

GREAT WHITE SHARK

Carcharodon carcharias (Scientific Name) or commonly known as this legendary great white shark is far more fearsome in our imaginations than in reality. As scientific research on these elusive predators increases, their image as mindless killing machines is beginning to fade.



Shark Attacks Of the 100-plus annual shark attacks worldwide, fully one-third to one-half are attributable to great whites. However, most of these are not fatal, and new research finds that great whites, who are naturally curious, are "sample biting" then releasing their victims rather than preying on humans. It's not a terribly comforting distinction, but it does indicate that humans are not actually on the great white's menu.



Characteristics Great whites are the largest predatory fish on Earth. Its size is equivalent to a bus. They grow to an average of 15 feet in length, though specimens exceeding 20 feet and weighing up to 5,000 pounds have been recorded.

They have slate-gray upper bodies to blend in with the rocky coastal sea floor, but get their name from their universally white underbellies. They are streamlined, torpedo-shaped swimmers with powerful tails that can propel them through the water at speeds of up to 15 miles per hour. They can even leave the water completely, breaching like whales when attacking prey from underneath.

Hunting Adaptations Highly adapted predators, their mouths are lined with up to 300 serrated, triangular teeth arranged in several rows, and they have an exceptional sense of smell to detect prey. They even have organs that can sense the tiny electromagnetic fields generated by animals. Their main prey items include sea lions, seals, small toothed whales, and even sea turtles, and carrion.

Endangered The great white shark was added to the endangered list because its population has dropped due to the unregulated trade and excessive hunting.

The great white shark is the top predator of the ocean, and adults have no threats in the seas. However, humans kill a large number of white sharks every year to get their teeth and jaws for trading, their meat for eating and their fins for remedies.