

Grey Reef Shark



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FastFacts

- Like all sharks, grey reef sharks belong to the group of cartilaginous fishes known as Elasmobranchii.
- The maximum reported length for the species is 2.5 meters and the maximum weight is 33.7kg.
- Live to a recorded maximum of 25 years.
- They enjoy a diet of reef fishes, squid, octopi, crabs, lobsters, and shrimps.
- Females give birth to 1-6 pups.
- As far as predators of these majestic fish, humans are this shark's worst enemy!

InquisitivePredators

Diving out on the reefs in the Coral Sea, one is likely to encounter a grey reef shark or two. These beautiful animals are inquisitive by nature, often approaching divers or investigating disturbances. Grey reef sharks are found associated with coral reefs throughout the Indo-west and Central Pacific, often near drop-offs to the open sea or high current areas. Recent studies have shown that the smaller, juvenile sharks tend to stick around particular reefs, with very little migration. However, older mature sharks might travel great distances showing no particular affinity to any one reef. One of the sharks tracked traveled 134 kilometres in less than 48 hours.

Grey reef sharks are easily recognized by the conspicuous wide black margin along the caudal fin. Grey reef sharks also go by the common names grey whaler shark, blacktail reef shark, and longnose blacktail shark. These sharks are active during the day, but tend to keep most of their activities to the night time. When a grey reef shark is acting aggressively, it will raise its head and arch its back, lowering its pectoral fins. It will swim with very exaggerated movements.

LATINNAME

Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos
(Bleeker, 1856)



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ConservationConcerns

These top predators are slow growing and late maturing, which means it takes many years for populations to recover when they have been depleted. It would take 14 years for any population to double in size, giving the species very low resilience. Compare this with anemone fish that have a population doubling time of 15 months!

Though these sharks are repeatedly incriminated in attacks on humans, it is humans that are the larger predator in this relationship as grey reef sharks are caught in commercial fisheries for consumption, fishmeal and other shark products.

The IUCN Status of grey reef sharks is **near threatened**.

Sources

Froese, R. and D. Pauly. Editors. 2010. FishBase. World Wide Web electronic publication. www.fishbase.org, version (05/2010) [accessed 13/03/2010].

Heupel MR, Simpfendorfer CA, Fitzpatrick R (2010) Large-Scale Movement and Reef Fidelity of Grey Reef Sharks. PLoS ONE 5(3): e9650. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0009650

Photos: Nicola Temple

