



FACT SHEET

BULL SHARK

Carcharhinus leucas

Family: Carcharhinidae

Other common names: Zambezi shark, Zambesihaai

Description

A large shark with a short, broad and blunt snout. They have small eyes and large triangular, serrated upper teeth. They are grey-brown in colour and lack an inter-dorsal ridge.

Distribution

Worldwide in warm-temperate, subtropical and tropical seas. Also found in estuarine, riverine and lake systems. In southern African waters found from the Breede River northwards into Mozambique.

Habitat

Coastal waters including inshore and offshore reefs, the surf-zone, estuaries, rivers and coastal lakes where they are tolerant of freshwater. Newborn pups appear to be confined to nursery areas in coastal lagoons, turbid estuaries and rivers.

Feeding

Indiscriminate, especially in larger individuals. There is a preference for other sharks and rays with increasing size. Sea turtles, marine and terrestrial mammals, birds, fish, crustaceans and cephalopods are also occasionally taken. Juveniles show a strong preference for bony fish and smaller sharks.

Movement

Recent satellite and acoustic telemetry research has indicated that individuals can move over 3000 km (e.g. from the Western Cape to central Mozambique). However, bull sharks may be seasonally resident in some areas (e.g. on certain reef systems) and show repeated migration patterns.

Reproduction

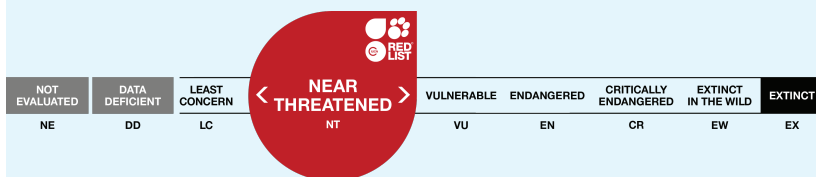
They reach maturity at a size of 190 cm precaudal length and an age of 20-21 years. Most evidence indicates a mating and pupping season between November and February with a gestation period of 11 months but a prolonged breeding season is possible. Mating and early pregnancy takes place in Mozambique waters. Large estuarine systems along the Mozambique and KwaZulu-Natal coasts may act as important nursery areas. They are viviparous and give birth to between 1-13 pups.

Age and growth

They can reach a maximum size of 340 cm total length and a weight of over 317 kg. They are slow growing and have been aged to over 50 years.

Current status

The current status of this species in South African waters is not known. However, there has been a declining trend in KwaZulu-Natal Sharks Board net catches suggesting that populations may have been locally depleted in some areas. In addition, previously important nursery areas in South Africa have been degraded. They have been evaluated as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List (2005). South African Sustainable Seafood Initiative (SASSI) List: Not assessed.



Capture

Important in the competitive shore angling fishery, primarily in KwaZulu-Natal but extending into the Eastern Cape, but most specimens are released. Also caught year-round in the bather protection nets of the KwaZulu-Natal Sharks Board but mainly in summer. Some recreational ski-boat and charterboat anglers target this species offshore.

Current recreational fishing regulations

Daily bag limit: 1 per person per day
Minimum size limit: None
Closed Season: None
Other regulations: None
Marine protected areas (MPAs): It is likely that large no-take MPAs in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape provide some protection for this species.

Reference

Information from the ORI Fish App. www.saambr.org.za



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