

Sharks!

Non-chronological report

It is hard to believe but sharks have existed on our planet for over 400 million years! With 510 species of shark, it might be difficult to identify what these fish have in common and how we can tell them apart.

Read on to find out more about these amazing animals and some key facts about some of Earth's most famous varieties of shark.

What do all sharks have in common?

- **Skeleton** = every shark's skeleton is made of cartilage. This is the same material that a human's nose and ears are made of. Cartilage is strong and flexible so it is ideal for a predator that needs to be able to turn quickly when chasing its prey!
- **Teeth** = Surprisingly, all sharks have teeth, even the ones that only eat plankton. Their teeth come in a range of sizes and shapes depending on what they eat.
- **Gills** = The majority of sharks have five gills but some species have six or sometimes seven. The gills are found on both sides of the head and they help the shark to absorb oxygen from the seawater so that they are able to breathe.



Great white sharks

Probably the most famous of all the species, the great white is often described as the ultimate shark! This variety of shark live in the upper 200 metres of the sea and can generally be found near shorelines in temperate (warm or mild) seas and oceans. Because of this, they feed on animals that can be found near the water's edge such as seals, sea lions, elephant seals and dolphins. The great white has even been known to eat other sharks and rays!

Interestingly, the great white is warm-blooded which is unusual for a shark. Being warm-blooded means that great white is able to contract its muscles three times faster and with much greater strength which allows it to move at greater speeds. As this species relies

on the element of surprise, this additional speed is necessary and they have been known to accelerate to speeds of over 20 mph! This speed can cause the shark to seem to fly out of the water as it attempts to catch its prey!

Although these animals might appear to only care about their next kill, they are actually incredibly clever creatures who are able to communicate with each other in order to prevent arguments concerning kills, personal space and dominance! This means they are able to decide who the boss is without coming to any serious harm!

Whale sharks

Unlike great white sharks, whale sharks prefer prey that is smaller in size! Generally, they feed on plankton and other food such as small crustaceans, squid and fish eggs. This might surprise some people because whale sharks are actually the largest fish in the ocean as they can grow up to 18 metres in length!

Whale sharks are found across the globe in all of the tropical and warm, temperate seas as they regularly travel extremely long distances looking for rich food patches. Unbelievably, a whale shark can travel over 10,000km just searching for food! Their love for food means that they have worked out where the best food supplies are across the planet and some sharks in the Philippines have even learnt how to suck the fish out of fishermen's nets!

The gathering of whale sharks, when they meet just off the Yucatan Peninsula near Mexico has been given its own name. When the little tunny releases billions of fish eggs into the water, the whale sharks are attracted to the region in an event called 'afuera'. It is thought that during this process, the sharks filter tens of thousands of gallons of water every hour!



A photograph of a great white shark.



A photograph of a whale shark.

Scalloped hammerhead sharks

Similarly to whale sharks, the scalloped hammerhead shark can be found around the world in warm, temperate and tropical seas and is the most common type of hammerhead shark.

Like all other hammerhead sharks, this variety of shark has a 'hammer' or 'cephalofoil' on its head. Its eyes and nostrils are positioned at

either end of the hammer and they normally grow to 2.7 metres in length. However, the longest one ever found was 4.3 metres long! These sharks come in a variety of colours: olive, bronze, light brown, grey-brown or even silver-grey but they all have a white belly.

Scalloped hammerhead sharks mostly feed on bony fish and squid but they occasionally hunt other sharks and rays too!

When these sharks are younger, they can be found in groups of up to 100 or more members but tend to hunt alone or in much smaller groups as they get older.

FUN FACTS!

- Did you know that sharks never run out of teeth? Unlike humans, sharks are able to continue to replace their teeth for their entire life!
- Did you know that a shark's skin is actually covered in tiny, modified teeth? The purpose of these teeth is to reduce the drag created by the water which helps the sharks to swim even faster.
- Did you know that some sharks are able to see in colour and in very good detail? Also, the majority of sharks are able to see in the dark!



A picture of a scalloped hammerhead shark.