

Rampant ignorance about the sea ^[1]

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Calificación:



By Cynthia López Cabán / End.cynthia.lopez@elnuevodia.com ^[2] endi.com ^[3] Although Puerto Ricans live surrounded by beaches, we have not developed a culture oriented to understanding this natural resource that paradoxically constitutes one of the favorite recreational activities of the islanders and its key for the local economy. The lack of knowledge also drives many people into hysteria when situations involving their marine surroundings arise, like the presence of marine species whose approach to the shore is not common. The cases of a shad in El Condado and the bite suffered by a girl in Isla Verde were situations documented in the press in the last weeks. On those cases it was speculated about different species, like sharks and barracudas. The lack of education and responsibility for the marine environment are also validated by the numbers. According to marine biologist Árida Ortiz 85% of the Puerto Ricans do not know how to swim. Swimming courses, in an Island with 230 beaches, are not required in any school of the Country. This, although visits to those beaches are more and more common. Last year the 12 beaches administered by the Company of National Parks received three million visitors. The lack of love for the beaches, in addition, turns many of the visitors in ungrateful guests, who do not respect the basic rules of civility like not littering in the sand or the water. "It is normal to find this type of species in the water, it is their habitat. We are the ones invading their space", affirmed the marine biologist on the recent marine species sightings. "They are not exotic, nor are they outside of their atmosphere. We are the ones who visit in those spaces", also added the advisor for the Tourism Company. Marine biologist Omar Rodríguez as well as Ruperto Chaparro, director of the Sea Grant program of the University of Puerto Rico in Mayagüez, assured that the bite suffered by a girl in a beach in Isla Verde, which needed 51 stitches is an isolated case. "I'm inclined to think it was a big barracuda. Sharks grab and tear apart", said Rodríguez. Authorities have still not been

able to identify what marine animal attacked the minor, but facing the situation, the first thing that swimmers think is that it is a shark, one of the most feared species by humanity, because the knowledge that they have about the animal is based on the Hollywood experiences. Nevertheless, both reiterated that beaches are safe, but that swimmers must know that when they go into the water they could find turtles, dolphins, jellyfishes, sea urchins, fire coral, among other species. The sea urchin has dangerous thorns and this type of coral causes burns. Sharks usually approach the coasts and shallow areas in search of food or to reproduce, clarified several experts consulted by El Nuevo Dia Domingo. After giving birth, sharks leave their calves in coral reefs, where the feeding and survival conditions are more favorable, Rodriguez explained. The disappearance of coral reefs, home of many marine species from which sharks feed, could attract them to the coasts in search of food. The appearances of sharks tend to be cyclical, according to the oceanographer Antonio Mignucci, who remembered that 2001, year in which the sharks close to the coasts of Florida made headlines. The attacks of these predators are very unlikely, even in the Island. In Puerto Rico a shark attack of shark in the coast has not been reported in decades. In agreement with Chaparro, the few cases of bites and reported attacks involve people who were fishing sharks with harpoons.

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