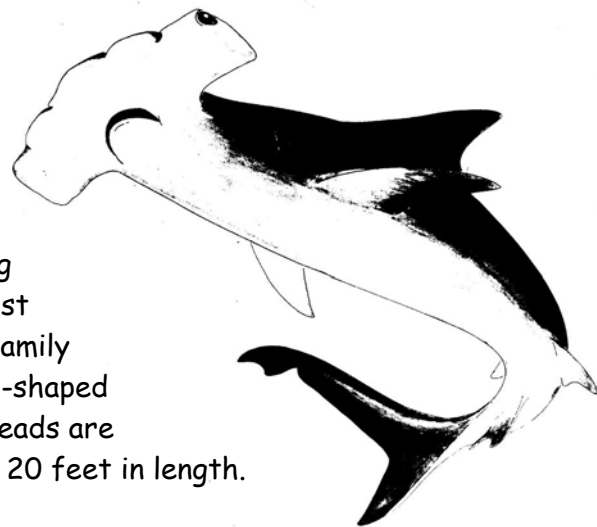


HAMMERHEAD SHARK



Of the over 450 species of sharks found worldwide, the hammerheads are among the best known, perhaps because they are the most unusual looking. There are nine members of the family *Sphyrnidae*, each with the characteristic hammer-shaped snout. The great, smooth and scalloped hammerheads are the largest species, with adults ranging from 10 - 20 feet in length.

ALTHOUGH THE HAMMERHEAD AND OTHER LARGE SHARKS ARE WIDELY FEARED AS MAN-EATERS, THESE OCEAN PREDATORS HAVE MUCH MORE TO FEAR FROM MANKIND.

For over 400 million years, the shark has been a top predator in the sea's food chain, playing a critical role in population control and species diversity. But today, the hammerhead and other sharks are threatened by another, more efficient predator - man. Typical of long-lived sharks, hammerheads grow and mature slowly and give birth to a very small number of young. This low birth rate makes sharks unable to reproduce fast enough to replenish their numbers under even modest fishing pressure. Shark populations can be depleted quickly and take decades to recover. Historically, shark fisheries around the world have exhibited a "boom and bust" pattern, as rapid development of new fisheries is soon followed by equally quick decline and then collapse.

THE WORLD'S FISHERMEN KILL MILLIONS OF SHARKS EACH YEAR. MOST ARE WASTED. Sharks are regularly caught on fishing lines and in nets set for more marketable commercial species. In particular, sharks are a substantial incidental catch in the longline fisheries for tuna and swordfish. U.S. longliners report discarding 9 out of 10 sharks they catch, and many of these unwanted animals are dead when returned to the water. But the greatest global threat facing sharks today is a gruesome fishing practice known as finning, which is responsible for the deaths of 100 million sharks each year. Driven by the lucrative Asian shark-fin soup market, finning involves cutting off the sharks' fins and discarding the mutilated fish at sea, leaving more room on board the vessel for the highly prized fins. Pound for pound, shark fins can fetch over 850 times the price of the body meat. Hammerheads are listed as a "preferred shark" for the Atlantic fin fishery, along with sandbar, bull and blacktip sharks.

FINNING BANS EXTEND FROM FEDERAL TO INTERNATIONAL WATERS. After an alarming rise in the number of sharks killed just for their fins in U.S. waters in the Western Pacific, the National Coalition for Marine Conservation (NCMC), working with its partners in an alliance known as the Ocean Wildlife Campaign, was successful in persuading Congress to pass the "Shark Finning Prohibition Act of 2000," giving sharks a safe haven from finning in all U.S. waters. The action on the part of the United States set the stage for similar measures to be enacted internationally. In 2004, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT), which manages fisheries on the high seas in the Atlantic, passed a shark-finning ban for member countries. Modeling ICCAT's resolution, the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) adopted a finning ban for member countries in the Eastern Pacific in 2005.

THE UNITED STATES HAS THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE SHARK CONSERVATION PROGRAM IN THE WORLD, BUT IT'S NOT ENOUGH.

Fishery managers in the U.S. classify hammerheads as "large coastal sharks," the group biologists consider to be in the greatest danger from overfishing in the Atlantic Ocean. Other threatened large coastals include the great white, dusky, whale, basking, bull, tiger, lemon and nurse sharks. In 1993, NOAA Fisheries (formerly the National Marine Fisheries Service), at the urging of the NCMC, instituted a Fishery Management Plan for 39 species of Atlantic sharks. A management plan for Pacific species, created by the Pacific Fishery Management Council, followed 11 years later. The federal plans set catch limits for commercial and recreational fishermen, yet the most recent study revealed that the number of large coastal sharks is low and still dropping. Although regulations prohibit anyone from catching 19 of the rarest shark species, others continue to decline. It remains to be seen whether the government will implement new conservation measures to rebuild the most overfished species. In addition to urging NOAA Fisheries to set conservative catch limits, the NCMC is working to curtail indiscriminate fishing with longlines and drift gill nets to reduce the number of sharks that are killed accidentally in other fisheries.

THE HIGHLY MIGRATORY BEHAVIOR OF SOME SHARK SPECIES FURTHER HAMPERS EFFORTS TO PROTECT THEM.

Because their oceanic migrations are not confined to U.S. waters, but often cover vast expanses of open ocean, the most effective conservation strategies for sharks are those enforced throughout the range of the fish. Unfortunately, there is no international organization overseeing shark conservation on the high seas. CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) called on the world's fishing nations to collect and exchange information on high seas shark fisheries and global trade in shark products. To unify and coordinate the shark conservation plans of each country, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) adopted an International Plan of Action that provides guidelines for countries to implement shark research, monitoring and management programs.

THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR MARINE CONSERVATION (NCMC) IS CALLING FOR STRONG AND IMMEDIATE ACTION TO PROTECT AND RESTORE SHARK POPULATIONS:

The strictest possible catch limits must be implemented both domestically and internationally to halt declines in these important predators and to begin rebuilding their populations. The NCMC recommends setting low, risk-averse catch allowances for both commercial and sport fishing. We encourage catch-and-release fishing by anglers. More selective fishing practices must be developed for the tuna and swordfish fisheries to reduce shark bycatch. Special ocean reserves should be established to prohibit non-selective fishing on known shark spawning and nursery grounds. The NCMC also recommends improving research and fishery data collection on individual shark species. Finally, rebuilding shark populations to healthy levels will require international cooperation.



For more information, contact the
NATIONAL COALITION FOR MARINE CONSERVATION
 4 Royal Street SE, Leesburg, VA 20175
WWW.SAVETHEFISH.ORG