

Description

Sharks are a type of streamlined fish that have cartilaginous skeleton and between 5 to 7 gill slits. There are a series of fins along the body serving various purposes: triangular dorsal fin for balance; paired pectoral fins for steering and movement control; anal fins may be absent but when present prevent rolling; caudal fin is moved side to side giving thrust through the water. Sharks have scales known as a denticle. If rubbed from head to tail the skin is smooth, from tail to head it feels rough. Sharks do not have swim bladder, so they aid buoyancy by having oil in their liver instead of water (lighter in weight). Enamel teeth vary in shape and size, and worn or loose teeth fall out and are continually replaced by teeth that 'pop-up' as they move over the rim of the jaw.

Distribution

There are many different types of sharks therefore you can find different species of sharks in most marine environments around the world including bays, oceans, reefs, estuaries, and some species such as the Bull Shark are also found in the freshwater rivers.

Diet

Sharks are known for their acute olfactory senses, with some species capable of detecting one part of blood in one million parts of seawater. At a closer range sharks can detect prey using their lateral lines system, which can detect movement in water, along with their Ampullae of Lorenzini to detect electrical fields of prey. This makes them very efficient carnivorous hunters. They have a varied diet ranging from small fish and crustaceans for the benthic Wobbegong sharks, to larger prey items such as turtles, seals and dolphins in the larger shark species including Tiger sharks and Great Whites, to the gentle filter feeding giants like the Whale Shark that sieve plankton and small animals from the water.

Breeding

Paired pelvic fins are, in males, are modified into a penis-like 'clasper', which is a hook like tentacle which holds onto the female while sperm is transferred. In females they remain fins. There are three different modes of reproduction in sharks. Most are live bearing, but some lay eggs. Viviparity is the most advanced form of development, where the female provides nourishment for the embryos as they develop inside her. Ovoviviparity is where the eggs are fertilized, hatch and develop within the female and oviparity is where sharks lay eggs in the form of egg cases which they attach to a firm substrate.

Threats

Sharks are threatened mostly by human activities such as overfishing. Shark fin soup alone is responsible for the death of 75 million sharks annually where they are caught, their fins removed and then dumped back into the ocean to slowly die. The fear that has been imbedded in people's minds about sharks due to flicks such as Jaws has also led to the cruel and unnecessary deaths of many sharks around the world.

Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Sub Phylum:	Vertebrata
Class:	Chondrichthyes
Sub Class:	Elasmobranchii