



RESTORING OCEAN HEALTH BY SAVING SHARKS

Blacktip Reef Shark

(*Carcharhinus melanopterus*)

Order – Carcharhiniformes
Family – Carcharhinidae
Genus – *Carcharhinus*
Species – *melanopterus*



Image Shark Research Institute

A small to medium sized robust shark with recognizable black fin tips that have white highlights. They have short, wide, rounded snouts and moderately large, oval eyes. Blacktip reef sharks are abundant on coral reefs, making them a popular species in reef and dive tourism.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

These sharks are commonly found throughout the tropical Indo-Pacific in shallow, inshore clear waters alongside coral reefs or lagoons. They rarely venture out to deeper water, but they have been spotted in mangroves or in brackish and freshwater environments. However, they don't swim far into freshwater and it's not clear how long they can actually tolerate the water. This species typically spends a majority of their time within a small area over the course of a year, and migrations are not far from home. They are usually around the same island or between neighboring islands.

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS

1. They have horizontally oval eyes, and long, thin and narrow serrated teeth.
2. Their most distinguishing feature is the black tips on their dorsal and caudal fins, with a white pigment closer to their bodies.

BIOLOGY

→ Distinctive Features

They have medium sized fusiform bodies with short, rounded snouts and a down-turned mouths. They lack an interdorsal ridge and have a large second dorsal fin with a short rear tip.

→ Coloration

Blacktip reef sharks are a gray/brown color with a white underside. Their anal fin is white, but their pectoral, dorsal, and tail fins all have black tips. They also have a white band that runs alongside their body that extends to the pelvic fins.

FUN FACT

An important apex predator, the blacktip reef shark plays a major role in structuring inshore ecological communities on coral reefs.

→ Size and Age

Most blacktip reef sharks are thought to live for at least 12 years. There is a regional variation in blacktip reef sharks size at birth, size at maturity, and overall maximum size. They are born around 1-2ft long, but can reach about 5ft, with the maximum being 8.3ft.

→ Food Habits

Blacktip reef sharks are opportunistic feeders that are active during dawn, dusk, and at night. They mainly eat fish, but have been known to eat crustaceans, cephalopods, and other mollusks. In inshore mangrove areas they will also consume sea snakes.

→ Reproduction

Blacktip reef sharks are viviparous with the eggs hatching inside the body being nourished by a yolk-sac. Maturation may take up to 7 years, and there is a 8-16-month gestation period (regional) that results in litters averaging around 2-4 pups.

→ Predators

These sharks have several predators such as tiger sharks, great white sharks, sandbar sharks, groupers, and other larger blacktip reef sharks.

FUN FACT

These sharks are known to hunt in packs around the edges of reef systems. They work together to circle and trap prey before attacking. Blacktip reef sharks have been known to fully jump out of the water during a feeding frenzy.

DANGER TO HUMANS

Blacktip reef sharks do not pose a serious threat to humans. They have been occasionally known to bite swimmers, but the International Shark Attack Files has only recorded 11 unprovoked bites since 1959.

CONSERVATION

This shark is considered “Vulnerable” according to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and their population is continuously decreasing. In December of 2023 Blacktip reef 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.