

Atlantic Blacktip Shark

Carcharhinus limbatus



Also Known as

Black fin shark, Blacktip whaler, Common blacktip shark, Gray shark, Requiem shark, Small blacktip shark, Spot-fin ground shark



Appearance

Atlantic blacktip sharks are gray to gray-brown, with white on the belly and a conspicuous wedge-shaped band or Z-shaped line on the sides.

Their pectoral, dorsal, and tail fins have black tips, but the anal fin is white.

Their bodies have a torpedo shape, which allows them to swim through the water with little effort.

Atlantic blacktip sharks are often confused with spinner sharks due to their similar size, shape, coloration, and behavior. Both species are known for leaping and spinning out of the water while feeding on schools of fish. A distinguishing feature is that the anal fin on the blacktip shark is white whereas the anal fin of the spinner shark has a black tip.

Biology

Atlantic blacktip sharks grow quickly and can reach up to 6 feet in length. The oldest observed blacktip shark was 15.5 years old.

They often form large groups, segregated into separate schools of males and females when they are not mating. They mate between March and June.

Males mature at 4 to 5 years of age, while females mature later, at 6 to 7 years of age.

Females have an 11- to 12-month gestation period and give birth to an average of three pups per litter in the Atlantic and four to five pups per litter in the Gulf of Mexico.

Pups are born in shallow nursery grounds away from the adult population. After giving birth, the females leave the nursery area while juveniles remain.

Blacktip sharks eat bony fishes, smaller sharks, squids, stingrays, shrimp, and crabs. They often follow fishing boats and are sometimes seen consuming discarded fish.

Where They Live

Atlantic blacktip sharks can be found year-round in the Gulf of Mexico and are common from Virginia through Florida.

They have been known to migrate as far north as Cape Cod, Massachusetts.