

# FACTSHEET SHARKS



## SPECIES

Nearly 500 worldwide

## SIZE

*Smallest:* 18-20 cm, 7-8 in,  
(Dwarf lantern shark)

*Largest:* over 18 m, 60 ft  
(Whale shark)

## HABITAT

Shallow, coastal regions to deep water; ocean floor to open ocean

## TAXONOMY

*Class:* Chondrichthyes

*Subclass:* Elasmobranchii

## LIFE SPAN

Avg. 20-30 years, up to 100 years (Whale Shark)

## GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Worldwide



## DESCRIPTION

Flexible cartilaginous skeletons, 5-7 gill slits, elongated counter-shaded bodies. Tooth-like scales (dermal denticles). Excellent sight, smell, and hearing. Additional receptive sensory system (Ampullae of Lorenzini).



## BEHAVIOR

Varying degrees of social interactions. Some species migrate far distances for feeding and breeding. When threatened, display aggressive movements, arched backs, and lowered pectoral fins.



## REPRODUCTION

Sexually maturity: 7-25 years. Live young (viviparous) and lay eggs (oviparous). Gestation up to 22 months. Offspring range from 1-2 pups (Sand Tiger Sharks) to about 300 (Whale Sharks).



## DIET

Fish, crustaceans, mollusks, plankton, krill, marine mammals, marine birds, reptiles, and other sharks.



## PREDATORS

Humans, other sharks, killer whales.



## MAIN THREATS

### Overfishing and finning

- 97 million sharks killed annually (266,000/day) for fins, meat, cartilage, liver, and skin.
- 90% declines in the last 50-100 years.
- 46% of migratory sharks and 25% overall are threatened with extinction.

### Loss of habitat, pollution, and lack of management

**Bycatch:** ~50% of high seas fisheries catch.

## SPECIES IMPORTANCE

### ECOLOGICAL VALUE

Sharks are dominant (apex) predators, and are vital for maintaining biodiversity and healthy ecosystems in all ocean communities.

### SOCIOECONOMIC VALUE

- + *Globally:* shark tourism \$314 million annually
- + *Whale Shark tourism:* \$47.5 million
- + *Reef tourism:* \$9.6 billion
- + *Single shark's value:* \$1.9 million (\$179,000 annually)



## SOLUTIONS

- ✓ Ban the catch of sharks and shark finning
- ✓ Enforce existing laws
- ✓ Improve species management
- ✓ Establish no-take marine reserves
- ✓ Obtain biological & stock assessment data
- ✓ Advise communities, policymakers, fishers, and consumers on shark importance, and the extremely low shark attack numbers

*Chances of getting attacked by a shark:*  
**1 in 11.5 million**



Sharks are definitely at the top of the list for marine fishes that could go extinct in our lifetimes."

Dr. Julia Baum

## KEY WEBSITES

**SHARKS OF THE ATLANTIC RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION CENTRE (SHARCC)**  
www.atlanticsharks.org

**THE SHARK RESEARCH INSTITUTE**  
www.sharks.org

**PEW GLOBAL SHARK CONSERVATION**  
www.pewtrusts.org/en/projects/global-shark-conservation

**END OF THE LINE: WILDAID & OCEANA**  
oceana.org/sites/default/files/o/fileadmin/oceana/uploads/Sharks/EndoftheLine\_Spread\_sm.pdf

**REEFQUEST CENTRE FOR SHARK**

**RESEARCH:** www.elasmo-research.org/index.html

**SOS: SUPPORT OUR SHARKS:**  
www.supportoursharks.com/default

**TIME MAGAZINE: SHARK FIN SOUP:**  
content.time.com/time/magazine/

## VIDEO

**PEW: ECONOMIC VALUE OF SHARKS**  
www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2011/05/02/milliondollar-reef-sharks

**SHARK AWARENESS EDUCATION**  
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lma5bzeWal4

**NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC | SHARKS IN THE BAHAMAS**  
ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2007/03/bahamian-sharks/video-interactive

**CARTOONIST JIM TOOMEY ON HEALTHY REEFS:** www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZ-517dM1lc

**SHARKS' IMPORTANCE TO HEALTHY REEFS:**  
www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxtzVYBIC08

**PEW: SHARKS' ROLE IN OCEAN FOODWEB**  
www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDqzGOa-adc

## EXPERTS

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Available: [WaaittInstitute.org/factsheets](http://WaaittInstitute.org/factsheets)

