

ST. LAWRENCE SHARK OBSERVATORY (ORS)

Increased Presence of White Sharks in the Gulf of St. Lawrence:
Update — Incident Involving a Paddleboarder and a White Shark



PRESS RELEASE For Immediate Release

⚠ MEDIA CONTACT ⚠

No interviews will be granted regarding this release.

Increased Presence of White Sharks in the Gulf of St. Lawrence: Update — Incident Involving a Paddleboarder and a White Shark

Editorial Note: This communication follows the one issued on [August 11](#). Once again, **its purpose is not to sound the alarm**, but to raise public awareness of the presence of the white shark, through a precautionary message based on scientific observation rather than exaggeration, fear, or sensationalism. We are acting out of concern for safety and public information—not out of obligation—in response to numerous calls from the media and concerned citizens, as well as in the absence of any official communication from government agencies. Any media coverage of this release—particularly the headlines—should faithfully reflect its preventive scope, **avoiding any wording likely to cause unjustified fear or confusion**. This release also aims to provide a scientific counterbalance to distortions on social media, AI-generated hoaxes, excessive generalisations by influencers, and misinformation in general. Media outlets may quote in full the content of this text as well as the personal remarks of the Scientific Director of the St. Lawrence Shark Observatory.

Liverpool, Nova Scotia, 13 August, 2025 — Barely a day after the publication of our August 11 precautionary notice regarding the increase in white shark sightings in the Gulf of St. Lawrence—shared in advance with a Magdalen Islands media outlet on August 4—a paddleboarder had a direct encounter with a white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*) off Cherry Hill Beach, Nova Scotia ([44.140600, -64.510088](#)).

The tooth marks observed on the stand-up paddleboard (SUP) are characteristic of a juvenile white shark. Fortunately, the paddleboarder was not injured. Although he was knocked off his board, he managed to climb back on and fend off the shark, which was still latched onto it. Using his paddle to strike at the animal, he escaped with nothing more than a fright and a damaged board. To avoid the spread of false information, details of the August 12 incident will be added to the [Canadian Shark Attack Registry](#) following a rigorous analysis of witness accounts and data. For now, although the investigation is still ongoing, this event matches exactly the hypothesis we put forward on Monday—a hypothesis that today has taken on the appearance of a prediction.

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The St. Lawrence Shark Observatory (ORS), which also publishes the Registry, notes that this is the first known incident involving a paddleboarder in Canada and only the second recorded case of a direct confrontation with a recreational water user¹.

[The other incident](#), which occurred in August 2021 in the Gulf of St. Lawrence off Cape Breton Island, involved a swimmer who suffered a bite or gash to the thigh, with a dorsal fin observed nearby both before and after the event. However, this incident, which the person also survived, has yet to be officially confirmed due to the absence of a direct statement from the victim.

As we have previously stated, an accidental encounter with a white shark requires a combination of specific factors and is often a matter of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In this case, one possible scenario is that the animal was merely passing through en route to a seasonal hunting ground.

Once again, we believe it is essential to place the current developments in context to better assess the concept of risk. In Australia, for example, a far greater number of people regularly use the ocean, and over the past decade there has been an average of about 20 incidents causing injuries each year, of which approximately 2.8 are fatal². However, there are also more species there considered dangerous to humans, which increases the overall risk.

By contrast, the vast habitat available to the white shark in Canadian Atlantic waters—particularly in the Gulf of St. Lawrence—the lower human density in coastal areas, and the relative isolation of seal colonies, all significantly reduce the likelihood of a chance encounter. Moreover, the white shark is the only species posing a significant risk in the Gulf and in Atlantic Canada, which further limits the probability of an incident. That said, **the risk remains very real, as yesterday's incident reminds us.**

Personal Commentary – Jeffrey Gallant, Scientific Director of ORS

"In the 1990s, I spent five summers working as a scuba diving instructor and completed hundreds of dives in the Lunenburg area of Nova Scotia. Our favourite activity was diving right in the middle of a seal colony, where divers and animals mingled without incident, season after season. At the time, mentioning the possibility of encountering a shark—especially a white shark—would immediately trigger reassuring laughter. We knew the species had been reported on rare occasions at the southern tip of the Bay of Fundy, in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, but rarely as far as Lunenburg. Encountering a white shark, therefore, was the last thing on our minds.

Today, the Lunenburg area is home to a white shark research station on the Tancook Islands (Tancook Islands Marine Field Station) and is now the most active location in the country for tagging this species. I would no longer dive at our former seal site—not because divers have become targets, but because the renewed presence of the white shark, once unimaginable, completely changes the equation. The risk of an incident there is now too high for my liking.

¹ We have seen photos of the damaged board, but we do not have the rights to share them.

² Australian Shark Incident Database : <https://taronga.org.au/conservation-and-science/australian-shark-incident-database>

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And yet, I still spend part of my family vacation every year at White Point, only 25 minutes from the location of yesterday's incident. The place resembles Cherry Hill Beach, with its surfers, paddleboarders, and waders sharing the water with the occasional seal—and possibly a white shark. I personally have no hesitation about swimming or spending hours bodyboarding. I am fully aware of the sharks patrolling the coastline, and I often think about them when I'm in the water, but it never stops me. There isn't enough natural prey to make it a constant gathering spot for sharks, so I go in—confident, but nevertheless alert—perhaps as the paddleboarder did yesterday. This change, observed in less than a decade, offers a glimpse of what lies ahead as the white shark population continues to grow in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.”

