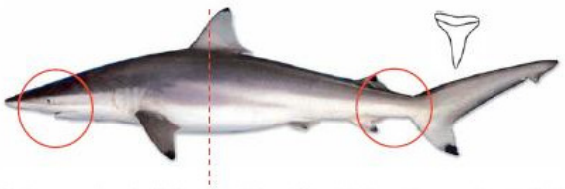
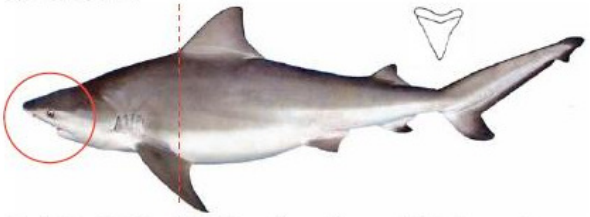


Blacktip shark (*Carcharhinus limbatus*): snout pointed; snout length approximately equal to mouth width; first dorsal fin over pectoral fins; anal fin does not have black tip; maximum size approximately 6 feet; occurs inshore and offshore.



Spinner shark (*Carcharhinus brevipinna*): snout pointed; snout length approximately equal to mouth width; first dorsal fin originates behind pectoral fins; anal fin has distinct black tip+; maximum size approximately 7 feet; occurs inshore and offshore.



Bull shark (*Carcharhinus leucas*): snout blunt; snout length much shorter than mouth width; first dorsal fin above pectoral fins; maximum size approximately 9 feet; occurs primarily inshore but not uncommon offshore.



Finetooth shark (*Carcharhinus isodon*): snout pointed; teeth are needle-like and similar in upper and lower jaw; edges of teeth smooth; gill slits noticeably long; all fins lack distinct markings; body blue to grey in color; maximum size approximately 5 feet; occurs primarily inshore.



Blacknose shark (*Carcharhinus acronotus*): snout pointed; tip of snout usually has distinct black marking; dorsal fin behind pectoral fins; fins lack distinct marking with possible exception of second dorsal fin; body grey to yellow in color; maximum size approximately 4 feet; occurs inshore and offshore.



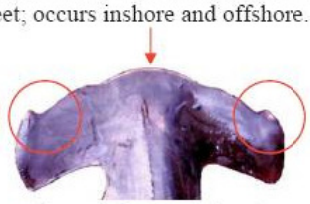
Atlantic sharpnose shark (*Rhizoprionodon terraenovae*): snout pointed; first dorsal fin behind pectoral fins; second dorsal fin originates over midpoint of anal fin; body usually with several to many conspicuous white spots except for very small individuals; maximum size approximately 3 feet; occurs inshore and offshore.



Scalloped hammerhead (*Sphyrna lewini*): front of head with a central indentation; sides of head project past front of head; maximum size approximately 11 feet; occurs inshore and offshore.



Great hammerhead (*Sphyrna mokarran*): front of head with a central indentation+; sides of head do not project past front of head; maximum size approximately 15 feet; occurs inshore and offshore.



Smooth hammerhead (*Sphyrna zygaena*): front of head without a central indentation; sides of head project past front of head; maximum size approximately 12 feet; occurs inshore and offshore.

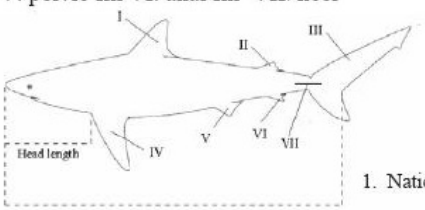


Bonnethead (*Sphyrna tiburo*): head shovel-shaped; sides of body covered with numerous black spots; maximum size approximately 4 feet; primarily occurs inshore.

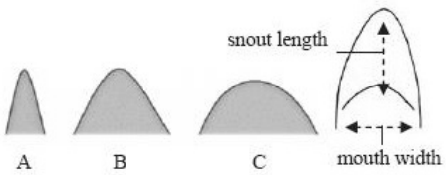
Lengths reported in fork length, except nurse shark. All species listed, except oceanic whitetip and tiger sharks, do not have an interdorsal ridge. Teeth illustrated are the largest in upper jaw. * Similar species, indicated as "easily confused with", will not share characteristics listed in italics. + characteristic does not apply to some individuals less than 54" fork length. All sharks of a given species are not identical in appearance (i.e. first dorsal fin position), however, characteristics provided are correct for the majority of individuals.

Technical terms:

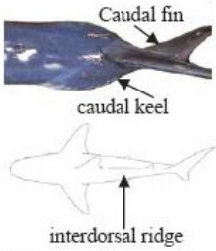
I. first dorsal fin II. second dorsal fin
III. caudal fin IV. pectoral fin
V. pelvic fin VI. anal fin VII. keel



Fork length



Snout shapes:
A. very pointed B. pointed C. blunt



Prepared by William B. Driggers III [1] and Eric R. Hoffmayer [2]
1. National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Fisheries Science Center, Mississippi Laboratories
2. University of Southern Mississippi, Gulf Coast Research Laboratory
Photographs and drawings provided by NMFS, E. Hoffmayer, S. Iglésias and R. McAuley