

Letters

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MERELY A VICIOUS RUMOR

Your interesting article "Shark Attack" (March '93) stated in bold type that attacks on surfers by tiger sharks are "believed by some to start as cases of mistaken identity" for sea turtles. This is a misguided belief. There is no scientific information to support such an idea. Unfortunately, the news media in Hawaii has repeatedly voiced this speculation, causing many to believe it is true.

The ~~fact~~ is that tiger sharks don't have to mistake anything floating on the surface in order to strike, bite or eat it. Taking things at the surface is a natural part of the tiger shark's feeding strategy. The theory by some scientists that great white sharks mistake surfers for seals off California simply can't be transposed to tiger sharks and sea turtles in Hawaii. Very different species of sharks and prey items are involved.

Explorer Jean-Michel Cousteau summarized the situation correctly when interviewed a year ago following the death of a swimmer attacked by a large shark at Okowalu, Maui. Cousteau said: "Tiger sharks are particularly dangerous to swimmers. Some sharks are more fussy than others about what they eat. Tiger sharks are known to eat almost anything and everything, and...are more likely to attack anything on the surface whether it's a piece of wood, a surfboard, a boat, or a bird."

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