

Sharks along Nantucket: A researcher has tagged 100-plus sharks there as population rebounds

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While much of the shark focus is centered on great whites along Cape Cod this time of year, another shark species has been making waves in

recent years off of Nantucket.

Sandbar sharks, after the [local population](#) was decimated decades ago because of overfishing, are now all over the Nantucket coast—and a [researcher](#) at the New England Aquarium has tagged more than 120 sandbar sharks in the area.

Caroline Collatos, a Ph.D. student and shark researcher at the New England Aquarium's Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life, has been catching, tagging and releasing sandbar sharks off of Nantucket for the last three years.

"We're starting to see a potential rebound now with sandbar sharks," Collatos recently told the Herald, noting that there weren't nearly as many sandbar sharks in the water when growing up in the 1990s.

The local shark population had been wiped out because of overfishing for their large dorsal fin, which was highly desired for shark soup.

Then in 2008, sandbar sharks were protected in state and federal waters—leading to the gradual population rebound in recent years.

The 120-plus sandbar sharks that Collatos has tagged are mostly [adult females](#), measuring up to 6.5 feet. Many of the sharks are found very close to shore.

"I also find it interesting about their preference for certain areas over others," Collatos said. "I'm trying to figure out if that's more impacted by predators or prey."

The researchers catch the sandbar sharks by luring them with a piece of bluefish on a hook. The scientists then tag the shark, measure the animal, remove the hook, and let the shark swim away.

Collatos' goal is to gather data using acoustic telemetry about the annual presence, habitat use, and migration patterns of the local shark population.

It's a long-term study to better understand the behavior and trends among the sharks there each year.

"Part of the larger goal of this research program is promoting management and conservation with accurate, scientific-based information," Collatos said.

New England Aquarium's shark research team around the world is tagging and monitoring various species, ranging from nurse sharks and oceanic white tip sharks to bull sharks, sand tigers, sandbar, and white sharks.

There are more than 500 species of sharks in the world, and scientists in the Aquarium's Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life have tagged more than 40 different species and related animals in the wild, many of them in New England waters.

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