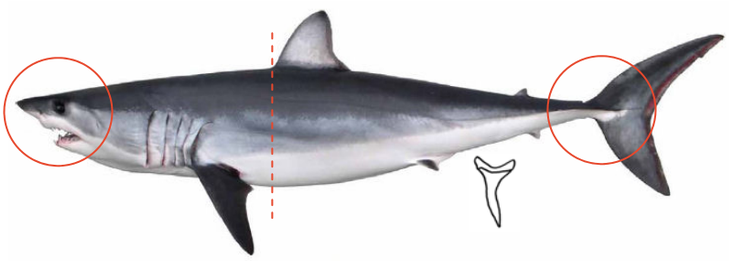
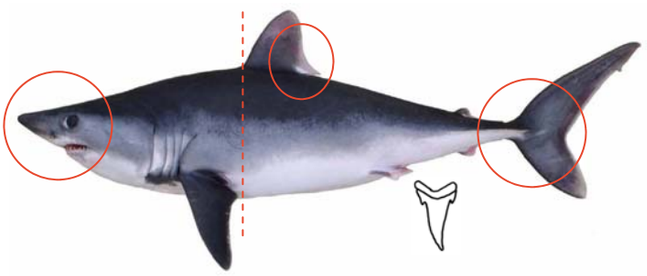
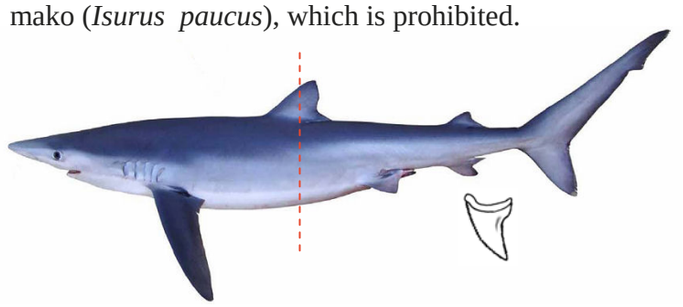
Sharks that can be legally retained by recreational anglers in the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico



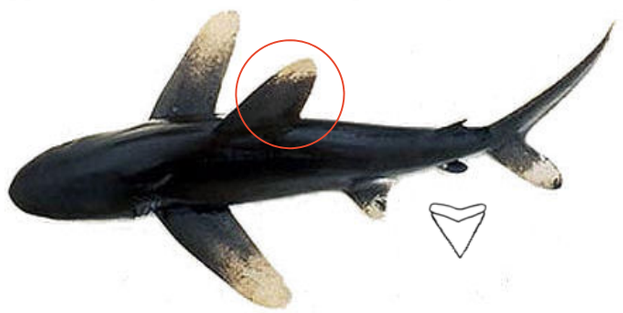
Shortfin mako (*Isurus oxyrinchus*): snout very pointed; teeth without cusplets; edges of teeth smooth; *head length greater than pectoral fin length**; *underside of head white**; first dorsal fin behind pectoral fins; caudal fin with a single keel; maximum size approximately 12 feet; occurs primarily offshore; easily confused with the longfin mako (*Isurus paucus*), which is prohibited.



Porbeagle (*Lamna nasus*): snout very pointed; teeth with cusplets; edges of teeth smooth; head length greater than pectoral fin length; first dorsal fin above pectoral fins; distinct white marking rear edge of first dorsal fin; caudal fin with two keels; maximum size approximately 11 feet; occurs primarily offshore.



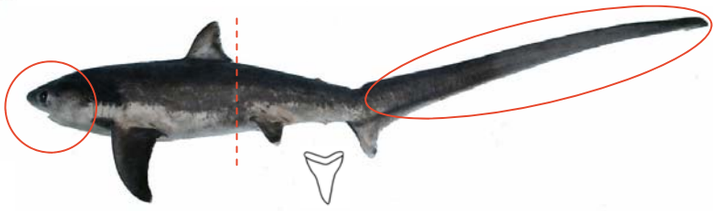
Blue shark (*Prionace glauca*): snout pointed; snout length longer than mouth width; midpoint of first dorsal fin closer to pelvic fins than pectoral fins; top of body with brilliant blue coloration; maximum size approximately 11 feet; occurs primarily offshore.



