NURSE SHARK

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SCIENTIFIC CLASSIFICATION

Kingdom	: Animalia
Phylum	: Chordata
Class	: Chondrichthyes
Subclass	: Elasmobranchii
Superorder	: Selachimorpha
Order	: Orectolobiformes
Family	: Ginglymostomatidae
Genus	: *Ginglymostoma*
Species	: *Ginglymostoma cirratum, unami*

CONSERVATION STATUS

EX · EW · CR · EN · VU · NT · **DD** · LC

Extinct · Endangered · **Data deficient**

Maximum Size
4.3 metres
Average size
3.04 metres
Maximum Weight
109.6 kilograms

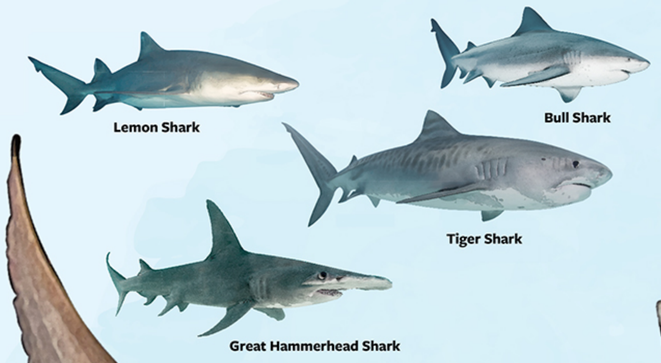
REPRODUCTION

The mating behaviour of the *Ginglymostoma cirratum* is one of the most studied of all shark species. Males approach resting females and bite them on the pectoral fin, before flipping them over and inserting its claspers. After mating, gestation takes six months before 20 to 30 pups measuring 27 to 30 centimetres are born.
Nurse sharks are ovoviviparous, with development of the young in the uterus being sustained by a large supply of yolk.

Newborn pups measure around **27–30 centimetres**

PREDATORS

No species regularly targets nurse sharks, although their remains have been found in the stomachs of lemon sharks and tiger sharks. Attacks by bull sharks and great hammerheads have also been observed.

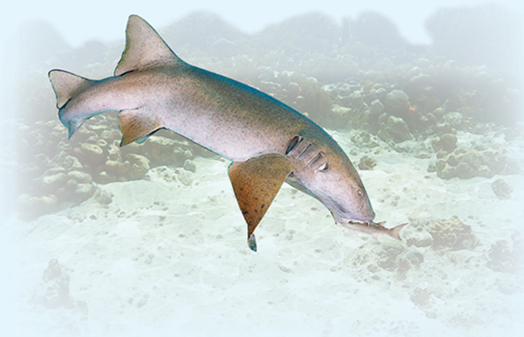


DIET

The nurse shark is an opportunistic benthic predator that feeds predominantly on bottom dwelling invertebrates such as lobsters, shrimps, crabs, octopus, squid and clams, though it will also eat fish such as catfish, mullets and stingrays.

VACUUM FEEDING

A large muscular cavity called pharynx allows the nurse shark to suck in food at high speed like a vacuum. This feeding technique is used to extract prey from its hiding place in crevices and rocks on the reef. The action is so powerful they are even able to extract snails from fully intact conch shells.



GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

G. cirratum occurs in temperate and tropical waters in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.
Western Atlantic: Rhode Island, USA to Southern Brazil, including the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean and the Antilles.
Eastern Atlantic: Cape Verde to Gabon; accidental to France.
On the other hand, *G. unami* is an endemic species in the Eastern Pacific Ocean: From the southeast coast of Baja California to Peru, including the Gulf of California.

Area of distribution

HABITAT

Nurse sharks are commonly found on sandy and rocky bottoms around channels and coral reefs. They are more active at night, where they move into shallow water to feed. Sometimes found resting during the day in groups of up to 40 sharks, individuals show fidelity for certain sites and often return to the same area to rest after nocturnal activity.

TOURISM

Because of their docile behaviour, swimming with nurse sharks is a popular type of eco-tourism. They are attracted to baited shark dives where they often approach the bait box in search of food. Some divers consider them a nuisance due to their persistance and tendency to stir up the sand which can be dangerous when diving with other large shark species.

NASAL BARBELS

Either side of the mouth underneath the nostrils are two nasal barbels or whiskers that give the species a unique appearance and are used to help the shark discover prey hiding in the seabed.

JAWS & TEETH

The mouth is very close to the tip of the snout, and there are 30 to 42 upper rows and 28 to 34 lower rows of teeth in the jaws. The teeth have broad cusps with two to six cusplets on each side. Unlike other shark species, they do not overlap and can be replaced individually.