



GREAT HAMMERHEAD SHARK

FACT SHEET

Scientific Name: *Sphyrna mokarran*

Order – Carcharhiniformes

Family – Sphyrnidae

Genus – Sphyrna

Species – mokarran

Distinctive Features/Morphology: The great hammerhead is a very large shark with a characteristic hammer-shaped head, from which it gets its name. The laterally expanded head is slightly curved across the front, extending almost 90-degrees in either direction from the rest of the body.

Size: The great hammerhead is the largest of the 9 species of hammerheads. Adults average more than 500 pounds and are officially reported to reach 18 feet in length. Most individuals are 15 feet or less. The largest ever reported was 20 feet in length. The world record great hammerhead was caught off Sarasota, FL, weighing 991 pounds. Expected life span is 20 to 30 years.

Color: Pale gray or beige fading to a yellowish off-white on its underside.

Geographical Distribution: Tropical waters above 75-degrees. It is known in the Western Atlantic Ocean from North Carolina to Uruguay, including the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean regions; in the Eastern Atlantic Ocean from Morocco to Senegal, including the Mediterranean Sea; throughout the Indo-Pacific and the Eastern Pacific Ocean from southern Baja to Peru.

Habitat: Great hammerhead sharks are more often found inshore than offshore, but can be found in either environment. They can live in depths of nearly 1,000 feet as well as in shallow coastal areas such as continental shelves and lagoons. Great hammerheads migrate seasonally moving toward cooler waters in the summer months.

Diet: Active predators, great hammerheads are basically fish eaters. Individuals will also feed on crabs and squid and demonstrate a preference for stingrays, possessing an apparent immunity to the poison spines at the end of a ray's tail. Hammerheads will also feed on sharks, including their own species. Cannibalistic behavior has been observed in great hammerheads.

Predators: Juvenile and sub-adult great hammerheads fall victim to larger sharks, however adult great hammerheads have no known predators.

Disposition: In some parts of the world, the great hammerhead is a known attacker of man. Although generally not considered aggressive toward man, because of its reputation elsewhere and its very large size, it should be regarded with great respect.



AMERICAN ZOO AND AQUARIUM ASSOCIATION