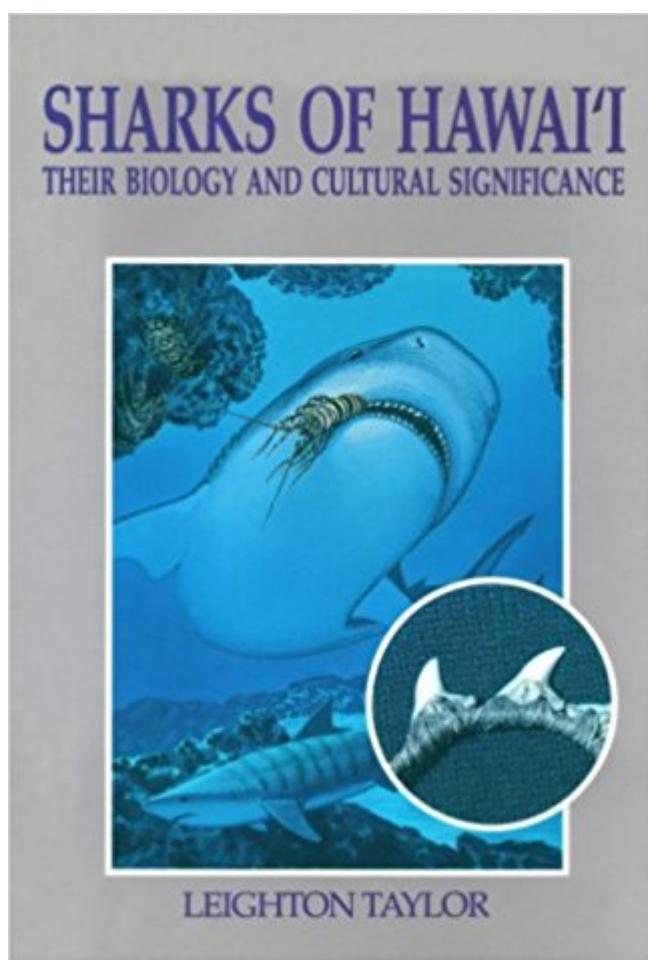


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Sharks Of Hawai'i: Their Biology And Cultural Significance



Synopsis

A fascinating look at sharks in general and, in particular, the species inhabiting waters around the Hawaiian archipelago. Combining modern knowledge of shark biology with details culled from oral tradition, legends, and artifacts, Taylor provides a scientific account of individual species and sheds

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book was a true surprise. After being disappointed with the lack of literature on sharks (especially for the hawaii area), I was very happy to have stumbled onto this book. The amount of depth into the cultural significance of sharks in the hawaiian culture was astounding. It also had a good deal of ichthiology and marine science information. I reccomend it to anyone interested in the history and cultures of hawaii, or to anyone looking for a good book on sharks.

Sharks of Hawaii: Their Biology and Cultural Significance, by Leighton R. Taylor, is a great book on Hawaii's sharks. The book includes information on individual species of sharks (with line drawings and photographs), information on the relationship between Hawaiians and sharks (including the concept of 'aumakua, and fishing techniques), modern conservation concerns, and a good summary of shark biology. The book also has a detailed listing of the Hawaii shark attack file maintained by NOAA scientist George Balazs. "Pau pele, pau mano." Tell the truth or be subjected to the perils of volcanos and sharks.

If you read much at all about sharks, you encounter so many contradictions that it's obvious some authors are talking through their hats. It's fair to say that Dr. Leighton Taylor wears his -- former director of the Waikiki Aquarium, taxonomist who was called to write the species description of the Megamouth shark when it was discovered, veteran of many research efforts in the North Pacific. A man who knows enough to know which questions are best left open. The sharks of Hawaii are political animals. The natural history, while it still contains many mysteries, is the easy part. Here Taylor is admirable, if brief. 'Sharks of Hawaii' has three kinds of illustrations -- color photographs, outline drawings and 10 paintings by Michael Cole. Cole paints plausible versions of natural events never observed by anybody. So, for example, this book takes a thorough look at the cookiecutter shark, one of the mysteries of the deep. It was only recently that this little shark's mode of life was deduced. It nips a bite out of bigger fish or mammals with its specially adapted teeth. Researchers still don't understand now the rather flabby, small-finned and obviously slow cookiecutter manages to get close enough to fast moving prey such as ahi (yellowfin tuna) to get a meal. 'Freshly caught specimens glow a ghostly green,' writes Taylor. 'Perhaps the cookiecutter attracts prey with the green glow and then ambushes the would-be predator.' The little nightmare is widely distributed but not known to have ever attacked a live human in the water, in Hawaii at least. Of the hundred or so known cases of sharks biting people in the islands, some of whom were probably already dead from other causes (like drowning), only two species are pretty surely implicated: the tiger shark and perhaps great white sharks, although the latter are rare around Hawaii. To put it in perspective, the most dangerous sea creature in Hawaii is the opihi, a limpet about two or three inches across. Several people drown each year while collecting opihi, while fatal shark attacks seldom exceed one a year. There is much still to be learned about Hawaii's sharks, and not just for the pure pleasure of knowing. Taylor is commendably frank about pointing out where the areas of ignorance lie. 'Terms such as "the shark" and "sharks" are general to the point of vagueness. Careless use of such indefinite terms can be misleading It is careless, inaccurate, and perhaps even irresponsible for modern commentators to make such imprecise statements as "sharks are sacred to Hawaiians" and "Hawaiians did not kill sharks" or "sharks were important food for Hawaiians." Such statements are true for some species, but we are by no means certain which species match which Hawaiian names.' 'Sharks of Hawaii' is a nicely balanced book: respectful, well-informed, well illustrated and politically incorrect.

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