

The story of Kapa'aheo, the Kohala shark god seems almost unarguably to be a great white shark. Heloke Mookini has related it to scholars at the Bishop Museum:

"Long ago young girls enjoyed swimming in a lovely cove in Kohala on the Big Island. Often a swimmer would disappear and never be seen again. The people were very afraid and wanted to learn what had happened to the girls. A fisherman noticed that when a swimmer disappeared, a mysterious stranger named Kapa'aheo could be seen sitting on the shore nearby. This fisherman then got all of the other fishermen together and they were on hand when the girls went swimming again. As before the stranger was sitting on the rocks overlooking the cove. When he disappeared the leader of the fishermen ordered the others to dive into the water and form a protective circle around the girls.. The shark swam toward the group and a huge fight began. Many times the shark was wounded by the spears of the fishermen. Finally the shark swam away. When the men were back on shore, they found the stranger dying from many wounds that looked like they were made by fishing spears. When the man died from the wounds, he was transformed into the stone found near the edge of the cliff by the ocean."

This stone, a 7'6" reclining column of pahoehoe lava, was moved from near the Upolu Airport to Honolulu and eventually to Bishop Museum. It now reclines in a lovely peaceful garden--- but touch it, gaze upon its conically pointed nose, stroke its massive length. I dare you not to hear the sharp scream of a young Hawaiian girl and see the crescent tail of a white shark slash the ocean's surface.

Various interpreters and recounters of Hawaiian legends have called the large dangerous sharks of Hawaii *niuhi*. However it is seldom clear which large species, the tiger or the white, is meant. I think the two species have been confused in several stories. Based on the differences in the two animals, we can make some educated guesses about which species is which.

For example, Kamakau told of a special method of fishing for niuhi:

"A fisherman sailed far out on the ocean until the land looked level with the sea, that was the place for shark fishing. When all was ready, the prow of the canoe was turned into the current so that the upswell of the current would be behind the canoe. The net containing the decomposed pig mixed with pebbles and broken kukui nut shells was tied to the starboard side of the canoe at the forward boom. Then the net was splashed into the sea and poked with a stick until the grease ran through the pebbles and shells. A shark would scent the grease, his dorsal fin would break through the surface of the sea, and it would snap its teeth close to the canoe. The large sharks were the niuhi; they could be tamed like pet pigs and be tickled and patted on the head. The fisherman would pat the shark on the head until it became used to being touched. Then he rested his chin on the head of shark and slipped a noose over its head with his hands, turning his palms away from the shark lest it see their whiteness and turn and bite them. When the snare reached the gills, the fisherman eased it downward to the center of the body and tightened the noose. If it were a big shark there would be a furious tugging and battling."

It seems likely that the large niuhi described in this account is a tiger shark rather than the more violent great white shark. Large tigers are

are hunted with very heavy-duty specialized gear. Compare that equipment with the gear available to a band of Hawaiian fishermen. Their struggle to subdue an adult white shark with rope made from plant fiber while braced in a wooden canoe must have been rigorous indeed.