

MEDIA PERCEPTIONS OF SHARKS

Source A – The Telegraph, 14 May 2018

Man in hospital after shark attack off the Cornish coast



It is a nightmare scenario which is widely feared but less likely to occur than being struck by lightning. But yesterday a British fisherman was taken to hospital after being bitten by a shark in Cornwall.

It's thought the casualty Max Berryman, 21, has been bitten by a porbeagle shark on Sunday morning that was brought on deck in the vessel's nets.

It is one of just several dozen serious shark attacks recorded in the UK in modern history.

Mr Berryman was airlifted to the Royal Cornwall Hospital in Truro by the coastguard helicopter. Coastguard, Alex Grieg, said the fisherman had received significant injuries including wounds to the lower leg. "

The porbeagle is a cousin of the great white shark and can be nine feet long and weigh over 500lbs or 36 stones. It is one of the most common types of shark to be spotted by British fishermen.

It comes amid fears that a great white shark is prowling the British coastline after two dead dolphins were found washed up on a beach in Norfolk.

A spokesman at the Marine Conservation Society said: "Porbeagles, like many other shark species, do occasionally get caught in trawl gears. Fishermen are encouraged to return shark species to the water when they are accidentally caught. There's always a danger that a bite will occur when a shark is being handled on a boat deck or in fishing gears".

The International Shark Attack File attributes just three bites to this species - one provoked and non fatal - and two on boats.

Life-saving advice | How to survive a shark attack

Arm yourself

At the first sign of a shark attack, experts advise that you find yourself a weapon. Be this a knife, harpoon or pole, grab whatever is close to hand. Because even the most ineffectual, blunt object is a considerably better option for smacking a shark than your (edible) hands or feet.

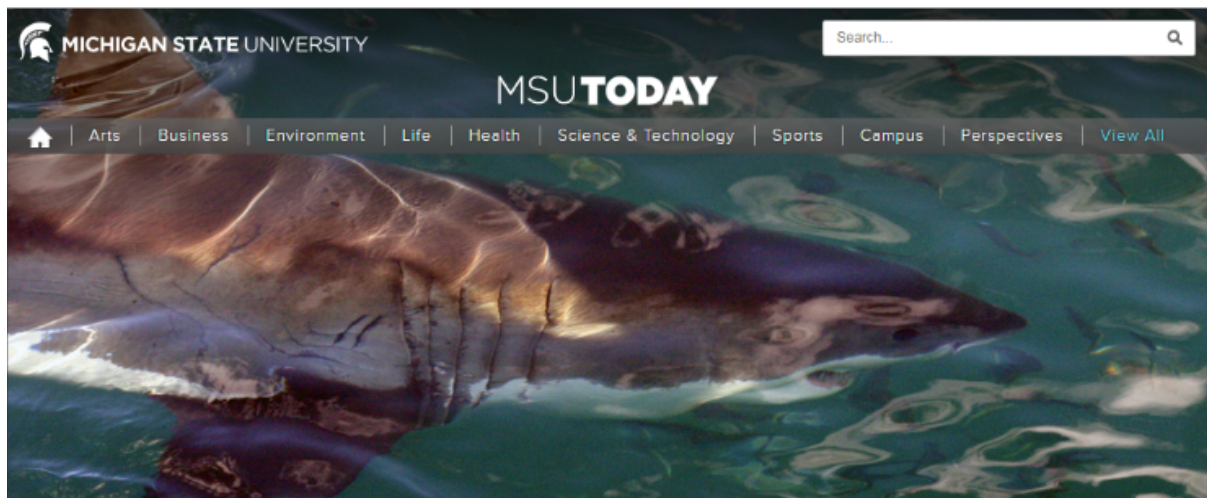


Punch it in the face

Despite sounding ridiculously cartoonish, this method is a proven and fairly reliable way to deter a shark. Landing a blow directly on its nose will deter the unfriendly fish.

Get your claws out

If the situation becomes desperate – he's eaten your harpoon and grown immune to your constant punches – then scratch and claw at the shark's two most vulnerable features: the gills and the eyes.



SHARKS: BAD CREATURES OR BAD IMAGE?

Historically, the media have been particularly harsh to sharks, and it's affecting their survival.

The results of a Michigan State University study reviewed worldwide media coverage of sharks – and the majority isn't good.

Australian and U.S. news articles were more likely to focus on negative reports featuring sharks and shark attacks rather than conservation efforts. Allowing such articles to dominate the overall news coverage diverts attention from key issues, such as shark populations are declining worldwide and many species are facing extinction, said Meredith Gore, MSU assistant professor of fisheries and wildlife and the School of Criminal Justice.

“The most important aspect of this research is that risks from -- rather than to -- sharks continue to dominate news coverage in large international media markets,” said Gore. “This is problematic for shark conservation.”

According to the study, more than 52 percent of global coverage focused on shark attacks on people, and sharks were portrayed negatively in nearly 60 percent of the

coverage. That's compared to a mere 10 percent featuring shark conservation issues and just 7 percent focusing on shark biology or ecology.

The issues affecting sharks' survival are many. They include the threat of overfishing (overharvesting sharks for their fins), pollution, habitat loss and climate change. Sharks are especially vulnerable to these threats due to sharks' slow-growth rates, late age of maturity, long gestation periods and low reproductive output.

One way to improve sharks' image would be to balance the coverage. Examples of positive articles include highlighting the rarity of attacks, discussing preventive measures water users can take to reduce vulnerability to attacks, and discuss conservation issues related to local and threatened species of sharks, Gore said.