

BAHAMAS SHARK FEEDING TOURS ENDANGER ISLAND VISITORS

Marine conservationists call on Bahamas government to prohibit feeding underwater predators

MIAMI, FLORIDA USA. March 6, 2008. Shark feeding tours to The Bahamas – like the one that ended last week in the tragic death of an Austrian diver – also pose a threat to island visitors not involved in these expeditions, said a spokesman for a Florida-based marine conservation group.

Bob Dimond, president of the Marine Safety Group (MSG), said that shark feeding places other ocean enthusiasts at risk – even those far removed from feeding sites. “Once a shark learns to associate boat arrivals and/or people in the water with dinnertime, those associations are remembered for a long time and taken with the shark wherever it may wander – a recipe for disaster”, Dimond explained.

Observations of seasoned dive operators support these claims. Randy Jordan of Emerald Charters (Jupiter, Florida) told reporters that aggressive sharks still approach his boat whenever he pulls up to a particular dive site, even though feeding was stopped at that site 6 years ago. The web site of Bimini Undersea Adventures reports that the same response (sharks swarming an arriving boat) “has been observed ... (at) virtually every location throughout the Bahamas that has, or still does, conduct shark feeding dives.”

Veteran marine biologist Dr. William Alevizon (MSG scientific advisor) agrees that shark feeding dives are a bad idea. “This is classic conditioning of the worst kind – deliberately changing the behavior of large predators in the wild, where they are free to interact with an unsuspecting public”, he said. “Active shark feeding sites are scattered all over The Bahamas and no one but the feeders knows exactly where most of these sites are located. How are visiting boaters supposed to avoid them?”, Alevizon asked.

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Such concerns are not idle speculation. Dr. Denise Herzing, a marine animal behavioral specialist and Assistant Professor at Florida Atlantic University reports being unexpectedly swarmed by large aggressive lemon sharks at a Bahamas research site that she and students had worked for years without incident. The reason became clear when Herzing learned that a Florida live-aboard dive boat had established a feeding site about a mile away. The newly conditioned sharks did not seem particular what boat pulled up within their new feeding territory – to them, it was simply the signal for dinnertime.

Dimond noted that in 2000, a swimmer had half his leg removed by a shark while swimming off the beach at a popular Bahamian resort in Lucaya (Freeport), only about a mile from an active shark feeding site.

“I often wonder how many so-called ‘unprovoked’ shark attacks have been committed by sharks whose behavior had been altered by feeding dives” Dimond said. “It’s time for The Bahamas to put a stop to them, as have the Cayman Islands, Florida and Hawaii.”

The Marine Safety Group, Inc. is a registered Florida Non-Profit corporation dedicated to the protection of coastal and marine habitats and wildlife, and the people that interact with and use these resources.

For more information visit: www.marinesafetygroup.org

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