

# GREAT HAMMERHEAD

## SCIENTIFIC CLASSIFICATION

Kingdom : Animalia  
 Phylum : Chordata  
 Class : Chondrichthyes  
 Subclass : Elasmobranchii  
 Superorder : Selachimorpha  
 Order : Carcharhiniformes  
 Family : Sphyrnidae  
 Genus : *Sphyrna*  
 Species : *Sphyrna mokarran*

## CONSERVATION STATUS

EX EW **CR** EN VU NT LC  
 Extinct Critically endangered Threatened

Maximum Size  
**6.1 metres**  
 Average size  
**3.7 metres**  
 Maximum Weight  
**449.5 kilograms**

## PREDATORS

Juveniles are preyed upon by other shark species such as bull and tiger sharks, while adults have no major predators except for orcas. Orcas have been known to hunt various hammerhead species of any size.



## REPRODUCTION

Hammerheads are viviparous; they gestate live young via a yolk sac placenta for 11 months before giving birth to between 13-42 pups in a litter. The average size of a pup at birth is around 60-70 centimetres in length and they have a more rounded head shape than adults which slowly changes as the shark reaches maturity.

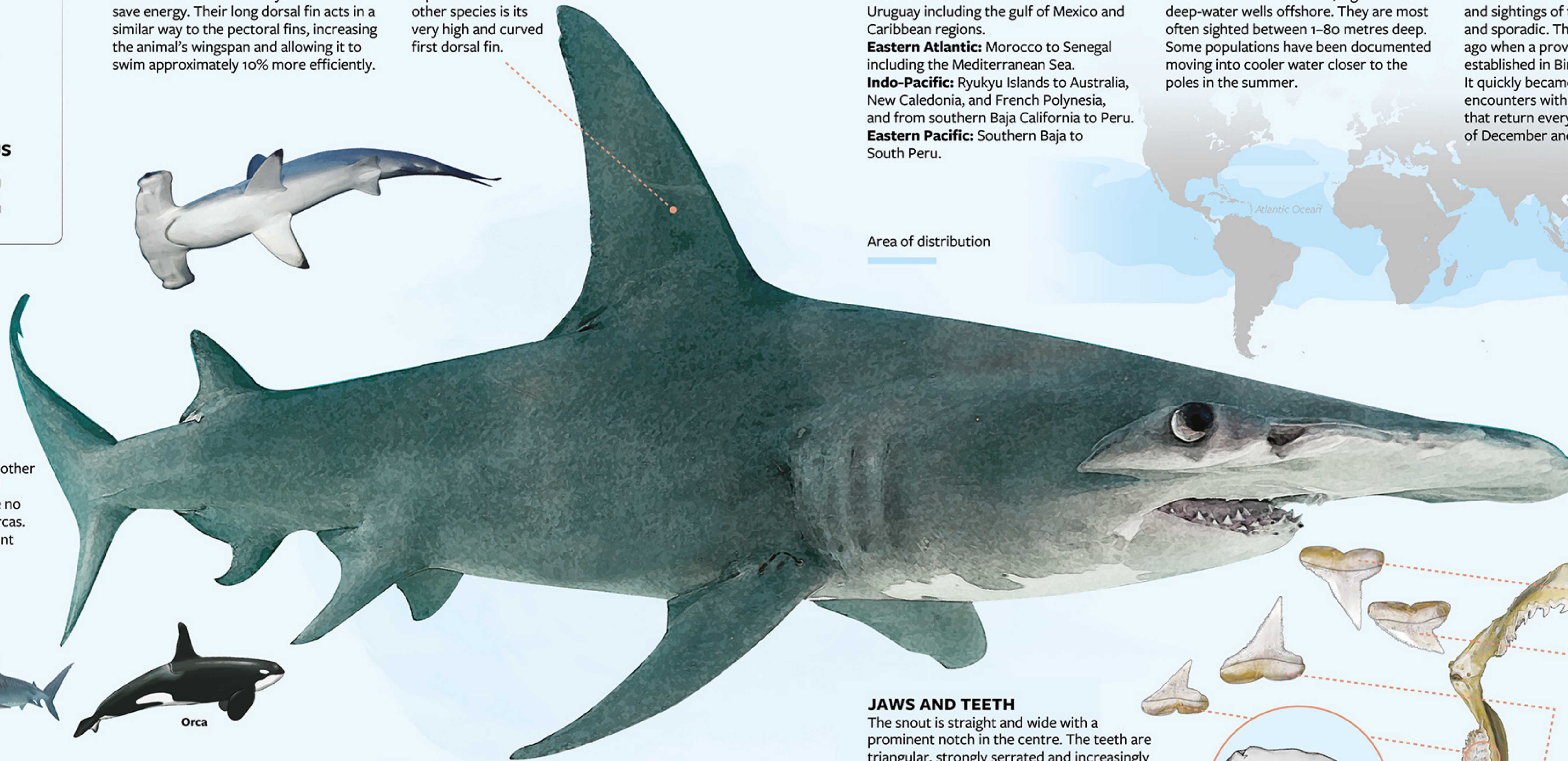


## ENERGY CONSERVATION

A 2016 study using accelerometers revealed that hammerhead sharks often roll over and swim sideways in order to save energy. Their long dorsal fin acts in a similar way to the pectoral fins, increasing the animal's wingspan and allowing it to swim approximately 10% more efficiently.

## GIANT DORSAL FIN

Aside from its size, the best way to identify a great hammerhead and separate it from other species is its very high and curved first dorsal fin.



