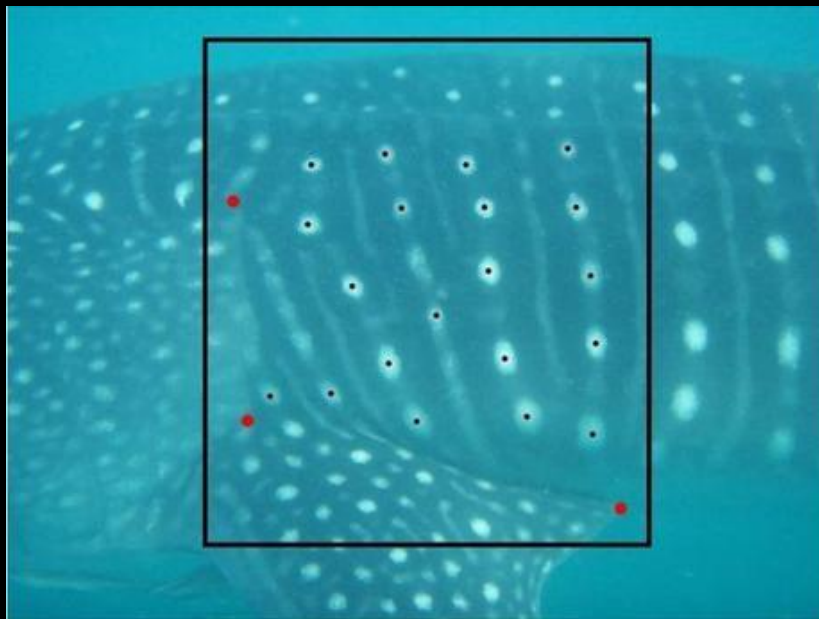


# Whale Shark



## Facts



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Like human fingerprints, whale sharks have a unique pattern of spots which allow individual sharks to be identified. By taking photos and cataloguing them, WWF has identified 458 different whale sharks in the Philippines.

The whale shark is the biggest fish and shark in the world. These gentle marine giants roam the oceans around the globe, generally alone. However, large numbers of whale sharks often gather in areas with abundant plankton food—making them prime tourist attractions. Its enormous mouth (nearly five feet wide) engulfs large quantities of tiny plankton that it filters through its gills as it swims.

## Swimming with whale sharks near the Mesoamerican Reef

Just off the tip of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula near Isla Holbox, the world's biggest fish, whale sharks, gather in the summer months to feed on plankton. Our mission? To swim with them.



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## Why They Matter



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## Plankton eaters

The whale shark is the biggest fish and shark in the world. These gentle marine giants roam the oceans around the globe, generally alone. However, large numbers of whale sharks often gather in areas with abundant plankton food—making them prime tourist attractions. The distribution of whale sharks indicates the presence of plankton and the overall health of our oceans.

# Threats



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## **Whale shark meat on a drying rack. Pamilacan Island, Philippines.**

Whale sharks are highly valued on international markets. Demand for their meat, fins and oil remains a threat to the species, particularly by unregulated fisheries. They are victims of bycatch, the accidental capture of non-target species in fishing gear. And whale shark tourism presents a threat to the species as it can interrupt their feeding and sharks can be injured by boat propellers.

## **What WWF Is Doing**

A WWF-supported ecotourism project that focuses on swimming with whale sharks (while following strict rules to avoid disturbing the animals) has brought a flourishing tourism industry to Donsol, an island town in the Philippines.

### **Helping and Improving Whale Shark Tourism**

Donsol Bay, Philippines, attracts huge numbers of whale sharks because of the high levels of plankton found in its water. WWF has helped with whale shark tourism there since 1998. We continue to work to ensure whale sharks stay safe during the frequent interactions they have with people and tour boats.

As whale shark tourism is very popular in Mexico, we educate tourists on codes of conduct for swimming with sharks. We also raise awareness with tour boat operators about the movements of sharks, which has resulted in fewer boat collisions with the animals.



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