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PRESS RELEASE

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Moss Landing Marine Laboratories Student Discovers Eight New Sharks

By Brynn-Hooton Kaufman

Moss Landing, Calif. – 2 August 2012 - Moss Landing Marine Laboratories graduate student Paul Clerkin recently returned from a two-month research cruise in the southern Indian Ocean, and he brought with him exciting discoveries. In his cargo were eight newly discovered deep-sea shark species, caught by fishermen trawling seamounts along the Melville Ridge. These new sharks may be even more important than the charismatic white shark, said Moss Landing Marine Laboratories Pacific Shark Research Center Director Dr. Dave Ebert.

The new shark species came from a remote location that took a week of boat travel across open ocean to reach, the isolation making it a poorly studied area that was ripe for discoveries. “Sharks haven’t really been explored as much as we think,” said Clerkin. Dr. Ebert suggests it’s this lack of basic information about sharks that makes these new species so important. “White sharks are protected in North America and in many places through the world, while these new species aren’t even known and therefore can’t be protected,” said Dr. Ebert. New discoveries like Clerkin’s are critical, therefore, to keep shark species such as these from falling under the radar.

Clerkin will be taking more than eight-six measurements and collecting genetic data from each of the sharks to confirm that they are, in fact, new species. He will then take to the exciting task of naming them, a rare opportunity for such a young researcher. Clerkin credits much of his newfound success to Moss Landing Marine Laboratories. “The Pacific Shark Research Center at Moss Landing Marine Labs has great opportunities for students to collaborate with a network of international organizations and researchers,” Clerkin said. “The trip was very rewarding for me, and I’m very grateful to have had the experience.”

Moss Landing Marine Laboratories’ Pacific Shark Research Center is the second-leading contributor in discovering and naming new shark species in recent years, with over 20 new species named.

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