



# Fishin' for Facts: Goblin Shark™

**Scientific name:** Genus Species: "Mitsukurina owstoni"

## Size

Slow, silent, and slender, but not necessarily small - the goblin shark can be as long as a small car - about 12.6 feet (3.85 meters). Only a few goblin sharks have ever been found. Except for one small one 3.5 feet, the rest ranged from from 10 to 12.6 feet. The largest found weight 463 pounds (210kg)



"ugliest" shark in the sea. It just waits in the dark for its next meal.

Like many a Halloween mystery,

## Where are they found?

Though only less than 50 (according to one source) have been found, it seems they may be found in many of the world's oceans. They've been found off the coast of Japan, Australia, California, the Atlantic near Portugal, South Africa...and other places. Goblin sharks thrive in the dark deep sea at depths between 885 feet (270m) and 3149 feet (960m), one as deep as 4265 feet (1,300m).

## Highlights

Motionless, the shark waits for its meal to swim close. Snap! Sharp teeth pierce the skin of the fish, not allowing it to get away. Gulp. It devours the fish whole. This shark has never seen the sun. It doesn't know about people. It doesn't care that people call it the

little is known about the rare goblin shark. And, at first glance, a goblin might be insulted by the comparison. You see, the goblin shark is not a handsome animal.

Unlike the sleek fast-moving sharks most people recognize, the goblin shark is a flabby slow-moving animal. And, sad to say, even with its pink highlights, the white to light gray shark wouldn't win a shark beauty contest.

The goblin shark has a short, flat, pointy snout that makes it look like a peculiar swordfish. Its mouth looks like the mouth of a grotesque puppet. Rows and rows of fang-like teeth line the top and bottom jaws of this shark and would be the envy of Dracula.

Scientists used to think the goblin shark spent most of its time hunting



or resting in the sand. However, new information shows that a goblin shark doesn't eat animals hidden in the sand. It eats active, swimming animals. The question is, how does a slow shark catch a speedy squid or fast fish? The answer is in its squishy body and the odd design of its head. Researchers think the goblin shark floats -- motionless -- in the water, waiting for dinner to swim to it. That's where the "flab" comes in. The soft body of the shark allows it to hang in the water without sinking or rising to the surface. That means it doesn't have to make any noise moving its fins or tail to stay in one spot. This is very different than other sharks that sink if they stop swimming.

The goblin shark is found deep in the ocean where there is no light. By being able to stay perfectly still, the goblin shark can hide in the middle of the water without being seen or heard.

The silent shark waits for something to swim close enough. Like other sharks, a shark can detect movement

and electrical currents in the water. To zero into its prey, a shark relies on Ampullae of Lorenzini. Ampullae of Lorenzini pick up electrical currents in the water. Anything alive gives off an electrical current. The goblin shark's extra large snout may give it an advantage to detect creatures swimming past. Then, with lightning speed, the squid or fish is snatched from the water. The goblin shark's specially designed jaws project outward to snap up and maybe even "suck in" its food. Like other sharks, its teeth are only used to grasp the prey, which is then swallowed whole.

So, what's the point of the pointy snout? The snout might provide a larger area for the sensory pits that pick up electrical current. What? Every living thing gives off an electrical current. Sharks have the ability to detect these currents. In the dark, the ability to sense or feel when something is nearby is an excellent way for the goblin shark to find its food.

What a great design. It almost makes a great white look silly, with all its swimming and sneaking around. The goblin shark simply sits perfectly still waiting for a squid to swim by and in one fast movement its lunchtime.

The goblin shark is a beautifully adapted, incredible looking, perfect predator!

Photo courtesy of Tokyo Zoological Park Society

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