



## NORTH CAROLINA AQUARIUM

at Fort Fisher

900 Loggerhead Road, Kure Beach, NC 28449 • (910) 458-8257 • Fax: (910) 458-6812

[www.ncaquariums.com](http://www.ncaquariums.com)

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**MEDIA CONTACT: Robin Nalepa, 910.458.8257 ext. 211 or Lindsey Walters, ext. 242**

## **SHARK FACTS**

Out of more than 400 different species of sharks inhabiting the world's oceans, only 50 species are found in North Carolina waters. Of those, 26 species are found from within the continental shelf to near-shore waters, but are not present in our waters year-round. Some move north and south, and others move inshore to offshore. Some species visit coastal waters based on water temperatures, food supplies and breeding patterns.

## **WHY SHARK ENCOUNTERS OCCUR**

- Most shark encounters with humans are cases of mistaken identity. Swimmers, surfers and others in the water may splash and present visual targets that mislead the shark, causing it to mistake people for prey.
- Most attacks occur in near-shore waters, between sandbars, or near steep drop-offs where sharks feed. Sharks are found in these areas because their food supply is there.
- In these instances a shark may bite, only to realize the human is a foreign object or is too large. The shark will then immediately release the victim.
- As coastal areas become more populated and visitation to beaches and coastal waters increase, more shark encounters can be expected because of the increased number of people in the water.

## **HOW TO REDUCE RISK OF A SHARK ENCOUNTER**

Chances of encountering a shark in North Carolina waters are very low. To further reduce your risk, consider the following:

- Always stay in groups. Sharks are more likely to attack a solitary individual.  
(MORE)

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
PAT MCCRORY, GOVERNOR • DONALD R. VAN DER VAART, SECRETARY • DAVID R. GRIFFIN, DIVISION DIRECTOR





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- Do not wander too far from shore. This isolates an individual and places one farther away from assistance.
- Avoid being in the water during dusk, darkness or twilight hours. This is when sharks are most active and have a competitive sensory advantage.
- Do not enter the water if bleeding. A shark's sense of smell is acute.
- Wearing shiny jewelry in the water is discouraged because the reflected light resembles the sheen of fish scales.
- Avoid waters where there are signs of baitfish or feeding activity. Diving seabirds are good indicators of such action.
- Sightings of dolphins do not indicate the absence of sharks. Both often feed on the same prey.
- Avoid wearing brightly colored contrasting clothing in the water. Sharks see contrast particularly well.
- Refrain from excess splashing to minimize your risk.
- Exercise caution when swimming between sandbars or near steep drop-offs. These are favorite hangouts for sharks.
- Leave the water if sharks are sighted. And, of course, do not harass a shark if you see one.

### **STATISTICS**

- Out of the more than 400 species of sharks worldwide, less than 10 percent are considered dangerous or are known to have been involved in attacks.
- Some of the more common species are not considered dangerous, such as the sand bar, nurse, silky and dogfish.
- From 1935-2014, there were 52 reported unprovoked shark attacks in North Carolina, according to the Florida Museum of Natural History International Shark Attack File (ISAF). Of those, only three were fatal. This is a small number considering the millions of people that enter the water every year.

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- ISAF puts the 2014 yearly total of unprovoked shark attacks worldwide at 72, lower than the 75 unprovoked attacks in 2013. However, over the century the number of attacks has grown and can be directly related to the increase in the number of people that enter the ocean for recreation.
- Other injuries and fatalities from ocean activities far outnumber shark attacks. These include drowning, jellyfish and stingray stings, spinal injuries, cuts from shells and being caught in riptides.

### **A BIT ABOUT SHARKS**

- Sharks can hear sound under water for miles, detect odors within hundreds of yards, and sense pressure changes created by currents or movement up to 100 yards. However, their feeding is mainly dependent on vision, which is good for tens of yards, depending on water clarity.
- Their eyes are well developed and work well in low light.
- Sharks have electro-reception that can detect tiny electrical fields created by prey's muscular movement. This ability is good only within a distance of inches.
- Sharks eat at one or two day intervals. They don't need much food because little energy is expended while cruising through the water. A satiated shark may not eat again for several weeks.
- Some sharks may have bursts of speed up to 23 miles per hour; however, most sharks maintain a cruising speed of about 5.75 miles per hour.
- Like other wild animals, most sharks try and avoid people.
- Two of the largest sharks are the whale shark and basking shark. Both can reach 50 feet in length and feed exclusively on tiny fish and plankton.

*NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher is located just south of Kure Beach, near the mouth of the Cape Fear River, on U.S. 421. The site is less than a mile from the Fort Fisher ferry terminal. Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily (closed Thanksgiving and Christmas days). Admission: \$10.95 Ages 13-61, \$9.95 Ages 62+ and military, \$8.95 Ages 3-12. Taxes not included. Free for children 2 and younger, NC Aquarium Society members and pre-registered North Carolina school groups. General information: [www.ncaaquariums.com/fort-fisher](http://www.ncaaquariums.com/fort-fisher).*

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