Florida's shark population is diverse and includes species that range in size from only a few feet to more than 40 feet in total length. Experts caution sea-goers to beware of sharks 6 feet or longer due to the damage they can cause in a single bite. Among the species that grow to this size and have been known to attack humans are bull sharks, tiger sharks and great white sharks. However, these are not the predominant shark species that a person is likely to come across in Florida waters. The following species are among the most common.

### Bull Shark
Bull sharks (*Carcharhinus leucas*) prefer to live in Florida's shallow, inshore waters, but they have a great tolerance for a wide range of salinity, meaning they can easily move up rivers into fresh water. They have even been found far up the Mississippi and Amazon rivers. Bull sharks are stout-bodied with a short, broad rounded snout. They can grow to 11 feet, and are pale to dark gray on top, with a white underside. The pups may display black tips on their fins that fade with age. Bull sharks' thick, wide body may appear sluggish cruising in the shallows, but they are quick, agile and opportunistic hunters, and are a popular target among sport fishermen. Because of the bull shark's aggressive personality, it is considered among the top three most dangerous sharks in the world to humans.

![Bull Shark](image)

**Diane Peebles**

### Blacktip Shark
Blacktip shark (*Carcharhinus limbatus*) bears a distinctive black tip on most fins except its anal fin. Blacktips are principally pelagic but often come inshore in large schools, particularly in association with Spanish mackerel. Frequently it is the most common shark (especially young) in clear-water cuts and along beaches in Florida and the Bahamas. The blacktip is a valuable commercial species with marketable flesh, hide, fins, and liver. It is one of the most commonly collected sharks in the commercial fishery, but is also fished for sport on light tackle and often leaps out of the water when hooked. The blacktip is thought to be the culprit in most “hit and run” attacks on humans. It can grow to 8 feet in length.

![Blacktip Shark](image)


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**Spinner Shark**

Spinner shark (*Carcharhinus brevipinna*) is a large and slender, fast-swimming shark that often leaps “spinning” out of the water. It feeds primarily on fishes like sardines and herrings but also on small sharks and rays. It is gray-bronze in color with a white belly, and is often mistaken for the blacktip shark, but distinguished by the dark tip on its anal fin. Commonly found in coastal waters, it grows to an average of about 6 feet in length.

**Sandbar Shark**

Sandbar shark (*Carcharhinus plumbeus*), also called the brown shark, is found nearshore typically at depths ranging from 60 to 200 feet. It is both a predator and scavenger, feeding chiefly near the bottom on fish and shellfish. It migrates long distances and matures at about 6 feet in length but can reach a maximum length of nearly 8 feet. It is brown or gray in color with a white underside. It migrates south in schools to Florida waters during the winter. Some remain throughout the year. This shark accounts for about 60 percent of the state’s commercial landings.

**Blacknose Shark**

Blacknose shark (*Carcharhinus acronotus*) is a small shark commonly found in Florida bays and lagoons over sandy, shell and coral bottoms. It has a very noticeable dusky smudge or “moustache” on the tip of its snout, which is more prominent when young. The blacknose feeds on small fishes, but is often preyed upon by larger sharks. Its color ranges from a pale olive-gray above to whitish below. Its maximum length is about 5 feet. While commercially valuable, they pose little threat to humans.

**Nurse Shark**

Nurse shark (*Ginglymostoma cirratum*) is rusty or yellow-brown in color, and is one of the few sharks that can be found lying on the bottom. It sometimes hides under ledges and wrecks. Nurse sharks are recognized by fleshy appendages called barbels that hang below the nose and help detect prey. They can grow to 14 feet in length, but most often range from 6-9 feet and weigh an average of 300 pounds. Valued in the Caribbean for its high quality hide, the nurse shark is considered a nuisance species in most North American longline fisheries with fins and meat of little value. Though relatively slow and sluggish, it can be dangerous to humans if aggravated.
Scalloped Hammerhead Shark
Scalloped hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna lewini*) is predatory, feeding mainly on fish, squid, and stingrays. It has a distinctive flattened head extending to hammer-like lobes on each side. It can grow quite large -- it is common to 6 feet and can reach 20 feet. The Florida record is 991 pounds. It is often confused with the much less abundant but larger great hammerhead and can be distinguished from the great hammerhead by the curved backside of its head, which differs from the straight edge found on the great hammerhead.

Bonnethead Shark
Bonnethead shark (*Sphyrna tiburo*) is the smallest of the hammerhead family, commonly 3 to 4 feet in length. It is abundant in nearshore Florida waters, and popular in aquariums. Gray or grayish-brown in color, the bonnethead has a broadly widened head in the shape of a shovel. It feeds chiefly on crabs and other crustaceans. It is a good sportfish, though of limited commercial value, used mostly as crab bait.

Helpful Links
NOAA Fisheries-National Marine Fisheries Service
International Shark Attack File
Florida Museum of Natural History
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission