

Thresher Shark Best Fishing Practices

- ❑ Avoid the take of large pregnant females
- ❑ Minimize fight time by using heavy tackle and a fighting harness
- ❑ Maneuver the boat to follow a hooked shark and gain line whenever possible
- ❑ Use circle hooks to increase the likelihood of mouth hooking sharks
- ❑ Avoid foul-hooking sharks
- ❑ Resuscitate exhausted sharks before release
- ❑ Report tags and catch data (see back panel)

SHARK TAG REWARD

The Southwest Fisheries Science Center has an ongoing shark research program and needs your support in the return of any tags that you may encounter in the dorsal region of shortfin mako, blue, and thresher sharks. Information from tagged sharks is essential towards shark age, growth, and movement studies. Tagged mako sharks have been injected with oxytetracycline which leaves a reference mark on the shark's vertebrae. We offer a US\$100 reward for return of the tag with a four inch section of the vertebrae. Please notify the Southwest Fisheries Science Center as soon as possible if you catch a tagged shark.



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Best fishing practices for safe handling



Common Thresher Shark (*Alopias vulpinus*)
Photo © Phil Zerofski

Thresher Sharks

The common thresher shark (*Alopias vulpinus*) is a highly migratory species (HMS) and a valuable coastal resource that we share with Canada and Mexico.

Thresher sharks are a relatively long-lived species that can live more than 20 years and reach weights in excess of 1000 pounds. Thresher sharks do not mature until 5-6 years of age and produce few offspring (2-4 pups annually). It is important to avoid the harvest of pregnant females to maintain a healthy stock.

California thresher shark stocks have been depleted from overfishing in the past, but you can help to ensure the future of the fishery by using some of these best fishing practices.

Thresher Shark Best Fishing Practices

Handling thresher sharks can be dangerous to both the angler and the shark. Following a few basic techniques can reduce the threat of injury.



Avoid harvesting large females

Female thresher sharks can be identified by the lack of claspers between the anal fins. Most females in excess of 300 pounds caught from March-June will be carrying pups. Avoid the take of large pregnant females.



Male

Female

Minimize fight time

Tail-hooked thresher sharks exhaust quickly and often die when fight times exceed 1.5 hours because of limited water flow across the gills.

The use of heavy trolling tackle (80 lb. test minimum) and a fighting harness is strongly recommended to reduce fight time and the number of tail-hooked sharks lost with trailing gear.

Mouth-hooking thresher sharks is a good alternative to increase catch-and-release survivorship. Mouth-hooked threshers often jump out of the water and offer a great fight on lighter tackle, while allowing the shark to breathe throughout the fight.

Maneuver the boat to keep a good angle on the line and chase the fish when possible to gain line. Avoid fighting the shark from a dead drift, as this will kill your back and the shark as well.

Mouth-hook your catch

Since thresher sharks use their long tail to stun prey before it is eaten, most sharks are hooked by the tail when caught on trolled lures. Foul-hooked sharks have a reduced capacity for ram ventilation, which results in reduced catch-and-release survivorship in the recreational fishery. Mouth-hooking thresher sharks is a preferred technique, especially when practicing catch-and-release. The following tips can be used by anglers to effectively hook thresher sharks in the mouth and provide many benefits for both the angler and the shark.

Mouth-hooking techniques

Teaser and drop-back or skip bait:

This technique involves trolling baited teaser lures with no hooks, loose drags, and a skip bait or a drop back bait rigged with a circle hook and wire leader. Carefully watch the rod tips or affix a bell to the tips while trolling. Upon detection of a strike, pull the boat out of gear and slowly reel in the trolled lure while dropping back or sinking out your skip bait. Drop-backs should be rigged with a small piece of wire leader to a circle hook and a small sinker (1-2 ounce) to get the bait down to the shark. This may take a few minutes, but can be very effective. Simply replacing standard J-hooks with circle hooks on your trolled lures may be another effective way to hook more sharks in the mouth.

Slow-troll live bait:

Slow troll a live mackerel rigged with a small piece of wire and a circle hook at the surface or on a loose down-rigger clip. When a strike is detected put the reel into freespool, put the boat in neutral, and wait for the thresher to come back to eat the stunned bait. The shark may strike the bait several times with its tail before eating it.

Chumming/Chunking:

Once a productive area is located by slow-trolling teasers or finding large baitballs, shut down the boat and drift while setting up a continuous chunk line or chum bucket. Send out a couple of chunks or slabs at different depths rigged with a small wire leader and a circle hook.

Benefits of mouth hooking:

- Enhanced recreational angling experience with acrobatic jumps and erratic runs from the hooked shark
- Shorter fight times on lighter tackle for IGFA and angling club records
- Reduced gear loss and fewer sharks lost with trailing gear in their tail
- Healthier sharks and reduced post-release mortality following capture



Use circle hooks, not J hooks

Circle hooks reduce the likelihood of foul hooking thresher sharks upon the initial tail strike and are effective for hooking sharks in the corner of the mouth.

Circle hooks reduce shark mortality. **8/0 Eagle Claw 2004** circle hooks work well. The use of large stainless J hooks is not a good idea if you intend to release the shark.



Handling your catch

Tail-hooked threshers should be carefully handled by leadering the shark and grabbing the tip of the tail, **above the hooks**. Care must be taken to firmly hold the tail **above the hooks** while the hooks are removed. If the shark begins to kick excessively upon grabbing the tail, then let it go after making sure that anglers are clear of the tail and hooks and wait until it is more manageable.

Mouth-hooked sharks can be brought alongside the boat while idling forward. With the boat moving forward, grab the leader and remove the hook with pliers or cut the line or hook with a pair of bolt cutters. Again, caution must be taken to avoid the tail of the shark.



Revive exhausted threshers before release

When at the boat, an exhausted shark often looks dead, but most of the time it is not. If the mouth is pumping regularly, then the shark can typically be released in good condition.

If the shark is not moving it may be resuscitated by walking it next to the boat (similar to walking billfish). This can be done by sticking a small, barbless gaff into the base of the dorsal or pectoral fin. Orient the shark parallel with the boat and bump the boat forward in and out of gear for roughly 10 minutes until the mouth begins pumping or the shark begins to kick.



Common Thresher Shark Fork Length-Weight Relationship

Fork Length (ft)	Weight (lbs)
4	74
4.5	100
5	130
5.5	166
6	207
6.5	253
Females > 300 lbs caught March-June are likely carrying pups	
7	305
7.5	362
8	426
8.5	497

L-W relationship from Kohler et al. 1996 for N. Atlantic sharks. Verified for Southern California from survey and fishery data.