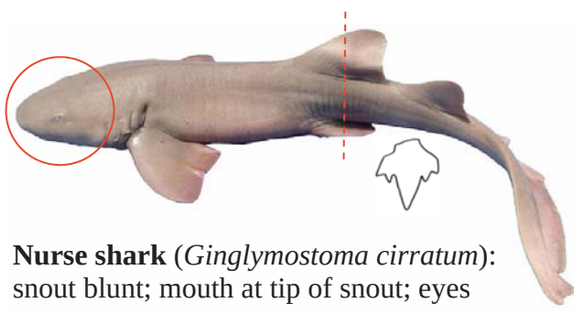
Oceanic whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*): snout pointed to blunt; first dorsal fin large and rounded at tip; tips of most fins with distinct, mottled white coloration+; maximum size approximately 10 feet; occurs primarily offshore.



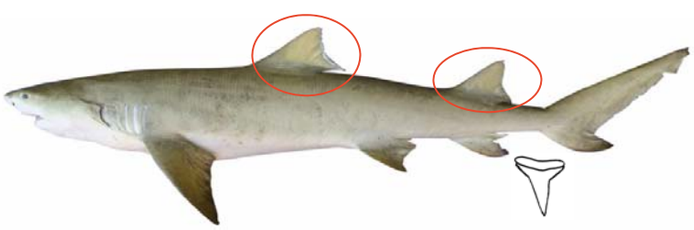
Tiger shark (*Galeocerdo cuvier*): snout blunt; snout length much shorter than mouth width; caudal fin with a single keel; body covered with dark bars, spots or patches; maximum size approximately 17 feet; occurs inshore and offshore.



Thresher shark (*Alopias vulpinus*): snout pointed to blunt; *eye sockets are circular and do not extend onto top of head**; *top of head does not have deep grooves extending from eyes to pectoral fins**; *first dorsal fin does not extend to pelvic fins**; caudal fin greatly elongated; maximum size approximately 9 feet; occurs primarily offshore; easily confused with the bigeye thresher (*Alopias superciliosus*), which is prohibited.

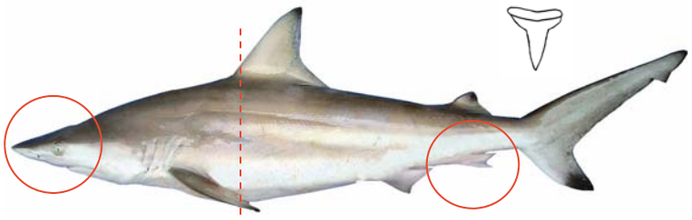


Nurse shark (*Ginglymostoma cirratum*): snout blunt; mouth at tip of snout; eyes very small; first dorsal fin above pelvic fins; lower lobe of caudal fin poorly developed; body is orange to brown in color; maximum size approximately 10 feet (length from tip of snout to tip of tail); occurs primarily in inshore.

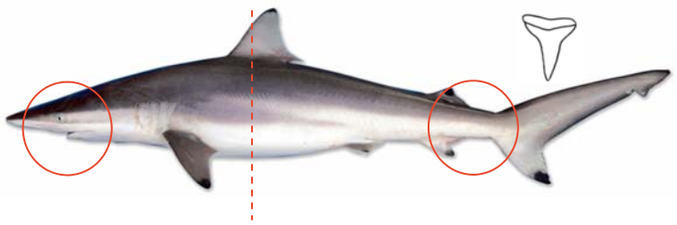


Lemon shark (*Negaprion brevirostris*): snout blunt; snout length shorter than mouth width; teeth without cusplets; both dorsal fins approximately equal in size; body yellowish-brown in color; maximum size approximately 10 feet; occurs primarily in inshore.

