

Shark Field Guide

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Sharks and Culture

The land and sea are intrinsic Hawaiian culture, passed on in mo'olelo, or oral histories. The inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands that existed before humans, including sharks, manō in Hawaiian, are regarded with the respect given to an elder relative. Of all beings, sharks are some of the most universally prevalent 'aumekua, ancestors and family protectors. 'Aumekua can be reincarnated family members, are highly revered, and often given offerings of food. In return for this reverence, it is believed that manō will come to family members in their dreams or in other ways to impart knowledge and guidance. Hawaiians classify sharks by personality, which is why there are three species (sandbar shark, gray reef shark, and Galapagos shark) included under one Hawaiian name, manō.

Whitetip Reef Shark

Trienodon obesus The whitetip reef shark is a widely distributed species found in the tropical waters of the Pacific and Indian oceans. Preferring the shallows, this shark can be found around coral reefs where it rests during the day in caves and hunts at night. whitetip reef sharks don't typically grow more than 6 feet in length and they can live up to 25 years. Those who have this species as their 'aumakua (family deities or ancestors) do not harm these sharks and believe they receive protection in return. (Near Threatened)

Lalakea

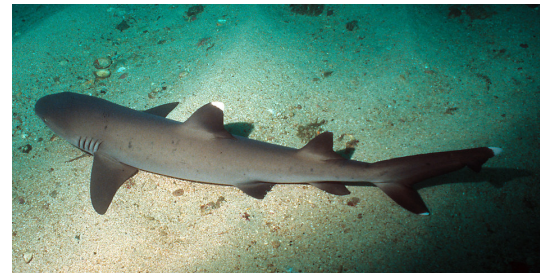


Photo by August Rode

Manō Pa'ele

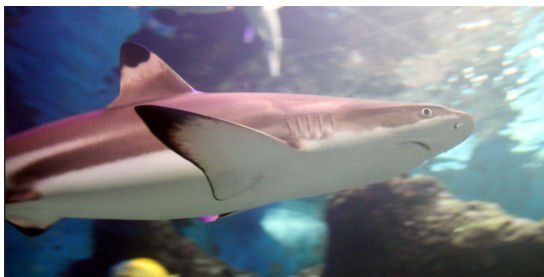


Photo by Kahunapule Michael Johnson

Blacktip Reef Shark

Carcharhinus melanopterus A shallow-water species named for the characteristic black tops on their fins, these sharks have a round snout and angled teeth. They are commonly found in small groups or schools around the coastlines of Pacific regions. Growing up to six feet long, their diets consist mainly of reef fish, though sometimes expanding to crustaceans, cephalopods and mollusks. After the general manō (shark), the modifier pa'ele (pa and ele) indicates the shark's black or charcoal-colored fin tops. (Near Threatened)

Scalloped Hammerhead Shark

Sphyrna lewini These open-water hunters are named for their scallop-like cephalofoil (their “hammer head”). They are listed by the IUCN as critically endangered due to mass commercial overfishing. They can grow to around 12 ft, are pelagic and often found near continental and insular shelves in temperate, tropical seas globally. Hammerhead sharks are known in Hawaiian culture for being protectors or guardians, oftentimes of swimmers and fishermen from the more aggressive great white. Some are ‘aumakua: family ancestors sent to protect their kin. (Endangered)

Manō Kihikihi



Photo by Bethany Weeks

Niuhi



Photo by Willy Volk

Tiger Shark

Galeocerdo cuvier A large predatory shark that can weigh up to 2000 pounds and reach more than 18 feet in length. The tiger shark gets its name from the distinct striped markings running along this species' back which fade with age. Females give birth to live young and has a varied diet ranging from sea turtles, to other sharks. They are found in coastal waters of tropical and temperate regions globally. The Hawaiian name, niuhi is used when talking about a fierce shark, and this is used for both the tiger shark and the great white due to their aggressive personalities.

(Near Threatened)

Sandbar Shark

Carcharhinus plumbeus As its name suggests, sandbar sharks prefer the sandy bottoms of coastal areas, and are known for seasonal migration. They can be recognized by their large and triangular dorsal fin and pectoral fins, and they average about six feet in length. Sandbar sharks have been targeted by commercial and sports fishers due to their high fin-to-body weight ratio, but because of this they also have protected species status in many areas. (Vulnerable)

Manō

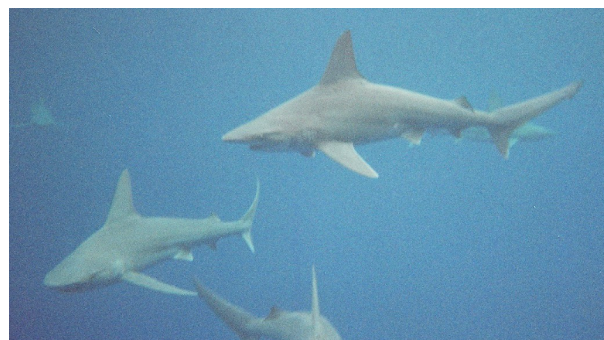


Photo by KTesh

Manō

Gray Reef Shark



Photo by USFWS Pacific

Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos The gray reef shark can reach up to around 8 feet in length and is found in coastal waters of the Indian and Pacific oceans. It is a social species known to aggregate during the day before splitting up at night. They can live up to 25 years and females give live birth to up to 6 pups at a time. Shark guardians, or kahu manō, take great care in feeding and cleaning of the gray reef sharks that are 'aumakua. (Near Threatened)

Galapagos Shark

Manō

Carcharhinus galapagensis Galapagos sharks are medium-sized, can reach up to 11ft in length, and live around 24 years. It is found in tropical waters around the world and is most commonly observed around oceanic islands, where it prefers to hunt benthic fish and cephalopods. Though it is similar looking to the grey reef shark, it is thinner and has a more rounded dorsal fin. Females give live birth to litters of 4 to 16 pups. (Near Threatened)



Photo by Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument

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