

Sharks reel in fans in Eastern Mediterranean winter waters

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Every winter, as sea temperatures drop, sharks seeking warmer waters head to a northern Israeli shore, drawing enthusiasts hoping for a glimpse of the predators

The wind was blowing, clouds blocked the sun and the sea was choppy and cold, but Hagai Mayer and his two friends didn't care. They wanted

to see the sharks.

Every winter, as sea temperatures drop, sharks seeking warmer waters head to a northern Israeli shore, drawing enthusiasts who take the plunge in hopes of catching a glimpse of the enigmatic predators.

Dozens of sandbar and dusky sharks, which can reach up to three metres (10 feet) in length, converge by the bubbly stream of seawater used to cool the turbines of a power station near Hadera that is discharged back into the Mediterranean.

The site has become a magnet not only for sharks but also for researchers and people like Mayer, a resident of the nearby kibbutz Nahsholim, who on a cold February morning was preparing to go snorkeling.

"We're here to visit the sharks, we've been doing so for the past few years, whenever we have an opportunity," he said.

Seeing the large animals underwater in a natural habitat is "an adrenaline rush you can't even describe", he said.

"To me, encounters with wild animals in nature is the highest level of excitement, certainly with impressive animals like these," he added.

'No reason to fear'

Scientists are not entirely sure what draws the sharks to the small area below the four looming chimneys of the Hadera power plant, but it's clear to them that "it has something to do with the sea temperature", said Adi Barash.



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The PhD student, researching sharks at Haifa University's Leon Recanati Institute for Maritime Studies, said the Hadera phenomenon, which exists to a lesser extent off smaller power plants in southern Israel, is not known to occur elsewhere in the world.

Sharks, according to Barash, have an unjustifiably bad reputation that is costing them their lives.

"The movie 'Jaws' created a very significant change in people's perception," promoting a "primordial fear that encourages mass killings

of sharks, totally disproportionate to the danger they pose," she said.

"A shark is not dangerous, there's no reason to fear it," Barash went on, noting that more people die by slipping in the shower than from sharks.

"Of course you need to treat it with respect, it's a wild animal and a predator, but not dangerous to people."

There have not been any recorded incidents of sharks attacking people off Israel's Mediterranean coast for decades.

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