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D.P.N.R. Provides Shark Guide in Effort to Help Virgin Islanders Stay Safe While on Beaches

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A Lemon Shark By. GETTY IMAGES

The Department of Planning and Natural Resources announced Friday that the Division of Fish and Wildlife has published a new guide to common sharks of the Virgin Islands, with guidance for swimmers.

According to the release, the guide is especially timely as reputable scientific sources like the International Union for the Conservation of Nature report more than 30 percent of sharks declining worldwide. Sharks commonly found in the waters of the Virgin Islands include the lemon shark (Near Threatened – *Negaprion brevirostris*), nurse shark (Data Deficient – *Ginglymostoma cirratum*), Caribbean reef shark (Near threatened – *Carcharhinus perezi*), Grey

reef shark (Endangered – *Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*), and Blacktip reef shark (Near threatened – *Carcharhinus limbatus*).

Large marine fish, like sharks, enhance and improve fish habitats by culling weak fish thereby promoting healthy fish populations, D.P.N.R. said. As such, sharks are harbingers of healthy ecosystems. Sharks in the oceans support abundant populations of reef and pelagic sport fish species important for our fisheries and economy. Shark tourism is also popular among divers and contributes to a portion of our tourism industry. Fewer than thirty-five shark attacks have occurred since 2000 across the entire Caribbean with only five fatalities.

The following recommendations are provided to ensure that outdoor recreation in the territory's marine waters is a fun and a safe experience for swimmers of all ages:

- Stay alert
- Always swim with a buddy
- Follow posted swim guidelines
- Listen to lifeguards
- Swim in clear, calm water
- Don't approach or feed sharks
- Remain calm