



Whale Sharks

Where do we live?

Whale sharks live in pelagic (open sea) tropical and sub-tropical water.

What do we eat?

Whale sharks mostly eat plankton (microscopic organisms) but will also eat tiny crustaceans like krill, tiny fish and marine plants. Whale sharks do not have large teeth and do not hunt for food like most sharks. Whale sharks are filter feeders. They open their mouths and suck in water. Then, filter pads in their throats collect the food and water leaves through the gills.

Who/what are our predators?

Juvenile whale sharks are hunted by other sharks.

Are we endangered?

Yes. The greatest threat to whale sharks is human activity. Whale sharks are hunted for their skin and meat. Divers and tourists seeking "selfies" interrupt feeding and their boats cause propeller injuries. As the oceans become warmer and more acidic from the absorption of carbon emissions, sharks struggle to survive in their natural habitat.

Interesting extras...

- Whale sharks are **ovoviviparous** – young emerge from egg sacks inside females and are born live and fully formed.
- Whale sharks are the largest fish on earth. Individuals have been known to reach 50 feet long.
- Biologists think whale sharks can live up to 120 years, but the average lifespan is 70 years.
- Unlike most sharks, where the mouth is on the underside of the head, whale shark mouths are located at the front of their heads.
- Whale sharks are cartilaginous fish.
- Whale sharks have been observed "coughing" up food that is larger than 2 centimeters.
- Whale sharks possess countershading camouflage – white on the underside with dark gray skin on top. Their skin is covered with white spots. These spots are like fingerprints – unique to individual sharks.
- NASA technology used to identify star systems helps biologists track whale shark migration.