

Like the other large sharks, the White Pointer is viviparous, the young being large and well able to fend for themselves from the time of birth. Although in both cases the young vary considerably in size at birth—as does the number of those born—my own experience indicates that the young are relatively smaller as a rule in the greater shark.

Though it is not my purpose in dealing with what might be termed dangerous sharks, or those which may truly be regarded as potentially dangerous, in Australian waters, to give details of shark attacks, I shall be obliged to mention certain cases when considering the Whaler Shark. The only one I shall mention here in relation to the White Pointer—as there was strong presumptive evidence that it was the species involved—is a shocking tragedy which occurred at Brighton, near Melbourne, in February 1930. Though, as I have said, the White Pointer is more especially a pelagic species, it is not uncommon in its occurrence in the wide waters of Port Phillip and the lower areas of Hobart outer harbour.

At half past four in the afternoon of 15th February 1930 a lad who had just dived in off the end of the Middle Brighton Pier was seized by a very large shark—estimated in Press statements variously to be from 15 to 20 feet in length—in full view of hundreds of people who had gathered for an interstate sailing race. The shark dragged him down out of sight momentarily, and then he was seen again for an instant, apparently still in the grip of the shark as it swam out into the deeper water and disappeared with its human prey. Although search parties went out immediately to look for the lad's body, and continued the search in the days following, while the water was dragged for a great distance around, no trace of him was ever found. It was stated authoritatively at the time that this was the first shark tragedy in that locality for fifty-four years. Piecing together some of the eye-witnesses' accounts and discussing the matter with them on the spot later, I came to the conclusion that the monster was a Great Shark, probably about 18 to 20 feet long. The carrying of the body right away is quite an unusual feature of shark tragedies—with which, sadly enough, we have been only too familiar in our east coast waters, notably in the vicinity of Sydney and Newcastle.

I have mentioned this instance particularly because, however black the record of the White Death may be in the waters of the world beyond Australia, as I have previously indicated we have very little in the way of attacks on humans to pin on the monster. Nor in this case could the shark be identified with any certainty, as the flurry in the water prevented any observer from seeing it clearly.

The brief account that I have given of this shocking occurrence is founded upon the personal evidence of eye-witnesses who talked to me shortly after the tragedy. As is well known, Press accounts frequently contain lurid exaggerations of these shark attacks, and are sometimes filled with fanciful details not noted by careful observers. There were several such accounts in some of the Australian newspapers relating to this Brighton attack. Dr Schultz, in his excellent book *The Ways of Fishes* (1948), has

introduced an account of the Brighton occurrence which, unfortunately, reads like one of these fanciful newspaper statements. I hasten to add that Dr Schultz is well known to me as a careful and competent ichthyologist, who would not willingly lend himself to sensational journalism. Here is his account:

In 1930 an eighteen-year-old youth, bathing at Melbourne, Australia, was cruelly murdered by an enormous Gray Nurse shark, estimated to be 15 to 20 feet long. The fish seized its screaming victim in its huge jaws, gripped him at the waist with its sharp teeth, submerged him and emerged again ten times, tossing him about like a cat torturing a mouse. Each time the animal and the youth appeared above water, they were further down the bay, leaving a bloody trail. The scream became fainter and fainter and ultimately the shark carried its victim off and down for the last time.

It will be remembered that, in discussing some records as to the size attained by the White Pointer in various seas, I said that there had been quite trustworthy accounts on the New South Wales coast indicating the existence of much larger sharks than those mentioned. The most extraordinary of these I shall relate. The first, we shall find, is not so hard to swallow! But as for the second . . . !

In May 1939, during some discussions in the Sydney Press regarding the stature of sharks, Captain J. S. Elkington of Queensland wrote to me to tell me of an observation that he made in the year 1894 of a great shark outside Townsville Breakwater. (I may mention that Captain Elkington spent a considerable part of his life in the service of the sea, and was always a keen observer of Nature.) He said that while the 35-foot launch he was in was broken down for half an hour this shark lay within ten feet of the launch, giving him ample opportunity for observation. "It was not a Basker," (Basking Shark), he wrote, "but a real white or yellowish sort, which projected a couple of feet at least beyond each end of the launch." This observer knew the Basking Shark and was sure that the one seen was the Great White Shark.

