

ACTIVITY: Fishing
CASE: GSAF ND-0133
DATE: Prior to 1908
LOCATION: Monterey, California.

NAMES: Unknown
DESCRIPTION: Some of the crew of a Japanese fishery for basking sharks.

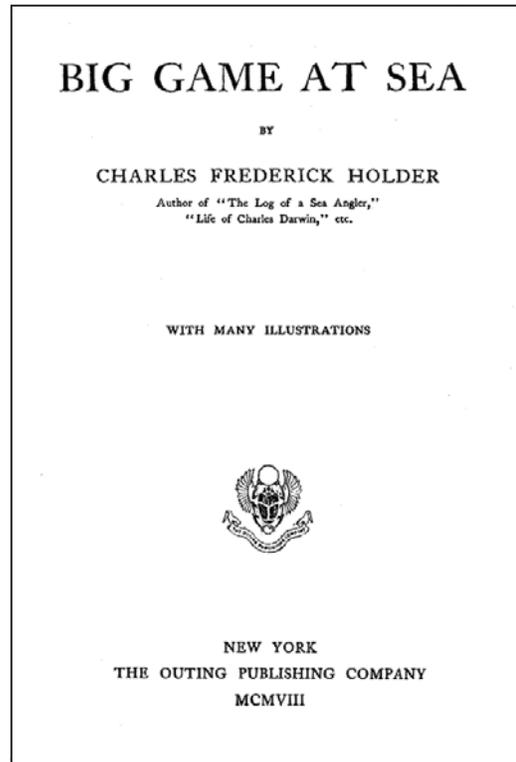
NARRATIVE: The shark had been caught but “came suddenly to life and killed several men, and so utterly ruined their boats that the fishery was abandoned”.

SPECIES: Basking shark

SOURCE: Charles Frederick Holder, (1908), Big Game at Sea, pages 158-159

NOTE: Harpoon and net fisheries for basking sharks existed in the North Atlantic for centuries. Until the early 1900s the sharks were hunted for the oil in their livers. Between 1924 and 1937, a small fishery for basking sharks off Monterey Bay produced fishmeal and shark liver oil. It expanded from 1946 to early 1950s, but collapsed as the numbers of basking sharks diminished and market prices for shark liver oil dropped. As result of damage caused by basking sharks when they became entangled in fishing nets, in the 1950s the Canadian Fisheries Department initiated eradication programs of the species along the coast of British Columbia.

By 2002, the future of these giant slow-growing plankton-feeding sharks was so grim that the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species moved to provide international protection for the sharks by listing them on Appendix II. The remnants of the population of basking sharks off the California coast are being studied by the Pelagic Shark Research Foundation (PSRF), based in Santa Cruz, which also strives to secure legislation protecting these unique animals. (<http://www.pelagic.org>)



PSRF research intern Susan Arnold of UCSC tags the dorsal fin of a 25' long basking shark in 200' feet of water near UCSC Long Marine Lab in the fall of 1991. PSRF has tagged a world record number of basking sharks since 1990.

Big Game at Sea

having hauled us in all perhaps five miles, including circles and rushes, it gave signs of weakness; its struggles almost ceased except for an occasional lunge, and from here it was towed in; yet this occupied nearly two hours, owing to its repeated lapses from the quiescent state.

Reaching the beach, the line was tossed ashore, and two score men pulled the shark up on the sands, where it was found to measure between thirteen and fourteen feet in length; but it was the girth of the monster which made the greatest impression upon the average observer. It was impossible to weigh the huge creature, but few of those who saw it placed the weight at less than fifteen hundred pounds, and every ounce of it was game.

On the Californian coast the Bonita shark abounds, and in the neighborhood of Santa Catalina they afford great sport.

Recently several large Basking sharks have been taken on the Californian coast; one observed by me measured nearly thirty-five feet in length, small compared to some which reach fifty or more feet in length on the Atlantic coast, where there was a large and important fishery a century ago.

The progressive Japanese established a shark fishery at Monterey some years ago to catch the members of a large school which lay off that part in summer; but the first shark they caught came suddenly to life and killed several men, and

158

Big Sharks as Game

so utterly ruined their boats that the fishery was abandoned.

An acquaintance of mine stated that once in Monterey Bay a huge specimen of these sharks followed him about for hours, becoming so attentive that he came in shore. This shark, which was estimated to be thirty or forty feet in length, placed its head directly beneath the rudder of the launch about three feet down and held that position.

These huge creatures are harmless, having extremely small teeth, and doubtless live on sea weed, and on small fishes and animals of various kinds. The specimens caught off the Southern California coast became entangled in nets, involving great loss to the Portuguese and Italian fishermen.

At Santa Catalina sharks of remarkable size are taken with rod and reel, and in other ways—it being not unusual to see huge Grouper sharks, twelve or fifteen feet long, brought in by anglers, while Mackerel and Thresher sharks, Hammer-heads, Oil sharks, and many more fall to the anglers especially in September, when the big game comes in from the outer sea to prey upon the schools of fish which abound in the vicinity of the island.

159