

SUN

SHARKS!

■ Fisherman brings in sandbar shark at Frangista Beach.

By PASHA CARROLL
SUN REPORTER

"You are not swimming in a swimming pool," South Walton Fire District Chief Les Hallman said.

Last week, fishermen pulled two sharks out of the water at Frangista Beach.

"Sharks are native to the area, it is a natural occurrence," Hallman said. "They pretty much stay to themselves."

"I have seen some in the water from time to time," Jerry Robison, whose vacation house is on the beach, said. "I have never seen it like this before."

Robison, who has been vacationing in Destin for about 30 years, said the shark caught on Tuesday was at least 100 pounds.

"The guy that caught it held it up like this," Robison said, holding his hand up over his head. "And it was at his feet."

The first shark fought for two hours before being hauled onto the beach.

Robison said other sharks were spotted in the water about a half-mile east, near Whale's Tale.

On Wednesday, Steve Fontana, who has lived in Destin for six years and fishes the Frangista Beach

waters almost daily, caught a different shark at Frangista Beach.

"There are 15-20 sharks out here at nightfall," Fontana said. "When you are out here at night there are fish all around you."

Sharks are close to shore. They are only about 10 feet out at the first

sandbar.

Because cobia fish are now in season, fishermen use live eel as bait. In addition to attracting cobia, the bait attracts sharks, too, Fontana said.

Cobia season lasts only from March

to May on the Emerald Coast because of its migratory patterns.

"This is the only place and time to get cobia," Patrick Grower, a honeymooner from Memphis, Tenn., said. "The cobia are spawning right now."

Most sharks in the water aren't huge, like great whites and aren't very aggressive, but they would bite if they mistook a swimmer for live bait, Fontana said.

"Sharks are something tourists should be aware of, not scared of," Hallman said.

Hallman said swimmers are safe but advised caution in murky waters and against swimming near a large school of bait-fish.

“Sharks are something tourists should be aware of, not scared of.”

South Walton Fire District Chief Les Hallman



Darien Draggett/Special to The Sun

A New York tourist, Sparkelynn Carroll, held the tail of a shark caught on Tuesday at Frangista Beach.

How to keep yourself safe from sharks

The relative risk of a shark attack is very small but, risks should always be minimized whenever possible in any activity. The chances of having an interaction with a shark can be reduced if one heeds the following advice:

- Always stay in groups since sharks are more likely to attack a solitary individual.
- Do not wander too far from shore — this isolates an individual and additionally places one far away from assistance.
- Avoid being in the water during darkness or twilight hours when sharks are most active and have a competitive sensory advantage.
- Do not enter the water if bleeding from an open wound or if menstruating — a shark's olfactory ability is acute.
- Wearing shiny jewelry is discouraged because the reflected light resembles the sheen of fish scales.
- Avoid waters with known effluents or sewage and those being used by sport or commercial fisherman, especially if there are signs of bait fishes or feeding activity. Diving seabirds are good indicators of such action.
- Sightings of porpoises do not indicate the absence of sharks — both often eat the same food items.
- Use extra caution when waters are murky and avoid uneven tanning and bright colored clothing — sharks see contrast particularly well.
- Refrain from excess splashing and do not allow pets in the water because of their erratic movements.
- Exercise caution when occupying the area between sandbars or near steep dropoffs — these are favorite hangouts for sharks.
- Do not enter the water if sharks are known to be present and evacuate the water if sharks are seen while there. And, of course, do not harass a shark if you see one!

Information provided by the Florida Museum of Natural History, <http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu>.



The odds of being killed by a shark

As compared to being struck by lightning in Florida, 1959-2003 -
Lightning fatalities: 425
Number of shark attacks: 466
Shark Fatalities: 8

Shark attacks: 459
Shark deaths: 8

U.S. annual average of animal-related fatalities during the 1990s
Deer colliding with vehicle: 130

Dogs: 18
Snakes: 15
Mountain Lions: .6
Sharks: .4

As compared to being killed by an alligator:
In Florida, 1948-2003 -
Alligator attacks: 326
Alligator deaths: 13



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Shona art from Zimbabwe will be featured at ArtsQuest. See page B1.



Breaking ground on building green. See page C1.



South Walton remains winless. See page C25.

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