



Photo Courtesy of Chad Macfie

Great Hammerhead Shark

Sphyrna mokarran

Range: The Great Hammerhead is a coastal-pelagic, semi-oceanic shark meaning that it is most commonly found close inshore and well offshore, over continental shelves, island terraces, and in passes and lagoons. They exhibit a cosmopolitan distribution, spanning from North Carolina to Brazil and the Gulf of Mexico in the Western Atlantic. They can be found at depths ranging from 3-1000ft (1-300 m).

Similar Species: The Scalloped Hammerhead (*Sphyrna lewini*) is similar in appearance to the Great Hammerhead Shark. The head is the easiest distinguishing characteristic between these two species. While the head of both exhibit a curved front edge with a median indentation, the Scalloped Hammerhead Shark's head is more strongly curved. Additionally, the Scalloped Hammerhead has internarial grooves which are absent in the Great Hammerhead.



Great Hammerhead exhibits a straighter frontal head form



Scalloped Hammerhead has a more strongly curved head

Identification: The Great Hammerhead exhibits the characteristic hammer-shaped head from which it gets its common name. The front margin of the head is nearly straight with a shallow notch in the center, distinguishing it from the smooth hammerhead and scalloped hammerhead. The dorsal side of the great hammerhead is dark brown to light gray or even olive in color fading to white on the underside. The largest of the hammerheads, the Great Hammerhead has been reported up to 20 feet (6.1 m) in length.

Note: It is thought that the hammer-shaped head evolved to maximize the area of sensory organs, such as the Ampullae of Lorenzini which sense electro-magnetic fields as well as temperature gradients. The ability to sense electro-magnetic fields given off by muscle movement aids the Hammerhead in detecting prey even when the prey is buried in the ocean bottom. The hammer shape also allows Hammerheads to scan significantly larger areas of the ocean bottom when hunting than is capable by other shark species.