

# Shark fishing is not for the weak — or timid



LUKE OVGARD

CAUGHT OVGARD



Luke Ovgard/Contributed Photo

**This dude snapped Dom's rod. It was my fault for not loosening the drag more, given that it was facing away from the fish. This was the most beautiful shark I've ever caught, if that's any consolation.**

the 7-footer as a sandbar shark. Using the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Agency (NOAA) shark size calculator, put it at 155 pounds. My biggest fish!

If we'd stopped there, I would've been stoked, but we still had bait, so ...

I caught a few live ballyhoo, a popular baitfish, and we threw one out live on a lighter rod. It also hooked a small shark that broke me off after about 10 minutes when it dove under the boat.

I hit pause on the self-loathing when the big shark rod started bouncing again.

Dom assumed nurse shark based on the lack of run, and having caught more nurses than any other shark, I agreed. It was absurdly heavy, and lifting it up 70 feet of water was exhausting, even with the less-than-stellar fight.

When we saw it, and it clearly wasn't a nurse shark, we expected it to take off on a blistering run at any moment. But it didn't. I got it in more quickly than the first one, but as we got it boatside, the scale of the nearly 10-footer was staggering. It was also much, much thicker.

"This fish is pretty green, so be careful," Dom said as we staged for pictures. I snapped a few middling ones before the fish got irritated and swept its massive tail out of my hand and dove.

With a powerful stroke, its tail slapped into Dom's shoulder with a wet smack that would've broken his nose if delivered just a bit higher. We wrestled the beast back in, unhooked it and caught our breaths.

My largest fish was now a (very conservatively) 9-foot lemon shark that weighed 328 pounds, according to NOAA. Probably more like

350 or 375, given how thick the pregnant female was.

## Reef madness

My spirit was willing, but my body was only marginally able. I'd pulled my left forearm, my right hand was swollen and aching, my back screamed in pain and I felt as though I'd just sprinted several miles in double gravity.

So naturally, this is when we hooked up again.

The third and final shark of the day was a reef shark, the same species that had sampled Dom's foot years before. But it was just a 6-footer, and we got it boatside relatively quickly on the heavy gear.

At Dom's instruction, I loosened the drag and placed the rod in the holder so we could handle and release the fish. I only loosened the drag three or four clicks, though. Something told me to loosen it more, but I didn't. With the lemon, the rod was facing the same way as the fish when in the holder. This reef was facing the opposite way. I brushed the thought away.

We got some fantastic pictures and tried to unhook it. At this, the reef shark dove with shocking speed. Dom had been holding the steel leader in his gloves and let go. I was holding the one-pound sliding sinker in one hand to protect our teeth and the 250-pound mono leader in the other.

I was not wearing gloves. And like an idiot, I didn't let go immediately.

I moved to grab the rod but before I could react, the mono dug into my palm and left me with a friction burn. I flinched instead of going for the rod, which was being pulled backwards. In a horrifying moment, it snapped.

It was my fault.

We both cursed, but Dom was much more gracious than I would've been. I felt sick, but we were able to re-land and release the fish, though our shark fishing was over.

This one was almost exactly 6 feet and weighed 80 pounds via NOAA.

We finished up the day chasing a smaller quarry before limping back to the dock. Even with the broken rod, bruised shoulder and aching muscles, it was a great day. Those are the risks of shark fishing, and better a broken rod than a bitten foot, right?

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## ON THE SLATE

**SATURDAY, JULY 24**

Youth baseball  
Hodgen Distributing at La Grande Tournament  
Pepsi Diamondjazz Tournament, Bob White Field  
**Oregon State Little League Major Tournament**  
Hermiston vs. TBD, 3:30 p.m., Troutdale

**SUNDAY, JULY 25**

**Oregon State Little League Major Tournament**  
Hermiston vs. TBD, Troutdale

**MONDAY, JULY 26**

**Oregon State Little League Major Tournament**  
Hermiston vs. TBD, Troutdale

**TUESDAY, JULY 27**

**Oregon State Little League Major Tournament**  
Hermiston vs. TBD, Troutdale

**WEDNESDAY, JULY 28**

**Oregon State Little League Major Tournament**  
Hermiston vs. TBD, Troutdale

**THURSDAY, JULY 29**

**Oregon State Little League Major Tournament**  
Hermiston vs. TBD, Troutdale



Luke Ovgard/Contributed Photo

**My sandbar shark. A new species and (briefly) my largest fish ever at 7 feet long and about 150 pounds.**



Luke Ovgard/Contributed Photo

**The lemon shark is not the sportiest shark, and this was a pregnant female, which probably kept me from passing out. It measured 9-10 feet long and weighed about 350 pounds. It is my largest fish ever.**

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