

Florida's real shark hunter: He's caught nearly 100,000 sharks and isn't stopping yet - meet the man hooked on maneaters

By ASSOCIATED PRESS
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Posing with one of the 20,000 monster fish he has slayed in his 40 year career, Mark 'The Shark' Quartiano is one of the world's last shark hunters.

Counting Hollywood mega stars Will Smith and Robert De Niro as friends and customers, Mark, 60, charges up to £750 a day to hire his 50 foot boat Striker 1.

Big and brash, former fireman and policeman Mark, 60, has been professionally fishing since 1976 and counts 15ft, 1400 pound mega Tiger Sharks among his catches.



Last of a kind: Mark 'The Shark' Quartiano poses with an 8ft long bull shark caught in the waters around Miami, Florida

With some species of Hammerhead Shark classified as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and Tiger Sharks seen as threatened, Mark's work is controversial.

However, that doesn't stop him taking out groups of blokes on stag parties and even girls on hen outings.

'Everyone is fascinated with sharks and now this new generation of kids even more so,' said Mark.

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'I started up professionally just after Jaws in 1976 and I sometimes work seven days a week at 'Mark the Shark's Monster Fishing Charters'.

'My customers over the past 35 years have included Robert De Niro, Will Smith and the basketball legend Shaquille O'Neal.

'De Niro has been out on the boat a few times with me and he is always so busy with his work, reading a script.



What a catch: Mark with a 12ft long thresher shark and a 7ft long hammerhead shark in Miami

'He fishes for sail fish and one time we played a practical joke on him with a rubber chicken.

'When he wasn't looking we attached it to the end of his line and sent it well out to sea.

'He spent half an hour battling with that 'fish'.'

Capable of taking out groups up to six large, Mark charges individual customers £125 a go. Now he is the last remaining shark hunter in Miami he has a monopoly.

'Some people just come out to watch the whole experience, to see a 14ft Hammerhead being reeled in,' said Mark.

'They don't want to do any fishing at all, just to watch.

'Some customers like Will Smith have chartered my boat just to get away from the paparazzi.

'Will is a big fan of stone crabs which are a delicacy here in Florida.

'He and his wife Jada Pinkett Smith have come on the boat just to relax and to sail on the seas with no fishing at all and just eat their crabs.

'He doesn't even like fishing.'

Like a modern day version of Captain Quint the mad-eyed sea-dog from the Spielberg hit Jaws, Mark is almost immune to criticism from animal rights groups.

'I use the world's finest rod and reels to catch my fish, the Ferrari's of the fishing world,' says Mark.

'I sit in the large chair at the back of the boat and reel them in with time and patience.

'Then when I have pulled them up to the back of the boat we pull them in with a pulley system to handle their weight.



Valuable for research: Mark with two more of the fish he has landed

'I have caught 20ft long thresher sharks, 15ft tiger sharks and even once off the coast of New York City a 15ft, 2,500 pound great white.

'I tell people that I have hunted 20,000 sharks but that doesn't include the pregnant ones that I have fished.

'Last week I caught two Tiger Sharks that had 90 babies between them.

'If you tot up all the sharks that I have caught the number comes closer to 100,000 sharks.'

Unable to continue fishing for thresher sharks due to Florida state laws, Mark fends off any suggestion that he is a cold blooded killer.

'It is the large scale commercial line fishermen in Florida and worldwide who do the damage, not a recreational lone fisherman like me,' said Mark.

'They are trying to catch tuna and swordfish and the sharks get tangled on the lines and they can't swim and drown.

'There isn't a shark that I can't catch and I pride myself on that, I work hard to fish these fish.

'I work with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries Service to tag and keep track of some of these larger fish out here.

'Last year alone I tagged 250 sharks and I through that I help supply valuable research material that helps scientists continue the shark population thriving.

'Sharks are great creatures, I am not gonna let some animal rights protestor tell me I am wrong for fishing and then think that they go home to eat their steak or shrimp cocktail.

'That is hypocrisy.'