



SHARK STEWARDS

RESTORING OCEAN HEALTH BY SAVING SHARKS

GREAT HAMMERHEAD (*Sphyrna mokkaran*)

Order – Carcharhiniformes
Family – Sphyrnidae
Genus – Sphyrna
Species – Mokarran

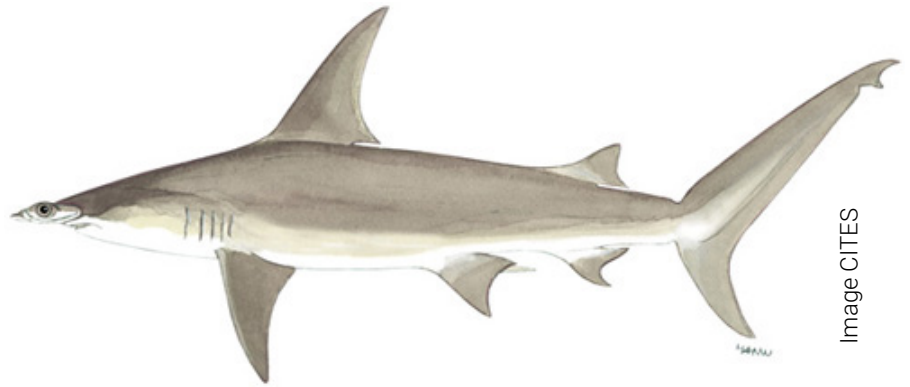


Image CITES

The largest species in the genus *Sphyrna*, they are known for their wing-like cephalophoil (“hammer head”). These large sharks are circumglobal and severely threatened. They use this specialized cranium and highly developed senses to detect their prey, even flat fish and rays, hidden beneath the sediment.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

These sharks are found globally, in coastal warm, temperate, and tropical seas including the Mediterranean. This coastal pelagic species, and often found near continental and insular shelves as well as neighboring deep water. The great hammerhead is considered a highly migratory species. They have been recorded at depths of 300m (984 ft.). The great hammerhead migrates seasonally, with some populations moving poleward to cooler waters during the summer months.

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS

1. Hammer is straight and squared to a stout body
2. A large notched tail with a markedly tall, curved, first dorsal fin
3. Pelvic fins are large with a prominent leading edge and a recurved rear margin

BIOLOGY

→ Distinctive Features

The giant hammerhead is distinguished from other hammerheads by its size and large, curved dorsal fin.

→ Coloration

The great hammerhead is dusky brown to light gray on the dorsal surface, fading to a cream-colored underside, with an asymmetrical caudal fin. The anterior margin of the head is more recurved in juveniles, developing into the straight margin seen in adults.

FUN FACT

The widely set eyes at the end of the head, combined with a sinuous swimming motion give these sharks exceptional binocular vision, allowing them to see 360 degrees!

→ Size and Age

This species averages over 500 pounds (230 kg). The world record great hammerhead was caught off Sarasota, Florida (US) weighing 991 pounds (450 kg). The largest reported length of a great hammerhead is 20 feet (610 cm). Expected life span of the species is 20-30 years of age.

→ Reproduction

These sharks are the species is viviparous, developing embryos provided nutrition via a yolk-sac placenta. Following a gestation period of approximately 11 months, birth occurs during the spring or summer in the Northern Hemisphere, Litters range in number from 6 to 42 pups each measuring between 50 and 70 cm total length, Females breed once every two years. Males reach maturity at a length of around 7.4 feet (2.25 m) at to a weight of 113 pounds (51 kg). Females mature at a total length of 6.9 feet (2.10 m) corresponding to a weight of 90 pounds (41 kg).

→ Predators

Larger sharks will prey on small or injured hammerheads. There are no major predators of the adults of this species other than humans.

FUN FACT

In Hawaii, sharks are considered spirits of a family's ancestors which, made strong by prayer and sacrifice, live in a shark's body and act as supernatural counselors to their kin, who honor them as household divinities. They are revered as Aomaku and not eaten.

→ Prey

This warm-water, coastal shark eats tropical bony fishes and invertebrates, as well as smaller sharks and rays. They will also eat young of their own species.

DANGER TO HUMANS

According to the International Shark Attack File, there have been 17 unprovoked attacks for the genus *Sphyrna*, though none were fatal.

CONSERVATION

The IUCN lists great hammerheads as "Critically Endangered". They are listed with the smooth and scalloped hammerheads under Appendix II of CITES. Little management exists to protect the species in international waters. Due to their migratory schooling behavior, large groups can be harvested in short time. Their fins are among the most valued in the shark fin trade. Due to their high risk of mortality sport fishing can have an impact on local populations. Shark Stewards has joined the Center for Biological Diversity in petitioning to protect these sharks under the Endangered Species Act.