

Do You Know Your Neighbors?

SHARKS THAT CALL THE GULF OF MEXICO HOME

Angel shark
Basking shark
Bigeye sand tiger shark
Bigeye six-gill shark
Bigeye thresher shark
Bignose shark
Blue shark
Caribbean reef shark
Chain dogfish shark
Common thresher shark
Cuban dogfish shark
Dusky shark
Florida smoothhound shark
Goblin shark



Bonnethead Shark



Blacktip Shark



Finetooth Shark

Great white shark
Longfin mako shark
Nightshark
Nurse shark
Oceanic whitetip shark
Sand tiger shark
Sandbar shark
Seven-gill shark
Shortfin mako shark
Silky shark



Great Hammerhead Shark



Tiger Shark



Atlantic Sharpnose Shark

Six-gill shark
Smalleye hammerhead shark
Smalltail shark
Smooth hammerhead shark
Smooth dogfish shark
Spinner shark



Bull Shark



Whale Shark



Thresher Shark



Scalloped Hammerhead Shark



Lemon Shark



Blacknose Shark

TEXAS STATE AQUARIUM

SAVING SHARKS

WHERE SCIENCE AND SHARKS MEET

SAVING SHARKS CLASSIFICATION KEY FOR GULF OF MEXICO SHARKS

Read this before you begin!

Identification of unknown organisms can be tricky unless you have a good classification key. Classification keys are constructed from contrasting pairs of statements called couplets. Each couplet has an “a” and “b” choice that compare the organism’s physical features. Every choice will provide directions for the next step, eventually ending with the classification or name you are seeking. Classification keys are like a puzzle – challenging, but fun – and a great way to learn new vocabulary.

To identify the sharks:

Study the drawings of the sharks and choose one to identify. Begin with Couplet 1 and compare the features of your shark with the descriptions provided. Select the description that best matches the shark’s features, and follow the instructions at the end of the statement. Continue as above until you arrive at a common name. If your selection of characteristics has been accurate, your shark has been identified. To verify your classification, refer to an online reference for sharks of the Gulf of Mexico and/or Atlantic Ocean. At the Texas State Aquarium, we use Encyclopedia of Life, at www.eol.org.

Words you will need to know:

Anal fin - a single fin on the ventral side of the fish nearer the tail than the pectorals

barbel - fleshy sensory projection on either side of the mouth

caudal fin - tail fin

couplet - a pair of contrasting statements about an organism’s physical features

dorsal fin - a fin or fins on the back of a fish

pectoral fins - pair of fins on either side of a fish

pelvic fins - pair of fins on the ventral side of a fish, below or just behind the pectorals

ventral - toward the belly of an animal; the underside of the shark

After you are done:

Texas scientists are tracking sharks and Pacific sea turtles and you can too at OCEARCH.org! Look for sharks Harvey and Daymond (tagged near Corpus Christi); Buddy, Finley, and Einstein (Port Aransas); or Hans, Jacob, and Lazarus (Padre Island National Seashore). To see the tracks of Gulf sharks tagged in 2014, look for Madeline, Sam Houston, Wyatt, or Hunter. These tracking studies are supported by the Texas State Aquarium’s Wildlife Care, Conservation, and Research Fund.

For teachers!

From our Aquarium Plus field trips to Aquavision Distance Learning and Aquarium Outreach, Texas State Aquarium offers affordable ways for every classroom to get up close and personal with sharks. See texasstateaquarium.org/educate to book your experience!

CLASSIFICATION KEY – Selected sharks of the Gulf of Mexico

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| 1. A. Anal fin absent..... | Cuban dogfish |
| B. Anal fin present..... | Go to 2 |
| 2. A. Top half of caudal fin nearly the same length as bottom half..... | Go to 3 |
| B. Top half of caudal fin much larger than bottom half..... | Go to 4 |
| 3. A. Mouth at front of snout rather than underside of head..... | Whale shark |
| B. Mouth on underside of head..... | Shortfin mako shark |
| 4. A. Head expanded on sides with eyes at the ends of the expansions... | Great hammerhead |
| B. Head not expanded..... | Go to 5 |
| 5. A. Caudal fin very long, almost as long as entire body..... | Thresher shark |
| B. Caudal fin regular length..... | Go to 6 |
| 6. A. Barbels present..... | Nurse shark |
| B. Barbels absent..... | Go to 7 |
| 7. A. Teeth obvious, even with mouth closed..... | Sand tiger shark |

