

N.Z. great white sharks take 'tropical holidays'

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This file photo shows a great white shark jumping out of the water during a hunt. New Zealand's great whites enjoy an annual "tropical holiday", swimming thousands of kilometres to warm South Pacific waters before returning home, according to researchers.

New Zealand's great white sharks enjoy an annual "tropical holiday", swimming thousands of kilometres (miles) to warm South Pacific waters before returning home, according to researchers.

Scientists who monitored the giant predators for the past six years at Stewart Island, off New Zealand's south coast, found that they regularly set off for destinations such as Tonga, Fiji and Vanuatu in mid-winter.

They then returned to Stewart Island after about six months, some using their powerful navigational instincts to reach almost the exact spot where

scientists had tagged them the previous year, the researchers said.

New Zealand's National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) said the study provided an insight into the life-cycle of great whites, the largest predatory shark, which can grow to eight metres (26 feet) long.

"The pieces of the puzzle are gradually coming together," NIWA principal scientist Malcolm Francis said on Thursday.

"We knew that most of our [white sharks](#) emigrate from New Zealand during winter and travel several thousand kilometres for a tropical holiday.

"Now we have discovered that many, perhaps most of them, make the return trip to exactly the same place in New Zealand."

Scientists studied great whites at Stewart Island and the Chatham Islands, 750 kilometres (466 miles) east of New Zealand, which are considered "hot spots" for the sharks because their large seal colonies are a rich food source.

Data from [electronic tags](#) showed the sharks made deep dives of 800 metres during their migrations, possibly to feed on squid and deep-water fish. One shark reached a depth of 1,200 metres on its way to Australia.

The researchers found large numbers of great whites at Stewart Island during this year's expedition in April, tagging 27 during the three-week trip, three times the previous record in 2009.

But NIWA, which conducted the research with the Department of Conservation and Auckland University, said it was still unclear whether great white numbers were stable or declining.

The species is listed as vulnerable and has been protected in New Zealand waters since 2007.

While it is known that great whites live up to 50 years, they mature slowly and produce relatively small litters of about 10 juveniles every 2-3 years, meaning populations take a long time to recover from any setbacks.

Francis said the ongoing study would help scientific understanding of the fearsome predators.

"We hope that we will collect a detailed and exciting dataset that tells us where each shark was and when," he said.

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