

ACTIVITY: Snorkeling

CASE: GSAF 2010.11.19

DATE: Friday November 19, 2010

LOCATION: The accident took place in the lagoon at Palmyra Atoll, in the Northern Pacific about 1800 km from Honolulu.

NAME: Kydd Pollock

DESCRIPTION: He is a 33-year-old marine scientist with the Nature Conservancy.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, November 21, 2010

HISTORY: The Kingdom of Hawaii claimed the atoll in 1862, and the US included it among the Hawaiian Islands when it annexed the archipelago in 1898. The Hawaii Statehood Act of 1959 did not include Palmyra Atoll, which is now privately owned by the Nature Conservancy. This organization is managing the atoll as a nature preserve. The lagoons and surrounding waters within the 12 nautical mile US territorial seas were transferred to the US Fish and Wildlife Service and were designated a National Wildlife Refuge in January 2001.

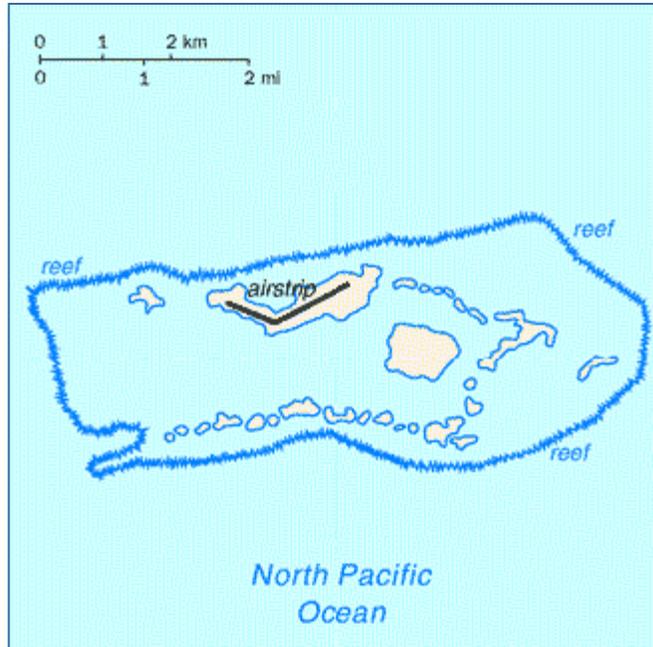
TIME: 13h30

NARRATIVE: Kydd was snorkeling while divers were using nets to capture Maori wrasse in order to place sonic tags on them. The shark swam into one of the nets, and after the divers freed it, the panicked shark swam past Kydd, then turned and grabbed his head.

INJURY: He sustained multiple lacerations to his head.

TREATMENT: "His girlfriend Amanda stitched him up," reported Kydd's father, Rick Pollock

SPECIES: A two-metre grey reef shark.



Kiwi's horror shark attack

A young Kiwi marine scientist's act of kindness to a trapped shark went badly wrong when the 2m predator turned on him in a frenzy.

Kydd Pollock was saved from possible death by his diving mask when the grey reef shark bit him three times in the face and on the head in a lagoon off Palmyra Atoll, in the Northern Pacific.

"He's extremely lucky... considering where it happened on his head [and] where he was at the time... a remote place with few medical supplies and little prospect of getting to [hospital]," his father, Whakatane-based sport fishing charter skipper Rick Pollock, told Sunday News.

Rick said Kydd, 33, had been doing marine research at Palmyra, about 1800km from Honolulu – one of the most isolated islands in the Pacific. Kydd, who was snorkelling, and two or three scuba divers were using nets to capture giant hump headed Maori wrasse for tagging.

"This six-to-seven foot reef shark swam into one of the nets and got caught," Rick said. "My son was... on the other net. They [the scuba divers] cut the shark out and... once it got out of the net it panicked and it made a beeline for the other net.

"It looked like the shark was going to swim right into the net again and get tangled, so he [Kydd] grabbed the floatline and swam down to the bottom with it. The shark swam right past him, went through as he had hoped but spun around – and that's when the attacks started on his head.

"The first bite was on the back of his head. The second bite, which was potentially the worst one, that was the one that his mask took the full... brunt of. It shattered the glass and twisted the mask into a pretzel, so I just can't imagine what sort of force went into that. And then it came back for a third time and grabbed him on the forehead and the top of the head."

Rick said it was extremely lucky the shark didn't inflict a severe injury on Kydd, like puncturing his eye or severing an artery, because it would have taken a medivac 12-24 hours to get him to a mainland hospital. Palmyra is half way between Hawaii and American Samoa.

Instead, his girlfriend Amanda patched him up.

"[Amanda] is there on the island... she's a PhD, not a medical doctor. They didn't actually have a medical officer on there. She was the next best thing," Rick said.

"She's the one that stitched him and sewed him... and stapled him up. I thought it was quite remarkable that she would be able to divorce herself of any sort of emotional entanglement and was able to deal with the issue as it stood. She shaved his head... and did everything that was required, and I really take my hat off to her."

Rick said despite the attack, at about 1.30pm on November 19, his son "doesn't harbour any malice towards sharks at all".

"He [Kydd] doesn't actually refer to it as an attack. He's looking [at it as] more of a defensive manoeuvre from a panicked animal."

Kydd told him about his mauling about an hour after it happened.

