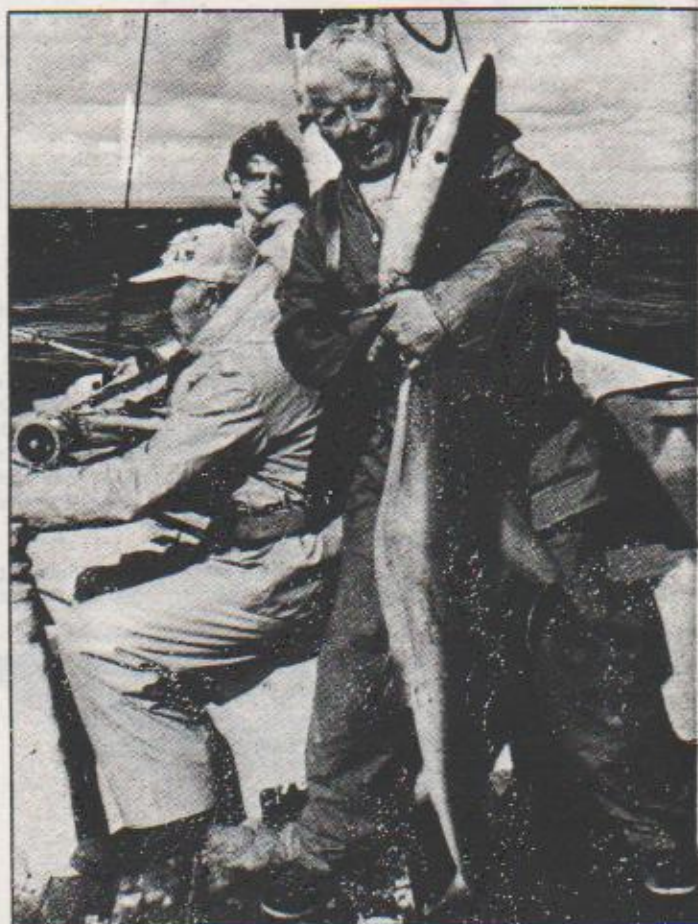
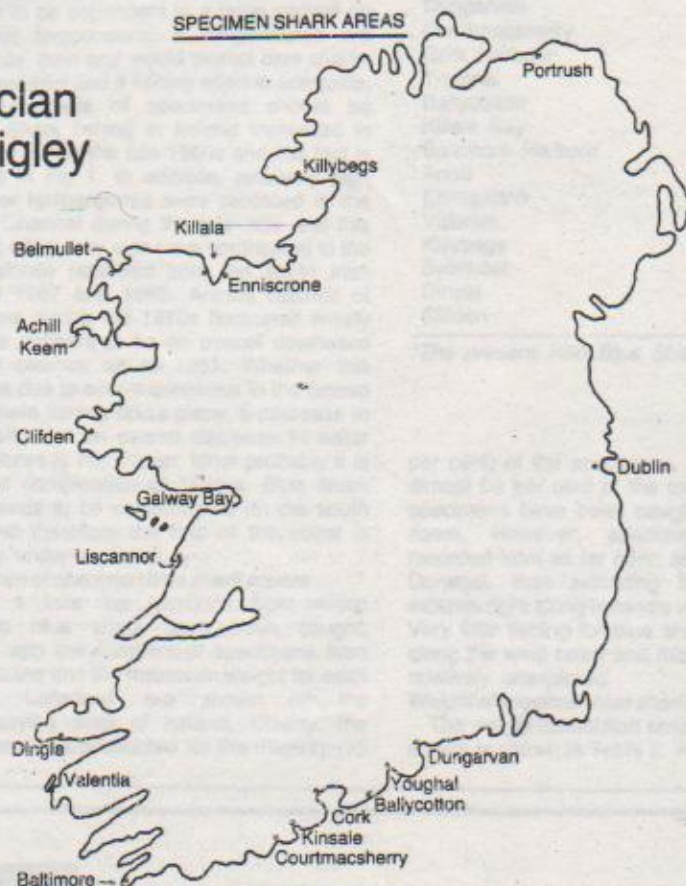


