

Beach Closed; Shark Is Seen

SURFSIDE, Fla. (UPI) — A menacing 8-foot hammerhead shark lurking in the waters off Haulover Beach attacked a surfer and returned the next day, forcing thousands of bathers to dry ground.

Sharks are not uncommon off the coast of southern Florida and lifeguards said the popular beach could not be closed indefinitely just because one big shark was seen.

Up to 15,000 people crowded the beach each day during the weekend.

Thousands of beachgoers were ordered out of the water 2½ hours early Sunday by a confirmed shark sighting. On Saturday, the beach was closed after a hammerhead attacked John Popper 20 to 30 yards off the beach.

Popper, 22, of North Miami suffered a gash on his right foot from his heel to his toe, requiring surgery to repair the tendons.

There were no attacks Sunday and no shark sightings until late afternoon when a swimmer spotted a hammerhead near the same area and alerted lifeguards.

"We reopened the beach as usual this morning," life guard Capt. Marcus Breece said Sunday. "But at about 4:30 p.m. we had a bather who thought he saw a shark. A half-hour later three life guards saw an 8-foot hammerhead and we closed the beach for the rest of the day."

He said there was no way to tell if it was the same shark that attacked Popper, but it was about the same size.

"It's been here all week," said lifeguard Dan Winthers, who said he saw the shark charge a fisherman in waist-deep water last week.

"I saw him go after the man. He just dropped his pole and ran in," he said. Lifeguards also said that earlier last week, a snorkler's fin was bitten off and a surfboard damaged.

But Beach Patrol Lt. David Battenfield said one shark is not necessarily enough reason to close a beach.

"You can't keep a beach closed," Battenfield said. "Even when they had a school of sharks in Hallandale, they opened in the afternoon. You can't keep 15,000 to 20,000 people out of the water."

Until Popper's injury, no shark attacks had drawn blood in 30 years at Haulover, said Battenfield.

Popper said he was getting ready to climb on his surfboard when the shark bit his foot.

"I felt something strong grab my foot," he said. "It felt like big masses of heavy jaws." Popper said. "My first reflex was to get back on my board and look at my foot. I didn't know if it was still there."

Popper rode the board into shore and was rushed by jeep to North Miami General Hospital.

Authorities said the shark apparently was attracted to the area by bait used at a fishing pier near the beach and may have been in the area for a week.

It was the first shark attack reported in Florida since October, when a wind surfer was bitten near Miami.