"He skyped me. I was kind of shaken. As it sank in, the what-ifs started falling into place and I thought, 'Gee it could have been very, very bad'," Rick said.

Grey reef sharks are an aggressive species and have been responsible for a number of attacks on humans.

Kydd, just one year old when his family moved here from the United States, has grown up around the ocean. Rick runs sport fishing charter operation White Island Marine Charters.

At 18, Kydd became the youngest person to obtain a skipper's ticket in New Zealand. He also completed his scuba instructor certificate in the same year. He enrolled at Townsville's James Cook University and graduated with a Bachelor of Science. After co-captaining the family's 17m sport fishing boat Pursuit, he moved to Hawaii where he helped set up an open-ocean aquaculture farm.

Kydd has also constructed an offshore fish farm for the Portuguese government, and skippered a sport fishing boat from Florida to Panama.

Now living in Honolulu, he spends four to six months a year at Palmyra. He is a science specialist for The Nature Conservancy, a leading conservation organisation working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people.

SOURCE: Lee Umbers, Sunday News, Stuff Co NZ, December 12, 2010, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/4449680/Kiwis-horror-shark-attack>

A shark bite incident - the real story

Late last year, while assisting with a marine research project at Palmyra Atoll, I was injured in an incident involving a grey reef shark.

A news story on the incident was published here in New Zealand some time later, accompanied by several graphic photos that made the injuries I incurred seem more serious than they actually were.

The news story and photos appeared without my knowledge or consent in the newspaper, so you can imagine my surprise when I awoke one morning in Palmyra to scores of emails from friends worried about my health and wellbeing. In fact, such was the overwhelming response and concern

I want people to know that I healed quickly and was back at work filling my marine scientist role just two days after the accident occurred. And then, just three weeks later, I was rapt to be back in the water again.

That said, I want to take this opportunity to correct a few errors of fact and perception that accompanied the original report. Specifically, I want people to understand that this was not a 'shark attack' as the headline stated; it was simply a shark bite – and the difference is crucial.

At the time I was assisting a University of Hawaii research team place sonic tags on humphead Maori wrasse. This species of fish can grow to great proportions, is very shy and difficult to capture, yet is globally threatened.

"They have been overfished around the world to such an extent that Palmyra is one of the few

places left where you can see and study them. The UH project is designed to help us better understand their home range and movement patterns, and is the first step toward designing management strategies to help protect the species across its range,” according to Dr Eric Conklin, Marine Science Advisor of The Nature Conservancy of Hawaii.



Grey sharks over a reef are a sign of a healthy ecosystem.

Part of the project involved the team attempting to capture a large wrasse using a barrier net, but unfortunately a passing two-metre grey reef shark became entangled in the netting first. The team stopped immediately to untangle the shark, but once free, the shark began swimming slowly toward another portion of the net in a disoriented and lethargic manner. Seeing this, I moved quickly to hold the net down so it could pass freely. When the shark veered away, I momentarily turned my attention back to the net, only to look up and see that the shark had made an abrupt turn and was heading back towards me at great speed.

Before swimming off, it bit me twice over the top of the head, removing my mask, and inflicted a third glancing bite, leaving cuts on the left side of my face. (My mask was not shattered and twisted, as one media report stated.)

The response to the accident was prompt and smooth. Within minutes, I was rushed back to the station, where several on-island personnel with medical training for remote locations successfully patched me up. They received guidance from our on-call remote medical staff.

I was fortunate that day – the outcome could have been far worse. Still, I have never considered the incident an ‘attack.’ Most sharks at Palmyra are reef sharks – grey, white-tipped and black-tipped – and not aggressive, unless provoked or threatened.

Dr Conklin notes that this is the first time there has been an incident involving a shark at Palmyra, and there was a good reason for it.

“Grey reef sharks will generally not attack unless they feel threatened, and even then they will generally display aggressive behavior in an attempt to scare away their perceived threat before attacking. In this case, the shark may have felt threatened or confused after being caught in the net, and its behavior is consistent with that,” he said.

Sharks are common at Palmyra. Indeed, researchers dive there safely on a daily basis surrounded by sharks. The atoll is one of the few remaining places in the world where top predators such as sharks and other large fish still dominate the marine reef ecosystem. Their presence is a sign of overall reef ecosystem health and a key reason why Palmyra is one of the few places in the world where they can be studied in natural numbers across their habitat range.

My own beliefs about sharks are echoed by Dr Jonathan Gardner, a marine scientist at Victoria

University of Wellington, who also conducts research at Palmyra: "Sharks may be unpredictable, but they generally don't cause significant problems for human populations. They deserve our respect and admiration, but perhaps, more than anything, they deserve our protection.

"We need far less hysteria about sharks and far more understanding of their biology and their natural role in marine systems. It's important to see this incident for what it really was – an encounter with a shark in its environment, which thankfully didn't result in permanent injury. All of the researchers involved will doubtless understand this and be back in the water tomorrow to further contribute to the acquisition of new knowledge about sharks."

I have unwavering respect for sharks and have always loved being around them. Indeed, this incident has only strengthened my respect for these magnificent creatures.

SOURCE: New Zealand Fishing News, April 6, 2011,
<http://www.stuff.co.nz/sport/fishing/news/4854890/A-shark-bite-incident-the-real-story>



Staples hold the edges of the bite marks on Kydd's head.