



## Sharks

### Introduction

Let's learn about sharks! Start with a [1-minute video on sharks found in your national marine sanctuaries](#). How many types of sharks can you find in the video? What are they?

Next, check out [these 12 fun facts about sharks that may surprise you](#). Did you learn something new?

As apex predators, sharks are the wolves of the sea, removing the sick, injured, diseased, and deceased animals, keeping the ocean clean, and marine life populations healthy. While sharks are highly effective predators, they are also scavengers readily consuming the weak and dead. Sharks are a vital part of marine ecosystems. They play a major role in structuring marine communities directly when they



consume prey, but also indirectly when they are absent. The removal of sharks may alter the prey species composition or shift the preferred prey of another predator in that ecosystem. With fewer sharks in an ecosystem, the mid-level predator species increase in population and feed on the smaller, mainly herbivorous fishes that keep algae populations in check. As algae becomes overgrown, it can outcompete coral (for example) for space in the sun, leading to the degradation of the entire reef ecosystem. Your national marine sanctuaries help protect sharks, therefore also protecting the ecosystems they call home. Want to learn more about sharks? Check out the videos and activities below!

Photo: Tiffany Duong

### Species Spotlights

Watch a [1-minute video on the bluntnose sixgill shark](#), which can be found in Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary. As you watch, look for the answer to the question below:

- What makes the bluntnose sixgill shark different from other shark species?

Watch a [1-minute video on the whitetip reef shark](#), which can be found in Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary. As you watch, look for the answer to the question below:

- Why are whitetip reef sharks a more common sight for scuba divers than other species?

Watch a [1-minute video on the basking shark](#), which can be found in Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary. As you watch, look for the answer to the question below:

- Why might researchers want to “tag” basking sharks they spot in national marine sanctuaries?

Want to keep learning? Check out [this website for species spotlights on every type of shark!](#)

## Cultural Connection

The early Hawaiian culture viewed sharks as vessels that housed the family god or worshipped ancestors called 'aumākua. As the spirit of the family member could appear at any time in the form of a shark, families who had the shark as their 'aumākua would not hunt or eat sharks. Instead, believing that their departed ancestors took the form of the shark, these families would feed and protect sharks. In return, it was believed that the shark would protect their family. Known as manō lālākea, whitetip reef sharks are relatively small animals and were considered non-threatening to ancient Hawaiians. It is interesting to note, out of respect for the sharks of Hawai'i, the Maui Ocean Center in Hawai'i conducts a welcoming protocol for sharks under the aquarium's care. Every shark that enters the center is met by the aquarium's cultural advisor who asks the shark for guidance, permission to be there, forgiveness if any unintentional harm is caused, and to educate visitors about sharks while also engendering respect for animals like it. Follow along on [this species exploration document](#) and fill in the boxes as you research the ecological and cultural significance of the whitetip reef shark. Optional extension: use your research to create a trifold brochure on whitetip reef sharks to be displayed in the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary visitor center to teach visitors!

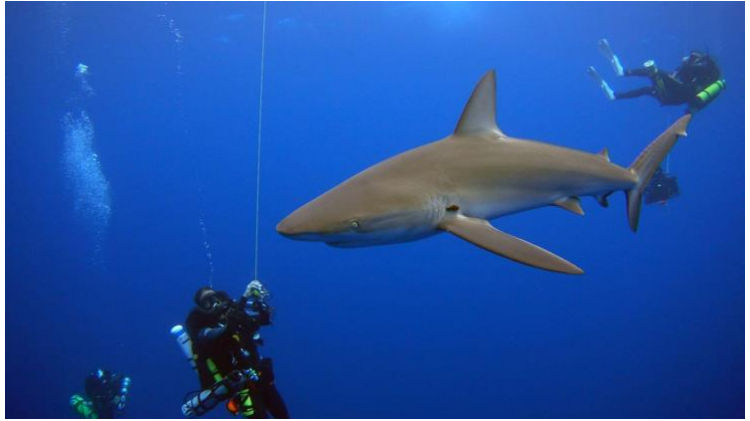


Photo: NOAA and Richard Pyle/Bishop Museum

## Explore

Take a [virtual dive in Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary](#) and “swim” with whitetip reef sharks!

Watch a [1-minute video to learn how NOAA scientists study white sharks](#) in Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary.

Read [this Earth is Blue magazine special on sharks in sanctuaries](#).

To continue learning about sharks in a fun way, check out [Sharks and Rays in Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary coloring book!](#)

[Download the ParkPassport App](#) to learn more about national marine sanctuaries. Take virtual tours, view live webcams, earn digital badges, and more.

All information in this document was adapted from the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries' resources. This collection was developed in partnership with the National Park Trust in support of the 50th anniversary of the National Marine Sanctuary System. *The inclusion of links in this guide does not imply endorsement or support of any of the linked information, services, products, or providers.*