Irish specimen

sharks

Declan
Quigley



*A blue shark taken off
Youghal, Co. Cork.*

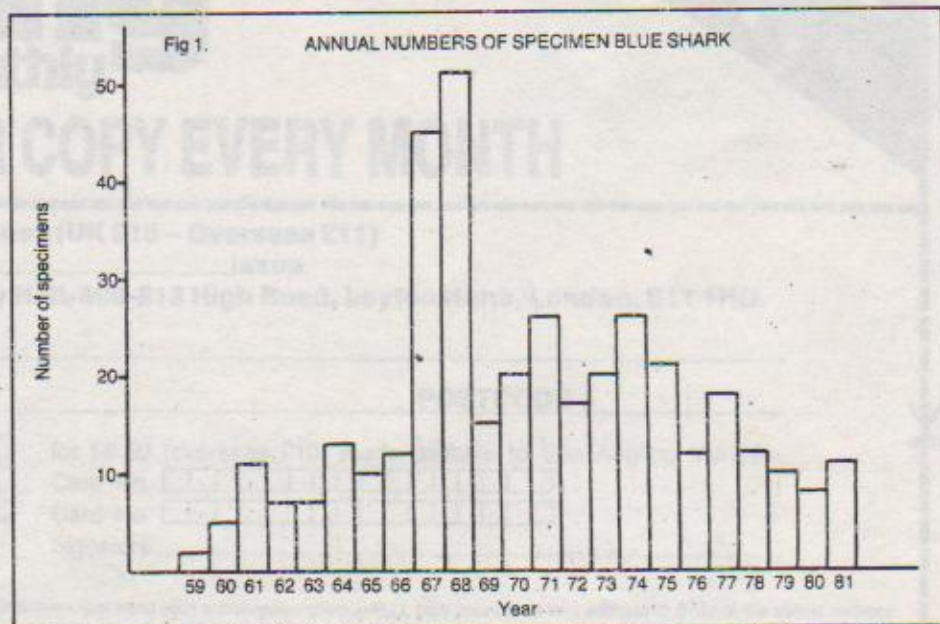
Although shark fishing as a sport is not new to Ireland (several centres, particularly along the south and west coasts, are internationally well known), no detailed analysis of the sport in Irish waters has been undertaken.

Ireland's unique geographical position in the north-east Atlantic, where both Lusitanian and boreal waters meet and overlap, affords a great variety of both warm and cold water fish for the sea angler. These rich waters, which have been the topic of much heated debate in recent times among the member nations of the EEC, support a prolific population of sharks. Warm-water species, such as the blue shark, migrate in their thousands into Irish waters during the summer, while species with a more northerly distribution, such as the porbeagle, patrol our coasts throughout the year. Other shark species that have been recorded from Irish waters, but only occasionally, are the six-gilled, mako and thresher.

The Irish Specimen Fish Committee (ISFC) has recorded annually, since 1959, details of specimen sharks caught in Irish waters. An analysis of the ISFC data, in the light of current knowledge on the biology of sharks in Irish waters, provides a wealth of information for the specimen-shark hunter.

Annual numbers of specimen blue shark

Fig 1 shows the annual numbers of specimen blue shark (weighing upwards of 100lb) caught between 1959 and 1981. It is not



possible to determine the annual catch of sharks per man-hour from the ISFC data and therefore Fig 1 prevents any reliable conclusions from being drawn. However, blue sharks are typically a warm-water species and their abundance in Irish waters from year to year appears to be dependent to a large degree on sea-water temperature. If temperatures are favourable, then one would expect blue sharks to be abundant and if fishing effort is adequate, greater numbers of specimens should be caught. Shark fishing in Ireland increased in popularity during the late 1960s and this fact is reflected in Fig 1. In addition, relatively high sea-water temperatures were recorded in the English Channel during the late '60s and this warming effect may also have contributed to the large catches recorded from the south Irish coast in 1967 and 1968. Annual catches of specimens during the 1970s fluctuated widely but there appears to be an overall downward trend in catches up to 1981. Whether this decline is due to over-exploitation in the limited areas where fishing takes place, a decrease in fishing effort or an overall decrease in water temperatures is not known. Most probably it is due to a combination of factors. Blue shark fishing tends to be concentrated on the south coast and therefore the rest of the coast is relatively under-exploited.

