

White-spotted Bamboo Shark

Chiloscyllium plagiosum

Relatives: White-spotted bamboo sharks belong to the family Hemiscyllidae. Other bamboo shark species include the brown-banded bamboo shark and the epaulette shark.



Appearance: White-spotted bamboo sharks have dark brown stripes on a lighter brown/gray background, and white spots. They have two spineless dorsal fins that are about the same size. Their body and tail are stout, and they have a rounded snout with two fleshy appendages (barbels) extending from their upper lip. These barbels are sensory organs that help the shark locate food on the ocean floor. They also have openings, called spiracles, just behind their eyes. These help them to breathe more easily while resting on the bottom. Instead of sucking sandy water in through their gills, they can pull clear water in through the spiracles and then force it out through the gills.

Size:

- **Males:** 1½ -2½ feet long
- **Females:** 2-3 feet long

Range: These sharks are found in the Indo-West Pacific regions of Madagascar, India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, China, Japan and the Philippines.



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Habitat: White-spotted bamboo sharks prefer inshore, shallow, tropical reefs. They have such slender bodies that they are able to glide between coral branches and hide in the crevices of the reef.

Feeding: These sharks are nocturnal predators, feeding on bottom-dwelling fish and crustaceans. They have thin, fleshy, whisker-like appendages (barbels) on the upper jaw in front of the nostrils that help them locate food along the bottom. Like other sharks, they also have electroreceptors along their snout to help them locate prey that is buried in the sand and mud. They have a small mouth, but powerful jaws.

The small, sharp teeth are arranged in rows, and are replaced when broken or lost by teeth that are waiting just behind to rotate into position. These teeth can be used for eating soft or hard prey. When a bamboo shark bites into a soft prey item, like a fish, the sharp edges bite in and grasp the prey. The shark will then shake its head vigorously to rip the prey in half. On the other hand, if the shark bites a hard-bodied prey item, such as a crab, the teeth will fold toward the back of the shark's mouth. As the front row folds down onto the rows behind it, the entire set of teeth is transformed into a crushing plate to smash the crab's shell. Imagine your own front teeth staying upright if you bit into a piece of fruit, or tilting backward if you bit into the shell of a nut.

Breeding: White-spotted bamboo sharks are oviparous, meaning that they lay eggs. The eggs hatch after about three months. The young sharks are about five inches long when they hatch. Mother bamboo sharks do not provide any parental care once they have laid their eggs.

Behavior: These sharks rest in crevices in the reef during the day and come out at night to feed. They have muscular paired fins that they can use like legs to crawl along the ocean floor or reef.

Predators: Larger fish.

Lifespan: Unknown.

Conservation: White-spotted bamboo sharks are currently listed globally as **Near Threatened** by the IUCN, meaning that they do "not qualify for Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable now, but are close to qualifying for, or are likely to qualify for, a threatened category in the near future without ongoing conservation measures".

White-spotted bamboo sharks are regularly caught in inshore fisheries in Madagascar, India, Thailand and China and are utilized for human consumption.