

Bonnethead Shark

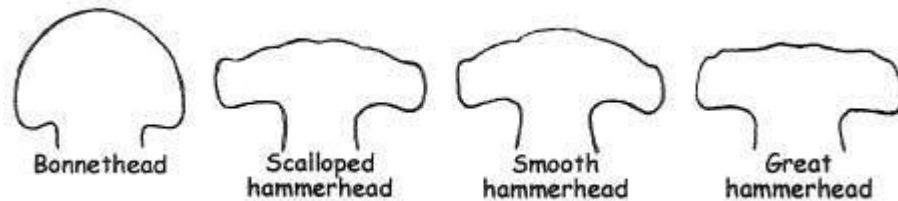
Sphyrna tiburo



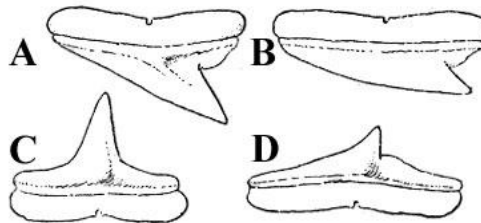
Image Courtesy of SC Aquarium

Relatives: The bonnethead shark is the smallest of the 9 species of hammerhead sharks. It is a cartilaginous fish, making it kin to sharks, skates and rays.

Description: The bonnethead shark looks a little different than the rest of its' family. It has a spade or shovel shaped head with eyes on either side. It is gray-brown on the back of the body and white on the underside. The pectoral fins are fairly short and broad. Below shows you the four different species of Hammerhead Sharks that we have off of our coast in South Carolina.



The upper teeth have broad bases, narrow cusps and are deeply notched on the outer edge. The outermost lower teeth are flattened and used as crushers.

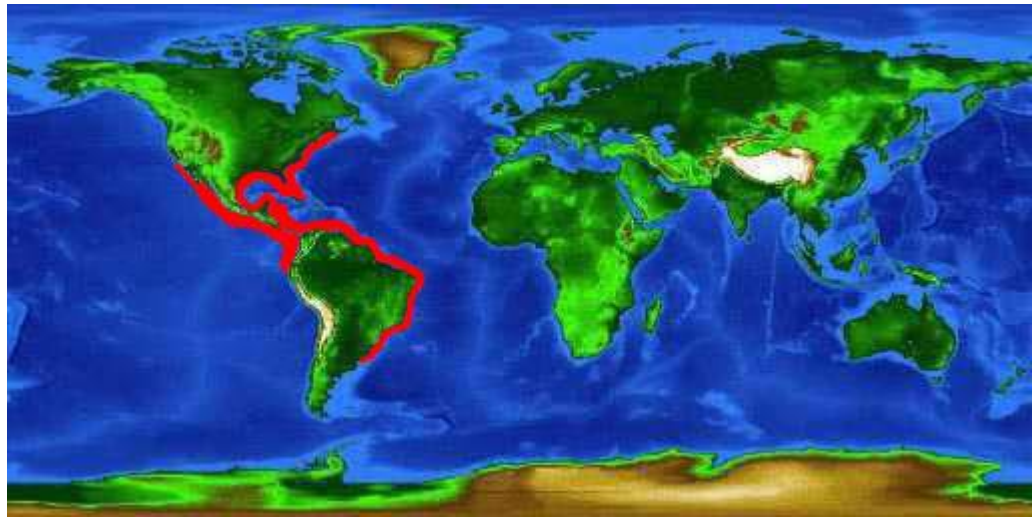


A: Fourth upper C: Second lower
B: Tenth upper D: Seventh lower

Size: Adults can reach a maximum of 5ft (1.5m) long with the average being about 3.3ft (1m). Females can get larger than males. The heaviest bonnethead ever recorded was only 24 pounds.

Habitat: The bonnethead shark can be found in bays, sounds, and estuaries. They prefer warm coastal waters and sandy or muddy bottoms.

Range: The bonnethead shark is only found in the Western Hemisphere. They are found in warm waters of the Atlantic Ocean from New England (very rare) all the way to the Gulf of Mexico and Brazil. In the Pacific Ocean, they are found from Southern California to Ecuador. They also inhabit the Caribbean Sea.



Bonnetheads travel long distances, following changes in the water temperature. As a result, the bonnethead is found closer to the equator during the winter, moving back to higher latitudes during the summer.

During the summertime, the bonnethead commonly resides in the inshore waters off the Carolinas and Georgia (U.S.) while during the spring, summer, and autumn it is found off the coast of Florida and in the Gulf of Mexico.

Predators: Humans and larger sharks

Diet/Prey: They mainly prey on crustaceans (mostly blue crabs and shrimp), and will feed on mollusks, squid and small fish. Their mouths are positioned on the underside of their body to crush up prey from the bottom of the ocean.

Aquarium Diet: A cut mix of smelt, squid, krill, shrimp and salmon, and mackerel

Reproduction Reproductive development is placental viviparous or live birth. The female

: will give birth to 4-14 pups that are about 14in. (35cm) long in the summer and fall. They have the shortest gestation period of all sharks, only 4-6 months.

Females will reach maturity at about 2.5ft (75cm).

Fun Facts:

- Usually a timid, shy, harmless shark; difficult to approach underwater
- There has only been one unprovoked attack by a bonnethead ever recorded.
- Normally hang out in schools of about 15 individuals, but have been spotted in schools of hundreds or thousands when migrating.
- Segregates by sex; females moving into shallow water for birth
- Sharks do not have a swim bladder like most bony fish to maintain their buoyancy, instead they must continuously swim otherwise they will sink. To compensate for the lack of a swim bladder, the shark has a relatively large liver (making up as much as 25% of the shark's weight) containing high density molecules of oil that aids in buoyancy control.
- Another interesting aspect of this species is a cerebrospinal fluid used in chemical communication among individual bonnetheads, informing others when there is a bonnethead in the area. Further studies are needed to learn more about this communication system.

Conservation Connection:

Currently, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) categorizes this species as a species of "Least Concern" due to its high population numbers.

Bonnetheads are a common inshore shark. often taken by small fisheries with shrimp trawls, nets, longlines, and hook-and-line. In other places, the flesh is marketed for human consumption as well as processed into fishmeal. Although it is marketed, this species is of little economic importance. Shark can also be a sustainable choice on a menu if it is local or domestic. Bonnetheads can provide great sport for recreational fisherman on light tackle or fly fishing gear. They are often found on shallow water flats and caught on live and cut bait including crabs.

Status in SC:

During the months of June and October, the bonnethead is one of the most abundant sharks off the South Carolina coast.

Aliases:

Shovelhead shark, shovel-nose shark, bonnet nose shark

References:

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