Distribution of specimen blue shark waters

Table 1 lists the locations from which specimen blue shark have been caught, together with the numbers of specimens from each location and the maximum weight for each location. Locations are shown on the accompanying map of Ireland. Clearly, the south coast has accounted for the majority (95

Table 1

Location:	Number of Specimens:	Maximum Weight:	
		lb	oz
Kinsale	227	162	0
Dungarvan	44	146	0
Courtmacsherry	41	162	0
Cork Harbour	19	144	0
Youghal	17	133	0
Ballycotton	10	121	0
Killala Bay	5	109	8
Baltimore Harbour	3	130	0
Achill	3	206	0*
Enniscrone	3	128	0
Valentia	2	105	0
Killybegs	2	126	0
Belmullet	1	108	0
Dingle	1	109	12
Clifden	1	102	0

*The present Irish Blue Shark Record.

per cent) of the specimens. Kinsale produced almost 60 per cent of the total. Relatively few specimens have been caught along the west coast. However, specimens have been recorded from as far north as Killybegs, in Co. Donegal, thus indicating that this species extends right along Ireland's western sea board. Very little fishing for blue shark is undertaken along the west coast and this area is therefore relatively unexplored.

Weight of specimen blue shark

The weight distribution among specimen blue sharks is shown in Table 2. Almost 60 per cent

of the specimens weighed between 100lb and 110lb, while only five weighed 150lb or more and only one of these sharks weighed over 200lb. The record blue shark weighed 206lb and was caught off Achill on October 7, 1959 by J. McMonagle. However, a shark weighing 285½lb was caught at Kinsale in 1939 but this fish is not recognised as the record by the ISFC. *Monthly catch frequency of specimen blue shark*

The monthly catch frequency of specimen blue shark is shown in Fig 2. Generally, blue shark migrate into Irish waters from mid-June

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Table 2

Weight Limits (1lb):	Number of Specimens:
100-110	227
110-120	91
120-130	38
130-140	13
140-150	5
150-160	1
160-170	3
170-200	0
200-210	1

Table 3

Location:	Number of Specimens	Maximum Weight: lb oz
Galway Bay	6	190 0
Kinsale	4	302 0
Liscannor Bay	3	173 8
Keem Bay	1	262 0*
Dungarvan	1	250 0

*The Irish Record Porbeagle Shark was caught in Keem Bay in 1932 by Dr O'Donel Browne. It weighed 365lb and is not included in the above table which only accounts for sharks recorded since 1959.

onwards. Water temperature appears to play an important role in determining how close inshore the blues come and how well they are likely to feed. Investigations have shown that most blues are caught when the water temperature is above 16°C and few, if any, are taken if the temperature is below 14°C. During the early part of the summer, blues are found well out from the coast (15-20 miles) but, as the water temperature increases, they move closer inshore and are therefore more accessible to the angler. It is interesting to note that the peak catch of specimens occurs in July, and thereafter catches fall off sharply. By late October, when the sea water has begun to cool, the blues migrate southwards to warmer climes.

