

“Swallowed by the whale” : Lobster diver survive s close encounter with humpback

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Michael Packard is a lobster diver. On the morning of June 9, he was seriously injured in a rare incident. He was caught in the mouth of a humpback whale. The whale was feeding near a beach in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

Packard, who is 56 years old, was taken to Cape Cod Hospital in Hyannis, Massachusetts. One of his legs was broken.

"He was swallowed by the whale," his sister Cynthia Packard said. "He was in his mouth for about 20 seconds."

Cynthia Packard spoke with lobster boat crewman Josiah Mayo. He told her what happened. Michael Packard had just dived down into the water in search of lobsters. Suddenly, a whale burst to the surface, Mayo said. At first Mayo thought it was a great white shark.

"There was all this action at the top of the water," he said. Then, fortunately, the whale released Packard from its mouth.

Tough Job

Lobster divers have a tough job. In Provincetown, they dive into cold waters to grab lobsters off an underwater shelf. The lobsters emerge from a nearby deep channel. They are migrating toward warmer water. They pause a while to get used to the warmth. That's when it's easy for divers to get them.

A crewman onboard one of these lobster boats follows the diver below as he or she drifts with the strong current. The spot where the diving takes place is dangerous. Many divers have almost died. Some have been seriously injured.

"Thank god it wasn't a white shark. He sees them all the time out there," Cynthia Packard said. "He must have thought he was done."

Are Humpback Whales Aggressive?

Charles "Stormy" Mayo is a scientist and whale expert. He works at the Center for Coastal Studies in Provincetown. Packard's crewman Josiah Mayo is his son.

Stormy Mayo said what happened to Packard is extremely rare. He said he was not aware of a single incident of people having problems with humpback whales. Humpbacks do not eat or attack people, he said. What happened was probably an accident. The whale was likely feeding on fish and swallowed Packard without meaning to.

Stormy Mayo also said Michael Packard didn't do anything he shouldn't have. It was all just a strange accident.

"Michael is a smart guy and an exceptional diver," he said. "You can be sure he did everything he was supposed to do."

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