

Tiger sharks follow paddleboarders on Maui

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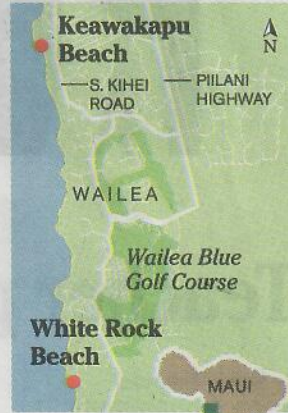
Beachgoers were being warned to stay out of the ocean between Keawakapu Beach and White Rock Beach in Wailea, Maui, on Wednesday after large tiger sharks were sighted, including one that bit a stand-up paddle board, the state Department of Land and Natural Resources announced in a statement.

Wesley Mundy, conservation police officer for DLNR Division of Conservation and Resources, said Maui County Ocean Safety officers were dispatched at 9:44 a.m. after a stand-up paddle boarder reported a 10-foot tiger shark about 300 yards offshore from the Andaz Wailea Resort.

The lifeguards went out on two Jet Skis and reported the possible sighting of three tiger sharks at least 10 feet in length and one had bitten the board.

"We say 'possible' because we're not positive if they saw the same shark twice," said Rylan Yatsushiro, Maui County fire services chief.

Next, "about 15-20 minutes later and a little southeasterly of the (first) contact, the Ocean Safety officers partly witnessed at least one shark coming up at a group of paddleboarders, who were fending it off



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with their paddles," Mundy said.

No one was hurt.

On Dec. 3 off Kihei, Maui, stand-up paddler Larry Oberto's inflatable board was bitten by a 10-foot tiger shark and deflated; Oberto was rescued by paddleboarder AJ Gaston, and, pursued by the shark, the two men paddled safely to shore.

The warnings will continue until at least noon today, after authorities patrol the area.

There are more tiger sharks in Maui waters during winter than other seasons, with the highest numbers present in January and February, according to new research on tagged tiger sharks by scientists at the Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology.

However, no correlation between numbers of sharks and bites was found.