



## Wellfleet harbor finds itself brimming with sharks

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WELLFLEET — There's something other than sailors, swimmers, and kayakers enjoying this town's famous harbor — namely, white sharks. Wellfleet Harbor generated more than 6,500 individual shark detections last year, second only to Chatham on the Massachusetts coastline.

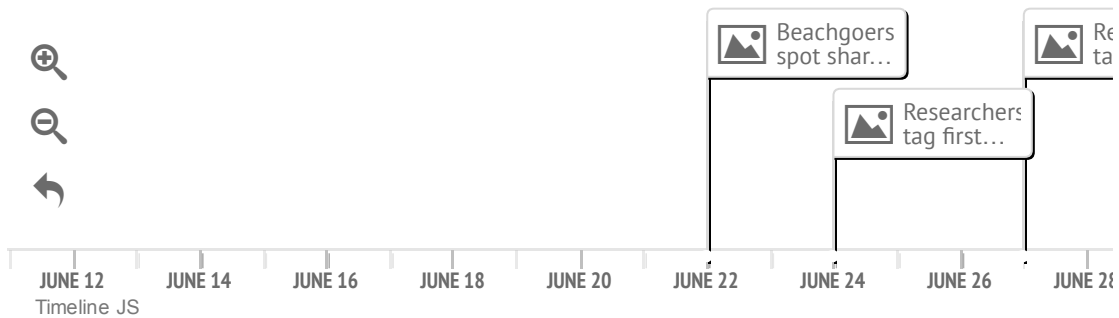
### **Cape Cod Shark Activity Timeline**



Atlantic White Shark

# FIRST WHITE SHARK OF THE YEAR SPOTTED OFF CAPE COD

The first white shark of the research season was seen in Monomoy, according to a post on the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy's Facebook page. [Read more](#)



That was the message John Chisholm, a marine fisheries scientist who works with Greg Skomal at the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy in Chatham, delivered to the Wellfleet Non-Resident Taxpayers when they met last Thursday.

On July 22, Chisholm said, he and Skomal had a 19-shark day.

“We’ve seen as many as 22 individual sharks in a day, usually at the peak at the end of August and September,” he said, but added that seeing 19 sharks in one July day got him wondering. “I don’t know if this is an early peak or if September will blow our socks off.”

Any white sharks that he and Skomal can get close to are tagged on their dorsal fins. The acoustic tags emit a series of pulses for up to 10 years that are picked up when the shark swims by a receiver placed in the water.

At first, Chisholm said, the researchers focused on Chatham and Orleans.

“We did not think that other towns would pick up sharks, but we soon learned that they do,” he said, noting that last year they detected 6,564 shark swims in Wellfleet Harbor. Wellfleet is second only to Chatham, where 14,124 were detected last year.

“The real surprise to us was Wellfleet Harbor,” he said. “One shark in particular would come and go in the harbor, right down to Dec. 6, which was the last detection in Wellfleet.” The Wellfleet figures, he added, “kind of shocked us.”

Provincetown, in comparison, had only 902 detections, Chisholm said, but had more individual sharks — eight in all. The highest number of individual sharks detected in place was 28 in Chatham.

Data are collected by a snorkeler who retrieves the information recorded on receivers that are placed throughout the harbor. That snorkeler knows the number on the tag, but not what kind of animal it is attached to. One snorkeler called Chisholm once to ask what fish they were tagging that had a number he kept seeing.

“When I told him white sharks, he was a little shocked,” Chisholm said.

Chisholm showed the group at the meeting a photo of Jameson, a shark that made headlines last July when he washed up in Chatham and was rescued and tagged by Skomal.

“This is the shark that has been in Wellfleet Harbor the most,” he said of the small white shark. “One of the things we know is that the smaller sharks prefer fish, so we speculate that because Wellfleet is a good harbor for fish, once Jameson found it, he remembered fish were there and came back all last summer.”

There have been only two incidents involving sharks and people in the past four years, and that includes one in Plymouth where kayakers went out looking for a shark they heard was chasing seals. Keep in mind, Chisholm said, that sharks “are just doing what they do. They are out there every day among people swimming, paddle boarding or kayaking. When they are hunting, they are looking for that big silhouette, and they will take a bite at it” if it looks like the silhouette of a seal.

“There is a risk to swimming and kayaking in Wellfleet Harbor,” he said. “But sharks are pretty intelligent. They are finding seals among bathers. But you have to keep in mind that they are out there.”