



# WHALE SHARK

*Rhincodon typus*

The mighty Whale Shark is the biggest fish in the ocean. The largest on record was over 20m long and weighed 42 tonnes!

These slow-moving giants are grey-blue in colour with a distinctive pattern of pale spots. This is unique to each individual, just like human fingerprints!

They're one of three filter-feeding sharks. Long comb-like structures on their gills (known as gill-rakers) trap and filter zooplankton as small as 1mm - such as krill, crab larvae and jellyfish.

Whale Sharks are highly migratory, with many individuals returning to the same locations each year.

Hot spots include Western Australia, Philippines, Mexico, Belize, Costa Rica, Galapagos, St Helena, Mozambique, Seychelles and the Maldives.

The largest known aggregation sites host hundreds or even thousands of individuals.

## FAST FACTS

### SIZE:

Matures at:  
♀ 800cm | ♂ 600cm  
Max: ~1000cm

### DIET:

Plankton (mainly zooplankton) & small fish.

### RANGE:

All tropical & warm-temperate seas, except the Mediterranean.

### HABITAT:

Open seas, lagoons & coral atolls. May dive to depths of 1,928m to feed.

**STATUS:** Endangered

## WHALE SHARK THREATS

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Whale Sharks are long lived (~130 years), slow growing and late to mature. This suggests a low reproductive rate, which makes them vulnerable to human threats:

- **FISHERIES** – In some countries they are fished for their meat and fins. They're also caught as bycatch.
- **ENTANGLEMENT** - Due to their size, they easily become entangled in fishing nets and ropes.
- **BOAT-STRIKE** - Propeller and boat strikes are a serious danger. Particularly in areas where shipping lanes are placed close to Whale Shark feeding areas.
- **HARASSMENT** - In all the excitement of seeing Whale Sharks, boats often end up striking them. As well as causing physical harm, this also disrupts their natural behaviour - such as feeding, courting and mating.

## SHARKpartners



We're proud to be working with Shark SUPs to create positive change for sharks.

[www.sharksups.com](http://www.sharksups.com)

### 3 WAYS TO HELP WHALE SHARKS

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1. If booking a Whale Shark tour choose a responsible operator that follows these guidelines - [vimeo.com/148616963](https://vimeo.com/148616963)
2. If you see a Whale Shark, record your sighting on our Sightings Database.
3. Support vital research by adopting a Whale Shark with us today.

Safeguarding the future of sharks - [www.sharktrust.org](http://www.sharktrust.org)