



A great white shark swims near the coast of Mexico, in the Pacific Ocean.

 Close Caption

Brandon Cole

JULY 14, 2014

Hurricane Trackers

Sharks and other fish help scientists forecast deadly storms

BY CODY CRANE | FOR SCIENCE WORLD MAGAZINE

Scientists have a surprising new ally to help them forecast hurricanes—large fish like sharks and tuna. About 50 of the animals are currently fitted with satellite-tracking tags, which gather information about water temperatures in the Atlantic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean Sea. That data could help scientists better predict dangerous storms and protect people living in their paths.

HOT SPOTS

For years, scientists at the University of Miami have tagged fish to learn more about their migration, feeding, and reproduction. One thing they discovered is that many fish swim toward waters that are 26°C (79°F). When plotted on a map, their movements create a temperature trail called an **isotherm**. Meteorologists happen to use this same isotherm when studying storm development, since 79°F is the lowest temperature at which hurricanes form.

The fish also move up and down in the ocean while searching for food, providing water temperatures at different depths. And they often swim toward storms, which churn up the water and make hunting easier. “The beauty of this is the fish can give a gazillion pieces of information,” Nick Shay, a meteorologist who’s working on the project, told the *Sun Sentinel* newspaper.

STORMY SEAS

Humid air rising from warm waters fuels hurricanes. If fish can provide data on warming waters, weather forecasters might be able to more accurately predict which storms will turn into monsters. For the fishy

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detection system to be truly effective, scientists plan to enlist hundreds of the animals as ocean weathermen.

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