

Name: _____

Hammerhead Sharks

By Guy Belleranti

When they hear the word *shark* many people think of the great white shark. While this shark is the largest and most ferocious fish in the sea, there is another shark I find equally interesting. This shark is the hammerhead shark.

Actually there are nine different species or types of hammerhead sharks. The smallest is only three feet long. The largest, the great hammerhead, can grow to nearly 20 feet. What makes all nine so interesting is their flat hammer-shaped heads, with an eye on each end of the "hammer". This large spacing between eyes gives the hammerhead shark a much wider field of vision than other sharks. Such vision is great for spotting prey.



What kind of prey do they hunt? Other fish including smaller hammerheads, squid, octopuses, crustaceans are all commonly eaten. And, of course, there's also the hammerhead shark's favorite meal: stingrays. The hammerhead shark sometimes uses its head to pin stingrays to the sea floor. Hammerheads have small mouths for sharks. Their triangle-shaped teeth are serrated and sharp.

Like other sharks a hammerhead has special sensing organs called electroreceptors in its head. These sensors detect the movements and vibrations of prey. They can even help a hammerhead find prey hiding beneath the sand on the sea floor!

Like all sharks, hammerheads have a great sense of smell. They have a pair of nares, which are like nostrils, right below their snout. Once a shark picks up the scent of its prey, it can follow the smell for many miles until it finds its meal.

Most fish lay eggs. Sharks are the exception because their young are born alive.

Mother hammerhead sharks give birth to as many as 40 or 50 young, or pups.

During the day, hammerhead sharks swim in schools. At night, they usually hunt alone.

Of the nine known species of hammerheads, only three can be dangerous to humans: the scalloped, great, and smooth hammerheads. The great hammerhead is among the fiercest fish in the ocean. Even though they can be very dangerous animals, there have been less than 50 known hammerhead attacks on humans. Still, I wouldn't want to swim with one!

Concern has grown in recent years about the fading numbers of some hammerhead shark species. One reason they have become endangered is overfishing. The hammerheads' extra tall dorsal fin is considered a delicacy and is used to make shark fin soup in some parts of the world.



About the Author

Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences working with wild animals and teaching others.

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1. List 5 things a hammerhead shark eats.



2. What does a hammerhead shark use its nares for?

- a.** swimming faster **b.** chewing food
c. smelling prey **d.** detecting vibrations of prey

3. Hammerhead sharks...

- a.** lay eggs **b.** do not lay eggs
c. do not have eyes **d.** are herbivores

4. Explain why hammerheads have been overfished.

5. How many species of hammerheads are there? _____

How many hammerhead species are dangerous to humans? _____

Write the names of the hammerhead species that are dangerous to humans.

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. _____ t i s p n t o g
hint: seeing; catching a glimpse of

2. _____ t c e d e t
hint: find; sense

3. _____ o n t i v r a i b s
hint: continuing, fast movements

4. _____ s t r n i l o s
hint: holes in an animal's nose

5. _____ r e n a s
hint: holes in a shark's nose

6. _____ s i o n v i
hint: ability to see

7. _____ s p p u
hint: young dogs or sharks

ANSWER KEY

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1. List 5 things a hammerhead shark eats.

stingrays, squid, octopuses, crustaceans,
and smaller hammerheads



2. What does a hammerhead shark use its nares for? c
- a. swimming faster
 - b. chewing food
 - c. smelling prey
 - d. detecting vibrations of prey

3. Hammerhead sharks... b
- a. lay eggs
 - b. do not lay eggs
 - c. do not have eyes
 - d. are herbivores

4. Explain why hammerheads have been overfished.

The hammerhead's extra tall dorsal fin is considered a delicacy in some parts of the world and is used to make shark fin soup.

5. How many species of hammerheads are there? 9

How many hammerhead species are dangerous to humans? 3

Write the names of the hammerhead species that are dangerous to humans.

scalloped hammerhead, great hammerhead, smooth hammerhead

ANSWER KEY

Hammerhead Sharks

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. spotting
t i s p n t o g
hint: seeing; catching a glimpse of
2. detect
t c e d e t
hint: find; sense
3. vibrations
o n t i v r a i b s
hint: continuing, fast movements
4. nostrils
s t r n i l o s
hint: holes in an animal's nose
5. nares
r e n a s
hint: holes in a shark's nose
6. vision
s i o n v i
hint: ability to see
7. pups
s p p u
hint: young dogs or sharks