



## Bull Sharks

### What are they?

Bull sharks are large sharks. They are related to cownose rays and skates. All of these animals have a skeleton that is made out of cartilage (a tough, flexible tissue) instead of bone.

### What do they look like?

Like all sharks, bull sharks are a kind of fish. Their wide, short snout makes them look kind of like a bull. That's how they got their name.

Bull sharks have two dorsal fins (the fins on its top as it swims through the water.) The front ones are much longer and more pointed than the ones near their tails. Their top sides are silver-gray.

The average adult male is about seven feet long, weighing about 200 pounds. Females are generally larger, averaging about 11 feet long and weighing up to 500 pounds. However, the bull sharks that visit the Chesapeake Bay are usually less than six feet long.

When people think of sharks, they often think of their teeth. These sharp, triangular-shaped teeth are located in rows inside their mouths. Bull sharks use the first two rows of teeth to capture their prey. If they lose a tooth or it wears down, a new tooth from the other rows moves up to take its place.

### Where can you find them?

Generally, bull sharks are found in the lower Bay. However, unlike other sharks, they can live in fresh water as well as salt water. Because of this, they are sometimes found in the upper parts of the Bay as well. For example, in 1987, *The Baltimore Sun* reported that a man had caught a 420-pound bull shark when he was fishing around the Chesapeake Bay Bridge.

However, bull sharks are not common in the Bay. Smaller sharks such as the smooth dogfish are found much more often.

### How do they behave?

Many experts consider bull sharks to be very dangerous because they are so aggressive, or hostile to other creatures, including people.

Bull sharks have very tiny eyes. Instead of relying on them, they use their other senses to hunt for food. They like to slowly cruise along the shallow parts of the Bay or ocean, searching for food. However, they can move very quickly if they need to. They generally hunt for food alone.

Female bull sharks give birth to live babies called pups. There can be up to 13 pups born at one time.

### What do they eat?

In the words of one researcher, bull sharks will eat anything that doesn't eat them first. Some of the animals on their menu include other sharks, rays, fish, turtles, dolphins, and birds. Some studies have shown that bulls sharks most like to dine on baby sandbar sharks.

### What eats them?

When they are young, bull sharks can be eaten by other sharks, including other bull sharks. However, as an adult, bull sharks have no natural predators.

### Creature Feature

Like all other sharks, bull sharks can only swim in a forward direction. Other kinds of fish can swim both backwards and forwards.

