



FAST FACTS

Name: Greenland shark

Species name: *Somniosus microcephalus*

Average length: 6.5 metres

Average weight: 900 kg

PHYSIOLOGY

The Greenland shark is one of the largest sharks in the world and is the largest arctic fish. Despite its large size it has many small features, such as a small head, short snout and small eyes. Its dorsal and pectoral fins are also quite small, as are the shark's five gill slits in relation to its body.

The Greenland shark is brown, gray and black in colour and may have dark lines or white spots along its flanks or on the dorsal side. Its upper teeth are long while its lower teeth are flatter and more closely set—although all of the teeth are razor sharp. It also has an acute sense of smell. An interesting companion to its physiology is the bioluminescent, or glowing, copepods attached to the shark's eyes. A copepod is a whitish-yellow creature, approximately three millimetres to seven centimetres in size. The resulting glow-in-the-dark appearance of the shark's eyes is thought to attract curious prey.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

The Greenland shark is a slow swimming shark and is sometimes called the sleeper shark for its lethargic behaviour. It is commonly considered to be more sluggish than other large sharks, but using its short, broad tail, the Greenland shark can achieve short bursts of acceleration.

Known for eating just about anything, the Greenland shark feeds on fish, other sharks, skates, eels, seals, small crustaceans, jellyfish, sea urchins, crabs and squids. It is also known to eat carrion, the flesh of dead whales and reindeer and caribou that stand close to open holes in the ice.

The Greenland shark is a deep-water species that inhabits cold waters, between 1 and 12 degrees Celsius, near the shelves and slopes at least 1,200 metres underwater. They tend to inhabit shallower waters in the colder months.

RANGE

The Greenland shark lives in the cold waters of the Arctic and the North Atlantic. It has been found as far southwest as the Gulf of St. Lawrence and as far south as Cape Cod.