



THE SUNFISH

THE LARGEST BONY FISH IN THE WORLD

By John Joyce

“Avast there, Mateys! Have you ever missed the chance to get your Mum a card for Mothers’ Day? Then spare a thought for the Ocean Sunfish *Mola mola*, which lays a staggering 300 MILLION eggs into the Ocean at one time!”



Images & text copyright John Joyce

Since Ocean Sunfish can grow up to three metres long, four metres ‘tall’ and reach almost three metric TONNES in weight, you’d wonder why they’d need to lay so many eggs in order to survive. The answer lies in the fact that Sunfish keep themselves to themselves and don’t often come across a mate. So they increase the chances of having their eggs fertilised by laying as many as possible.

The chances of survival have also been stacked against Sunfish in recent years with the advent of plastic bags which, when dropped carelessly into the Ocean, look almost exactly like jellyfish – the Sunfish’s favourite food. One sunfish can eat up to 147 jellyfish in one day, which could also mean a lot of unwanted and indigestible plastic bags!

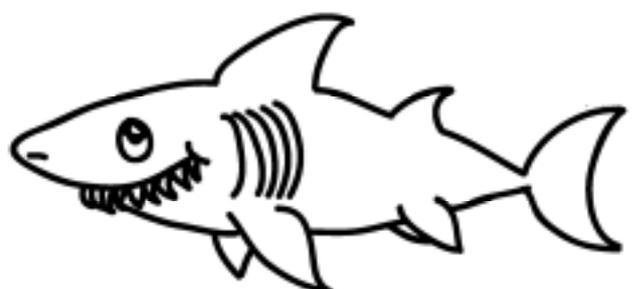
Sunfish are the largest bony fish in the world and have developed into five species – Ocean, Sharptail, Southern and Slender (which is a mere one metre long!), as well as the newest discovery, the ‘Hoodwinker’, so called because it looks so much like the Ocean Sunfish. The German name for Sunfish translates as ‘swimming head’, while the Hawaiian name ‘Kaumakani’ means literally “eyes stuck on it”! In Taiwan, the local name for Sunfish literally translates as ‘the fish that looks like a toppled car!’ So no beauty prizes there!

Sunfish are no stranger to Irish waters – particularly in summer when the water temperature rises. A recent international study recently recorded 12,700 of them around Ireland in the summer and more than 8,200 in winter. Numbers appear to be on the increase, which is thought to be due to global warming of the Ocean, which makes Irish waters more and more to the Sunfish’s liking, particularly in July, August and September. While these visitors are usually much smaller than their tropical relatives, one truly spectacular specimen caught off the coast of Kerry in 2003 was over three metres long!

HOW TO DRAW A SHARK



Draw the streamlined body with the fins



Put in the eyes, the five gill slits and the TEETH!

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