

World shark attacks dipped in 2005

Assertive and even aggressive human behavior could explain why shark attacks worldwide dipped last year, new University of Florida research suggests.

Greater safety precautions and in-your-face responses to confrontations with sharks went a long way in reducing the total number of attacks from 65 in 2004 to 58 in 2005 and fatalities from seven to four, said George Burgess, director of the International Shark Attack File.

In contrast, there were 78 shark attacks — 11 of them fatal — in 2000, the all-time high record year for attacks.

There also were simply fewer sharks to attack people, a result of a decline in shark populations, Burgess said.

In Florida, the number of attacks increased from 12 to 18 but was still well below the 2000 record of 37, he said.

The one fatal U.S. attack occurred June 25 along Florida's Gulf coast, when 14-year-old Jamie Daigle was attacked by a bull shark while swimming off Sandestin. It was the state's first death from a shark attack in four years. Two days later, 16-year-old Craig Hutto lost his right leg to a shark while fishing in waist-deep water off Cape San Blas.

Five of the attacks last year occurred along Florida's Gulf coast, which is a greater proportion to the Atlantic coast than previous years, Burgess said.

Trying to get a clue about birds

It is serious science, with a novel twist. Bird watchers will use a brightly colored or patterned object to measure how birds respond to the new and unexpected. This engaging new "Personality Profiles" experiment is run by The Birdhouse Network, a citizen-science project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, N.Y.

Across North America, thousands of participants in The Birdhouse Network monitor the activities of cavity-nesting birds, including nest-building and raising young. This spring, bluebirds, swallows and wrens may find a harmless, novel object tacked to their nest box.

Will they be curious or cautious?

"We believe that examining birds' responses to novel objects can help us understand why some bird species respond well and others poorly to human disturbance," said Dr. Janis Dickinson, a behavioral ecologist and director of Citizen Science at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

The Birdhouse Network's volunteers put nest boxes in their yards and monitor the numbers of eggs and young in each nest. People of all ages and skill levels can participate. To find out more or to receive a welcome packet, visit www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse, or call (800) 843-2473. The project fee is \$15 (\$12 for Lab members).

7th grader wins manatee art decal contest

Donovan Foster, a 13-year-old seventh grader at Citrus Springs Middle School, captured top honors in the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC's) 2006-2007 Manatee Decal Art Contest.

Foster entered a combination of prisma pencil and watercolor titled "Manatees at Sunrise." It will appear on the 2006-2007 manatee decal, sold by tax collectors to help fund the FWC's manatee conservation efforts.

Other students claiming honors include:

- Second place – Hannah Mericle, Rockledge High School
- Third place – Angela Bailey, Cocoa High School
- Honorable mention – Heather Foster, Vanguard High School
- Honorable mention – Erika Nef, Cooper City High School

Seventy-five students from nine high schools and 13 middle schools entered artwork in the contest.

Since 1992, manatee decals have been available to Florida vessel and vehicle registrants at county tax collectors' offices for a donation to protect the Florida manatee.



To see this year's and past winning artwork visit MyFWC.com/manatee and click on Manatee Decals.