Area of distribution



## GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

This species inhabits tropical and warm temperate waters around the world.  
**Western Atlantic:** North Carolina to Uruguay including the gulf of Mexico and Caribbean regions.  
**Eastern Atlantic:** Morocco to Senegal including the Mediterranean Sea.  
**Indo-Pacific:** Ryukyu Islands to Australia, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia, and from southern Baja California to Peru.  
**Eastern Pacific:** Southern Baja to South Peru.

## HABITAT

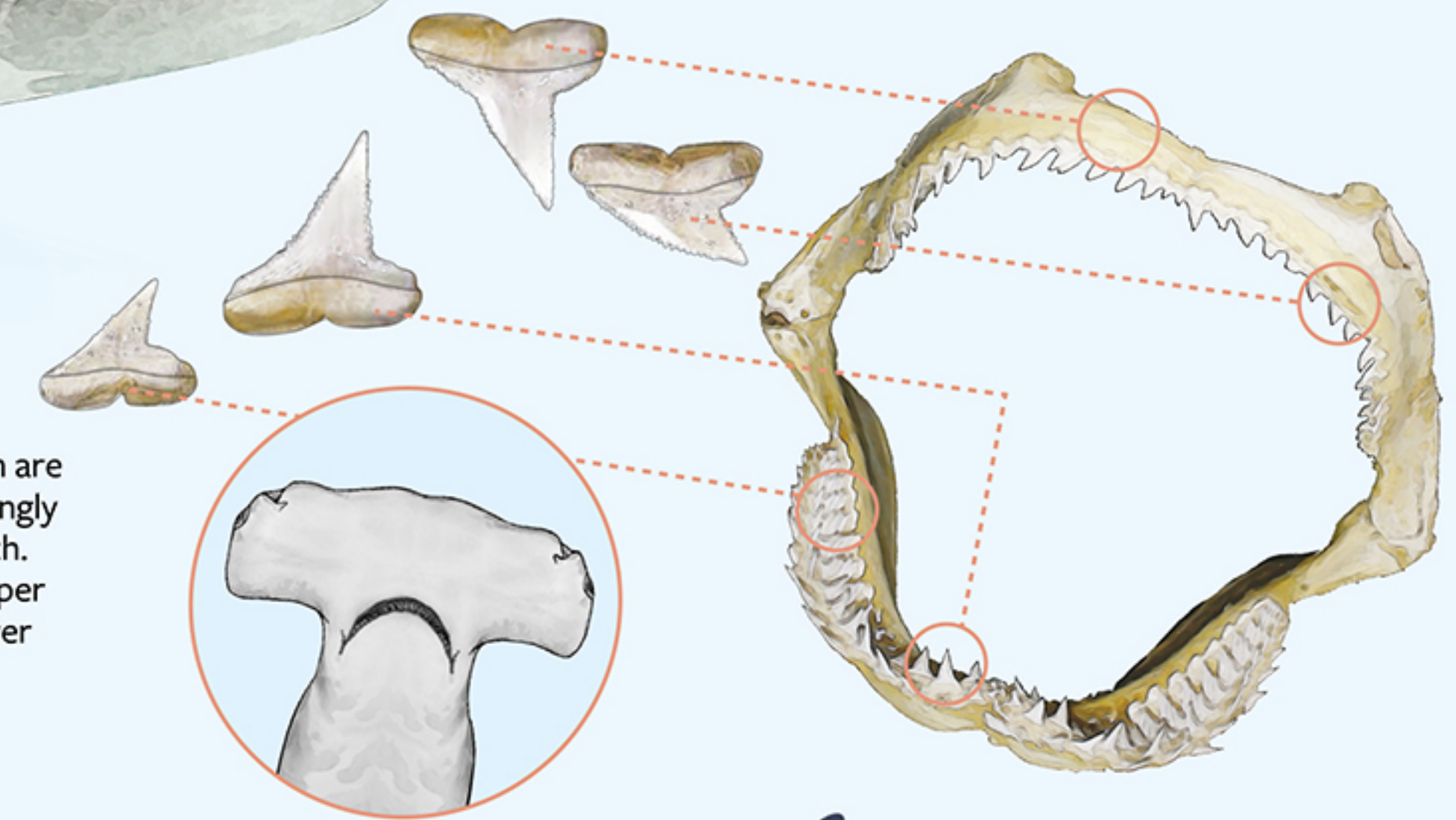
Hammerheads are a highly migratory species that favour coral reefs but also inhabit continental shelves, lagoons and deep-water wells offshore. They are most often sighted between 1-80 metres deep. Some populations have been documented moving into cooler water closer to the poles in the summer.

## TOURISM

Although widely distributed, the great hammerhead normally avoids interaction with humans and until recently, images and sightings of the species were rare and sporadic. This changed a few years ago when a provisioning site was established in Bimini, the Bahamas. It quickly became famous for its close encounters with a number of individuals that return every year between the months of December and March.

## JAWS AND TEETH

The snout is straight and wide with a prominent notch in the centre. The teeth are triangular, strongly serrated and increasingly oblique towards the corners of the mouth. There are 2-3 symphyseal teeth in the upper jaw with 17 teeth each side, while the lower jaw has 1-3 symphyseal teeth with 16-17 teeth each side.



## THE HAMMER

The great hammerhead has a large hammer-shaped head called a cephalofoil from which it gets its common name. The underside of the head is covered with numerous pores called ampullae of Lorenzini. These pores are used to scan the seabed and detect the electrical impulses of its favourite food, stingrays. The cephalofoil also serves as a hydrofoil that allows the shark to turn quickly when hunting, and is sometimes used to hit its prey and stun it before taking the first bite.



## DIET

Great hammerheads are a nomadic predator with a preference for rays and skates. Venomous spines of stingrays are often found lodged inside its mouth and do not seem to prevent them from routinely targeting this type of prey. They will also consume invertebrates such as crabs, lobsters, squid and octopus, bony fish and other sharks.

