

Sharp-toothed creature that bit Hawaii surfer was an eel

October 21 2015, by Caleb Jones



In this Aug. 6, 2014 file photo, people lounge on Waikiki's beaches in Honolulu. An eel, not a shark, bit a surfer off the shore of Hawaii's Waikiki Beach over the weekend. The state Department of Land and Natural Resources said Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2015, it made the determination based on an interview with the victim and photos of his injuries. They didn't specify what species of eel bit the man or what might have provoked it. (AP Photo/Audrey McAvoy, File)

An eel, not a shark, bit a surfer over the weekend off Hawaii's popular Waikiki Beach, officials said Tuesday.

The state Department of Land and Natural Resources said it made the determination based on an interview with the victim and photos of his injuries.

The agency didn't specify what species of eel bit the [man](#) or why. It investigated after the initial reports said the bite was from a shark.

Hawaii's coral reefs are home to a variety of eels, including some with large mouths, long teeth and strong jaws that help in capturing prey. The snakelike fish normally aren't aggressive but have been known to defend their lairs, according to the Maui Ocean Center's website.

Officials don't keep track of eel bites in Hawaii waters but noted there is no record of any [shark attacks](#) off Waikiki.

The surfer suffered injuries to his left foot Saturday, hours after a shark attacked a man off Oahu's Lanikai Beach.

Both men were hospitalized in serious condition. No updates on their injuries were released Tuesday.

In the attack off Lanikai Beach, a 44-year-old man was swimming about 50 to 100 yards from shore when a tiger shark bit him. Another man helped him to shore in an outrigger canoe.

It was Hawaii's sixth confirmed shark encounter this year, state statistics show. Another man lost his leg when a tiger shark bit him on Oahu's North Shore less than two weeks ago.

Most [shark bites](#) this year have happened in murky water, and all have

resulted in injuries. In April, a shark killed a woman who was snorkeling off Maui.

Officials recorded an average of 4.2 shark encounters per year from 2005 to 2009. Since 2010, the average has risen to 8.6 per year.

Still, the number of attacks is low compared with the number of people in the ocean, said Dr. Carl Meyer, a shark and reef researcher at the University of Hawaii's Institute of Marine Biology.

"The number of people living in Hawaii and using the ocean for recreation has increased over time, and this is the single most likely reason for a higher number of shark bites in recent years," Meyer said.

Hawaii Tourism Authority president George Szigeti said in a statement Monday that the weekend's bites were isolated but that people should be aware of the dangers in the ocean.

"As an island state, we are surrounded by the ocean, so it is important that both our visitors and residents take precaution to understand [ocean](#) safety and take precaution when entering the water," he said.

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Citation: Sharp-toothed creature that bit Hawaii surfer was an eel (2015, October 21) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-10-sharp-toothed-creature-bit-hawaii-surfer.html>

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