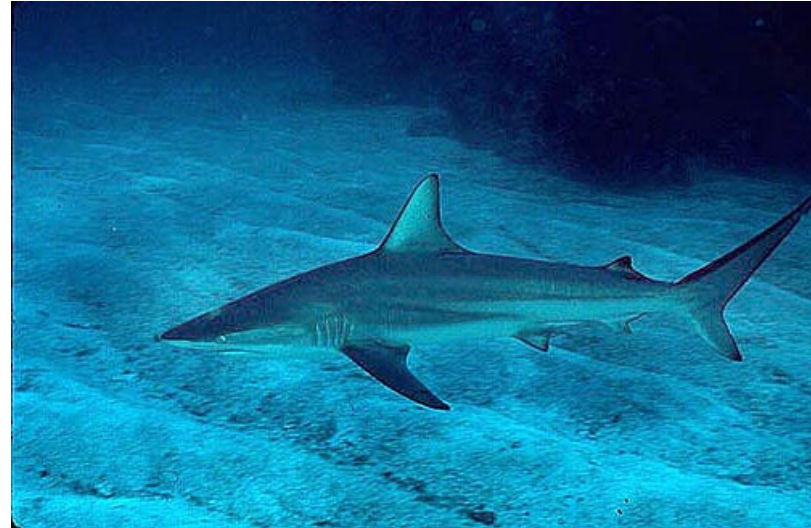


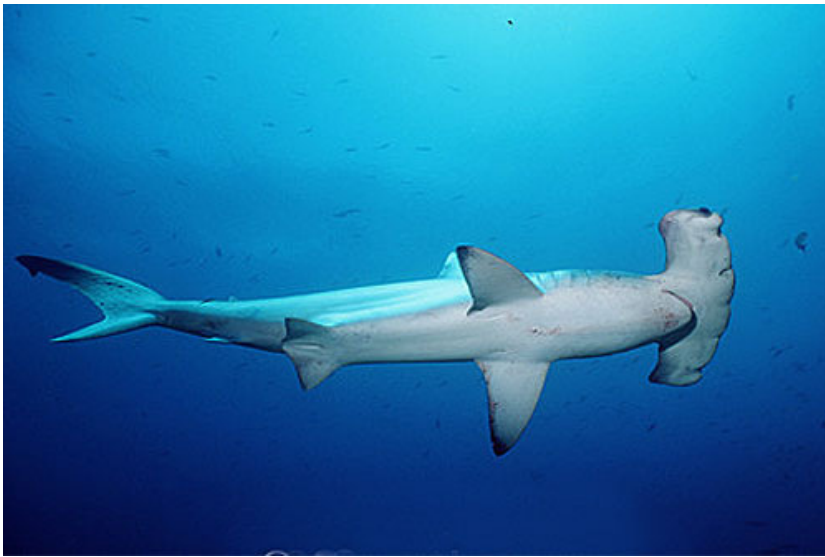
Sharks



Bull Shark(*Carcharhinus leucas*) Photo: Nick Caloyianis/NOAA



Blacktip Shark(*Carcharhinus limbafus*)Photo:David Snyder/NOAA



Scalloped Hammerhead Shark(*Sphyma lewini*)Photo: Doug Perrine/NOAA



Blacknose Shark(*Squalus acranotus*)
© Photo courtesy of Virginia Institute of Marine Science

Gulf Of Mexico Shark Facts

***Worldwide there are more than 400 recognized species of shark**, ranging in size from 7 inches (the spined pygmy shark) to 46 feet (the whale shark). Sharks are fish, and like their skate and ray cousins, do not have bones. Their skeletons are constructed of cartilage, like the tissue found in the human nose, ears, and joints. The only bones they possess are their teeth, and some may have up to 300 teeth at any given time. **Sharks have excellent eyesight and smell, some smelling a drop of blood in 25 gallons of sea water from a quarter mile away.** Unlike most fish, sharks do not have gas-filled bladders and must keep moving to stay afloat. **The speed of a swimming shark varies, but the fastest shark in the ocean is the mako, churning along at about 25 mph** in tropical and warm temperature seas all over the world. **Most sharks do not lay eggs, but bear their young alive, fully developed, and few in numbers. Some sharks do lay fertilized eggs, which are sometimes found on the beach. These eggs are commonly called "mermaids' purses."** In southern waters of the United States most "mermaids' purses" come from skates.

***Sadly, most humans have the image of sharks prowling the seas on the hunt for human victims. However, the odds of being a victim of a shark attack are less than one in a million.** Researchers seem to agree that most cases of shark attacks on humans are cases of mistaken identity. **The bull, blacktip, scalloped hammerhead and the blacknose shark are common on the Alabama Gulf coast.**

***The bull shark gets its name from its short, blunt snout and aggressive behavior.** They are gray on top and white below, and the fins may have dark tips, particularly on young bull sharks. They prefer to live in shallow coastal waters less than 100 feet deep, but they can be found in water from 3 feet-450 feet deep. They commonly enter estuaries, bays, and river mouths. It is the only species of shark that is known to stay for extended periods in freshwater. The largest reported bull shark was 11.5 feet, weighing over 500 pounds. Fast, agile predators, they will eat almost anything they see, including fish, dolphins, and even other sharks.

***The blacktip shark gets its name from its distinctive black markings on the tips of its fins.** They are often seen near shore around river mouths, bays, swamps, and in other estuaries, though they do not penetrate far into freshwater. They can be found offshore deep waters, but primarily stay less than 100 feet from the surface. Average adult size is around 4.9 feet, weighing about 40 pounds. The blacktip shark mainly feeds on small schooling fishes such as herring, sardines, menhaden, mullet, and anchovies, but also eats many other bony fishes.

***The scalloped hammerhead has been observed offshore, close inshore and even entering estuarine habitats.** Males reach maturity at lengths of 5.9 feet, and weigh approximately 64 pounds. Scalloped hammerheads feed primarily on sardines, herring, anchovies, mullet, smaller sharks and stingrays.

***As an inshore species, the blacknose shark resides in waters of continental shelves over sandy and coral bottoms.** This shark is known to form large schools and sometimes associates with schools of mullet and anchovies. The average length of a full-grown blacknose shark is approximately 4.1 feet, weighing about 22 pounds. The blacknose shark is a quick swimmer, feeding on small fishes including pinfish, croakers, porgies, anchovies, spiny boxfishes, and porcupine fish. It is also known to feed on octopus.

***How you can help keep our environment healthy ***

***The ocean is a vast wilderness, home to thousands of awesome and wonderful wild creatures. When you visit the coastal waters of Alabama, you are a guest in their environment.** You should respect that environment and its creatures.

Don't swim at early morning, evening or at night, these are prime feeding times

Stay out of murky water

Don't wear shiny jewelry

Avoid swimming between sandbars and in waters that drop off steeply to greater depths

Schools of fish jumping may be a sign they are fleeing from sharks

