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**BRIEF COMMUNICATION**

**Identification of young-of-the-year great hammerhead shark *Sphyrna mokarran* in  
northern Florida and South Carolina**

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Two sharks, visually identified in the field as young-of-the-year (YOY) scalloped hammerhead *Sphyrna lewini*, were identified as great hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran* based on nuclear-encoded single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNP) and sequences of mtDNA. Individuals were captured and released in Bulls Bay, SC and Saint Joseph Bay, FL, in 2013 and 2014, respectively. These findings indicate *S. mokarran* may be pupping in or around these areas and highlight new regions that may be a productive focus for future research on early life history of *S. mokarran*.

Key words: essential fish habitat; molecular identification; morphologically conserved species; shark nursery; *Sphyrna*.

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Very little is known about the early life history of the great hammerhead, *Sphyrna mokarran* (Rüppell 1837). Locations of nursery grounds are not well defined and identification of these areas is of importance for management of the resource and conservation of the species (Miller *et al.*, 2014). Large coastal sharks that give birth to live neonates of small size (< 70 cm) are expected to utilize discrete nurseries (Branstetter, 1990). The size at birth of *S. mokarran* (50–70 cm (Compagno, 1984) suggests that nursery use would be beneficial to neonates; pupping of *S. mokarran*, however, is thought to occur primarily in offshore waters (Hueter & Tyminski, 2007; Harry *et al.*, 2011). Young-of-the-year (YOY) *S. mokarran* have been observed utilizing nearshore nurseries off the Gulf of Mexico coast of Florida as far north as Yankeetown (29.004467° N; 82.815062° W; Hueter & Tyminski, 2007). Young-of-the-year and juvenile *S. mokarran* < 200 cm total length ( $L_T$ ) are not known to occur in coastal waters on the east coast of the U.S.A. (Castro, 2011).

To investigate nursery habitat usage of two sympatrically distributed sphyrnids, the scalloped hammerhead *Sphyrna lewini* (Griffith & Smith 1834) and the recently discovered Carolina hammerhead *Sphyrna gilberti* Quattro, Driggers III, Grady, Ulrich & Roberts 2013, double-digest restriction associated DNA sequencing (ddRAD) was used to identify a panel of single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNP) that can be used to differentiate between the species. Because *S. lewini* and *S. gilberti* are conserved morphologically and differ only in the number of precaudal vertebrae (Quattro *et al.*, 2013), the panel allows for conclusive, non-lethal species identification.

Fin clips were collected from eighteen putative YOY *S. lewini* spread across four sites: Corpus Christi, TX (27.689378° N; 97.055843° W), Panama City, FL (29.7326667° N; 85.3691° W), Cape Canaveral, FL (28.389406° N; 80.586626° W) and Bulls Bay, SC (33.009500° N; 79.485346° W). Genomic DNA was extracted using a Mag-Bind Blood & Tissue DNA Kit (Omega Bio-Tek; www.omeganiotek.com). Double-digest restriction associated DNA sequencing (ddRAD) library preparation was conducted following a modified version of Peterson *et al.* (2012; Supporting Information Table SI). The library was sequenced as a paired-end run on one lane of an MiSeq DNA sequencer (Illumina; www.illumina.com). The dDocent pipeline (www.ddocent.com; Puritz *et al.*, 2014) was used for reference construction, mapping reads and SNP calling. A total of 39 011 SNPs were recovered from 4584 contigs (Supporting Information Table SII).

