

## TERM FETUSES FROM A LARGE COMMON THRESHER SHARK, *ALOPIAS VULPINUS*

Little is known of the life history of the common thresher shark. It has been determined that this ovoviviparous species attains maturity at a length of approximately 4.2 m, and, on a worldwide basis, probably reaches a maximum length of some 6 m (Bigelow and Schroeder 1948). Most threshers taken in California waters are less than 2.4 m in length (Roedel and Ripley 1950; Fitch 1974), although larger specimens are often captured off southern California, particularly by anchovy purse seiners and barracuda gill-netters during summer months (J. Fitch and D. Schultze, Calif. Dept. Fish and Game, pers. commun.). Unfortunately, few of these large threshers have been closely examined before being cleaned. This note describes term fetuses taken from one such specimen.

On 3 June 1977, Michael McCorkle of the commercial fishing vessel *PIE FACE* landed a large female thresher that had become entangled in his gill nets the previous night. The nets had been set in 13 fm of water approximately 2 nautical miles off Solimar Beach near Ventura, California. The length of the fish was estimated at greater than 4.6 m and its weight was measured at 295 kg. When the thresher was cleaned, four large fetuses were removed, two of which were badly mutilated in the process. The intact specimens were donated to the University of California at Santa Barbara, and subsequently deposited at the Museum of Ichthyology in the Department of Biological Sciences.

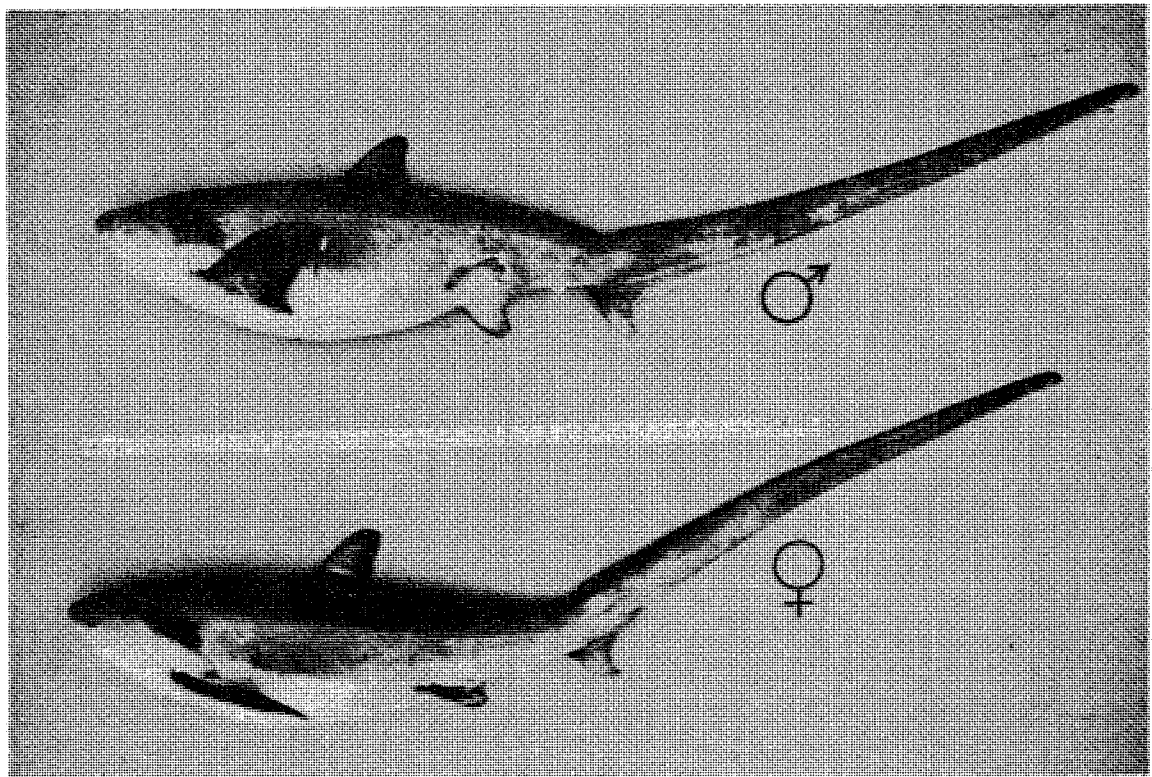


Figure 1. Male and female term fetuses of the common thresher shark. *Photograph by G. M. Wellington, June 1977.*

The two fetuses had been very near birth, as evidenced by their lack of umbilical scars and their large size (Figure 1). The male was 1417 mm in total

length and weighed 8.8 kg fresh, while the female was 1386 mm long and weighed 7.7 kg. These specimens approach the maximum fetal size of 1550 mm reported by Bigelow and Schroeder (1948). Moreover, free-living threshers considerably smaller than the fetuses have been taken off California (Herald and Ripley 1951), as well as off the eastern United States (Bigelow and Schroeder 1948).

In 1954, another large thresher carrying four term fetuses was captured off Newport Beach (Joseph 1954). Although it was larger than the one reported here (approximately 5.4 m) the fetuses were somewhat smaller and still exhibited umbilical scars.

As a final note, the litter size of the common thresher shark is invariably reported as ranging from two to four pups (Bigelow and Schroeder 1948; Roedel and Ripley 1950). However, McCorkle (pers. commun.) once captured a thresher that carried six fetuses.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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