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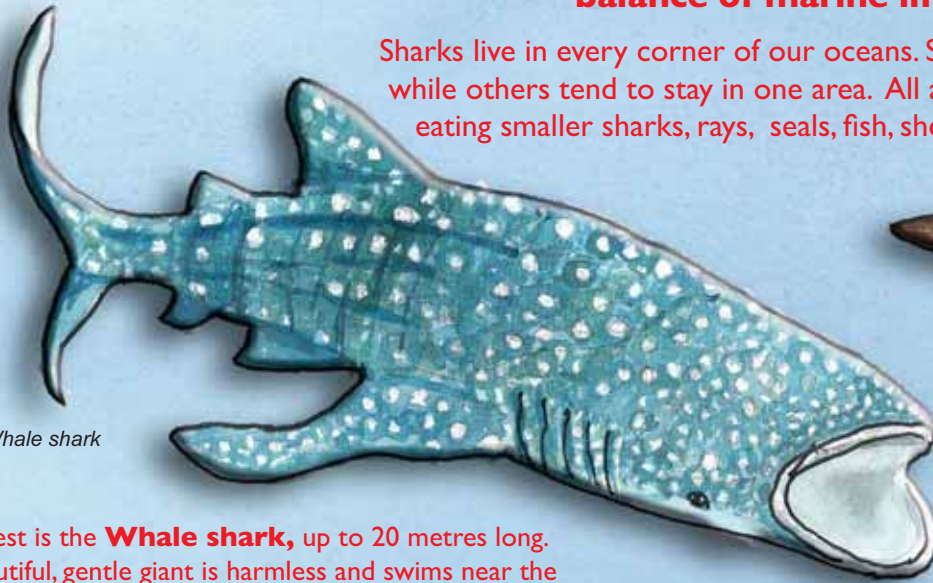
PERFECT



Hammerhead shark

In our oceans the top, and most perfect, predators are the sharks. For years they have been persecuted and overfished, but we are now realising their importance in maintaining the balance of marine life.

Sharks live in every corner of our oceans. Some migrate vast distances while others tend to stay in one area. All are predators and survive by eating smaller sharks, rays, seals, fish, shellfish and other sea creatures.



Whale shark



Dwarf lanternshark

The smallest shark is the 19 cm **Dwarf lanternshark**. It lives in the dark ocean depths and glows like a lantern.

The largest is the **Whale shark**, up to 20 metres long. This beautiful, gentle giant is harmless and swims near the ocean surface, feeding on tiny animals (plankton) that it sieves from the water.

Feeding times

Shark activity is related to feeding. Many species feed mostly at night and only a few are known to feed during the day. Some are very active around dusk and dawn, so it is unwise to go swimming at that time!



hunching back

tail gives big side-to-side sweeps

fins down

Behaviour

Sharks communicate through body language. They threaten each other and divers by hunching their bodies, holding their pectoral fins down, and exaggerating their tail movement as they swim. If the intruder does not give way they may attack. They also have a 'pecking order' and chase away, and even bite, smaller sharks approaching their food. Some sharks gather together in large groups, usually to find a mate or feed on the same prey.

Beware of your dog!

Most sharks (82%) are less than 2 metres long and are harmless. Only a few of the larger sharks are actually a danger to humans. In South Africa most shark attacks are by **Great White, Tiger, and Zambezi** sharks. However, despite millions of people using the sea, only about 100 people are attacked world-wide and fewer than 10 deaths occur, each year. By contrast, 31 Americans die every year from being attacked by their pet dogs!

Hearing – sharks are quick to respond to the sounds made by an injured fish.

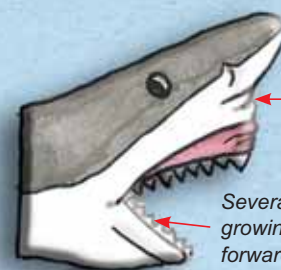
Good eyesight even in low light and can see colours.

Nostrils for breathing while resting or feeding. Their keen sense of smell can detect blood from kilometres away.

Pointed snout.

Pores on the face sense the minute electronic signals produced by prey animals.

Sharks have up to 7 gill slits. Large, active sharks must keep swimming in order to breathe!



Top jaw can move forwards to grab prey.

Several rows of teeth that keep growing from the inside and move forwards to replace old, damaged rows. Most sharks swallow their food whole.