

Nurse Shark Fact Sheet



Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Chondrichthyes
Order: Orectolobiformes
Family: Ginglymostomatidae
Genus: *Ginglymostoma*
Species: *cirratum*

History: This species of shark is called the “nurse shark”, but has also been referred to as the “carpet shark, and the “cat shark.” The female shark pictured above was acquired from a local aquarium wholesaler in October 2006 as a juvenile (approximately 36 inches in length).

Size: Averaging 7.5-9 ft. in total length and weighing 167-233 lbs. adult females reach a larger size than adult males. Size at birth is in the (11-12 in) range, with growth rates for juveniles of about (5 in) and (5 lbs.) per year. Once maturity is reached, growth rates are usually much lower.

Life Span: Approximately 25 years in zoological facilities.

Diet: At the Nature Center, we offer sardines, squid, scallops and even live shrimp to the sharks. Their relatively small mouth and large bellows-like pharynx allow this species to suck in prey items with tremendous force and speed like a vacuum. Nurse sharks in the wild feed on lobsters, shrimp, crab, sea urchins, mollusks and fish hidden in rocks and sand.

Habitat: Common in Atlantic and in the eastern Pacific, in coastal tropical and subtropical waters. This species is locally very common in shallow waters throughout the West Indies, south Florida and the Florida Keys.

The nurse shark rests on sandy bottoms or in caves or crevices at shallow depths of 3 ft. along reef and mangrove areas to over 200 ft. in the ocean. They occasionally occur in groups of up to 40 individuals, as they lie very close together sometimes even piling upon one another.

Fun Fact: One of the distinguishing features of nurse sharks is their barbels-fleshy appendages below their nostrils to help them feel and locate prey along the bottom of the ocean.

Predators of the nurse shark include other sharks and humans!