

GEORGIA AQUARIUM ANIMAL FACT SHEET

Sandbar Shark

Carcharinas plumbeus

Range/Habitat

- The sandbar shark is a coastal-pelagic species, common and widespread in tropical and warm temperate waters worldwide. It is found in the western Atlantic from Cape Cod south to Argentina, including the Gulf of Mexico, the Bahamas, Cuba and parts of the Caribbean. In the eastern Atlantic it ranges from Portugal to equatorial Africa, including the Mediterranean. It is present in scattered locations in the Indo-Pacific from east Africa and the Red Sea to the Hawaiian Islands. It also occurs in the eastern Pacific in the Galapagos and Revillagigedo islands.
- This shark is essentially a bottom-dwelling, coastal, shallow water shark that is seldom seen at the surface. It can occur offshore over the continental shelf and around islands, typically at depths between about 60 and 200 feet (20-65 m). Occasionally, it moves into the adjacent deeper water (to 5,900 feet [800 m]) during migrations (see below).
- It is common in bays, river mouths and harbors with smooth substrate and avoids coral reefs and other rough-bottom areas. This shark will not ascend rivers into fresh water.

Physical Characteristics

- The sandbar shark has a stout body with a moderately long, rounded snout and a large first dorsal fin.
- It is gray-brown to bronze on the back and flanks, with a white underside. The tips and margins of the fins are sometimes darker than the rest of the body.
- This shark averages about 6 feet (2 m) in length and weighs 100 to 200 lbs. (45 to 90 kg). The size record for this species is just over 8 feet (2.4 m) and 260 lbs. (118 kg). Females are heavier than males.

Diet/Feeding

- This species is an opportunistic bottom feeder preying on bony fishes, smaller sharks, rays, cephalopods, gastropods, crabs and shrimp.
- It feeds throughout the day, but is more active at night.

Conservation Status

- The sandbar shark is listed as "lower risk/near threatened" on the IUCN Red List.

Additional Information

- The sandbar shark is the most abundant shark in the western Atlantic.
- The populations along the coast of the U.S. undertake extended annual migrations, moving south for the winter and north for the summer. The southward migration is made in large schools, typically composed only of males. The females appear to migrate alone. Seasonal migrations also have been reported in some populations along the southeast coast of Africa.
- Migrations are made in deep water, well below the usual depths which the sandbar shark occupies. Ocean currents play an important role in these migrations, which scientists believe cover long distances.

- Mating takes place from May to June in the Northern Hemisphere and from October to January south of the equator. Females often carry deep scrapes and lacerations inflicted by aggressive males.
- The female sandbar shark is viviparous, nourishing embryos in her uterus via a placental sac. Gestation lasts 8 to 12 months depending on geographic location and the mother gives birth to 6 to 13 pups. Litter size varies by region. Females breed every other year.
- Birthing occurs in shallow water nursery grounds where the pups are protected from larger sharks, particularly the bull shark, which is known to prey heavily on small sandbar sharks. Bays and estuaries on the U.S. coast between Delaware and North Carolina are common sandbar shark nurseries.
- The juveniles remain in or near the nursery for 9 or 10 months and then form schools that move into deeper water. They return to the nurseries during warmer months. These migrations cover much shorter distances than those of the adult. The juveniles repeat this movement pattern until they are about five years old when they follow the wider migration pattern of the adults.
- Sandbar shark populations in the western North Atlantic have been severely overfished both commercially and by sport fishermen. The species appears to be recovering since the U.S. began tightly managing the fishery under a management plan implemented in 1993.
- This species is an important component of shark fisheries in most areas where it occurs. It is caught for its meat, oil and skin, as well as for its fins (for shark fin soup). It also is used for Chinese medicine.
- Young sandbar sharks are readily kept in aquariums.

Sources

www.fishbase.org

www.marinebio.org/species.asp?id=380

<http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/gallery/Descript/Sandbarshark/sandbarshark.htm>

www.aqua.org/animals-sandtigershark