



RESTORING OCEAN HEALTH BY SAVING SHARKS

BULL SHARK (*Carcharhinus leucas*)

Order – Carcharhiniformes
Family – Carcharhinidae
Genus – Carcharhinus
Species – leucas

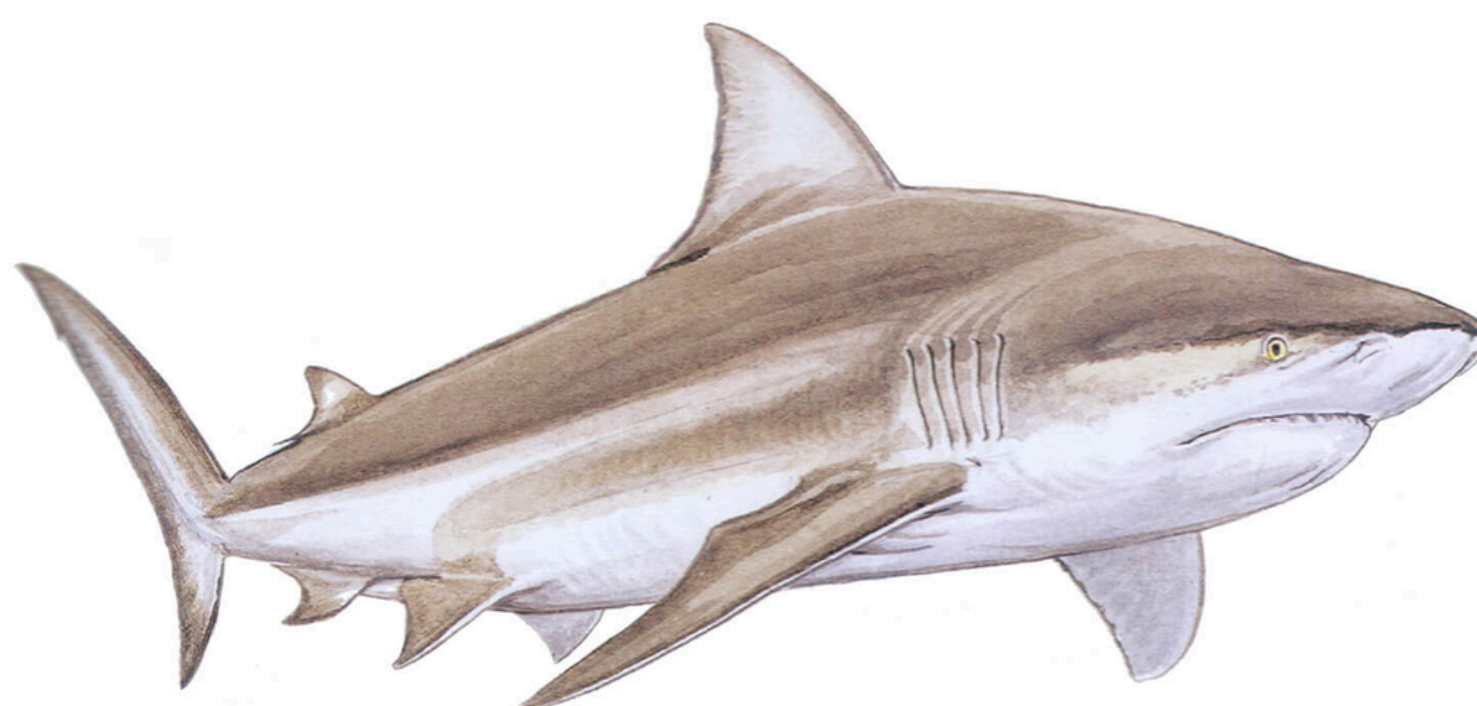


Image Shark Research Institute

Named for their stout appearance and reputation for aggressive behavior, and their distinct countershading - a pale grey dorsal surface fading to white on the shark's underbelly. They have unique adaptations that allow them to survive in both salt and fresh water.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

These sharks are found in tropical to subtropical coastal waters all over the world. They prefer to live in shallow coastal waters less than 100 feet deep but have been noted in waters around 450ft deep. Bull sharks are also known to survive in freshwater river systems for long periods of time. They typically move into estuarine or fresh waters to give birth to their young, all while juvenile sharks appear to use these low salinity estuaries and shallow marine habitats as nursery grounds.

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS

1. First dorsal fin is large and triangular with a pointed apex, its origin is posterior to the pectoral fin insertion
2. Short, broad rounded snout, wide mouth and small eyes

BIOLOGY

→ Distinctive Features

Bull sharks are very stout and have rounded snouts. The second dorsal fin is significantly smaller than the first, and they lack an interdorsal ridge. The pectoral fins are also large, broad and angular. They have small eyes which suggests that vision may not be as important for them in the turbid waters they frequent.

→ Coloration

Bull sharks are pale to dark gray above, fading to a pale cream to white color on their underside. In juvenile Bull sharks the fins have dark tips which fade to a more diffuse dusky color as they grow.

FUN FACT

Bull sharks were blamed for a series of attacks in 1916, which served inspiration for Peter Benchley's book *Jaws*, which Steven Spielberg turned into a blockbuster movie in 1975.

→ Size and Age

The maximum size for Bull sharks is around 400 cm (around 13 feet). The size of birth is about 2-3 ft. The age of maturity is between 15-20 years, and males reach the size of 5-7ft, while females are 6-7.5ft. The lifespan for Bull sharks is more than 25 years.

→ Food Habits

Bull Sharks are opportunistic feeders that mainly eat bony fishes but are known to consume other marine life such as stingrays, sea turtles, dolphins, crabs, shrimp, sea birds, squid, and other small sharks, including their own species.

→ Reproduction

Bull Sharks are viviparous with the eggs hatching inside the body being nourished by a yolk sac. The age of maturation for female Bull sharks is about 18 years old, and there is a 10–11-month gestation period, and results in litters averaging around 1-13 pups.

→ Predators

Adult bull sharks have few natural predators. Young bull sharks, however, can fall prey to tiger sharks (*Galeocerdo cuvier*), sandbar sharks (*Carcharhinus plumbeus*), and other Bull sharks.

FUN FACT

Bull sharks adapt well to being kept in captivity and are on exhibit in a number of public aquaria. Some have been kept in tanks for over 15 years

DANGER TO HUMANS

According to the International Shark Attack File (ISAF), bull sharks are historically responsible for at least 100 unprovoked attacks on humans around the world, 27 of which have been fatal.

CONSERVATION

Though Bull sharks are not a targeted species, they are routinely caught in fisheries around the world. Because they live in estuarine and inshore regions, close to human populations, they are vulnerable to human impact. In December of 2023 Bull Sharks were added to CITES Appendix II protection. These sharks have been given protections that limit trade in their meat and fins under international law.