

Tope Shark

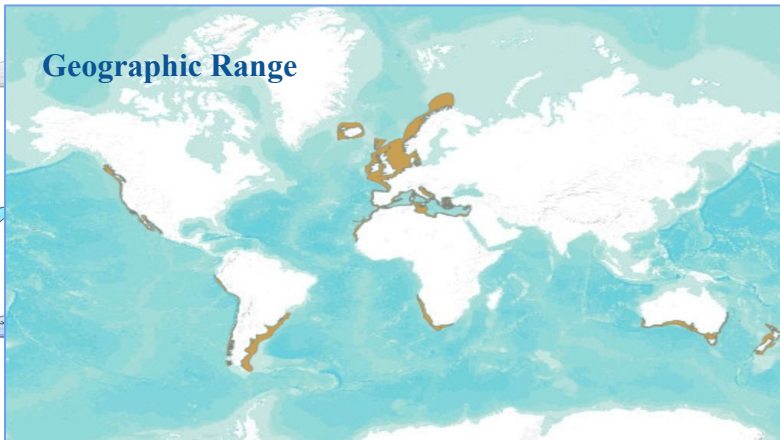
Endangered Species Listing Petition

Fact Sheet

What are Tope Sharks (*Galeorhinus galeus*)?

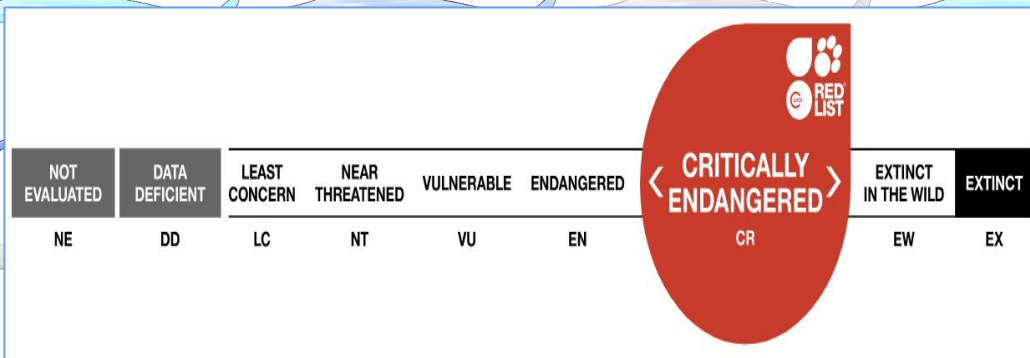
The tope shark, sometimes known as the school shark or soupfin shark among other names, is a small, harmless shark found in shallow, coastal waters around the world from the west coast of North America to southern Australia. These sharks can live up to sixty years and tend to segregate by age and sex. Females can birth up to fifty pups and have an unusual triennial reproductive cycle (reproduce every three years). The tope shark matures slowly with males reaching maturity around eight years of age and females even later.

Geographic Range



Threats and Current Protection?

Historically, the tope shark was heavily fished in the early 1900s for their vitamin A rich-livers. While the production of synthetic vitamins has helped reduce the demand, the population of these sharks has sadly never recovered and the species is currently listed as critically endangered on the IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species. Despite continually decreasing population numbers (an estimated eighty-eight percent population decline in the last eighty years) and increased recognition of the tendency to overfish, the shark today, is still fished particularly for their fins and meat, and is a highly popular catch in established fish markets worldwide. Given tope sharks' slow maturation rate and tendency to swim in schools segregated by sex and age, they are highly sensitive to overexploitation. Recovery opportunities are currently limited since multiple sharks can be caught at once in their schools and depending on the location, may be pregnant thereby never allowing tope shark numbers to grow. While recreational fishing limits vary throughout the world's fisheries and fin products specifically have been banned in many places, sport fishing is still authorized and commercial trade of whole tope shark is largely permitted by direct fishing or as a bycatch product. Unclear and conflicting tope shark species statuses throughout the world, despite an overfishing consensus, has led to a less authoritative and uniform stance on tope shark fishing restrictions internationally.



Why Should You Care?

Because of their global presence, tope sharks are integral to many coastal ecosystems and can be important markers of ecosystem health. In some waters in particular, the tope shark is considered a top predator and in addition to the threat of extinction for the shark itself, declining numbers can lead to disastrous effects on the ecosystem at large by destabilizing the food chain balance. Moreover, the tope shark is harmless to humans with zero unprovoked attacks on record. They can often be spotted from popular beaches and provide the public with a great opportunity to see marine wildlife up close, which is beneficial to the tourism industry and for rebuilding the often misperception of sharks as dangerous threats.

Well, What's the Plan?

Protection of the tope shark falls within Defend Them All's mission of helping to legally safeguard animals and their homes. With DTA's efforts to bring about community awareness in addition to searching for new regulatory policies, DTA is committed to helping preserve these sharks. By integrating legal measures, partnering with the scientific community, as well as gathering community support through social media campaigns and interactive education this can be achieved. Listing the tope shark under the Endangered Species Act, amongst other listings, can help reduce the sharks' ability to be fished and traded and may encourage global adoption of similar protections for the tope shark. Regulation to promote sustainable approached such as the use of pole catching and other individual fishing methods instead of gillnets and bycatch-favored techniques and restricting the number of days boats can trawl per week, will also be beneficial. Further research is needed to learn more about these sharks' behavior and their effects as a species as a whole. Therefore, partnering with scientists from coastal communities and with similarly-minded organizations can provide DTA with supplemental resources in this mission. Lastly, social media campaigns would be utilized to increase awareness and support for the regulatory measures or for more sustainable fishing practices.

What can you do in the meantime while DTA is hard at work?

1. Consider incorporating plant-based meals into your diet instead of turning to seafood and meat.
2. If seafood must be consumed, check Seafood Watch for the more sustainably caught options.
3. Help spread the word about the tope sharks to your community and use your voice to favor the listing proposal. #TopeAreDope #SchoolSharksAreCoolSharks

