

Project Update: May 2021

The Miskito Cays or as our field partner calls them the Faraway Cays are the most remote marine site in Honduras. This archipelago is made up of approximately 49 small cays (some so small you could walk around them in 5 mins) located about 90km from the mainland of Honduras. Many do not even have names and the ones that do might have three to four different names including the ones in Miskito dialect. The average Honduran is probably unaware they even exist or are part of our territory, but the local Miskito fishers have known about them for a very long time. These cays and adjacent banks are very important habitats for lobster and conch and are used by both artisanal and industrial fleets. They represent the economic livelihoods of the Moskitia region and their indigenous communities.

Our team was very excited about deploying longlines in the Miskito Cays, given the information from artisanal fishers and the previous landings we knew surely, we would catch some sharks. Getting to the cays is not an easy feat, and the journey there is usually about three days depending on the weather or unforeseen events. The closest port is Puerto Lempira; however due to COVID-19 access was very complicated. This field trip we departed from the Island of Guanaja, because travel was complicated to the mainland due to COVID-19. It took us approximately 24 hours by boat to reach of camping site, called by local Guanajans Dayton Cay.

The days at our field site at Dayton Cay started quite early around 5am to cut our bait and get all our gangions and gear neatly on board. Once at our sites, deploying the longline was very rhythmic and methodical, with everyone in their positions focused on baiting hooks, clipping gangions and throwing the line with the occasional joke on the person "slowing" the chain. We also were able to deploy, a Baited Remote Underwater (BRUV) Video station the team designed!

In the field trip we were able to deploy 36 BRUV stations and 16 longline sets. We caught and tagged 52 sharks. We also had many productive and successful days with several sharks on our longline, we caught, tagged and released four species of sharks: nurse sharks (*Ginglymostoma cirratum*), Caribbean reef sharks (*Carcharhinus perezii*) and Caribbean sharpnose (*Rhizoprionodon porosus*) sharks and Tiger Sharks (*Galeocerdo cuvier*). Most of the sharks we tagged were juvenile reef sharks. We caught two tiger sharks which I would consider the highlight of the trip! We also were able to train three new fishers and a local biologist on research methods such as longlines and BRUVs. Though data are still being analyzed, at first glance we have about 70% of our BRUVs with shark presence which is considered high for our region.



Fig. 1 Team Leader Gabriela Ochoa and Exson Flores, local artisanal fisher, getting ready to tag a juvenile tiger shark.

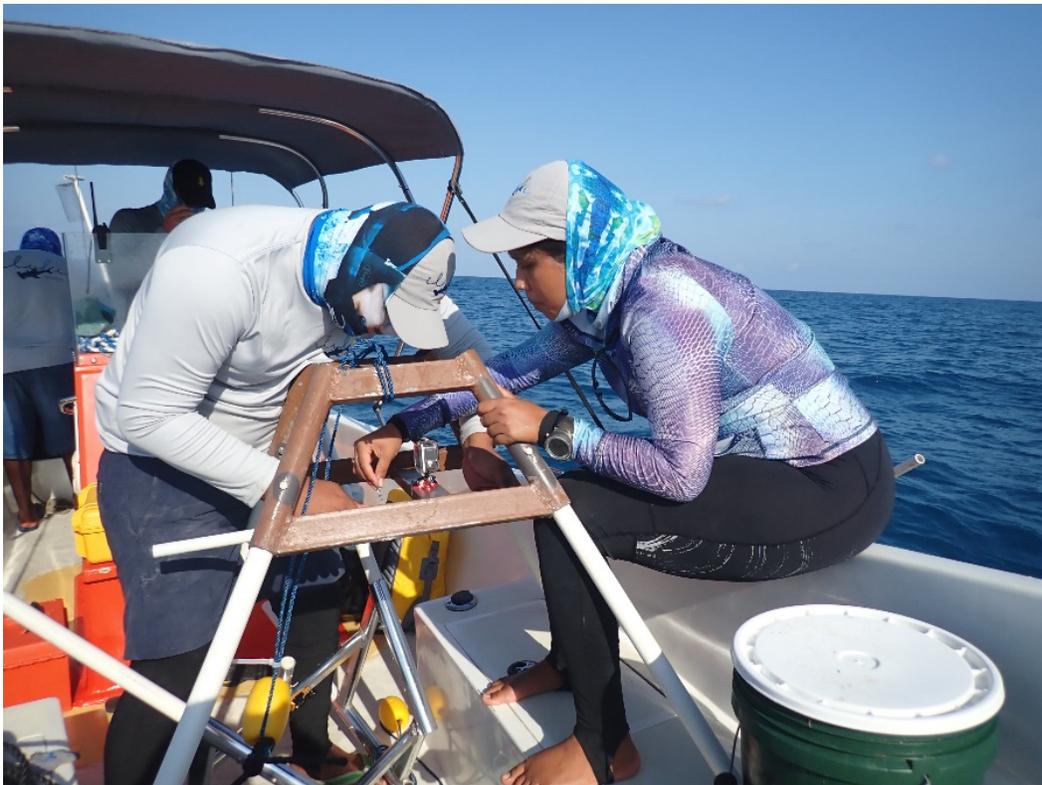


Fig. Team Leader Gabriela Ochoa and Odair Rodriguez, Miskito Biologist, getting a BRUV ready



Fig 3. Team Picture, left to right: Ely Augustinus, Royce Ebanks, Gabriela Ochoa, Exson Flores, Ernesto and Odair Rodriguez



Fig 4. Caribbean Reef Shark tagged and released safely.