

# Letters *THE MAUI NEWS* JAN 7, 1993

## Shark attacks are not 'mistakes'

I am writing to correct a mistake made in the commentary (Dec. 20) about sharks written by Charles K. Maxwell.

The statement was made that, "The experts in the (shark) task force have scientific information that shows every shark attack is a matter of mistaken identity by the shark for its natural food of turtles and seals." The fact is that there is no scientific information whatsoever to support such an idea.

There must have been a misunderstanding of information presented during one of the task force meetings. The proposition that tiger sharks have to "mistake" something floating at the surface for a turtle or other prey in order to attack it simply has no basis in fact. The idea also runs contrary to common sense, as well as the known feeding strategy of tiger sharks, a species that consumes an incredibly wide array of items, humans included.

Explorer Jean-Michel Cousteau summarized the situation correctly when interviewed last year following the tragic death of Mrs. Morrell at Olowalu. 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."

The 2,000-pound steer mentioned in Mr. Maxwell's column was in fact seen alive swimming off Maui when attacked and devoured by large tiger sharks. Certainly the steer wasn't "mistaken" by the sharks for a turtle, or even a Hawaiian monk seal, a very rare species around Maui.

Similarly, a surfer on a 6-foot, 4-inch-long surfboard, 21 inches wide, bears little if any resemblance to a turtle. The common element, however, is that both the surfers and intermittently the turtles are at the surface where tiger sharks are known to feed.

Recent attacks on surfboarders, as well as the fatal attack on a boogie-boarder took place during

## The Maui News policy on letters

The Maui News welcomes and encourages letters to the editor. The letters should be brief and to the point and on subjects of general interest. Letters must be signed and include an address and phone number where the writer can be reached during working hours for verification. The writer's name and community will be published.

Letters should be limited to 250 words or less with shorter letters being given priority. Letters of any length are subject to editing. Typed letters are preferred but others will be accepted if they are legible.

Letters may be mailed to The Maui News, 100 Mahalani St., Wailuku 96793; or may be faxed to 242-9087.

daylight hours in clean, clear water. It's hard to imagine that the sharks involved mistook the victims for something else.

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