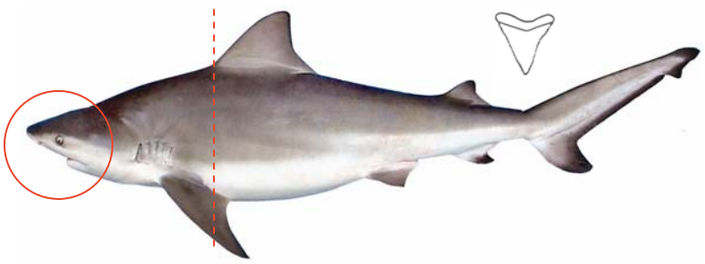
Recreational vessels must possess a valid HMS Angling or HMS Charter/Headboat permit to fish for sharks. Vessels are limited to one shark greater than 54” fork length per day, PLUS one bonnethead and one Atlantic sharpnose shark per person per day (no size minimum). Sharks not listed on this placard may not be landed and must be released.



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.



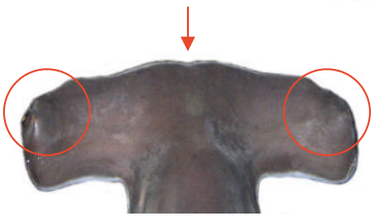
Blacknose shark (*Carcharhinus acronotus*): snout pointed; tip of snout usually has distinct black marking; dorsal fin behind pectoral fins; fins lack distinct marking with possible exception of second dorsal fin; body grey to yellow in color; maximum size approximately 4 feet; occurs inshore and offshore.



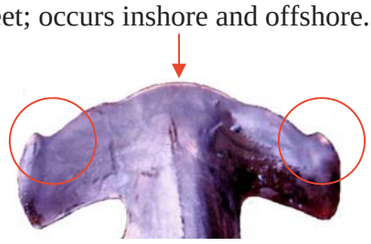
Atlantic sharpnose shark (*Rhizoprionodon terraenovae*): snout pointed; first dorsal fin behind pectoral fins; second dorsal fin originates over midpoint of anal fin; body usually with several to many conspicuous white spots except for very small individuals; maximum size approximately 3 feet; occurs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

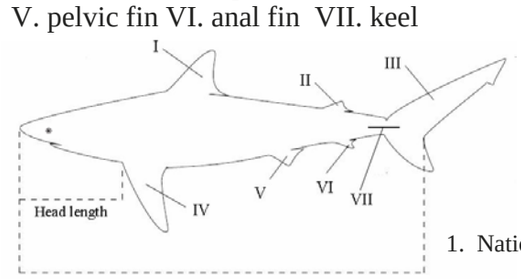


Bonnethead (*Sphyrna tiburo*): head shovel-shaped; sides of body covered with numerous black spots; maximum size approximately 4 feet; primarily occurs inshore.

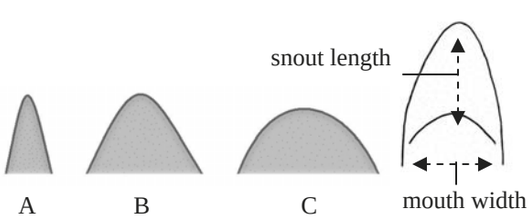
Lengths reported in fork length, except nurse shark. All species listed, except oceanic whitetip and tiger sharks, do not have an interdorsal ridge. Teeth illustrated are the largest in upper jaw. * Similar species, indicated as "easily confused with", will not share characteristics listed in italics. + 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:

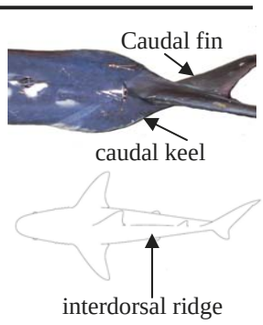
I. first dorsal fin II. second dorsal fin
III. caudal fin IV. pectoral fin
V. pelvic fin VI. anal fin VII. keel



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