



RESTORING OCEAN HEALTH BY SAVING SHARKS

TIGER SHARK

(*Galeocerdo cuvier*)

Order – Carcharhiniformes
Family – Carcharhinidae
Genus – *Galeocerdo*
Species – *Cuvier*

Named after their distinct color patterns, these large predatory sharks are known for consuming a large variety of prey. This relatively large, slow moving species is capable of great bursts of speed and voracity. Beloved by divers, it is also responsible for human injury and fatalities.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

The tiger shark is found worldwide in temperate and tropical waters. They can thrive in a multitude of habitats, including the open ocean, shallow coastal waters, and murky inlets and harbors. These sharks frequent shallow waters and at the surface, however have been recorded at depths of up to 1085 ft (350 m). Tiger sharks migrate seasonally, moving to warmer, tropical waters in the winter months, and returning to the temperate ocean in the summer.



Image Albert Kok

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS

1. Grey or pale tiger-like stripes that fade in older individuals
2. Blunt, wide snout, a large mouth with serrated teeth and large eyes

BIOLOGY

→ Distinctive Features

The tiger shark is easily identified by its robust form and remarkable pattern. Young tiger sharks are born with spots, which fuse as they grow into a distinct striping pattern. These sharks also have a distinctly smaller second dorsal fin, a large lunate tail and large eyes.

→ Coloration

Dark or light gray or black dorsal surface with a pale white underbelly. The distinctive stripes and spots are most visible in younger sharks and slowly fade as the shark matures.

→ Size and Age

The tiger shark commonly reaches a length of 10-14 ft (325-425 cm). Length at birth varies from 1-1.5 ft (51-76 cm). Males reach sexual maturity at 7-9 ft (226-290 cm), while females reach maturity at 8-10 ft (250-325 cm) The largest individuals can have lengths of over 18 ft (5.5 m). These sharks live long lives, although no specific lifespan is listed.

→ Food Habits

Prey include an iconically large amount of species, including turtles, dolphins, rays, other sharks, birds, crustaceans, squid, bony fish, and carrion. The shape of the tiger sharks' teeth, combined with a side-to-side shaking motion of the head, enables these sharks to rip large chunks out of their prey.

FUN FACT

Tiger sharks are known for eating almost anything, and have been found with ilicense plastes and barbie dolls in their stomach

→ Reproduction

Tiger sharks give live birth to as many as 80 pups. Pups develop from eggs fertilized and hatched internally in a process known as oviparity. Embryos develop from large eggs in the mother, and when the yolk supply runs out, tiger shark pups are nourished on uterine fluid. More developed pups consume their fellow womb mates as eggs called oophagy. After a 13-16 month gestation period, litters of pups can range from 10-81 individuals.

→ Predators

Juvenile tiger sharks can be prey to a multitude of species, including other tiger sharks. Adults have no major predators, aside from humans and occasionally orcas.

FUN FACT

Tiger sharks have unique teeth, easily identifiable with a curved shape, large serrations, and a distinct notch on the blade of the tooth

DANGER TO HUMANS

The tiger shark is a formidable predator and can be aggressive to humans. These sharks are often very curious and docile when encountered by divers, yet are responsible for unprovoked human fatalities. They should be treated with extreme caution.

CONSERVATION

The IUCN lists tiger sharks globally as "near threatened". Both commercial and recreational fishing catch rates for this species in the mid-Atlantic region have declined since the mid-1980's. In the NE Pacific and Hawaiian islands they have a healthy population, but are rare in SE Asian waters and the Indian ocean where they are harvested.

They are commonly targeted by sports fisherman, and for their fins to supply the shark fin trade. Tiger shark skin has commonly been used as leather, and their livers have been used as a source of vitamin A. As a migratory species they are vulnerable as bycatch in nets and longlines. Globally the species is on the decline.