



## Hurricanes Depress Shark Attacks

Florida's active hurricane season last year spawned the perfect storms to reduce the Sunshine State's number of shark attacks, which dipped to their lowest level in more than a decade and pulled down the national average as well, a new University of Florida study finds.

"When there are high winds and high surf, people don't go into the water," said George Burgess, director of the International Shark Attack File housed at UF's Florida Museum of Natural History. "It's a little hard to have a shark attack if you're in your vehicle heading inland as fast as you can drive."

The 12 attacks off Florida coasts were by far more than any other state but significantly fewer than the 30 recorded in 2003, said Burgess, who oversees the file, the world's largest database of shark attacks. Florida has not seen so few shark attacks since 1993, when there were 10.

"As Florida goes, so goes the United States and in large part the world in terms of statistics because Florida has more shark attacks year in and year out than any other place in the world," he said.

As in recent years, the largest share of attacks occurred in North American waters, but the 30 attacks in U.S. territorial waters, including Hawaii, are

down considerably from the 41 recorded in 2003, 47 in 2002 and 50 each in 2001 and 2000, Burgess said.

"Normally, we don't put much stock in year-to-year fluctuations unless there's a huge trend like what we saw this year in Florida, where there was a very obvious case of cause and effect," he said.

The number of deaths from shark attacks worldwide increased to seven in 2004, from four in 2003, three in 2002 and four in 2001, but it was still lower than the 11 fatalities in 2000.

The highest number of Florida attacks occurred in Volusia County, where an inlet near New Smyrna Beach is a popular surfing site, Burgess said.

There were three attacks there in 2004, down dramatically from the 13 reported in 2003, 18 in 2002 and 22 in 2001.

Burgess attributes the decline to the region being hit by strong winds from hurricanes Charley, Jeanne and Frances. "Volusia County had more than its share of bad beach days as a result of the storms," he said.

George Burgess, [gburgess@flmnh.ufl.edu](mailto:gburgess@flmnh.ufl.edu)

*Cathy Keen*