

Great White Shark: Danger or Endangered?

By Michèle Dufresne



- 1 Dive deep enough into the ocean, and you might encounter the creatures known as nature's killing machine—great white sharks. They are the top predator of the ocean, eating everything from birds and fish to turtles and whales. They even eat other sharks!
- 2 Of the 465 species of sharks in the world, the great white shark is one of the largest, growing up to 15 feet long. They can smell blood in the water from far away and rush toward it at 25 miles per hour. They hide from their prey using countershading, a feature that allows their skin color to blend in with light and shadows. From above, their slate-gray upper bodies blend with the sea floor. From below, their white bellies blend with the bright sky. When they reach their prey, they use their serrated teeth to rip off chunks of flesh and swallow them whole.
- 3 To most people, the thought of swimming with a great white shark would probably be terrifying. In the *Jaws* movies, they are ferocious man-eaters. But researchers are now observing them in their habitat, and what they're learning could completely change the way we think of them.
- 4 Of the 100 shark attacks reported every year, a third are by great white sharks. But most of these attacks are not fatal. When a great white shark bites a human, it will usually release them. It might seem strange for "nature's killing machine" to leave its victims alive. But some scientists think of these encounters as research. Great white sharks are highly inquisitive.
- 5 Sharks are not used to seeing humans. Since we don't live in the sea, they are curious to learn about us. They might use their noses to poke us. If a shark wants more information, it might take a bite to learn more. Sample bites help sharks understand more about the creatures in front of them.

6 When they are on the hunt, sharks help to maintain the health of the ocean. The easiest prey to catch are weak, sick, and old fish that can't move fast. With them gone, the healthier fish have more food to eat. And by removing sick fish from the water, sharks prevent the spread of dangerous diseases.

7 Humans are the biggest threat facing great white sharks. From 1960 to 1980, more than 70 percent of the sharks in the Atlantic Ocean were accidentally caught and killed in fishing nets. There are poachers who make a living by hunting sharks. More than 100 million sharks are killed each year by people fishing. They illegally sell the meat, jaws, and fins. Pollution also kills sharks. Because they are slow-growing creatures, they accumulate the pollutants and toxins in the ocean. A third threat to sharks is climate change. As the ocean temperature rises, it is changing what food there is for sharks to eat and where they can live. It is estimated that only 3,500 great whites are left in the wild, making them more endangered than tigers.

8 People around the world are now working to protect sharks. Many countries have banned the sale of shark fins—even in places where shark fin soup is a delicacy. Some countries have banned commercial fishing altogether because of the danger it poses to sharks. These efforts have helped the shark population grow again.



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Test Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1) What is the main idea of the passage?

- a) The great white shark is being affected by both humans and the environment.
- b) The great white shark is one of the largest sharks, growing up to 15 feet long.
- c) The great white shark's meat, jaws, and fins are illegally sold to markets and restaurants.
- d) The great white shark is necessary to maintain the health of the ocean.

2) This is a two-part question. First answer Part A, then answer Part B.

Part A: Which of the following provides evidence that the great white shark can camouflage itself in the ocean?

- a) Great white sharks are not used to seeing humans.
- b) Great white sharks' bodies blend in with their surroundings.
- c) Great white sharks use their serrated teeth to rip off chunks of flesh.
- d) Great white sharks help maintain the health of the ocean.

Part B: Why did the author include details about a shark's ability to camouflage itself?

- a) To support the idea that the great white shark's adaptations make it one of the world's greatest predators.
- b) To explain how the great white shark helps to maintain the health of the ocean.
- c) To support the statement that poachers can easily spot the sharks swimming in the ocean.
- d) To explain what is being done to help increase the population of great white sharks.

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Test Questions (continued)

3) What does the word *inquisitive* mean as it is used in the paragraph below?

Of the 100 shark attacks reported every year, a third are by great white sharks. But most of these attacks are not fatal. When a great white shark bites a human, it will usually release them. It might seem strange for “nature’s killing machine” to leave its victims alive. But some scientists think of these encounters as research. Great white sharks are highly **inquisitive**.

- a) endangered
- b) curious
- c) indecisive
- d) vanishing

4) Select two of the following sentences that state causes for the decrease in the population of the great white shark.

- a) “By removing sick fish from the water, sharks prevent the spread of dangerous disease.”
- b) “As the ocean temperature rises, it is changing what food there is for sharks to eat.”
- c) “Of the 100 shark attacks reported every year, a third are by great white sharks.”
- d) “There are poachers who make a living by hunting sharks.”

5) Which of the following statements names a problem affecting the great white shark and the problem’s solution?

- a) One hundred shark attacks are reported every year and a third are by great white sharks.
- b) Typically, sharks will bite a human out of curiosity, then release them.
- c) Humans are the biggest threat to sharks because the sharks get caught in fishing nets.
- d) Sharks are endangered, causing some countries to ban commercial fishing.