

# Whaleshark

Whale sharks are the largest fish in the ocean, and they are a magnificent sight to see. They are gentle giants, despite their size, and they have become increasingly popular with divers and tourists around the world. The whale shark is also known as the “gentle giant of the sea” because of its friendly and harmless nature towards humans. In this article, we will explore the appearance, habitat, food, species found in Indian waters, importance in the marine ecosystem, and IUCN status of the whale shark.

Characteristics	Description
Name	Whale Shark
Scientific Name	Rhincodon typus
Colour	Dark gray-blue with white spots and stripes
Found in which coastal waters of India	Along the coast of Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands
IUCN status	Endangered (EN)

## Appearance



Whale sharks are easily recognizable by their distinctive appearance. They have dark blue-grey skin with white spots and stripes, which are unique to each individual and allow scientists to identify them. They can grow up to 12.6 meters (41.3 feet) in length and weigh up to 21.5 tonnes (47,400 pounds). Despite their enormous size, they have relatively small mouths, which can only open up to 1.5 meters (4.9 feet) wide.

## Habitat

Whale sharks are found in warm and temperate waters around the world, including the Indian Ocean. They prefer shallow coastal areas with lots of plankton and krill, which are their primary food sources. They are often found near coral reefs, but they can also be found in open ocean waters. During certain times of the year, they migrate to specific areas to feed or breed.



## **Food**

Whale sharks are filter feeders, which means they feed by straining small organisms like plankton, krill, and small fish through their gills. They swim slowly with their mouths open, filtering water through their gills and trapping food in their large throats. They can consume up to 30 kg (66 pounds) of food per day.

## **Species found in Indian waters**

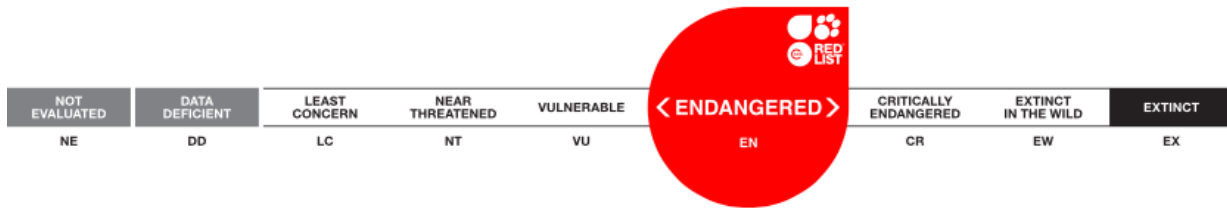


The whale shark is known to inhabit the waters of India, mainly along the western coast. The species found in Indian waters is known as *Rhincodon typus*. They are often seen off the coast of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Karnataka, and they migrate to the Lakshadweep Islands during the months of October to March. They are protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act of India, which prohibits their hunting, killing, or capture.

## **Importance in marine ecosystem**

Whale sharks play an essential role in the marine ecosystem. As filter feeders, they help to keep the ocean's food chain in balance by consuming large amounts of plankton and krill. They also serve as indicators of the health of the ocean's ecosystems. Because they are at the top of the food chain, any negative impacts on their population can have cascading effects on the entire marine ecosystem.

# IUCN status of Indian species



The whale shark is listed as “Endangered” on the IUCN Red List. Their populations are declining due to overfishing, accidental capture in fishing nets, and boat strikes. India has taken steps to protect the species, including implementing a ban on hunting, killing, or capture. However, more efforts are needed to protect the whale shark’s habitat and to reduce accidental capture.

## Conclusion

The whale shark is a magnificent and important species that plays a critical role in maintaining the health of the marine ecosystem. Their unique appearance and gentle nature have made them popular with divers and tourists worldwide. However, their populations are declining, and more efforts are needed to protect them. We must work together to ensure the survival of this gentle giant of the sea for future generations to enjoy.



