

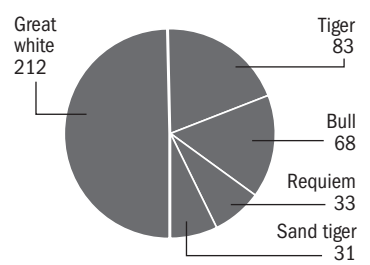


MEGAN WINSLOW staff photographer

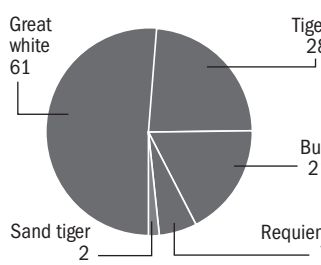
Campers from the Jensen Beach Environmental Studies Center play in the surf at Stuart Beach on Tuesday. Despite recent shark attacks in the Panhandle, teacher Denise Blanton said neither she nor her campers are overly concerned. For safety, the group swims in a cluster close to shore with teachers and aides stationed around the perimeter.

**TOP FIVE ATTACKING SHARK SPECIES**

Unprovoked attacks globally through Feb. 2005 ...



... and deaths resulting from those attacks



SOURCES: The Associated Press; International Shark Attack File Staff graphic/Hiram Henriquez The Sun Sentinel

“Tourists always ask me, ‘Aren’t you afraid to go in the water?’ And I say, ‘Aren’t you afraid to drive your automobile?’ There’s a much greater chance you’ll be in an accident.”

**Bruce “Spunky” Strunk**  
owner of Spunky’s Surf Shop in Fort Pierce

**SHARKS**  
FROM A1

Denise Blanton, a teacher with the Jensen Beach Environmental Studies Center Wave Runner Camp, takes a group of about 40 elementary and middle school children to the beach almost every day of the summer for a “cool-off session.”

For safety, the children swim in a giant cluster surrounded by teachers and high school aides.

As for the sharks, Blanton said neither she nor her charges are overly concerned.

“We keep an eye out, and we always go where the lifeguards are,” she said, corraling a few stragglers back into “bounds” at Stuart Beach. “We watch out for bait fish.”

Across the street at the Florida Oceanographic Society, Program Director Phillip Baldwin echoed that sentiment.

When sharks bite a person, it’s usually either self-defense or a case of “mistaken identity,” he said.

A swimmer’s bathing suit can contribute to the problem, he said. Contrasting colors like bold stripes and patches tend to look like a small school of fish to a shark.

Bruce “Spunky” Strunk, owner of Spunky’s Surf Shop in Fort Pierce, agreed that beachgoers should take precautions but shouldn’t fear the ocean.

“Aren’t you afraid to go in the water?” And I say, ‘Aren’t you afraid to drive your automobile?’ There’s a much greater chance you’ll be in an accident.”

Although autopsy results on shark victim Jamie Marie Daigle, 14, point to a bull shark attack, Baldwin said that species isn’t a real threat to Martin County residents.

Around Hutchinson Island, bites from blacktip sharks and nurse sharks are more common, he said.

The characteristically docile nurse shark really only bites when bathers accidentally step on it or poke at it, he said.

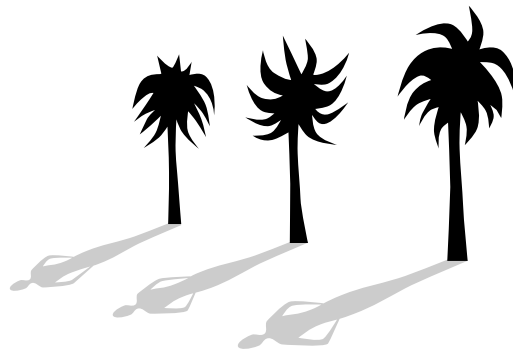
Reefs like the one at Bath-tub Reef beach provide a natural habitat for sharks to search for prey, and they often rest in the deep troughs between sand bars, waiting for fish to get stunned in the surf and sucked back out to sea.

But if beachgoers such as Blanton and her rowdy crew stay alert, their odds of becoming a target for a shark are very slim, Baldwin said.

“It’s always good, whenever you’re out in the wild, to be aware of your surroundings,” he said. “... If people use common sense and enjoy themselves, there’s really nothing to worry about.”

Staff writer Shauna Gallagher Vega contributed to this report.

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