

# Whale shark

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**In news :** Recently a study published in Nature states that the global population of sharks and rays have crashed by over 70% in the past five decades.

## About whale Shark

- It is a slow-moving, filter-feeding carpet shark and the largest known extant fish species
- **Scientific name:** Rhincodon typus
- **Size:** Around 18-20m
- **Appearance:**
  - Whale sharks have a unique pattern of spots which allow individual sharks to be identified.
  - Their white spotted colouration makes these gentle giants easy to distinguish and popular with snorkelers
  - Light vertical and horizontal stripes form a checkerboard pattern on a dark background, and light spots mark the fins and dark areas of the body.
  - The head is broad and flat, with a somewhat truncated snout and an immense mouth.
  - Several prominent ridges of hard tissue, often called keels, extend horizontally along each side of the body to the tail
- It holds many records for size in the animal kingdom, most notably being
- Whale sharks are the largest shark, and indeed largest of any fishes alive today.
- **Food:**
  - They feed on plankton and travel large distances to find enough food to sustain their huge size, and to reproduce.

- The whale shark is a 'filter feeder shark' which means it does not eat meat like other sharks.
- They filter sea water and feed on tiny planktons.
- The whale shark forages for food at or near the surface of the ocean. Its large mouth is well adapted to filter feeding and contains more than 300 rows of small, pointed teeth in each jaw.
- **Habitat:** They are found in all the tropical oceans (warm waters) of the world. Adults are often found feeding at the surface, but may dive to 1000m
- **Reproduction:** Although their reproductive biology is not well known, scientists presume that whale sharks give birth to fully formed live young. The smallest free-living whale sharks that have been measured were 55
- **Conservation:**
  - **IUCN:** Endangered since 2016
  - **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 :** A protected species
  - **CITES listing:** Appendix II