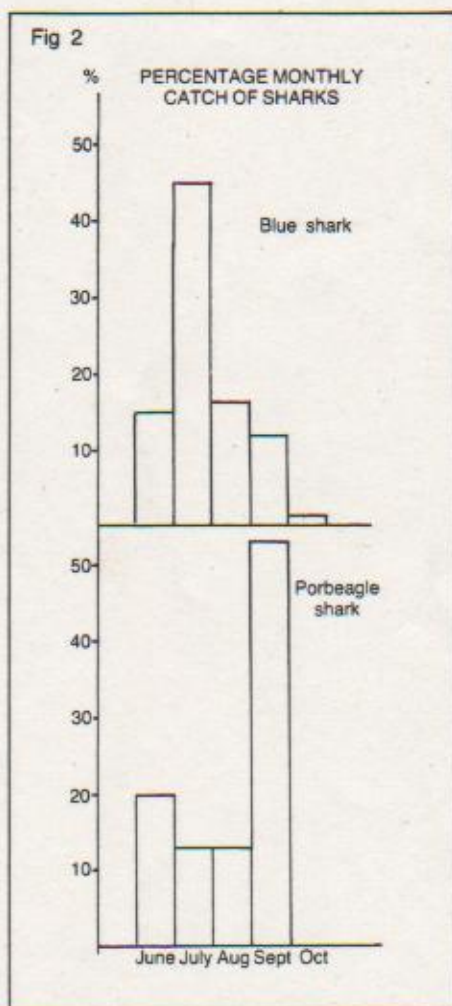
Specimen porbeagle shark in Irish waters

Only 15 specimen porbeagles (weighing upwards of 150lb) have been recorded by the ISFC since 1959. Table 3 lists the locations of capture, together with the numbers of specimens from each location and the maximum weight for each location. Porbeagles have been recorded from all around the Irish coast during every month of the year. Water temperature does not seem to affect their distribution in Irish waters but they do tend to be less common than the blue. However, they appear to be very common in certain areas, particularly along the west coast - notably Galway Bay and Liscannor Bay. During the late 1920s and early '30s, Keem Bay, on Achill Island, produced several specimen porbeagle (ten over 200lb), including the record fish, which weighed 365lb, taken in 1932 by Dr. O'Donel Browne.

Porbeagle have been taken very close to the shore on occasions. A fish weighing 268lb was caught on a handline from the shore at Ballycotton in 1960 and several porbeagle, weighing up to 145lb, were caught on rod-and-line from the shore of Green Island, Co. Clare, during the '60s.

Fig 2 shows the monthly frequency of captures of specimen blues and porbeagles. The porbeagle, in contrast to the blue, appears to come quite close inshore during the early summer and a greater percentage of specimen porbeagles are caught in June. However, the peak catch of specimens occurs in September. Porbeagles have been seen off the west coast as late as Christmas, but no fishing is done after October.

Porbeagles are fished commercially off the west coast of Ireland by Norwegian long-liners during the summer and undoubtedly there are far greater numbers of specimen porbeagles in Irish waters than is apparent from the ISFC



records. Very little attention has been given to them and only a few locations have been fished consistently. From surveys carried out along the west coast it would appear that there is a wealth of untapped shark fishing.

Other sharks in Irish waters

Only two specimens of mako shark have been recorded from Irish waters, both from Kinsale, on July 20, 1965 and August 21, 1969. These two sharks weighed 174lb and 90lb, respectively. The mako is typically an oceanic warm-water species that rarely comes close to our shores. However, it may be encountered in particularly warm summers and is highly prized by anglers for its fighting qualities.



Preparing to boat a good porbeagle. Only 15 specimens have been recorded by the ISFC since 1959.

The thresher has been recorded from Irish waters on only two occasions, neither of them recent. One specimen was recorded from Portrush in Co. Antrim, while the other was reported from the south-west coast. The thresher is also an oceanic shark that rarely comes close inshore.

The six-gilled shark is occasionally taken by anglers fishing on the south and south-west coast. The Irish record stands at 154lb, for a fish caught at Kinsale on August 28, 1968. The six-gilled shark is an oceanic species that rarely comes close inshore. Neither the mako, thresher nor six-gilled sharks warrant much consideration from anglers in Irish waters. □