

Anglerfish lands top prize in VIMS pumpkin carving contest

By David Malmquist

(October 31, 2012) A toothsome anglerfish complete with luminescent lure took top prize in the Virginia Institute of Marine Science's first-annual contest for marine-themed pumpkin carving.

Inspired by the yellowish-orange hues of the Florida pompano, a common visitor to Chesapeake Bay during autumn, VIMS' "Pumpkano" contest encouraged participants to transform their Halloween pumpkins into marine creatures, then post pictures of their spooky carvings to the VIMS Facebook page at www.facebook.com/fbvims.

VIMS marine scientist Jenny Dreyer teamed with graduate students Itchika Sivaipram and Jennifer Elliott to carve the winning entry, fittingly enough on a dark and stormy night during the passage of Hurricane Sandy.

Dreyer is an avid pumpkin artist with a long list of creatures she'd liked to carve. She says, "I love anglerfish and have been wanting to carve one for a long time. The VIMS contest inspired me to do it."



Anglerfish: Jenny Dreyer, Itchika Sivaipram, and Jennifer Elliott teamed to carve the winning entry—a deep-sea anglerfish with a bioluminescent lure.



Kraken: Nicole Trimmer of Newport News took an honorable mention for her intricate carving of this large octopus. "Release the Kraken!"

Dreyer has personal experience with these fearsome-looking deep-sea creatures, having collected several during a 2003 research expedition to the Bear Seamount in the northwest Atlantic. The mission, part of the decade-long Census of Marine Life program, was led by adjunct VIMS professor Mike Vecchione. Anglerfish are a common component of the mid-water fish fauna, dangling a bioluminescent lure in front of their fang-like teeth to attract prey in the perpetual twilight of the deep sea.

Dreyer reports that creation of the winning entry was not without its artistic struggles, including loss of the initial "lure" to fire. "We first tried to make the lure by using an apple corer to drill holes in a small white pumpkin," she says, "but when we put a candle inside the stem began to burn." On their second, successful attempt, they placed a non-flammable glow stick into a slitted orange pumpkin, with the stick's greenish hue closely mimicking

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the bioluminescent radiance of the real fish's lure. For the "illicium," the long filament that connects the lure to the anglerfish's head, Dreyer used the handle from one of her children's plastic buckets.

Honorable mentions in the inaugural contest went to Newport News resident Nicole Trimmer for her carving of an eight-armed "kraken," and to Erin Seney of Woodbridge, Virginia for her depiction of a loggerhead sea turtle and hurricane, with "carving time and added inspiration provided by Superstorm Sandy." The winning entry earned a \$25 gift certificate to the VIMS Gift Shop.

David Malmquist, Director of Communications at VIMS, says the contest is "a light-hearted way to engage the public in the marvels of marine biodiversity. Next year we expect even more amazing entries—maybe some catfish, a witch flounder, or a Vampire squid." Malmquist thanks Belmont Pumpkin Farm in Gloucester, which generously provided 20 free pumpkins to the VIMS community for use in the contest. Indeed, the winning entry was a Belmont pumpkin.

Pictures of the entries, which also included fanciful depictions of a coral reef, finfish, jellyfish, octopus, puffer fish, and seahorses, are available on the VIMS Flickr page at http://www.flickr.com/photos/vims_photos/sets/72157631897330067/



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