



SHARK STEWARDS

Blacktip Reef Shark (*Carcharhinus melanopterus*)



A small-medium sized shark with recognizable black fin tips with white highlights. Blacktip reef sharks are abundant on coral reefs in the Indian and Pacific Oceans from the surface down to a depth of 75 meters, making them a popular species in reef and dive tourism. The species has relatively low biological productivity.

- Since 2020, the IUCN has listed the Blacktip reef shark as Vulnerable with a decreasing population trend.¹
- The Blacktip Reef Shark has seen a global decline of up to 49% in the past 44 years due to exploitation and declines in habitat quality.¹
- In the Indian ocean severe localized depletions in reef sharks, that include the Blacktips, have been recorded.¹ The number of reef sharks in the Chagos Archipelago has declined from a mean of 4.2 sharks per dive in 1970 to 0.4 in 2006, which represents a population reduction of 94% over three generations.²
- Surveys from the Western Central Pacific between 2004 and 2010 showed that reef shark populations are higher in remote locations with limited or no human presence.³ It was estimated that reef sharks (including the Blacktip) in this region had declined by up to 10%.³
- Using data from the Global Finprint project⁴ nations containing 88.6% of the coral reefs Blacktip reef shark's range were sampled. The project compares the depletion of coral reef ecosystems to reef species depletion, in this case Blacktip reef sharks have declined by approximately 51.2%.⁴



STATUS:
VULNERABLE

↓ Decreasing

- The Blacktip Reef Shark is caught throughout its range in industrial and small-scale longline, gillnet, trawl and handline fisheries that occur in continental shelf waters and those around oceanic islands and reefs, especially those around coral reefs.^{5,6} Many are also taken as incidental catches in reef fisheries.⁵
- In many parts of east Africa, and southeast Asia, there are increasing amounts of fishing efforts targeted at sharks in continental shelf waters.^{7,8} It has been estimated that the number of vessels participating in the small-scale inshore fishery has increased nearly 30% since 2009.⁹
- Only in locations where fisheries are strictly regulated (e.g. Australia)¹⁰, where human population densities are low³, or where dive-based tourism supports protection¹¹ there are lower levels of threats to reef sharks.
- Blacktip reef sharks are still caught for consumption^{7,12} and were reported to make up 0.04% of fin trimmings sold in Hong Kong.¹³ It may also be retained for its liver oil and skin.



Image IUCN

- A 2011 study indicated that of 376 established shark ecotourism operations located in 29 different countries, the Blacktip reef shark accounted for 18% of all advertised shark tourism encounters.¹⁴ Reef sharks (including Caribbean reef and Blacktip reef) were present in over 33% of all global ecotourism locations.¹⁴
- In countries such as Palau reef shark tourism generates US\$18 million per year and accounts for approximately 8% of the gross domestic product of the country.^{15, 16} Revenue from shark divers in the Maldives was estimated to be US\$14.4 million.^{14, 17}
- In over 20 years, the Bahamas have offered over US\$1 million shark–diver interactions, contributing an estimated gross of US\$800 million to the local economy.¹⁴
- In order for this species to recover, maintaining the value and sustainability of the tourism industry to improve shark conservation efforts is essential. Additionally, increasing species specific fisheries management and marine protected areas over coral habitats would be beneficial to this species.
- Blacktip reef sharks under the Requiem (Carcharhinidae) shark family are recommended for listing under appendix II at the Coalition of the parties (COP19) at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

References

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