The second account that I shall give is regarded by me as the most outstanding of all stories relating to the gigantic forms of this fish that has ever come to light—I mean, of course, accounts which really appeared to be founded upon fact: In the year 1918 I recorded the sensation that had been caused among the "outside" crayfish men at Port Stephens, when, for several days, they refused to go to sea to their regular fishing grounds in the vicinity of Broughton Island. The men had been at work on the fishing grounds—which lie in deep water—when an immense shark of almost unbelievable proportions put in an appearance, lifting pot after pot containing many crayfishes, and taking, as the men said, "pots, mooring lines and all". These crayfish pots, it should be mentioned, were about 3 feet 6 inches in diameter and frequently contained from two to three dozen good-sized crayfish each weighing several pounds. The men were all unanimous that this shark was something the like of which they had never dreamed

Stead, D.G. 1963. *Sharks + Rays of Australian Waters*. London: Angus + Robertson

of. In company with the local Fisheries Inspector I questioned many of the men very closely and they all agreed as to the gigantic stature of the beast. But the lengths they gave were, on the whole, absurd. I mention them, however, as an indication of the state of mind which this unusual giant had thrown them into. And bear in mind that these were men who were used to the sea and all sorts of weather, and all sorts of sharks as well. One of the crew said the shark was "three hundred feet long at least"! Others said it was as long as the wharf on which we stood—about 115 feet! They affirmed that the water "boiled" over a large space when the fish swam past. They were all familiar with whales, which they had often seen passing at sea, but this was a vast shark. They had seen its terrible head which was "at least as large as the roof of the wharf shed at Nelson's Bay". Impossible, of course! But these were prosaic and rather stolid men, not given to "fish stories" nor even to talking at all about their catches. Further, they knew that the person they were talking to (myself) had heard all the fish stories years before! One of the things that impressed me was that they all agreed as to the ghostly whitish colour of the vast fish. The local Fisheries Inspector of the time, Mr Paton, agreed with me that it must have been something really gigantic to put these experienced men into such a state of fear and panic.

Personally I have little doubt that in this occurrence we had one of those very rare occasions when humans have been vouchsafed a glimpse of one of those enormous sharks of the White Death type which we know to exist, or to have existed in the recent past, in the depths of the sea. While they are probably not abundant they may yet be so. Lest the reader may still think me to be credulous I would like to say that I have seen actual teeth of a shark of this type which were no less than five inches (individually) across the base. They had been dredged up from the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. These, I believe, were not fossil teeth, such as are found in various Tertiary deposits—from which large quantities of great teeth of the White Shark type have been obtained. In my opinion they were so recent as to justify the belief that they had come from Great Sharks of a type which might still exist in the deep seas! Such a shark as that might readily take the whole of a crayfish man's outfit—pots, crayfish, lines and boat! A shark possessing such teeth would be from 80 to 90 feet long.

One of the most widespread fallacies in connection with popular shark lore, is that coloured people—more particularly black people—are immune from shark attack. I shall be dealing with this later, but it is interesting to refer here to a quaint statement made in *Cuvier's Natural History (Fishes, by Griffith and Smith)*, 1834, where it is said, in speaking of the sense of smell in the Great White Shark:

By this faculty the shark regulates his movements, and directs his attack; and the singular fact related by so many travellers, that this shark will take a black man and leave a white, when both are bathing together, or otherwise in his power, may be referred to the perfection of

the sense of smell, especially as it seems certain that the emanations from a negro are more odoriferous than from a white.

From my experience of the coloured races, the black man would hardly agree with the reference to odour. He always says that it is the other way about. But here is a reversal of the usual story of the shark's choice in the colour of human skins.

In the same work, and speaking of the stomach contents, we find this:

Brunnich writes of one killed near Marseilles, in the stomach of which, besides several whole fish, was found the entire body of a man; and Captain Brun relates that at Surinam one was opened, in which was found the body of a woman entire, except only that the head was severed from it. Muller states that one was taken off the Island of St Margaret which . . . contained the whole body of a horse, which had probably been thrown overboard from a ship.

Within the scope of this volume I am unable to go very deeply into taxonomic discussions regarding our sharks, but I feel that I should mention the following here: This great shark, as I have indicated earlier, is practically world-wide in its geographical distribution. Taking it by and large and selecting specimens from various localities—and even, I would add, often from the same locality—we find a very considerable range of variation in details of form. While this is more marked in comparing young with adult examples it is also noteworthy in comparing specimens of about the same size. There is nothing very remarkable in this, when we consider a number of other species which have adapted themselves to different locations and different temperatures and other conditions of water.

I must content myself with making this general statement here, and in recommending my readers, who have the opportunity, to verify it for themselves. I have adopted the specific name of *carcharias*, given to the shark in 1758, and have fitted it in—as is usual and proper—with the genus *Carcharodon*, created in 1838 to receive it.

In 1939 Whitley concluded that the Australian examples were specifically different from those of the Northern Hemisphere, and to the former he gave the name of *Carcharodon albigors*. I am unable, however, to agree with this on the readily available evidence regarding individual and geographical variation already referred to, and, therefore, must regard Whitley's species as just another of the many synonyms applied to this species of shark from time to time.