

SHARKS

of

Maldives



What is a **SHARK** ?

Sharks are amazing fish that have been around since long before the dinosaurs existed. They live in waters all over the world, in every ocean, and even in some rivers and lakes.

Unlike bony fish, sharks have no bones; their skeleton is made of cartilage, which is a tough, fibrous substance, not nearly as hard as bone. Sharks also have no swim bladder like most of bony fishes

The word shark comes from the German word “Schurke” which means villain.

There are about 380 species of sharks worldwide and one discovered as recently as 1976. The biggest is the harmless plankton eating whale shark that can grow up to 18 metres (59 feet) and weigh 40 tonnes (88,200lbs). It lays the largest egg in the sea with each egg measuring 300 x 149 x 80mm (12 x 5.5 x 3.2 inches).

It feeds by filtering vast amounts of sea water through its gills about 250,000 gallons an hour (more than one million litres!).

The smallest shark in the world is the pygmy or dwarf shark measuring just 25cm (9.8 inches) when fully grown.

They are found all over the world and inhabit all levels of water. They are also found in brackish waters, along beaches and even in rivers. The Bull shark was once found 2500 miles up the Amazon river. Scientist believe they go into freshwater to get rid of parasites and harmful body toxins.

About 30% of sharks lay eggs, the rest give birth to live young, gestation periods vary but can take as long as a year. Each litter can range from 2 to 30 pups and they are fully functional when born. As soon as they are expelled from the mother’s stomach, they have to take cover as cannibalism is quite common among sharks. They are left to fend for themselves and many are eaten by other predators.

The Sand Tiger shark are the only known creatures that have babies that will kill each other. The first ones that hatch from the thousands of eggs will eat the other eggs and newly hatched fry to ensure their own survival (less competition for food).



Contrary to popular belief, sharks are not 100% predators. Many prefer to scavenge for food, they also don't need to eat everyday, some only feed once every six weeks.

The diet of sharks are so varied it's almost comical. They have found bottles, cans, raincoats, plastic bags, umbrellas, tennis shoes, life jacket, ammunition shells, a keg of nails, a pony, a German shepherd, other sharks and even a French knight in full armour. I suppose a sinking French knight in a shiny suit of armour would look like an inviting lure.

Surprisingly the jaw pressure of a shark is similar to that of an average man ie. 42,000 pounds per square inch, what makes them much more effective are their razor sharp teeth. They have anything between 5 to 15 rows of teeth which are constantly being replaced. It's estimated they go through 30,000 teeth in a lifetime. They also have extended jaws that are not connected to the head. This allows it to jut its lower jaw out and widen its bite. Their sharp teeth and shaking head motion allows them to tear huge chunks of meat which they swallow without munching.

SHARKS in Danger?

One of the world's most feared creatures, the shark, is being ruthlessly harvested to satisfy the demands of the human appetite. "Little effort has been made to collect even the most basic information, such as numbers of sharks caught and discarded," says a report from the US Center for Marine Conservation, an environmental advocacy group.

Statistics on the amount of fish brought to shore are sketchy but it is estimated that the total grew from 200,000 tonnes in 1947 to more than 725,000 tonnes in 1994. Meanwhile conservation groups warn that the quirks of human appetite and the economies of the fish trade seem to be conspiring against sharks who grow slowly, tend to have long lives, extended gestation and low birth rates, making them especially vulnerable to mechanized predation





SHARK Attack

To say that sharks don't attack people would be bending the truth but to say that they are all man-eaters would be pure fabrication.

In plane crashes at sea, some recovered bodies have shark bites on them and the media plays this up and everyone goes into a shark hating frenzy.

It's well known that sharks are also scavengers and scientists are almost certain that the passengers were dead either from drowning or injuries before they were eaten by sharks.

We all know the expression "don't let food go to waste, think of all the starving people in the world". So why shouldn't sharks have the same attitude but there's a clear difference between attacking and scavenging for dead meat.

If all sharks were man-eaters, shark attacks would increase a thousand fold easily.



SHARKS of Maldives

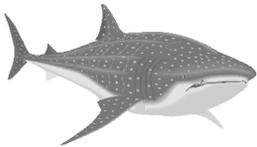
English Name	Scientific Name	Dhivehi Name
Whitetip Reef Shark	<i>Triaeodon obesus</i>	Faana miyaru
Blacktip Reef Shark	<i>Carcharhinus melanopterus</i>	Falhu miyaru
Grey Reef Shark	<i>Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos</i>	Vah boa miyaru
Silvertip Shark	<i>Carcharhinus albimarginatus</i>	Kattafulhi miyaru
Oceanic Whitetip Shark	<i>Carcharhinus longimanus</i>	Feeboa miyaru
Silky Shark	<i>Carcharhinus falciformis</i>	Oivaali miyaru
Blue Shark	<i>Prionace glauca</i>	Andhun miyaru
Tiger Shark	<i>Galeocerdo cuvier</i>	Femunu
Scalloped Hammerhead Shark	<i>Sphyrna lewini</i>	Kalhigandu miyaru
Great Hammerhead Shark	<i>Sphyrna mokarran</i>	Kalhigandu miyaru
Shortfin Mako Shark	<i>Isurus oxyrinchus</i>	Woshimas miyaru
Whale Shark	<i>Rhincodon typus</i>	Fehurihi
Varigated Shark	<i>Stegostoma fasciatum</i>	Hitha miyaru
Tawny Nurse Shark	<i>Nebrius ferrugineus</i>	Nidhan miyaru



Blue Shark



Hammer Head Shark



Whale shark



Shortfin Mako Shark

How can I save the **SHARKS**?

One of the sharks' most pressing problems is the belief that people just don't care. Here are some ways you can demonstrate that you DO care about sharks.

1. Write to your representatives in environmental organization and urge them to pursue legislation that bans finning and promotes the conservation of shark species.
2. Join or donate to a marine conservation organization. Your contributions will go towards the conservation of sharks and the ocean environment.
3. Avoid shark when you are making seafood choices.
4. When you buy your seafood or eat in a restaurant, ask questions about how the fish was caught and if the store or restaurant buys seafood that is fished responsibly.
5. Do some research on which fisheries are in good shape and which are in trouble? The following Web sites can help:
 - Seafood Watch at the Monterey Bay Aquarium
http://www.mbayaq.org/efc/efc_oc/dngr_food_watch.asp
 - Audubon Society's Guide to Seafood
<http://magazine.audubon.org/seafood/guide/>
6. Learn to dive, take a class or visit an aquarium. Learn all you can about sharks and then share it with your family and friends. Learning about sharks helps make them less frightening and more fascinating.
7. Conserve water, recycle and do all those things that make our lives more environmentally responsible. They contribute to a healthy ecosystem, which, in turn, benefits sharks.



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www.environment.gov.mv

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