

FIRST RECORD OF A WHITE TIGER SHARK, *GALEOCERDO CUVIER*, FROM THE NORTHEASTERN GULF OF MEXICO—*Steven J. Rider*⁽¹⁾, *Michael Athorn*⁽²⁾, and *George O. Bailey*⁽³⁾, ⁽¹⁾Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida Marine Research Institute, 350 Carroll Street, Eastpoint, FL 32328, USA, ⁽²⁾F/V Margaritas, Scipio Creek Municipal Marina, Apalachicola, FL 32320, USA, ⁽³⁾Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve, 350 Carroll Street, Eastpoint, FL 32328, USA

ABSTRACT: A white female tiger shark, *Galeocerdo cuvier*, was caught on September 30, 1999, by a fishing vessel operating in the northeastern Gulf of Mexico. White specimens have been reported in several other species of elasmobranchs. However, this is the first documented record of a white specimen occurring in this species.

Key Words: Tiger shark, albino, coloration, chromatophores

ALBINO and white elasmobranch specimens are rare. Only twenty-five specimens composed of seventeen species from twelve families have been reported. Ten of these specimens from the following species: sevengill shark (*Notorynchus maculatus*), tawny nurse shark (*Nebrius concolor*), basking shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*), zebra shark (*Stegostoma fasciatum*), gray smoothhound (*Mustelus californicus*), Japanese topeshark (*Hemitriakis japonica*), spiny dogfish (*Squalus acanthias*), thornback skate (*Raja clavata*), common stingray (*Dasyatis pastinata*), and cownose ray (*Rhinoptera bonasus*), were reported as partial albinos (Traquair, 1893; Herald, 1953; Joseph, 1961; Cohen, 1973; Nakaya, 1973; Capape and Pontoustier, 1975; Froiland, 1975; Furata, 1985; Taniuchi and Yanagisawa, 1987). However, partial albino may be an inaccurate term. These aforementioned specimens were white in color, but the irises were reported as having pigment; thus, not albinos. White animals lack pigment in the chromatophores, while albino animals have colorless chromatophores. That is, their bodies were unable to form melanin because of one or several metabolic defects, which is albinism (King and Stansfield, 1996). This genetic trait has rarely been observed in elasmobranchs. Only eight elasmobranch albino specimens composed of four species from three families have been reported. These species were gray smoothhound (*Mustelus californicus*), leopard shark (*Triakis semifasciata*), scalloped hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna lewini*), common torpedo (*Torpedo torpedo*) and in each specimen the irises were pink, indicating colorless chromatophores (McKenzie, 1970; Talent, 1973; Follet, 1976; Brahim et al., 1998). Six specimens from the following species: nurse shark (*Ginglymostoma cirratum*), blue skate (*Raja batis*), cuckooray (*Raja naevus*), southern stingray (*Dasyatis americana*), and cownose ray (*Rhinoptera bonasus*), were reported as white specimens (Wilson, 1951; Schwartz, 1959; Schwartz and Safrit, 1977; Castro, 1998). Herald and co-workers (1960) reported the cap-

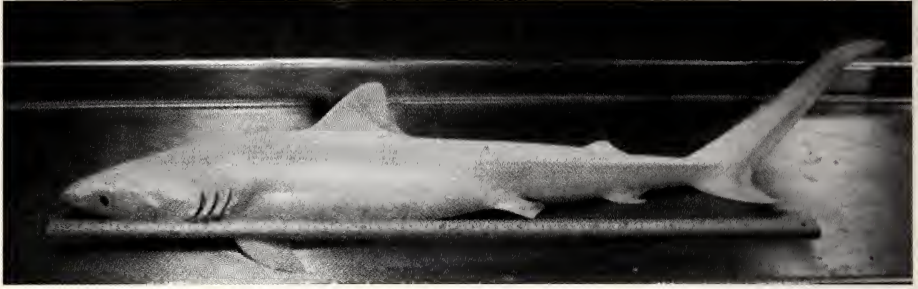


FIG. 1. A white female tiger shark, *Galeocerdo cuvier*, 124 cm total length, caught in the northeastern Gulf of Mexico.

ture of a white gray smoothhound, however it was unclear if this was a white individual or an albino. This note reports the collection of a white specimen from the family Carcharhinidae, or requiem sharks, captured in the Gulf of Mexico.

The white tiger shark, *Galeocerdo cuvier* (Peron & LeSueur, 1822), was caught on September 30, 1999. The locality was approximately 93-km southeast of Apalachicola, Florida along the 10-fathom curve (29.50° N, 85.21° W). The specimen was caught aboard the long-line fishing vessel, *F/V Margaritas*, while fishing for sharks. The specimen was verified as a tiger shark using the diagnostic characteristics as described by Castro (1996). The precaudal length of the white tiger shark was 124 cm and the weight was 7 kg.

The natural coloration was white, with the dorsal and ventral surfaces completely white (Figure 1). The dorsal dark spots, which give juvenile tiger sharks a mottled appearance were visible, although they were faint. Both irises were light brown in color. Based on reported length-at-ages by Branstetter and co-workers (1987), Castro (1996), and Winter and Dudley (2000), this specimen was less than 1 year of age. The white tiger shark was mounted and is currently on display at the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve in Apalachicola, Florida.

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