As an initial means of grouping individuals, a PCA was run in ADEGENET (Jombart, 2008) and three distinct genetic clusters were recovered (Fig. 1 and Supporting Information Video SI). The clusters were highly divergent across all loci ( $F_{ST} = 0.9-0.98$ ). A total of 846 bp from the mitochondrial control region (mtCR) was sequenced from two to three individuals from each cluster to determine species identity (Supporting Information Video SIV). Sequences were compared with haplotypes available on GenBank and three individuals were identified with 99% sequence identity as *S. lewini*, three with 99–100% sequence identity as *S. gilberti* and two with 100% sequence identity as *S. mokarran* (GenBank accession nos. KY315826–KY315830). The first individual identified as *S. mokarran* was captured in Bulls Bay, SC, on 9 July 2013 and the

second in St. Joseph Bay, FL, on 5 August 2014 (Fig 1). Total length was measured at 63.8 cm for the individual captured in SC and 67 cm for the individual captured in FL; both fell within the observed size range for neonate *S. mokarran* (Compagno, 1984). A neighbour-joining tree was created from mtCR data with MEGA7 (Kumar *et al.*, 2016) using a Jukes-Cantor substitution model with 500 bootstrap replicates (Supporting Information Video SIII). Three groups were recovered with 100% support and were consistent with clusters identified using SNPs in the PCA (Fig 2). Mean nucleotide divergence between the group identified as *S. mokarran* and other groups was *c.* 16% and mean divergence between *S. lewini* and *S. gilberti* was *c.* 5%. Within group distances were negligible (0–0.1%; Table I).

*Sphyrna mokarran* is primarily a tropical species hypothesized to give birth offshore (Harry *et al.*, 2011; Hueter & Tyminski, 2007). The observation of two neonate *S. mokarran* in nearshore habitat of South Carolina and the northern Gulf of Mexico coast of Florida indicates that *S. mokarran* may utilize nursery habitat further north and further inshore than known previously. Little is known about the early life history of the species and, like other hammerhead sharks, *S. mokarran* is susceptible to over-exploitation (Denham *et al.*, 2007), making identification of essential fish habitat, such as nursery areas, a critical research topic. Given present data, it is not possible to characterize how important these two northern, inshore sites are to *S. mokarran*. Three scenarios may account for the presence of *S. mokarran* in these nurseries. First, it is possible that individuals were pupped elsewhere and subsequently moved into Bulls Bay and St. Joseph Bay after parturition. Given the size of the individuals, however, it is unlikely

that they migrated a substantial distance. The capture date of the neonate in Bulls Bay occurred during the time of proposed parturition (Piercy *et al.*, 2010), meaning that the individual probably was born in close proximity to Bulls Bay. Second, these findings may indicate relatively new nursery habitat usage by *S. mokarran* due to a northward coastal expansion in nursery usage. Third, several diagnostic features of *S. mokarran* (falcate pelvic fins and nearly straight anterior margin of the cephalofoil) are not as apparent in neonates, causing them to appear relatively similar to neonate *S. lewini* (Castro, 2011). It is possible that neonate *S. mokarran* have been caught in these areas previously but misidentified as *S. lewini*. Such misidentifications are common between morphologically conserved species, especially when one species is expected in a given region or habitat while the other is not (Branstetter, 1982; Tillett *et al.*, 2012). Other potential nursery sites for *S. mokarran* may not yet have been described, in part because of misidentification. Future work is needed to document how frequently neonate *S. mokarran* are encountered in these areas and to estimate the number of breeding females utilizing each site.

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### Supporting Information

Supporting information can be found in the online version of this paper.

**TABLE SI.** A modified version of Peterson *et al.* (2012) method for double–digest restriction associated DNA sequencing (ddRAD) library preparation

**TABLE SII.** Single nucleotide polymorphisms recovered from *Sphyrna* spp.

**VIDEO I.** *Sphyrna mokarran* neonates identified in the present study.

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[\\_Shark\\_Status\\_Review\\_Report.pdf](http://www.cio.noaa.gov/services_programs/prplans/pdfs/ID266_Final_Great_Hammerhead_Shark_Status_Review_Report.pdf)

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TABLE I. Mean between and within-group nucleotide divergence among *Sphyrna* spp., based on mtCR sequences

	<i>S. gilberti</i>	<i>S. lewini</i>	<i>S. mokarran</i>
<i>S. gilberti</i>	0.001	0.049	0.165
<i>S. lewini</i>	0.049	0.000	0.159
<i>S. mokarran</i>	0.165	0.159	0.000

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