

**ACTIVITY:** Snorkeling  
**CASE:** GSAF 2011.06.01  
**DATE:** Wednesday June 1, 2011  
**LOCATION:** Palau Payar, Langkawi, Malaysia

**NAME:** Unknown  
**DESCRIPTION:** She is a female Canadian teenager.

**BACKGROUND**

**MOON PHASE:** Waning Crescent, 1% of the Moon was illuminated. New Moon, June 2, 2011.

**ENVIRONMENT:** The Pulau Payar Marine Park, Malaysia's oldest marine sanctuary, consists of four uninhabited islands: Payar, Lembu, Kaca and Segantang.

**NARRATIVE:** The girl was with a Coral Island, a tour operator. After lunch, the guide suggested snorkelers watch sharks feeding on scraps of food (chicken bones, etc.) After the guide entered the water, several teenage girls followed. A shark nipped the foot of one of the girls.



**INJURY:** The bite severed four tendons on the dorsal surface of the right foot.

**TREATMENT:** The operator arranged for evacuation. The girl was taken to Langkawi Hospital where her wound was surgically repaired.

**SPECIES:** The accident involved a blacktip reef shark, *Carcharhinus melanopterus*.



**Tuesday, June 7, 2011**  
**Shark Attack**

When I first visited Pulau Payar, Langkawi in 2009, I witnessed how tourists were offering bread to those coral reef fishes and there was a session where sharks were fed. It is a known fact that wildlife feeding will leave an impact to their behavior and diet thus offsetting the balance of their surrounding ecosystem.

I observed some of those Blacktip Reef sharks came very closely to the tourists and I had the impression that they were not aggressive at all. I was wrong. A recent incident has proven that these sharks are not to be taken for granted.

Some time ago, a guest of mine related her snorkeling experience during the shark feeding session. She was snorkeling and the operator started throwing the food into the water. Seconds later, she was surrounded by those fast swimming sharks. She told me that she was terrified for the fear of getting bitten. Luckily she was left untouched.

For another case, someone really got bitten. It was unlucky for this teenage girl who happened to be a friend of my friend. On 1st June 2011, three Canadian teenage girls went on a snorkeling trip with the Pulau Payar operator, Coral Island. A supposedly fun trip has turned sour when one of them got nipped badly by one of those blacktip reef shark (*Carcharhinus melanopterus*) during the feeding session.

**What had happened?**

The shark feeding session starts after a snorkeling group had their lunch and this is the usual practice of the operator. The reason for this? So that the operator can gather whatever left over food to be fed to these sharks.

A guide from Coral Island insisted that the teenage girls should have the fun of watching the shark feeding by snorkeling in the water. One of them was doubtful and asked the guide if it was safe to do so. The guide said that it was alright and he went into the water. The teenage girls thought it was safe after seeing the guide entered the water and they decided to follow.

Scrap food inclusive of chicken bones were thrown in to feed those blacktip reef sharks. One of them was snorkeling and had her both legs hanging in the water. Five minutes later, an unsuspected shark went directly to her right feet and SNAPPED!

She was immediately evacuated by the operator and straight to Langkawi hospital. A surgery was done on that evening itself.

The result of the bite has cost four sliced tendons above the toes and her little toe may require a skin graft operation.

I am not a marine biologist neither a shark specialist and I now know a little more about them, thanks to wikipedia and the resources from the world wide web. A blacktip reef sharks in general is timid and seldom poses any danger to human unless roused by food. People wading through swallow water are at risk of having their legs mistakenly bitten.

After surfing the net, I have found that this is not the first incident of people having bitten by a shark in Pulau Payar. Someone had his finger bitten off while feeding the sharks and a tourist nearly had her finger bitten off by a baby blacktip reef shark while feeding the coral reef fishes.

It is very unfortunate that this has happened to a young girl who now have to go through unnecessary difficulties. My questions are:

1. Do the authorities especially the Jabatan Taman Laut (Department of Marine Park Kedah) is aware of all of these incidents?
2. If they are aware, what actions have they taken to prevent such incidents?

Who should be responsible for this?

I vote for the authorities and the operator. They should know that shark feeding poses a risk to the feeder and yet they allowed these innocent tourists to be exposed to danger. There were past incidents related to blacktip reef sharks nipping tourists by mistake and yet they did not take any preventative measures to ensure such incident do not repeat. Are they going to wait for a fatality of a tourist before taking firm action? It will be too late by then.

**SOURCE:** <http://meblognature.blogspot.com/2011/06/shark-attack.html>





*First aiders attending to the victim on Pulau Payar before the evacuation.*



*A visit to Langkawi hospital.  
Victim's foot had a surgery and her tendons stitched up.  
She will undergo another follow-up as soon as she returns home.*