substantial amount of information regarding historical and recent records on the great white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias* (Linnaeus, 1758), from the Mediterranean Sea. This data include information on size, distribution, habitat, behaviour, reproduction, diet, fishery, and attacks on humans (De Maddalena, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2006; Celona et al., 2001, 2006; De Maddalena & Heim, 2012; De Maddalena & Zuffa, 2009; De Maddalena et al., 2001, 2003; Galaz & De Maddalena, 2004). An accurate recording of new observations of great white sharks in the Mediterranean area is a fundamental part of this ongoing research programme. Data on the presence of the species in the Mediterranean Sea have also been reported in recent years by Boldrocchi et al. (2017), Kabasakal (2014, 2016), Kabasakal & Gedikoglu (2008), Kabasakal et al. (2018).

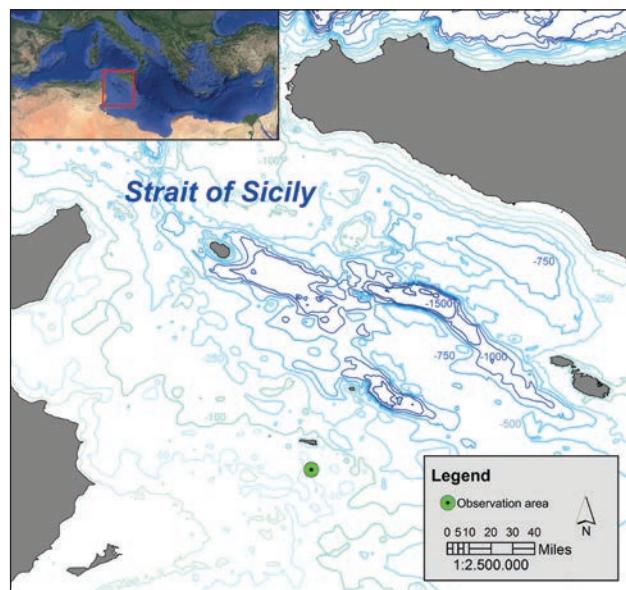
In the present article, we report the record of a large great white shark spotted in May 2020 by sport fishermen in the Pelagie Islands, in Italian Mediterranean waters.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

On the morning of 23 May 2020, three sport fishermen, Salvatore Sicurello and two friends, were aboard an 8 m long boat in the waters of Lampedusa Island, the Pelagie archipelago, Italy, in the Central Mediterranean Sea (Fig. 1). The anglers were fishing with *bolentino*, using strips of European flying squid, *Todarodes sagittatus* (Lamarck, 1798), as bait, without chum, and they caught some red porgies, *Pagrus pagrus* (Linnaeus, 1758). At 10:04 a.m., with a 5–6 kn wind and a calm sea, the dorsal fin of a shark was observed in 60–70 m deep blue waters, 10 nm south of the Lampedusa harbour. The shark was observed by the anglers for approximately 3 minutes. They were the only boat in the area at that moment. The shark showed no particular interest in the boat and, after swimming nearby, left the area. After the encounter, the three sport fishermen resumed fishing but moved to another site.

A short, 1:30 minute low-resolution video, filmed by Mr. Sicurello from the boat, was uploaded on a Facebook group, and brought public attention to this case. The video was later published by several Italian media (Stampa TV, 2020).

A higher resolution version of the video was provided by Mr. Sicurello to the authors, and was fundamental for identification purposes. A data collection form was sent by the authors to Mr. Sicurello, in order to collect detailed information on the observation.



**Fig. 1: Map showing the exact location where the female great white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias* (Linnaeus, 1758), estimated at 500 cm TL, was observed on 23 May 2020 (map created with ArcGis).**

**Sl. 1: Zemljovid obravnavanega območja (v ArcGis) z označbo lokalitete, kjer je bila 23. maja 2020 opažena približno 500 cm dolga samica belega morskega volka (*Carcharodon carcharias* (Linnaeus, 1758)).**

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Some evident morphological features of the animal, including brownish grey coloration, markedly spindle-shaped body, massive trunk, wide head, pointed conical snout, large and pointed dorsal fin with irregular posterior margin, long and wide pectoral fins, wide caudal keels, long gill slits, lunate caudal fin, presence of black spot at the pectoral fin insertion, white marks on pectoral fin, free rear tip, pelvic fins and caudal fin lower lobe (Fig. 2), allowed the authors to make an immediate identification of the shark as a great white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias* (Linnaeus, 1758).

