

White Sharks: *Dispelling the Myths*



Natural History

- The largest white shark ever recorded was 21 feet.
- White sharks feed only on fish until they are 10 to 12 feet long, at which point the shape of their teeth broadens and they switch to feeding on marine mammals. In California, the preferred prey of the white shark is the Northern Elephant Seal.
- White sharks are fish, yet they bear live young; the number of young produced per breeding attempt is between 4 and 11 “pups”.
- The slow reproductive rate (4-11 pups every other year) is why white shark populations (as well as other sharks) are highly susceptible to over-fishing.
- Despite popular belief, there is no evidence that white sharks breed in waters of Northern California, including Tomales Bay.
- Researchers believe that when a white shark attacks a surfer, it is a case of mistaken identity. This is why white sharks usually leave people alone after the initial ‘taste’.

Marine Migrants

- Using mini-computer tags, PRBO and other researchers tracked a male white shark’s 40 day, 3,800 km journey - from the Farallon Island National Wildlife Refuge all the way to Hawaii, in two consecutive years.
- At the Farallones, female white sharks have a biennial occurrence cycle, indicating that they breed only once every other year. In contrast, males return every year.

Protection

- In 1992, through the passing of a law protecting white sharks, it became illegal to kill white sharks in California waters.



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Learn more about the natural history and conservation of white sharks at www.prbo.org. PRBO’s White Shark Research and Outreach Program is supported by the McCaw Foundation.