

Sharks and rays: lesson 3 of 3

Sharks and people

Why sharks are in trouble,
and what we can do

Manta ray seen by MCP volunteers in Negros Oriental. Photo: MCP
volunteers



Remember this?

9

**people killed by sharks,
worldwide, in 2025**

80 million

sharks killed by fishing in 2019

Today we find out why, and what people are doing about it.



Why do people catch sharks?

Meat

eaten in many countries

Fins

for shark fin soup

Liver oil

used in some products

Gill plates

from manta rays, sold as medicine

By accident

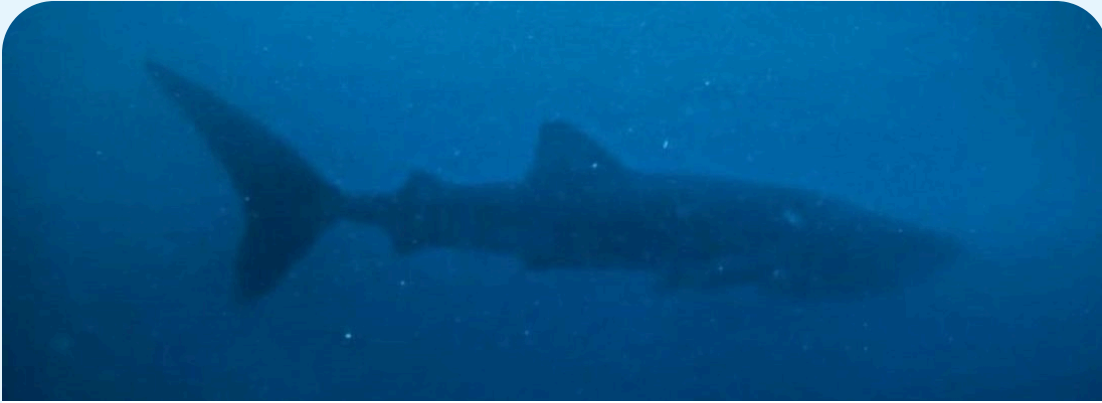
caught in nets and on hooks meant for other fish



Fish for sale at a Philippine market. Fishing feeds millions of families, so protecting sharks has to work for fishers too.



Slow to grow up



about 30 years

before a whale shark is old enough to breed



1 pup

every two to three years, for a female manta ray

When too many are caught, it can take decades for their numbers to recover.

How we know: Convention on Migratory Species. Pew Charitable Trusts, 2013.



Worth more alive?

Shark watching, worldwide

US\$314 million

spent each year by about 590,000 shark watchers, supporting 10,000 jobs, and expected to more than double

Shark fishing, worldwide

US\$630 million

value of the catch each year, and falling

Near Malapascua in Cebu, diving with thresher sharks fuels about 80% of the local economy. So why do you think many fishers still catch sharks?

How we know: Cisneros-Montemayor and others, Oryx, 2013. Thresher Shark Research and Conservation Project, via Greenpeace, 2015.



Research time

1. Get into six groups. Each group gets one true story.
2. Read it together. Take turns reading aloud.
3. Answer the questions on your planner sheet.
4. Get ready to tell the class about it in two minutes.
Everyone in the group says something.

20

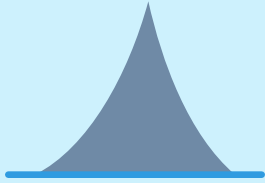
minutes to research

2

minutes to report



Six true stories



A The fin trade



B Caught by accident



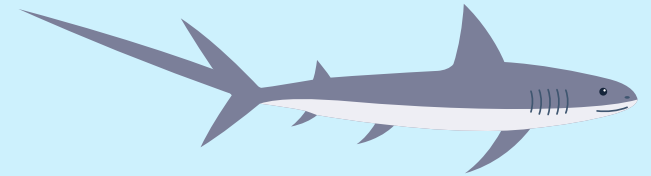
C Manta rays and gill plates



D Oslob: feeding whale sharks



E Donsol: watching without feeding



F Monad Shoal: a sanctuary for thresher sharks



Report back

1 What is happening in your story?

2 Who wins, and who loses?

3 What would you do?

While other groups report, write down one thing that surprised you.



The big question

Should people feed whale sharks so that tourists can see them?

Some people say yes

- It gives fishing families a steady income.
- That money helps pay for wardens who protect sharks and reefs.
- Thousands of people learn to love whale sharks.

Some people say no

- Fed sharks change how they behave, and some stop travelling.
- Crowds get too close to the sharks.
- Fed sharks have more injuries.

Think about Donsol too. Then vote: thumbs up, thumbs down, or somewhere in between.

How we know: Legaspi and others, 2020. Lowe and Tejada, 2019.



Some good news

1998

The Philippines bans catching, selling and exporting whale sharks and manta rays. Donsol becomes a whale shark sanctuary.

2013

Manta rays and hammerheads get international trade protection under CITES.

2015

Monad Shoal and Gato Island become a shark and ray sanctuary.

2022

CITES adds all 54 requiem sharks and more hammerheads, bringing most of the fin trade under control.

2026

MCP volunteers see more sharks and rays on local reefs than they did ten years ago.

How we know: BFAR, 1998. CITES, 2013 and 2022. Greenpeace Philippines, 2015. MCP, 2026.



What can we do?

Don't buy or eat shark fin, shark meat or manta products.

Choose shark and ray tours that don't feed or touch the animals, and keep your distance.

Share the real numbers: sharks are in far more danger from us than we are from them.

Support marine protected areas, and report illegal fishing to Bantay Dagat or your local authorities.

Keep plastic and old fishing line out of the sea.



My shark promise

On the bottom of your planner sheet, write one thing you will do for sharks and rays. Make it something you can really do this month.

I promise that I will...



Photos and sources

Photos: manta ray, whale shark, ghost net and fish market by MCP, Negros Oriental. Feeding whale shark by Matthew T Rader, CC BY-SA 4.0 (creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0), via Wikimedia Commons. All illustrations drawn for this lesson by Marine Conservation Philippines.

Sources:

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- Lowe, J. and Tejada, J.F. (2019). Tourism Management.
- Vera Files. Lessons from Donsol.
- Greenpeace Philippines (2015). Monad Shoal sanctuary.
- Cisneros-Montemayor, A. and others (2013). Oryx.
- Convention on Migratory Species. Whale shark.
- International Shark Attack File (2026).

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