

# All about... SHARKS

By Eliza McCarthy



Sharks have a variety of body shapes. Most sharks have streamlined, torpedo-shaped bodies that glide easily through the water. Some bottom-dwelling sharks (e.g. the angelshark) have flattened bodies that allow them to hide in the sand of the ocean bed. Some sharks have an elongated body shape (e.g. cookiecutter sharks and wobbegongs). Sawsharks have elongated snouts, thresher sharks have a tremendously elongated upper tail fin, which they use to stun prey, and hammerheads have extraordinarily wide heads. The goblin shark has a large, pointed bump on its head-its purpose is unknown.

Sharks belong to the group of cartilagenous fish. There are about 368 different species of sharks, which are divided into 30 families. These different families of sharks are very different in the way they look, live, and eat. They have different shapes, sizes, colours, fins, teeth, habitats, diet,

personalities, methods of reproduction and other attributes. Some types of sharks are very rare (like the great white shark and megamouth) and some are quite common (like the dogfish shark and bull shark).

Sharks may have up to 3,000 teeth at one time. The goblin shark has more than 5000 teeth in one lifetime!! Most sharks do not chew their food, but gulp it down whole in large pieces. When one tooth is damaged or lost, it is replaced by another. The teeth are arranged in rows; most sharks have about five rows of teeth at any time. The front set is the largest and does most of the work.

Sharks vary greatly in their diets, but they are all carnivores (meat-eaters). Some, like the great white, mako, tiger and hammerhead, are swift predators that eat fish, squid, other sharks and marine mammals. Slow swimming predators like the zebra horn shark, angelshark, and wobbegong that crush and eat shellfish (crabs and clams) from the ocean floor. Others, for example, the whale shark, basking shark and megamouth are filter feeders that separate tiny bits of plankton and small animals from the water as they swim with open mouths. They eat huge amounts of these tiny animals and plants.

Sharks live in oceans and seas all over the world and even in some rivers and lakes, especially in warmer waters. Some sharks live near the surface, some in deep water and others on or near the ocean floor. Pelagic sharks (living in the open ocean) include the great white shark and the basking

shark. Benthic sharks (living on the ocean floor) include the zebra horn shark, wobbegongs and angelshark which usually have flattened, camouflaged bodies that let them hide in the seabed. Some sharks even venture many miles up into the fresh water of rivers like the Mississippi in the USA and the Amazon in Brazil. The bull shark (*Carcharhinus leucas*) is another shark that sometimes ventures into freshwater.

When glacier ice melts due to global warming it goes into salt water oceans and the sharks that only live in salt water will probably die!!