White-tip Reef Shark (*Triaenodon obesus)*

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Common Name

There are several common names for the *Triaenodon obesus*, which usually describes the "white tips" on their dorsal and caudal fins. Common names include: White-tip Reef Shark, Blunthead Shark, Light-Tip Shark and Reef Whitetip.

Names in Spanish

Cazón, Cazón Coralero Trompacorta and Tintorera Punta Aleta Blanca.

Taxonomy

Domain	Eukarya
Kingdom	Anamalia
Phylum	Chordata
Class	Chondrichthyes
Order	Carcharhiniformes
Family	Carcharhinidae
Genus	*Triaenodon*
Species	*obesus*

Nearest relatives

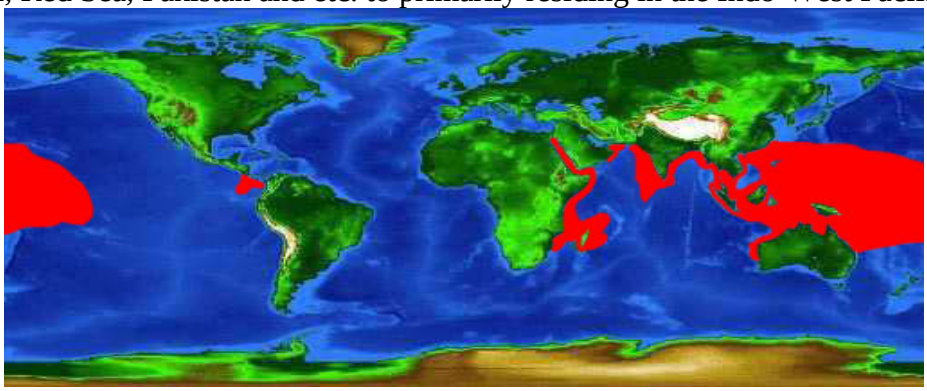
Sharks are cartilaginous fishes in the class Chondrichthyes with skates, rays and other sharks. Within the family Carcharhinidae (requiem sharks), the White-tip Reef Shark is related to the Galapagos Shark, Bull Shark, Oceanic Whitetip, Tiger Shark and Blue Sharks. The White-tip Reef Shark does not share their genus name with any other organism.

Island

They are found amongst the reefs surrounding most or all of the Galapagos Islands.

Geographic range

White-tip Sharks range geographically from Costa Rica, Ecuador, Galapagos, Cocos, South Africa, Red Sea, Pakistan and etc. to primarily residing in the Indo-West Pacific region.



(Red region indicates distribution of White-tip Reef Shark)

Habitat Description

As described in their name, White-tip Reef Sharks live amongst coral reefs with a home range of a couple square miles. They are also found in sandy patches and deeper waters. During the day these sharks tend to rest on the seabed or within caves and crevices.

Physical description

White-tip Reef sharks are named after the white tip on the dorsal (first and sometimes second) fins, and caudal fin lobes. These sharks have a broad and flattened head with protective ridges above eyes. This medium-sized shark is grey with a white belly and occasionally has small spots scattered over the body. They can grow up to 2.5 meters in length.

Abundance and Density

Some areas have higher density populations of White-tip Reef Sharks than others, but they are a fairly abundant species and are often seen by divers on the reef. In some areas their abundance may be lower due to human impact. In the Galapagos they are classified as a "Near Threatened" species due to loss of habitat

Human impact

White-tip Sharks are fairly harmless; they tend to swim away when approached, but may bite if provoked.

Fishing pressure, pollution and habitat destruction all negatively impact shark populations.

Diet

This nocturnal creature feeds at night on fishes, octopuses, cuttlefish, eels, crabs and lobster. Their tough skin allows them to rummage for food in the crevices of the coral reef.

Reproductive Ecology

Viviparous reproduction, giving live birth with up to 5 pups per littler. Their gestation period lasts for about 13 months. The reproductive rate for this shark is slow, with adults reaching sexual maturity around 5 years of age.

Interdependence/Symbiosis

The White-tip Reef Shark has a mutualistic relationship with cleaner fish (gobies, striped cleaner wrasses, etc). These cleaner fish remove and consume the parasites found on the sharks. Remoras share a commensalistic relationship with these sharks.

Economic Importance

This shark's fins are used in soup in some countries, but certain parts of the body, such as the liver, may be toxic if eaten and cause ciguatera poisoning. They are fished off of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Madagascar.

Shark fishing was prohibited in the Galapagos in 1990, but illegal shark fishing occurs to this day. Shark finning (fishermen slice of the shark's fins and throw the shark back in the ocean to die) and the trafficking and exportation of the fins are illegal acts throughout Ecuador. Targeted sharks are Hammerhead, Bigeye Thresher, Pelagic Thresher, Sandbar and Galapagos

sharks, but other sharks, such as the White-tip Reef Shark, may get caught in the nets set for these targeted sharks.

Ecological Importance

White-tip Reef Sharks help keep populations of certain reef fishes from escalating out of control. An example is the parrot fish, which too many of them would cause serious coral degradation because they scrape and eat the algae off of the corals.

References

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