If the white shark population continues to grow, it will only be a matter of time before such an incident occurs in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. We therefore believe it is essential to adopt a proactive approach based on adaptation and the dissemination of basic knowledge about shark behaviour, so that we can continue to dive safely and enjoyably. Avoiding large gatherings of seals—especially when they remain close to shore (which may indicate the presence of a predator)—avoiding murky water, diving with local operators who are familiar with the conditions, and staying informed about sighting reports can all help significantly reduce risks. Likewise, swimmers and paddleboarders should remain alert to the presence of seals and avoid areas where they are concentrated.

Conclusion

The Gulf of St. Lawrence and Québec will not be spared from the resurgence of the white shark in Atlantic Canada. In fact, this return to a state the St. Lawrence may once have known is already well underway.

As in other parts of the world where such interactions have been part of life for decades—and, for much longer still, among the Indigenous peoples of the Gulf—it is possible to coexist safely with this key player in the marine ecosystem by adopting prudent and informed behaviour.

For more information, additional context, or to consult recommendations for divers, swimmers, and other marine users, please visit the ORS [Canadian Shark Attack Registry](#). Details of the August 12 incident will also be added shortly, following careful analysis of the data.

Reminder of Legal Protection and Responsible Conduct

While the renewed presence of the white shark is already prompting some divers and marine users to exercise caution in certain areas, it may also encourage thrill-seekers to pursue this formidable predator, driven by curiosity, the quest for dramatic images, or media attention. It is therefore important to remember that the white shark is a protected species under Canada's *Species at Risk Act* (SARA)³. As such, it is strictly prohibited to harass a white shark, including by intentionally approaching it at the surface—which could disrupt a predation event or cause injury—flying a drone over it, luring it with bait, or attempting to cage dive without a permit from Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO).

³ https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2022/eccc/CW69-14-507-2021-eng.pdf

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We also advise boaters—particularly those in light or inflatable craft—to maintain a minimum distance of 10 metres from any surface activity involving a white shark, especially when it is feeding on a seal or another carcass, as was the case in Gaspé on July 31. A white shark engaged in predation can display energetic and unpredictable behaviour and, in rare cases, may strike a vessel or accidentally bite a pontoon or motor out of curiosity or mistake. This could lead to serious consequences, such as loss of balance or a deflated boat.

No Interviews on This Topic

Officially founded in 2003 (under the name GEERG), the St. Lawrence Shark Observatory (ORS) is a registered charity led by a small group of volunteer scientists and experts from complementary fields, all passionate about sharks and deeply committed to their professional and family lives. As previously mentioned, ORS is neither a public agency nor a government body. Consequently, we are under no obligation to publish such advisories, and we do not seek media attention or funding in connection with communications we consider to be in the public interest.

Our commitment to the sharks of the St. Lawrence is nothing new. Active in their study since the 1990s—at a time when these maligned predators swam unnoticed in a sea of indifference—we worked alone for many years, until the unexpected return of the white shark in the Gulf sparked a frenzy of interest from all directions in this iconic species, both scientifically and in the media. Practically every shark sighting now triggers a surge of enquiries, and we simply do not have the resources to manage the resulting deluge of media requests, which typically flood in over several days and at all hours.

Due to the risk of the story spiraling out of control and causing further prejudice through misinterpretation, and the persistent misconceptions that too often distort our words or the facts reported—a phenomenon unfortunately common in shark coverage, here as elsewhere—we will not be giving any interviews regarding this advisory. We instead invite the media to refer to it **verbatim and without extrapolation**, as it reflects our current understanding of the presence of the white shark in the St. Lawrence in relation to human safety. Any speculation beyond these facts risks leading to the kind of erroneous, sensationalist, or trivialising interpretations that are all too common and serve neither the public nor shark conservation.

The St. Lawrence Shark Observatory (ORS) will continue to share factual updates as its research progresses in the months and years ahead. However, for any questions regarding the increased presence of the white shark and, in particular, public safety risks, you may contact either Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)—responsible for the management and monitoring of marine wildlife—or the public safety authority with jurisdiction over the area concerned.

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Thank you for your understanding and for helping us ensure that public safety and shark conservation remain grounded in fact and respect.

Best regards,



Jeffrey Gallant, M.Sc.
Founder and Scientific Director
St. Lawrence Shark Observatory (ORS)
<https://geerg.ca>

ABOUT:

The **St. Lawrence Shark Observatory (ORS)**, Canada's first non-governmental organisation and registered charity dedicated to sharks, was officially founded under the name Greenland Shark and Elasmobranch Education and Research Group (GEERG) in 2003, following five years of groundbreaking exploration in the North Atlantic Ocean, the Saguenay Fjord, and the St. Lawrence Estuary. These expeditions led to the first cage dives with pelagic sharks in Canada in 2000 and, in 2003, the first natural encounters with the Greenland shark, launching a decade of research and novel scientific publications on this elusive and little-known species. Today, the St. Lawrence Shark Observatory's volunteer-based research and conservation activities no longer focus exclusively on the Greenland shark, but also on all shark species inhabiting the Gulf and Estuary of the St. Lawrence, the Saguenay Fjord, Atlantic Canada, and the Arctic Ocean.