

Sandbar Shark

(*Carcharhinus plumbeus*)

Habitat and Distribution: Found in tropical and subtropical waters of the Pacific Ocean, Western and Eastern Atlantic, including the Mediterranean. It is the most abundant species of large shark in the Western Atlantic. They favor shallow inshore waters down to 200 feet and are seldom seen at the surface.

Size: Females up to 8 feet in length, males up to 6 feet; each up to 200–250 pounds

Wild Diet: Bottom fish, shrimp, crab, crustaceans, and mollusks

Predators: Human, juvenile sandbar sharks may fall prey to large sharks like the bull shark

Lifespan: About 25–50 years

Reproduction: Sandbar sharks are viviparous, meaning their young are born live. Males and females reach maturity around 5 feet in length. Once fertilization occurs, the gestation period can range from 8–12 months depending upon geographical location. Size at birth ranges from 1½–2 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: As with many sharks in this genus group, the sandbar shark undergoes seasonal migrations. These movements are influenced mainly by temperature, although it is believed that ocean currents also play a significant role. Males migrate earlier and in deeper water than females, both migrating from the Atlantic waters near the southern US to the northern US waters.

Conservation Connection: Status: Near Threatened. Because of its numbers, moderate size, and tasty meat, it is the primary targeted species in the eastern US. Increased fishing and a heightened demand for shark fins and meat in the 1980's had a profound adverse effect on the numbers of sandbar sharks in the southwestern Atlantic. However, there has been a slight rise in population numbers in recent years as a result of fishery regulations and also due to a decrease of large predatory sharks that feed on juvenile Sandbars.

Interesting Facts: Sandbar sharks have a taller than average first dorsal fin. Due to its preference for smaller prey and tendency to avoid beaches and the surface, this shark poses little threat to humans.

