

GEORGIA AQUARIUM ANIMAL FACT SHEET

Spotted Wobbegong

Orectolobus maculatus

Range/Habitat

- The spotted wobbegong is a bottom-dwelling shark whose range includes the eastern Indian Ocean, southern and western Australia, Japan and the South China Sea.
- It occurs in warm waters on the continental shelf from intertidal areas to depths of about 360 feet (110 m).
- This species is commonly found on or near the bottom on coral and rocky reefs, under piers and on sandy bottoms. It has been observed in water barely deep enough to cover it.

Physical Characteristics

- The spotted wobbegong shark has a distinctive body shape, typical of a wobbegong. Its head and body are flattened and the pectoral and pelvic fins are broad. It has a wide mouth and large crescent-shaped spiracles behind each eye.
- A few branching skin flaps run continuously from the pectoral fins around the front of the head forming a lace-like beard below the mouth.
- The body and fins display a variegated pattern featuring dark saddles on the back, densely covered with pale ring-shaped markings. There is a dark triangular mark between the eyes.
- The spotted wobbegong can reach a maximum length of about 10.5 feet (3.2 m).
- It possesses a spiracle, allowing it to breathe while remaining motionless on the bottom.

Diet/Feeding

- This species is a nocturnal feeder that preys on bottom invertebrates and bony fishes.

Conservation Status

- The spotted wobbegong is classified as “near threatened” on the IUCN Red List.

Additional Information

- The spotted wobbegong is a master of escaping notice in plain sight. Resting quietly on the bottom, this species is almost undetectable. Its flattened body, enlarged pectoral and pelvic fins drape over the rocky or coral substrate, barely adding to the vertical relief of the bottom. The shark’s variegated brownish-grey markings and pale ring-like spots break up the body into irregular shapes that blend imperceptibly with the surrounding underwater terrain. Even the eyes, which would ordinarily be easily detectable, are hooded and surrounded by eye-shaped markings that make them difficult to identify. A beard of fleshy tassels obscures the outline of the shark’s head, making it hard to tell where the animal stops and the sea begins.
- It favors specific caves to rest in during the day, often sharing them with small fishes.
- It is ovoviviparous, i.e., fertilization of eggs occurs internally and the young develop within the female and are born fully formed. Females produce up to 37 pups per litter.
- Its flesh is sometimes eaten by humans and its skin is sometimes utilized for leather.
- It is of minor commercial importance.
- The species will bite if stepped on or when molested or provoked.
- The name “wobbegong” is Australian aboriginal in origin, but its exact meaning is unknown. It is speculated that it may mean “living rock”.

Sources

<http://www.fishbase.net>

<http://www.elasmo-research.org/education/ecology/id-orectolobiformes.html>