Other typical features of the species, such as the large triangular serrated teeth and the black apex of the pectoral fin's ventral surface, could not be observed due to the fact that the video was filmed from the surface, and the shark never exposed the ventral surfaces to the observer. However, based on the observable features listed above we identified the species as *C. carcharias*.

The higher resolution version allowed a close observation of the pelvic area, including a glimpse of the pelvic fin's free rear tip, which revealed the absence of claspers. We could therefore conclude that the observed shark was a female.



*Fig. 2: The female great white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias* (Linnaeus, 1758), estimated at 500 cm TL, observed near Lampedusa, the Pelagie Islands, Italy, on 23 May 2020 (stills from a video by Salvatore Sicurello).*

*Sl. 2: Približno 500 cm dolga samica belega morskega volka (*Carcharodon carcharias* (Linnaeus, 1758)), opažena 23. maja 2020 blizu Lampeduse (Isole Pelagie, Italija) (slika dobljena iz videoposnetka, ki ga je posnel Salvatore Sicurello).*

The size of the shark was estimated by Mr. Sicurello at 500 cm total length (TL), based on the size of the 8-metre boat.

The encounter took place in the Strait of Sicily, between Italy and Tunisia, a well-known parturition ground and nursery area for newborn and juvenile white sharks (Cigala-Fulgosi, 1990; De Maddalena & Heim, 2012). Since female white sharks attain sexual maturity between 400 and 500 cm TL, and both mating and parturition tend to occur in spring and summer (Compagno, 2001; Francis, 1996), we can assume that the female shark observed near Lampedusa was sexually mature, and speculate that perhaps its presence in the area may be related to mating or parturition. No mating scar is observable in the video, but this may be due to the relatively low resolution of the images, and should not eliminate the possibility of sexual maturity and potential sexual activity.

Great white sharks have long sexual maturation times, low fecundity, long gestation periods, and produce small numbers of young, which makes them highly vulnerable to over-exploitation (De Maddalena & Heim, 2012). Limited evidence indicates that great white sharks have few nursery areas, therefore even minimal fishing pressure in one of these pupping areas where pregnant females and newborns are concentrat-

ed, like the Strait of Sicily, can have devastating results. Great white sharks were, without a doubt, at one time much more abundant in the Mediterranean than they are presently, which could be the result of overfishing either the shark or its preys. A decrease of 45.88% in the number of great white shark records in the Mediterranean has been reported from the 1989–1998 decade to the 1999–2008 decade (De Maddalena & Heim, 2012). The observation of a potentially mature female in an important parturition ground presented herein is therefore a positive sign of the species' continuous vitality in the area. We also underline the importance of citizen science, public engagement, and social networks for the detection and observation of species of interest, including ecological observation of scientific relevance (Tiralongo et al., 2019a, 2019b).

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## ZAPIS O POJAVLJANJU BELEGA MORSKEGA VOLKA *CARCHARODON CARCHARIAS* PRI LAMPEDUSI, ITALIJA

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### POVZETEK

*Triindvajsetega marca 2020 so avtorji opazovali približno pet metrov dolgo samico belega morskega volka (*Carcharodon carcharias*) blizu Lampeduse (Isole Pelagie, Italija). Ta zapis je še posebej pomemben, saj je Sicilski preliv razmnoževalno območje te vrste, ki je opredeljena kot kritično ogrožena v Sredozemskem morju po merilih Mednarodne zveze za ohranjanje narave (IUCN).*

**Ključne besede:** beli morski volk, *Carcharodon carcharias*, Lampedusa, Italija, Sredozemsko morje

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