

Lemon Shark

(*Negaprion brevirostris*)

Habitat and Distribution: Found in tropical coastal waters of the western Atlantic, eastern Pacific and Indo-Pacific oceans. These sharks are usually found in shallow water around coral reefs, mangrove forests, docks, and in estuaries, bays and river mouths. They are found in water up to 275 feet deep.

Size: 6–10 feet in length; up to 200 pounds

Wild Diet: Fish, crabs, shrimp, seabirds, smaller sharks and rays

Predators: Humans, juvenile lemon sharks can fall prey to larger sharks

Lifespan: Unknown

Reproduction: Lemon sharks are viviparous, meaning their young are born live. Sexual maturity is reached between 6 and 15 years of age. Mating takes place in the springtime followed by a 10–12 month gestation period. Females return to nursing grounds between April and September to give birth to 4–17 pups. Pups remain in the nursing grounds for several years.

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's why it takes years for their populations to rebound after a serious decline from overfishing.

Behavior: Lemon sharks will rest on the sea floor and allow cleaner wrasses to clean parasites from their gills and skin. They will even stop the movement of their gills for up to two minutes to allow the wrasses access. These sharks also adapt well to captivity, which has allowed them to be extensively observed and studied. Studies have shown them to be highly social.

Conservation Connection:

Status: Near Threatened/
Vulnerable. The lemon shark is targeted by commercial and recreational fishermen along the US Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean, and in the eastern Pacific Ocean. Some fisheries commonly target this species, it is also caught as by-catch (accidental catch). Their skin may be used for leather and their meat can be consumed, all of which make this shark very marketable.

Interesting Facts: Lemon sharks have the ability to go into fresh water. They received their name from the yellowish color on their back and sides. In the wild, they are active both at night and day.

