

Endangered Sharks

Many species of sharks are endangered. One is the whale shark, which is the largest shark, as well as the largest fish, in the world. It can be up to 40 feet long. However, it is harmless and usually ignores swimmers and divers. Scientists estimate that whale sharks may live 100 years or more.

Another large, but endangered, shark is the bluntnose sixgill shark. This friendly looking species lives in the Western Atlantic, and can be found as far known as Iceland or down below the Equator. It likes deep water and sometimes sleeps on the bottom of the ocean.

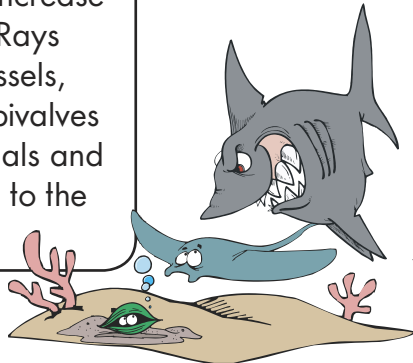
The oceanic whitetip, which makes its home in the Gulf of Mexico, is declining. So is the bull shark, a species that likes warm, tropical water and has been known to come close to shore.



© Georgia Aquarium, Zac Wolf

Do You Know?

The loss of sharks means an increase in **rays**, another type of fish. Rays feed on **bivalves**—clams, mussels, oysters, and scallops. These bivalves are a source of food for animals and humans. What might happen to the bivalves if the sharks die out?



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People More Dangerous Than Sharks!

By Jane Sellman

Sharks are not dangerous. People are dangerous. That's the opinion of a new lobby group, SHARKS (Sharks Have A Right to Keep Swimming). According to their spokesfish, Basking Shark, the reputation of sharks as cruel predators, or hunters, is exaggerated.

Basking and whale sharks only eat plankton, tiny sea animals and plants.

"People are in more danger from dogs than us sharks," Basking said. "Dogs bite about 4.7 million Americans each year."

"Sharks eat at the most, 10, maybe 12 people a year," said Basking. "But people kill 75–100 million sharks a year!"

"Some sharks, like the great white, tiger, and bull, are known to attack people, but most of the 340–350 species," said Basking, "are shy." They tend to ignore or avoid human beings.



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People More Dangerous Than Sharks!

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In fact, sharks as a species may be in danger of disappearing from our planet! According to a press release from SHARKS, overfishing is one problem. Since sharks do not reproduce at the rate that other fish do, the shark population cannot replace the millions of species that are caught each year in fishing nets.

"Many species of sharks are becoming extinct," said Spined Pygmy, "due to pollution of the oceans and overfishing. If an animal becomes extinct, it disappears forever."

Sharks are important to the **environment**. They provide a necessary balance to the **ecosystem**. The ecosystem includes all living things. If one species dies, others may die, too.

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Spined Pygmy Shark



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Both Basking Shark and Spined Pygmy Shark want to thank those scientists and other caring people who are finding ways to save sharks. Some of these people who care use satellites to identify and track sharks in an effort to protect them. They are passing laws to stop overfishing.

"People and sharks may be scared of each other," said Basking, "but we also need each other."



© Wikipedia, Chris Gotschalk

Basking Shark

Write About This!

Why is the fish attached to the shark?

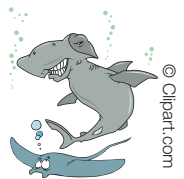


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FUN FACTS!

Sharks are very old. One of them, called Cladoselache, lived on the earth before dinosaurs. Most sharks appeared about 64 million years ago and lived during the time of the dinosaurs.

Some sharks will eat whatever is available; others have their favorite foods. The hammerhead shark prefers to dine on stingrays.



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Sharks live in all kinds of water, from very warm tropical seas to cold water in the Atlantic. Some also live in rivers and lakes that have access to a sea or an ocean. For instance, the Ganges River shark lives in the Ganges River in India.

Unlike people and some animals, sharks are not constantly snacking. For instance, lemon sharks in aquariums will only eat about every 40 to 80 hours. Sharks take awhile to digest their food before they eat again

WOWSER!

Cooks use the fins to make a soup that is popular in some parts of the world. Shark fin soup can cost \$400 a bowl!



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