

The shark is a meat-eating fish and one of the most feared animals in the sea. There are over 300 types of sharks that live in oceans all over the world. Most of them live in warm seas but some sharks prefer colder regions like the seas around Antarctica.

The first sharks lived in our oceans about 300 million years ago. They belong to the earth's oldest animals.

SIZE AND HABITAT

Sharks have different sizes and habits. The largest is the whale shark, which can grow up to 15 metres long and weigh twice as much as an elephant. The smallest sharks are only about 16 cm long and weigh about 28 grams. One of the strangest looking sharks is the hammerhead, with a flat head that looks like a hammer.

Some kinds of sharks live in the deepest parts of the ocean, others are found near the surface. Some stay close to the coast, while others swim far out at sea. A few types of sharks even live in rivers and lakes.

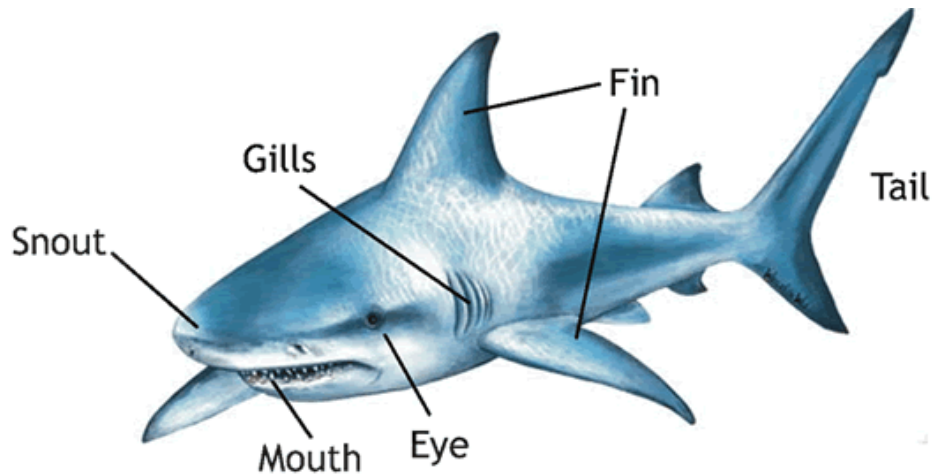


All sharks are meat eaters. Most of them eat other fish, either as a whole or by tearing off chunks of a bigger fish. They also eat dead animals, plankton, crabs, sea turtles, seals, sometimes even whales.

A SHARK'S BODY

Most sharks have a body that is shaped like a torpedo. The two side fins are stiff; the tail is often curved and it helps the shark swim. Small scales cover a shark's body and make its skin very rough. The mouth of most sharks is at the bottom of the head. They have many rows of teeth, which are sharp and pointed. New teeth grow and replace the older ones, sometimes as often as every week. Behind the eyes, sharks have five to seven gills on each side of the head. They use them to breathe underwater.

Sharks have sharp senses. They can find a fish to eat by the sound that it makes. They also have good eyes and can see almost everything in dark areas. Sharks must swim fast and well, otherwise they will sink. Some types have been recorded to swim at speeds of up to 90 km an hour.



BEHAVIOUR

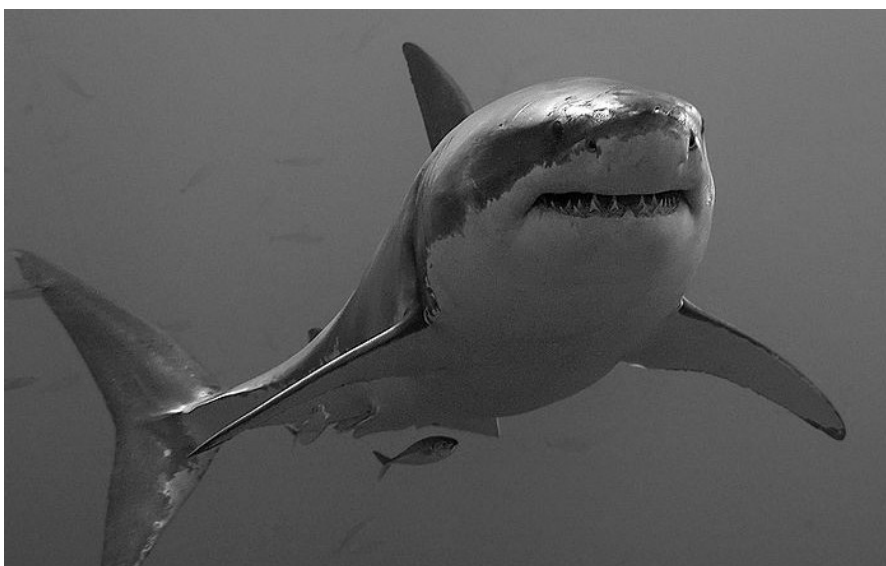
More than half of the sharks in the world are not dangerous to people and seldom attack them. Among the most dangerous is the white shark, a fish with sharp teeth that can rip off chunks of flesh from animals. They hunt for large animals, such as sea lions, tuna and other sharks. They have even attacked human beings, especially when they are hungry or worried. Move-ment, noises or blood in the water can provoke sharks and make them attack.

IMPORTANCE OF SHARKS

Fishermen catch sharks mostly for their skin and flesh. Shark skin is used to make leather goods. The Chinese use dry shark fins to make popular and expensive soup. The liver oil of sharks has a lot of vitamin A.

SAFETY

- Swimmers should always be careful in areas known to have sharks. Here are some **rules** to follow.
- Never swim or dive alone.
- Never swim or dive if you have an open cut on your body.
- Leave the water immediately when you see a shark. Swim as smoothly as possible and avoid wild movements.



The great white shark

WORDS

avoid = not do something

chunk = a large piece of something

coast = place where the sea meets land

crab = sea animal with a hard shell, five legs on each side and two large claws

dive = to swim under water with tanks that help you breathe

either = whichever, any

especially = above all

fear = to be afraid of

fin = one of the thin body parts that a fish uses to swim

flat = level, smooth

flesh = the soft part of the body of a person or animal that is between the skin and the bones

gill = one of the organs on the side of a fish through which it breathes

goods = things that are produced in factories

habit = things that you normally do

habitat = the living area of animals or fish

human being = a person

immediately = at once, quickly

liver = a large organ in your body that helps you digest food and cleans your blood

movement = the way something moves

open cut = skin injury; when you see blood on your skin

otherwise = or else

pointed = sharp

prefer = to like more than something else

provoke = to make someone or something react suddenly
record = information that is written down so that you can find it in the future

replace = grow in something's place

rip off = tear off

rough = not smooth, with an uneven surface

rule = instruction, advice

scales = small flat pieces of skin that cover the body of a fish

seal = a large sea animal that eats fish and lives around coasts

seldom = not very often

senses = the five natural powers that humans and animals have - seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting and smelling

shape = form

smoothly = soft, not with wild movements

snout = long nose of an animal or fish

speed = how fast something is

stiff = hard, not bendable

surface = the top layer of something

tear off = rip or cut off

tuna = a large sea fish that is caught for food

twice = two times

weigh = how heavy something is

whole = complete, all of it

worried = nervous because you keep thinking about something