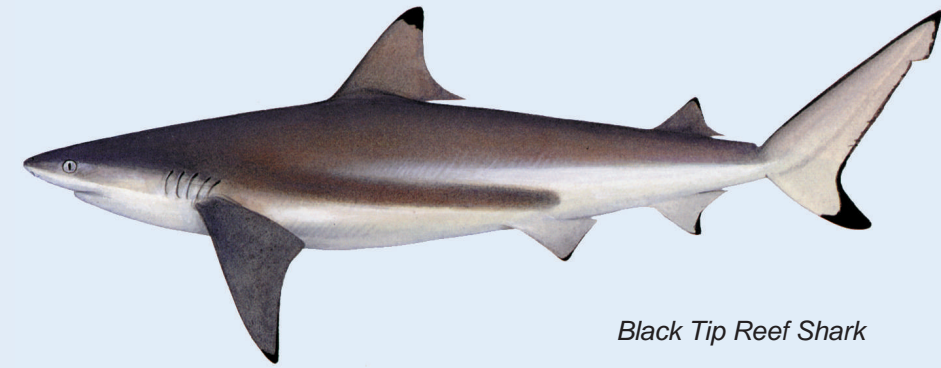


SHARKS



Black Tip Reef Shark

The earliest known sharks evolved more than 400 million years ago. Today more than 950 species live in the seas and freshwater systems of the world. Approximately 166 species of sharks live in Australian waters.

Reproduction

Seventy percent of sharks bear live young while the remainder lay eggs protected by a fibrous egg case. These cases are often found washed up on the beach. Grey nurse sharks are interesting in that their young actively hunt and eat their weaker siblings while still inside their mother.

Life Span

Sharks typically live for 20-30 years, however, some species of school sharks are known to live 50 years or more.

Swimming Speeds

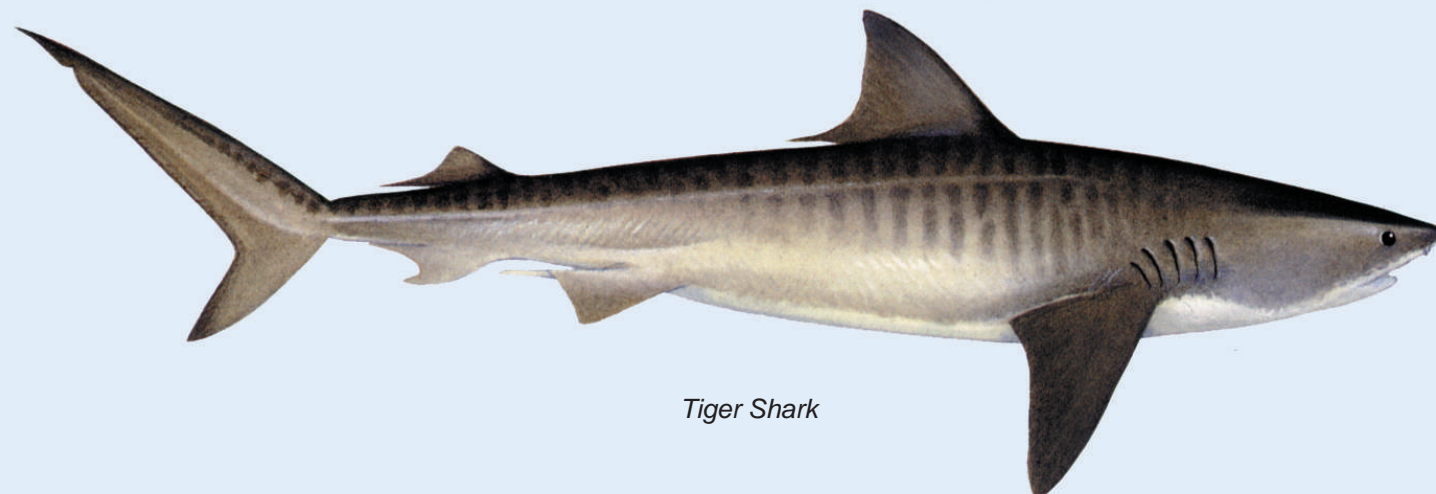
The average shark can cruise at around 2-5km/hour with short sprints of at least 30 km/hr. Mako sharks are the fastest reaching up to 35km/hr while leaping out of the water.

Prey

Species such as Whaler, Port Jackson and Gummy Sharks have specific food preferences that include small fish, squid, sea urchins and crustaceans. Tiger and Bull sharks on the other hand will eat anything.

Prey Location

Sharks locate their prey using smell, hearing, vision touch and taste. Their sense of smell is very good allowing them to detect fish oil and blood at about 1 part in a million over a long distance. They can also detect vibrations and pressure changes through a line of receptors that run along their bodies from their head to their tail. Sharks are also sensitive to electrical and magnetic fields.



Tiger Shark

Ecological Role

Sharks are at or near the top of the marine food chain and therefore have an important role within the ecosystem. Large predators such as sharks help to keep the population size of their prey in check as well as maintaining the genetic fitness of their prey by weeding out the sick and weak animals. The large scale indiscriminate killing of sharks does not only reduce shark populations but also have indirect effects on other animals.

Sharks attacks

Humans are a far greater threat to sharks than sharks are to humans. Australia has the worst shark attack record in the world, however, since record keeping commenced in 1791, sharks have killed fewer than 200 people nationally with 7 of those occurring in WA. More people were killed in car crashed in 1998 (226 deaths).

Shark attacks on humans are thought to be primarily a result of mistaken identity or because humans are perceived as a threat. Studies have shown most shark attacks occur between 2:00 and 6:00 o'clock in the afternoon.

Of all shark species globally nearly all fatal attacks can be attributed to only 4 species.

- * **White Shark:** responsible for most cool water attacks, primarily on divers who are thought to resemble the seals these sharks prey on.
- * **Tiger and Bull Sharks:** most frequently attack swimmers, particularly in murky water near estuaries.
- * **Oceanic White Tip:** probably responsible for the attacks on victims of air or shipping accidents in the open ocean.

Hammerhead and Grey Nurse Shark's do not deserve their bad reputations as few fatalities have been attributed to them.

North West Shelf Species

The most common species found in the North West Shelf include Tiger, Hammerhead, Grey Nurse, Black Tip Reef and Wobbegong.



Grey Nurse Shark