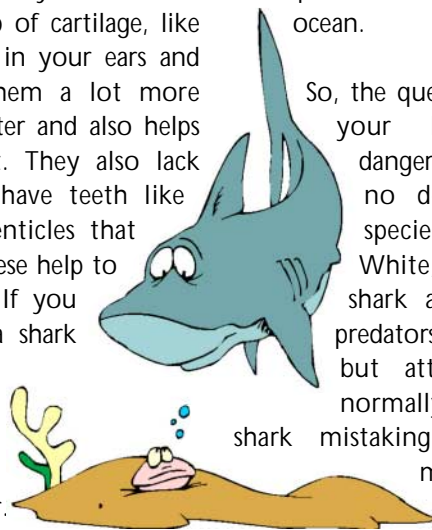


Sharks

If you are searching for an animal that has been on the planet for a long time look no further than the shark. Sharks have been around for nearly 400 million years that means they were about before the dinosaurs! Sharks, which belong to a group of animals known as Elasmobranchs, are a really successful group of animals that come in all sizes and shapes and differ from other fish in several ways.

Sharks do not have any bones; their skeleton is made up of cartilage, like the cartilage found in your ears and nose! This gives them a lot more flexibility in the water and also helps them stay buoyant. They also lack scales and instead have teeth like structures called denticles that cover their body; these help to protect the sharks. If you were ever to rub a shark from its tail to its head you would feel these denticles that make the shark feel like sandpaper.

Other features of the shark that make it different from other fish are that they usually have five gill slits (some have six and even seven!) and these can be seen behind their head. Like other fish sharks use their gills to take in oxygen and breathe. Sharks eat all types of food, some eat other fish and sea mammals but the largest of sharks are not carnivores. The Whale shark, the basking shark and Megamouth shark all eat plankton which are tiny shrimp-like animals found in the ocean.



So, the question that is on all your lips, are sharks dangerous? Well, there is no doubt that certain species like the Great White, Tiger, and Bull shark are highly adapted predators and can look scary but attacks on humans normally result from the shark mistaking people for sea mammals. What people tend not

to know is that humans kill thousands of sharks every year for their meat, fins, skin, cartilage and livers and that this is having a very bad effect on shark populations so that many shark species are now endangered. Killing sharks for their fins to make shark fin soup is one of the main reasons for such high numbers of sharks being killed.

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Sharky Facts!

- ◆ There are an estimated 375 species of shark.
- ◆ The biggest fish in the world is the Whale shark that can grow up to 18m!
- ◆ The smallest shark is the dwarf lantern shark at just 15cm.
- ◆ The fastest shark is the shortfin Mako that can swim at speeds of 20mph
- ◆ Some sharks need to keep swimming to keep water passing over their gills and thus breathe.
- ◆ Sharks have an excellent sense of hearing and taste and can even sense electric fields.



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Countershading



Some sharks have different colouring on their top and bottom sides and is called countershading. You can clearly see this in the Great White Shark pictured here. The underside of the shark is light in colour so it blends well with the lighter water near the surface when viewed from below. Countershading makes it difficult for predators and prey to see sharks.

Photo: © Gary Hammon