

If you see a basking shark in California waters...

Please report the following information to
(858) 334-2884 or
basking.shark@noaa.gov

- Date and time
- Latitude and longitude or general region
- Estimated length
- Number of sharks
- Observations such as behavior and water temperature

Photos and videos are greatly appreciated and can be emailed or sent to

Basking Shark
c/o NOAA Fisheries
8604 La Jolla Shores Drive
La Jolla, CA 92037



**Pacific
Shark
Research
Center**

Basking shark hotline:
(858) 334-2884

Canada



swfsc.noaa.gov
Southwest Fisheries Science Center
8604 La Jolla Shores Drive
La Jolla, CA 92037
Phone: (858) 546-7000

Have you seen this shark?



Basking Shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*)

Greg Skomal

Basking shark basics

Basking sharks are gentle giants that eat tiny animals called plankton.

They used to be abundant off the West Coast but are now listed as a Species of Concern in the U.S. and as endangered in Canada.

Scientists in the U.S., Canada and Mexico are collecting information on basking sharks to improve our understanding of their basic biology, movements, favorite habitats and patterns of abundance.

This research is critical to the conservation of basking sharks in the Pacific Ocean.

[You can help!](#)

Gentle Giant: The Basking Shark

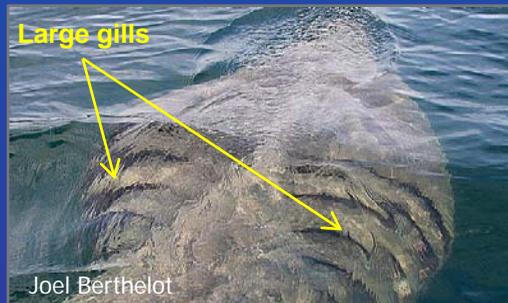
Human interaction

The population of basking sharks off the West Coast declined dramatically in the 1900s when they were targeted in fisheries and eradication programs. Where schools of 100's and 1000's used to occur off California and Canada, now few individuals are seen.

Like most other sharks, basking sharks are highly vulnerable due to their low reproductive rates. Based on the best available information

- o they have 1-6 pups,
- o pup every 1.5 - 3 years and
- o females reach maturity from 16-20 years old.

In addition, basking sharks are easily entangled in fishing gear and their fins are valuable in the international shark-fin trade.

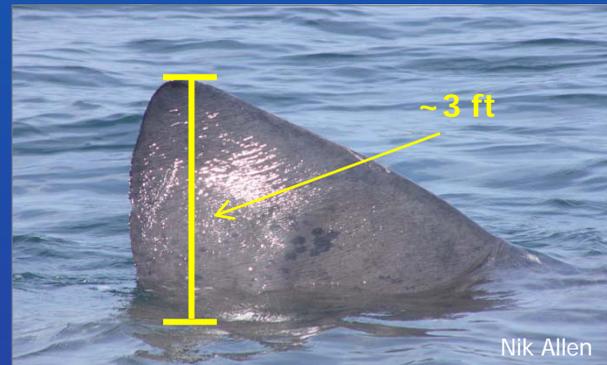


Basking shark take is prohibited due to concerns about their population. In federal and California state waters they can not be targeted and must be released immediately if caught accidentally.

Identifying characteristics

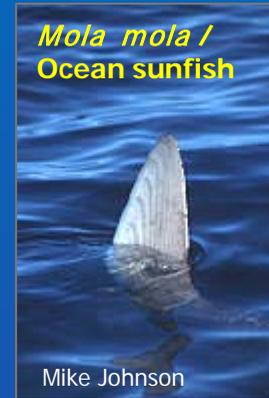


- Snout, dorsal and caudal (tail) fins may all be visible from surface
- Snout is long and conical
- Gills almost entirely encircle the head
- Dorsal fin may be ~3 ft tall
- Can reach up to 40 ft in length
- Often seen feeding just below surface
- Mouth is very large, ~ 3 ft



Similar looking species

At the water's surface, several species may look similar to the basking shark including mola mola (ocean sunfish) and blue, shortfin mako and great white sharks.



From the sky

Basking sharks are relatively easy to identify from the air. Aerial photos are very useful for our research.

Basking sharks can be seen in groups or alone. The image to the right was taken off the U.S. East Coast where larger numbers of basking sharks are observed.



The image below shows a basking shark feeding on a dense swarm of small planktonic animals.

