

A BOEM-NOAA study of Gulf of Mexico sperm whales has led to the discovery of a 5 and a half inch pocket shark (*Mollisquama* sp.), a very rare species. The only other known specimen (*Mollisquama parini*) was found off the Peruvian/Chilean coast 36 years ago. The pocket shark is named for a mysterious pocket-like orifice behind its pectoral fin. The discovery was made in 2013 while a NOAA Fisheries biologist was conducting a long-term analysis of more than 3,500 deep sea samples collected from a 2010 BOEM-NOAA Gulf of Mexico sperm whale acoustic prey survey.

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NOAA Fisheries Pascagoula Lab fisheries biologist Mark Grace made the discovery in 2013 while conducting a long-term analysis of more than 3,500 deep sea samples collected from a 2010 BOEM-NOAA Gulf of Mexico sperm whale acoustic prey survey. The specimen is being studied by the science community, including the American Museum of Natural History in New York and the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. It will be permanently archived at Tulane University's Biodiversity Research Institute.

While the pocket shark species is unusual, the path to its discovery is not. BOEM has been studying the endangered sperm whale in the Gulf of Mexico since the 1990s as part of its mission to protect the marine environment while managing offshore energy resources. BOEM and NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, through an interagency agreement, launched a four-year study in 2009 to learn more about the sperm whale's food sources. As often occurs, researchers have made some unexpected discoveries. In 2009, on the inaugural mission of NOAA's new state-of-the art fisheries survey vessel, *Pisces*, scientists captured a giant squid (*Architeuthis* sp.) at a water depth of more than 1,500 feet. At 19.5 feet long and 103 pounds, the squid was sent to the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. So after finding a giant squid and tiny pocket shark through the sperm whale study, what's next? Learn more about this amazing pocket shark discovery at http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/stories/2015/04/04_23_15pocketsharks.html.

Image below.

