

SHARK FEEDING

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Dear Editor

Feeding wild animals by humans is now generally discouraged. This is for two reasons:

- 1 Interfering with normal dietary intake and feeding activity contributes to health problems of the animals fed.
- 2 The increased risk to people from animal attack.

In June 1996 at a popular fish-feeding site on the Great Barrier Reef, a 21 year old female had her left arm shredded and subsequently amputated as a consequence of an unprovoked attack by a two-metre moray eel (J Johnson, Queensland Museum, personal communication, January 2001). In the same area a large potato cod seized a snorkeller by the head. The snorkeller drowned.¹

Recreational entertainment for scuba divers by fish feeding is big business and one of the latest trends in dive tours. Each year in South Australia and South Africa many groups of divers experience thrilling encounters with the great white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*). The great white can be observed from the relative safety of an underwater cage lowered from the stern of the boat. These huge carnivores are enticed to approach the divers and the boat by an appetising cocktail of blood, fish oil and raw meat. At some South Pacific dive destinations, feeding reef sharks follows similar lines. With this experience the sharks lose their natural caution and could be conditioned to associate humans with food.

Altered behaviour and movement patterns such as "downstream circling" has been observed in great white sharks.² Researchers using ultrasonic tracking devices found that following the cessation of chumming the sharks crisscrossed for several kilometres downstream of the

baiting station for up to twelve hours, apparently searching for food. Veteran divers at some popular dive sites in Florida have reported highly aggressive shark behaviour.³

It may be argued that there is some "public relations", as well as scientific, advantage in observing sharks at close quarters to understand their behaviour. However this endeavour must be balanced against the risks of producing familiarity. According to the International Shark Attack file, the number of great white attacks has increased steadily worldwide over the past few decades.⁴

The increasing practice of feeding marine animals should be seriously examined on the basis of potential injury to both humans and animals. The lessons of Pavlov's dogs and Skinner's rats appear to have been completely forgotten.

Bill Douglas

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Key Words

Injuries, letter, marine animals, recreational diving, risk.

BOOK REVIEWS**THE LAST DIVE**

A father and son's fatal descent into the Ocean's Depths.

Bernie Chowdhury

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Bernie Chowdhury has a writing style which is almost as if he was reminiscing spontaneously to a group of

fellow divers. But this is the result of his skilled weaving together of several themes, his involvement in and description of the development of American cave exploration and deep wreck diving, the relatively closed world of such elite divers, their fanaticism and willingness to risk life and health to out-dive others, the painful development of safer diving practices and a sympathetic account of the 4 year course of a husband and son from pupils to their deaths. There has a similarity to a classic Greek tragedy in their story, the consequences of hubris. Or the search for the