

## **Blacktip Reef Shark** (*Carcharhius melanopterus*)

**Habitat and Distribution:** Found in tropical and subtropical waters of the western and central Pacific Ocean, Indian Ocean, Red Sea, along the eastern African coast and in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. They usually gather inshore near shallow coral reefs from 0 to 50 feet.

**Size:** Up to 7 feet in length; up to 30 pounds

**Wild Diet:** Small fish, eels, crustaceans, octopus and squid

**Predators:** Humans, larger shark species and large groupers

**Lifespan:** Unknown

**Reproduction:** Black-tips are viviparous (give birth to live young), giving birth to 2–4 pups after a 16-month gestation period. Pups are usually born in the late spring or early summer when pregnant females move inshore to drop their young in nursery areas. The young stay in these nursery areas for their first year. Female black tips reach breeding age at approximately 4–6 feet in length; males at 4½–6 feet.

Sharks in general reproduce slowly, bear few young at a time, have a long gestation period, and many swim great distances to find a mate. That is why it takes years for their populations to rebound after a serious decline from overfishing.

**Behavior:** These sharks are often seen in schools of 6–12 individuals. They are constantly active since they must swim in order to move water over their gills for respiration (not all sharks need to do this).

**Conservation Connection:** Status: Near Threatened. Regularly caught by inshore fisheries and vulnerable to depletion because of small litter sizes and long gestation periods. Fins are valued for shark-fin soup and liver as source of oil.

### **Interesting Facts:**

Known for their leaping and spinning abilities when chasing prey, sometimes leaping high out of the water. Blacktip reef sharks have a beige body with black on the tips of all the fins. The teeth are narrow and triangular with finely serrated edges and broad bases.

