

## Text on whale sharks, with possible key words

### The whale shark: *Rhincodon typus*

The **whale shark** is the **largest fish** in the world. This gentle giant grows up to 12 metres in length. It is believed that some whale sharks even reach 18 metres. They may look fierce, but whale sharks are no real danger to humans. They eat small crustaceans, squid and fish by filtering them through the screens in their gills.

The **shark** is easily recognisable. It is dark grey, bronze or greenish-grey in colour and has a broad, flat head and a pattern of stripes and spots on its back. Its underbody is white or cream and it has ridges on its sides. Whale sharks swim with their mouths open so that they can filter their food as they move. They have about 300 teeth, but these are tiny and hooked, not long and pointed for tearing flesh.

Occasionally whale sharks can be seen hanging vertically in the water to feed. They float with their **tail fins** straight beneath them, bobbing up and down to force water into their mouths and through their gills.

These huge fish are often found in tropical and warm temperate seas, near **coral reefs**. If the water is warm, they may sometimes swim quite near the surface. The fish often travel alone but, in a few places in the world, they may gather in large groups, particularly where coral is spawning.

Researchers are trying to monitor the sharks' migratory movements. These ever-hungry creatures migrate to follow their food and can be found off the Mexican coast, in the Western Pacific, off Queensland in Australia and in the Seychelles. The largest groups appear along the coast of East Africa from October to April.

If you are ever lucky enough to see a whale shark, you might find that it has been tagged. Look out for the tag on its back near the dorsal fin. You probably won't get near enough to read the serial number but, if you do, notify your nearest **Shark Research** Institute.

### Possible key words not included in the text:

biggest fish

diving

shark migration