

Sharks! Are they really that scary?

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Speaking from personal experience, surprisingly ...no. Having worked with sharks and their trainers at Dolphin Cove for the past 8 years I have gained a deep respect and admiration for these modern day dinosaurs.

Sharks have remained unchanged for 350 million years, presumably because they are so successfully adapted to their environment. They are non-dangerous to humans for the most part. Most shark attacks are a case of mistaken identity- i.e. the shark mistaking humans for their true prey. Odds are that you are more likely to be killed by a falling mango tree than a shark!

Then why are we so afraid of them? Ignorance.

Movies like "Deep Blue Sea" and "Jaws!" have for many people been their sole education about sharks and their behavior. My mother did not go to the beach for months after Jaws premiered in 1975; and that fear still persists today. It is a fear that contributes to the senseless killing of sharks.

Worse still, an estimated 100 million sharks are killed every year around the world, a number that far exceeds what many populations need to recover.

The culprit is the proliferation of illegal shark finning to feed appetites for shark fin soup, a delicacy in parts of Asia and even the Caribbean. The numbers killed are so high that sharks may become endangered. They are vulnerable because they take long periods to mature and produce few young over their lifetimes.

As a predator they are a vital part of the ocean's ecosystem, helping to maintain its balance. The loss of sharks, can and will cause drastic and irreversible changes. For example, scientists have found that declines in shark populations can contribute to a shift from healthy, coral-dominated reefs to barren, algae-dominated reefs. That in turn hurts fish stocks and the protection of our coastline from wave action. It hurts us!

Conservation begins with awareness.